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**DALAI LAMA - GO!
GET WELL SOON!**

October 8, 2008

As my time here in Dharamshala, northern India, comes to an end my chances of another glimpse of H.H Dalai Lama might just be possible as he is due to return from New Delhi after a medical check-up. The Tibetan monk, 73, will return home to this northern Indian town where I've been for the last week and the Tibetan government-in-exile have been since 1959.

He departed here from Gaggal airport on Tuesday (sounds like a goose sanctuary) locals have told me that it is the pressure of the persistent demands for more autonomy for Chinese controlled Tibet.

...HH The Dalai Lama conducted his teaching last week in Dharamshala but trips to Germany and Switzerland this month have been cancelled. The health of the 73-year-old aging spiritual leader continues to cause concern, despite this being passed off as a 'check up'. At the end of August he underwent treatment for abdominal pains in Leelavati Hospital, Mumbai.

Whilst we wish him a speedy recovery all is not as rosy as it seems with the local Indian perception of how Tibetans are viewed here in Dharamshala. A local elder and ex-politician here told me:

"Frankly, Jim — when they came here they had nothing and were grateful for anything — even a cardboard box to live in. Now they have more money and more rights than some of our local villagers. Their donations coming in from all over the world far outweighs what the locals have here and it's our land — I can't see this continuing forever".

It did surprise me but the place was disrupted on August 8, 2008, when China officially announced the opening ceremony of the Olympics, thousands of Tibetans

gathered around the main temple, Tsunghlakhang, next to the Dalai Lama's residence in upper Dharamsala. One local recounted the disruption:

"The crowd of around over 3,000 Tibetans largely consisting of maroon-robed monks and nuns, along with local Tibetans, school children and Tibetans from across India began a protest march from McLeodganj. The protesters were accompanied by hundred or so foreigners (tourists) on the march which continued for over five kilometres to lower Dharamsala.

On the march the protesters shouted slogans of "One World, One Dream, Free Tibet, Free Tibet" as well as anti-China slogans, calling China a "butcher, murderer and liar." The protesters demanded IOC to wake up to the human rights violation in Tibet, asking for international support. The traffic in Dharamsala came to a stand-still for a few hours as the marchers flooded the road from McLeodganj to Dharamsala"

I did wonder how long Tibet would survive in it's own right either here or back in Tibet — maybe we are witnessing the final generation and Tibetans will cease to exist? That's not a cue for fans to start trekking, by the way.

(The author is the founder of <http://gосmelltheflowers.com/> - an alternative community of inspiration, health, media, food, people and places, with 16 writers globally.)

THE OTHER INDIA

In an alternate-culture series, Mini Chandran Kurian documents the lives of extraordinary men and women who go about preserving ancient patterns of art and craft, science and healing, across the country to keep traditions alive

RIVER LACE

An Andhra community, taught lace-making by Irish nuns years ago, is reviving it to find fame abroad

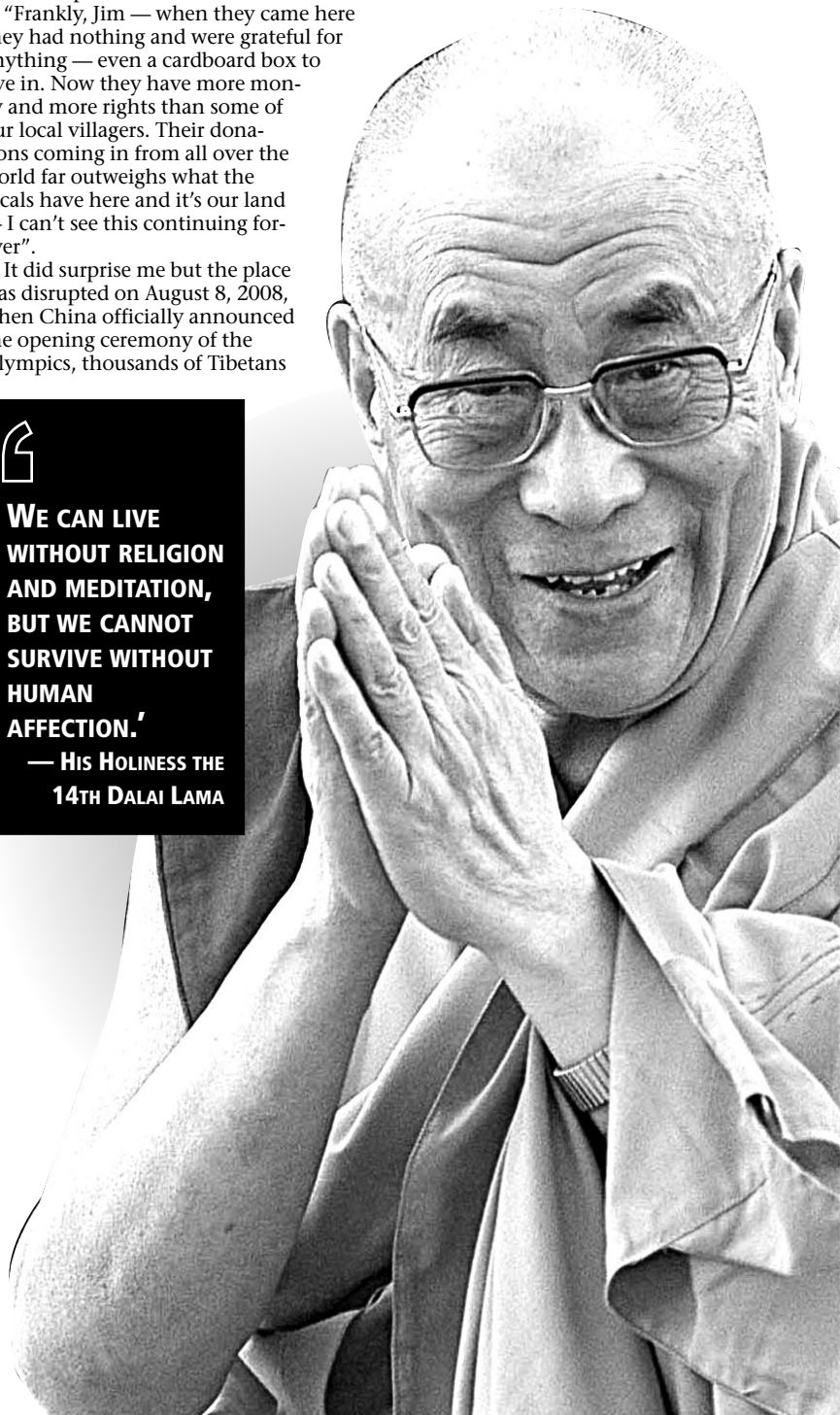
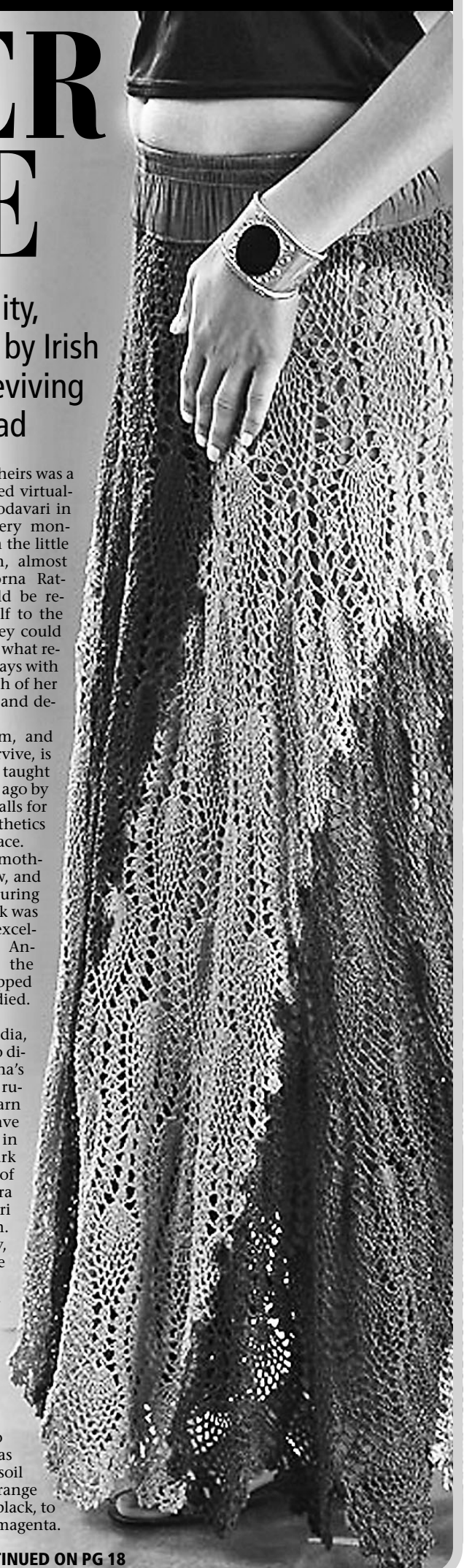
It was a bleak childhood. There's was a coastal community situated virtually on the banks of the Godavari in Andhra Pradesh, and every monsoon, the rains would lash the little village of Padamatipalam, almost submerging it. Annapoorna Ratnam's kachcha hut would be rebuilt, the family would resign itself to the loss, gather the few possessions they could retrieve, and life would go on... But what really imbues her memories of those days with deep sadness is the unexpected death of her father that rendered them helpless and dependent on others for a while.

What has helped Padamatipalam, and hundreds of other villages like it survive, is the hereditary craft of lace crochet, taught to the local women a good 200 years ago by Irish missionaries. A delicate art, it calls for patience and an inborn sense of aesthetics to turn out yards and yards of fine lace.

Annapoorna's mother and grandmother taught the little girl all they knew, and when traders from the neighbouring towns came to their village, her work was always held up as an example of excellence. "I had no other options," Annapoorna says simply. "This was the only skill I could pick up, as I stopped going to school after my father died. And I love making lace..."

Like so many parts of rural India, where the craftsman has no access to direct marketing outlets, Annapoorna's mother was paid a meagre five to 10 rupees for about half a kilogram of yarn done in a day. However, things have changed considerably for the better in the last decade, when the Lace Park Project supported by the Ministry of Textiles, the government of Andhra Pradesh and DRDA West Godavari was put into place in Narsapur town. This has rejuvenated the industry, and ensured that Narsapur lace wings its way into global markets.

Annapoorna, who enrolled as a trainee some years ago, has at 23, evolved as a design expert, imparting training to women of the nearby villages. She tells them how to use just the right yarn, thread and hook to create a certain timeless beauty. While the craft was not an indigenous one to begin with, over the centuries, it has acquired the hues and tones of the soil that nurtured it. The colours used range from ethereal white and the regular black, to shades of orange, powder blue and magenta.



“WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT RELIGION AND MEDITATION, BUT WE CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT HUMAN AFFECTION.”
— HIS HOLINESS THE 14TH DALAI LAMA

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