

Raghu Rai is one of India's most accomplished photographers, commended by no lesser person than the legendary French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. His collection of photographs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama since their first encounter in 1975 is a priceless pictorial record of the life and times of the Tibetan spiritual leader. The photographs are in black-and-white and somehow appear much more arresting than colour images would have been. They capture the many moods of an extraordinary human being, sometimes deep in meditative reflection. There are images that convey his empathy with those afflicted with pain and suffering while others reveal the deep reverence and respect he inspires among his devotees.

The pictures tell their powerful tale without need for commentary. It is good that the captions are brief, only locating place and time. The photographs are interspersed with a few moving reminiscences recorded by Rai of his several encounters with the Dalai Lama over the years and the profound impact these have had on his own life and thinking. Rai's sentiments are deeply felt and rendered in simple words of unabashed admiration and respect for a special friend who is also a sage.

There are several photographs of the Dalai Lama's visits to different places of religious worship in Delhi in 2009 to pray for the welfare of India and her people. The event marked 50 years since his exile to India in 1959 from his beloved homeland under Chinese occupation. It was part of several events organised by the Tibetan community to thank India for providing shelter to the leader of Tibet and several thousand Tibetan refugees. I had the privilege of being invited by His Holiness to join him on this special and memorable journey along with a number of other well-known personalities. We accompanied him to a Hindu temple, a Sikh gurdwara, a Christian church, a Jewish synagogue, a Muslim masjid and a Jain temple where we joined him in prayer and I thought of the powerful message he was delivering, reminding us of our common humanity though adhering to different faiths and creeds. Rai's pictures capture the mood of this extraordinary journey, festive and solemn in equal measure.

My personal favourites are a photo on page 54, where the Dalai Lama is sitting on the floor fixing a broken TV and by contrast, the two-page image on pages 60-61, showing him deep in meditation. Another arresting photograph on pages



# The Dalai Lama in black-and-white

Raghu Rai's portfolio captures the many moods of an extraordinary human being, says Shyam Saran



42-43, is of an assembly of lamas in Ladakh, soaked to the skin in pelting rain but listening with deep reverence to the Dalai Lama preaching. On a lighter note, it is hard not to smile seeing photographs of him sharing a laugh with Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, a long-time friend, on pages 188-89. And finally, the very last photograph in the book, which captures the Dalai Lama blowing out candles on a cake to celebrate his 80th birthday.

The book has a very readable introduction by Jane Perkins titled

"Early Years Inside Tibet and The Escape", which is a biography of the Dalai Lama from his early childhood to his escape into exile in India in 1959. Jane Perkins is an author and journalist who has been based mostly in Dharamsala. Her write-up is accompanied by some rare photographs of the Dalai Lama as a young child with his family members, of his discovery as the 14th incarnation by a search party from Lhasa and his life as a monastic student in Lhasa. There are also photographs of the Dalai Lama with Chinese officials in Lhasa after their occupation of Tibet in 1950 and of his escape to India through the forbidding Tibetan countryside. These add value to the book.

This introductory section concludes with a picture of Jawaharlal Nehru with a

young Dalai Lama at Teen Murti House in 1964 just before Nehru died. It is accompanied by the text of a letter by Nehru addressed to a Gopal Singh who, from the context, appears to have suggested that India take up the Tibetan cause at the United Nations. Nehru's words encapsulate the tragedy of Tibet and the sense of helplessness he may have felt after the defeat of Indian forces in the 1962 border war with China triggered by the events in Tibet:

"We are not indifferent to what has happened in Tibet. But we are unable to do anything effective about it."

That about sums it up. Eventuality.

The reviewer is former foreign secretary and currently a senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research



**A GOD IN EXILE: THE FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA**  
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