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Developing a New Poetic Tradition: A Chronicle of Tibetan Poetry in English

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Abstract

The paper tries to explore the emerging field of Tibetan Poetry in English. This branch of poetry in English is a post millennial development or extension of refugee writing in English. These writers, spread over three generations are a cross-section of Tibetan refugees past, present and future. They use a language laced with the colours of their experiences are a good indications of their lived experiences. Though many have a prosaic tone while others are almost no poetry, they have left their distinctive mark and style which stands out in all experiences. It's personal and political.

Key Words: Tibetan poetry, Dalai Lama, 3 generations, exile, refugee.

Introduction

For centuries, Tibet, nestled in the upper reaches of the mighty Himalayas was the forbidden country for all foreigners. They developed a culture of their own in isolation highly different from all other cultures around us. The Dalai Lama was the religio-political leader and the country was governed by a complex system of monastic and non-monastic orders. The monastery was the focal point of all the Tibetan system. However Tibet has not had any sort of coupes is ample proof of the administration system's success. In short religion was everything for Tibet.

In the 1950's the Chinese infiltration had changed the whole situation. The whole Tibetan system turned upside down and as a result a number of Tibetans chose to exile all round the world. As they have stepped out their sacred empire, it was hard for them to understand the ways and means of the world around them. Various ways to live in the modern world has problematized their lives. Religion and culture was perhaps the only aspects that had been their only refuge. Their ways and means have changed as years have passed. Along with religion this has given rise to a secular culture. Poetry turned out to be one of the best expressions of their experiences. Exile is a reality which has become an integral part of the Tibetan community for the last fifty and more years. This is a painful reality which each Tibetan has to reckon with – those who are inside as well as outside Tibet. Exile has revolutionized the perceptions of Tibetans. They were forced to step out of the borders of their country which till then had been forbidden terrain for all outsiders. As the native Tibetans had to flee the land of their birth and take refuge in strange lands; they brought with them their culture which had till then been unknown to the rest of the world. Thus the secretive nature of the Tibetan community had been lost in exile and on the contrary they have become more open. The new openness has allowed the community to flourish in exile with the outside world. Today the Tibetan diaspora has made its mark the worldwide. This experience of exile is poignantly described in many of their experiences.

The revival of the community and the various facets of tradition was the first and foremost concern of the Tibetan community in exile. Most of the traditions have been reset so that the modernisation of the community was made possible. The introduction of major reforms like the building of new schools with international curricula, democratisation of the community which resulted in the parliamentary elections of 2001 and 2011 and the reduction of the powers of the Dalai Lama were path breaking in nature. In the introduction of *Exile as a Challenge: The*

Tibetan Diaspora written by Dagmar Bernstroff and Hubertus Von Welck the Tibetan experience has been described as follows:

The Tibetan community in exile is one of the most resilient and successful refugee groups in the world. The Tibetans people who had lived for at least the last two hundred years secluded on the 'roof of the world' with hardly any contact with other societies and cultures, have in exile performed three remarkable feats. First, individual Tibetans and their families stand on their own feet economically and are able to maintain themselves. Second, a school system has been built up, which has transformed a largely illiterate society (as far as lay people were concerned; the monastics were of course learned) into a fully literate society within two generations – a testament to political will. Finally, His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama, the temporal and spiritual leader of the Tibetans, introduced democratization and reduced his own power step by step, so much so, that in 2001 the prime minister of the Government-in-Exile (the chief kalon) is no longer appointed by the Dalai Lama, but directly elected by the Tibetan diaspora. (1-2).

The success of the Tibetan refugee community is chiefly due to their culture of hard work. In all the exile communities they had reset their culture by rebuilding the monasteries and restarting the rituals like Kalachakra as well as centers for preserving medicine and traditional dances. They have started schools and have taken sincere efforts to educate and equip the younger generation. As part of exile the Tibetan society has been transplanted to countries which were till then for them distant unknown lands. The rulers of the countries where they had taken refuge had sent them to distant terrains in their lands; so that they will not be bothered by the exiles. In India

the first Tibetan settlements were in the barren Majnu ka Tilla in Delhi. Then they were shifted to earthquake prone Mac Leod Ganj in Himachal Pradesh as well as the barren lands of Bylakuppe and Kollegal in Karnataka. Even today a new refugee comes to India, visits the Dalai Lama and gets education in the Tibetan schools and later moves on to the various locales around the world. However exile had influenced the community in a rather positive manner. This had done more good to the refugees as they could organize their own internal administration, preserve their culture and choose their own leader. Such a measure had helped to rebuild their lives in a very positive manner. Bernstroff and Von Welck in their introduction to *Exile as a Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* has continues as follows:

The Tibetans retained their organizational structure, however, with one important difference: the influential abbots of the major monasteries as well as the big landowners have lost their power and influence with their land. In the settlements, every adult, whether farmer, nomad, business man or monk, was allotted half a hectare land – a drastic change in the society dominated by monastics. The young Dalai Lama was thus able to bring in modernization and democratization without much resistance. (2).

Exile for the Tibetans is a bane and a boon at the same time. Exile becomes a bane as it uproots the Tibetan out of his native land. It is a boon because particular care was taken in preserving the Tibetan culture and identity. The preservation of culture helps in understanding the traditions of the community as well as finding a place in the international arena.

The independent Tibetan poet sees the issue of exile not just as a political affair. He is aware of the past glories of his land as well as the current state of exile. The poets of the first generation have all passed away and only some of the poets of the second generation are alive. This is

therefore the age of the third generation poets. The experience of exile is best expressed in the third generation poets who present the glorious spirit of the exiled Tibetan. The Tibetans in exile are denied a voice in the public sphere; the print media has cast a veil upon them also the visual and auditory media. On the one hand those in Chinese controlled Tibet are banned from publishing anything by the PRC and on the other hand those exiles in the countries around the world are not allowed to publish for fear of the embarrassment they may cause to the host country in its relations with China.

Such a denial of the basic right of expression has to be resisted. Hence they make use of alternative modes of publication like websites and blogs. The creative skills of the people are developed to a fine art through emails and messages. Even these virtual publications are blocked inside the Chinese controlled areas to prevent the entry of the personae of the freedom fighters and their ideas into the minds of the Tibetans. This conquest of cyberspace by the freedom fighters of Tibet is, however, not given the importance it deserves by the academic world and the intelligentsia who consider these expressions as merely a diary entry or a personal note. The media considers them unimportant but this very insignificance attributed to them enable the exiles to resist in a better way by promoting the issues of exile.

Their poetry of resistance expresses itself in two ways. One way of resistance is by looking for and finding the silver lining in even the darkest clouds. This positive note of hope makes exile bearable. This is most profoundly found in the first generation and to some extent in the second generation poets. Another mode of resistance is by being aware of the both sides of exile – the pleasure of new friends, new avenues of expression and the pain of being stateless without a proper identity. Some poets of the second generation and almost all of the third generation express their thoughts in this manner. Some of them are angry over this statelessness and even

produced their poems without a title and written poems titled refugee. However both these attitudes are seasoned with the spice of hope that one day they would return to their own land on the snowy Himalayas, to a free and sovereign land. Hence poetry becomes a resistance in exile.

One seldom finds any poetry on exile in the first generation poets. It basically tells us about the experiences of a perplexed Tibetan in the modern world. They also fondly remember their antique land. The second generation is better at exposing the themes of exile as they were the first to go intensely through the exile experiences.

At present it is possible to trace out three distinct perspectives in Tibetan poetry in exile as represented by three generations of poets. This concept was first advanced by Buchung D. Sonam in his introduction to the anthology titled *Muses in Exile*. He says:

Exile Tibet minds three generations. Those who were born and grew up in independent Tibet and chased into exile after 1959; those who were born amidst the political upheavals of the communist Chinese takeover of the 1950s and sixties and came into exile at a tender age; and those who were born in exile (*Muses in Exile* ix).

During this time the world was deeply attracted to the Buddhist studies and the secular heritage of Tibet were noticed. It was during this period that Tibetan writing in English developed as a separate branch with the exile writers. Though other branches of literature also developed poetry was the most used medium by them and it had become a major part in the secular culture.

The first generations of poets are the elders who had seen Tibet in all its glory and were brought to exile in their middle age and old age. They were the ones who extolled the glories of their motherland. They never bothered with the idea of exile and only aware of it as a passing face of life. They were born in Tibet and had lived there for quite a long time and they were forced into

exile in their old age. The poetry of these writers express about the bygone era of Tibet. They are only waking up into the reality of exile. They thus sang of the golden past. The second generation accepted exile as a painful reality and expressed the idea of return to the motherland. These poets are those who had experienced the horrors of the Chinese aggression and had to flee from their homeland in their youth and middle ages. They were intense in returning to Tibet than the other generations. Hence many of them joined the armed resistance. The failure of it was of great disillusionment to them. This is seen pronounced in their poetry. Exile and return are continuously topics of discourse. The third generation poets are those who were born in exile, stateless and nameless knowing Tibet only through their elders. Most of them were either born in Tibet or on the way to India or in the labour camps on the Indian borders. Tibet for them was the representation of a distant reality. On the contrary to the other generations the third generation is perplexed and were unable accept neither exile nor return. They were born as citizens of other countries and had to legally take the refugee status. The disenchantment between reality and dream is always with them. A tug of war is inside each of them; their real identity verses the identity cards of the exile. Ajit Baral has rightly put it in the introductory paragraph of his 2003 interview with Tenzin Tsundue for the *Daily Star* from Bangladesh titled “I am born a Refugee”. He comments thus:

...Tibetan Exiles who exist in a paradox: in ‘reality’, a country named Tibet does not exist, at least in the official diplomatic world. Tibet is an ‘autonomous region’ and an ‘integral part’ of the People’s Republic of China since 1949, when its army seized the Tibetans’ homeland and put in place a brutal occupation policy....

(*Kora* 42)

The disenchantment between reality and dream is always with all the generations. The experience of these three generations varies along with their poetic expressions. The three generations thus represent the gist of Tibetan poetry in exile. A further introduction of individual poets of the age is given below.

First Generation Poets

Gendun Cheophel better known as Amdo Gendün Chopel (1903-1951), was a creative and controversial genius. He was a monk and the friend of the Indian writer, philosopher and freedom fighter Rahul Sankrityayan who was also a genius in Buddhist studies. Together they went to different places all over the world in search of Buddhist texts of the various orders – the Hinayana, the Mahayana, the Teravada and his own Vajrayana. He is considered by many as one of the most important Tibetan intellectuals of the twentieth century. He was often referred to as the mad monk because of his curious ways and the way he got mixed up in controversies. He was also a master debater, an engineer, a phonetician and a painter. His life was the inspiration for Luc Schaedler's film *The Angry Monk: Reflections on Tibet* and Donald S. Lopez's *The Madman's Middle Way: Reflections on Reality of the Tibetan Monk Gendun Chopel* (http://en.wikipedia.org /Genudn_Chophel). Cheophel died at a relatively young age of forty seven years in the early years of the colonisation of Tibet. He thus sings of Tibet's golden past; its stories and myths. His "Milerepa's Reply" is a good example for this. He writes:

The earth and sky held counsel one night,
And called their messengers from northern heights.
And came they, the storm fiends, the bleak and the cold,
They, who the storm winds in grim fingers hold,
... ..

But Milarepa, the Snow – mountain’s child
Feared not their onslaughts, so cruel and wild.
Though they attacked him most fiercely and grim,
He only smiled – they had no power over him. (*Muses in Exile* 1).

Apart from a few poems, Gendun Chopel wrote little while in Tibet but once outside Tibet he was a master creator. He authored a number of works: a travelogue (*The Golden Surface*), an unfinished history book (*The White Annals*), an erotica literature (*Tibetan Art of Love*), a pilgrimage guidebook (*The Guide to India*). He translated into English a Tibetan history of Buddhism, and translated into Tibetan Indian classics like *Shakuntala*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana*, and the Pali Theravadin canon, *Dhammapada*. He also wrote a number of treatises like the one on Nagarjuna’s philosophy of the middle way, besides numerous articles written for the newspaper *The Tibetan Mirror* as well as essays in English for the Mahabodhi Society Journal by him apart from poems in Tibetan and English (<http://www.gdqpzhx.com/english/>).

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987) was a Buddhist master of meditation, scholar, teacher, poet and artist. He was the holder of Kagyu and Nyingma lineages, the eleventh Trungpa tülku, the supreme abbot of the Surmang monasteries and the founder of the Vajradhatu and Naropa University. He was an eminent teacher of Buddhism and a major controversial figure in the spreading of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. Among his contributions are the translation of a large number of Tibetan texts, the introduction of the Vajrayana teachings to the West and a presentation of the Buddha dharma largely devoid of ethnic trappings. Regarded as a great master by many senior lamas; he is seen as having embodied the “crazy wisdom” tradition of Tibetan Buddhism (<http://www.strippingthegurus.com/stgsamplechapters/trungpa.asp>). His teaching methods and his personal habits were the topic of controversy during his lifetime and

afterwards. The book *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior* is considered as the most important work by him. *Discovering Elegance* is a film which he has produced. His autobiography *Born in Tibet* is an interesting account of his life till his escape to India. He has also written and co-authored a number of books on Tibetan tantra. Besides all these works Trungpa has written a number of poems which are known for their lyrical beauty (http://en.wikipedia.org/Chogyam_Trungpa). The American beat generation poets like Allen Ginsberg held high opinion for his works. Ginsberg says that Thrunpa's poetry represented "dramatic situation of someone who has realized the World as pure mind, and gone beyond attachment to ego to return to the world" (*Muses in Exile* xii). Ginsberg says that Thrunpa's poetry represented:

Dramatic situation of someone who has realized the World as pure mind, and gone beyond attachment to ego to return to the world and work with universal ignorance, confront the spiritual – materialist daydream of Western World – and tell it in modernist poetry... (*Muses in Exile* xii).

Trungpa's poetry was an account of his experiences in an alien country. His poetry also highlights Tibet's past but represents it in an alien exile world. His poem "Haiku" is a good example. He writes:

The beginner in meditation
Resembles a hunting dog
Having a bad dream.
His parents are having tea
With his new girlfriend –
Like a general inspecting the troops.

Skiing in the red and blue outfit,
Drinking cold beer with a lovely smile –
I wonder if I'm one of them?
Coming home from work,
Still he hears the phone
Ringing in the office.
Gentle day's flower –
The hummingbird competes
With the stillness of the air. (*Muses in Exile* 9).

The alien culture has placed the life of the exiles in a jeopardised reality and “Haiku” is a good testament of this. The alien Tibetan in Western civilization had to face such problems in the beginning of his exile life in various countries across the world.

Dhondup Gyal (1953-1985) is considered the first modern Tibetan poet breaking through traditional Tibetan formalist elements. Pema Bhum in an article in the *Lungta* magazine calls him as “A Shooting Star that Cleaved the Night Sky and Vanished” (“The Life of Dhondup Gyal: A Shooting Star that Cleaved the Night Sky and Vanished” 17). He is widely regarded in Tibet as the founder of modern Tibetan poetry. An accomplished scholar, writer, poet and patriot, he committed suicide in 1985 when he was only 32. Gyal never left Tibet but was a living exile inside the Chinese controlled Tibet. Protesting from inside; he wrote poetry, dramas and stories which were not given much importance during his lifetime. But after his death he is now considered a master poet by the Tibetan community in exile. Annual memorial lectures are now conducted in honor of poet Gyal and his works by the Tibetan community in exile. Gyal's poems present a panoramic view of the world around. They are known for their beauty and vigor.

Nature is considered an important theme in his poetry along with his philosophy and world view. The long poem “Waterfall of Youth” is a good example for this. The exile/return binary is not prominent in his poetry. Gyal can be considered as an iconic figure in the transition of poetry from the first generation to the second generation as his poetry exhibits features of both (http://www.tibetwrites.org/?_Dhondup-Gyal_). Gyal’s famous poem “Waterfall of Youth” is an ample testimony of his genius. The poem is a vivid portrayal of the Tibetan psyche. It is the best romantic poem in Tibetan poetry. Gyal portrays it as a sentinel watching over history. He sings:

Waterfall!

You are witness to history,

the way of the future-

the breathing and lifting of the snow land are written

on every droplet,

the rise and development of the Land of Snows

shine in each of your rays,

Without you!

Where can we whet the sword of language?

Where can we sharpen the sword of our skills.

(http://www.tibetwrites.org/_Waterfall_of_Youth).

Second Generation Poets

K. Dhondup (1952-1995) is a poet and activist born in Tibet but taken into exile at a young age. He graduated from St. Joseph’s College, Darjeeling, and joined the Tibetan Library and Archives, Dharmasala. He was also a historian and a journalist. He classified the amatory poems of the sixth Dalai Lama in *Songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama*. His *The Water Horse and Other*

Years: A History of 17th and 18th Century Tibet and *The Water Bird and Other Years: A History of the 13th Dalai Lama and After* are two interesting history books on Tibet. Dhondup's poems are the first among the second generation poets to talk about the condition of exile (http://www.tibetwrites.org/?_K_Dhondup).

K. Dhondup's poem "Exile" is a good example for the Tibetan's first experience of exile. There exile is presented as something that brings out good results – a positive energy. The poem goes on as follows:

Exile

is a marigold

blushing luxuriantly

in the morning sun

luring turquoise bees

from the beehives

to suck their honey.

(Muses in Exile 20).

Lahsang Tsering is a poet, writer and activist born in Tibet. He migrated into exile in India at a young age. He gave up an opportunity to study medicine in the US and joined the Tibetan armed resistance. He later became the President of the Tibetan Youth Congress. He was the founding director of the Amnye Machen Institute. Lahsang Tsering is an outspoken, ardent advocate for Tibet. He is also a great lover of literature and along with his family runs a bookshop titled "The Book Worm" in Dharmasala. He is a prolific writer who has published a number of articles, stories and poems. His famous collection of poems *Tomorrow and Other Poems* was published in 2004. Tsering's poems are powerful, inspiring and always about exile. The vibrant lyrical

quality of his poems lends them easily to being set to music. His poems are used by the popular Tibetan rock band “The Exile Brothers” as their songs (http://www.tibetwrites.org/?_Lahsang_Tsering). His poem “Waiting” is all about the hopeful waiting for freedom. He writes:

Waiting to know if she’ll see her son again,
Waiting to know if her man will ever return,
Waiting to know if she will go back home,
Waiting is what a refugee woman must do.
... ..
Waiting is, therefore, what she will do,
Waiting despite the pain and loneliness,
Waiting till the end of her dreary days –

For waiting is what a refugee woman must do. (*Tomorrow and Other Poems* 3).

Gyalpo Tsering is a poet, teacher and activist. He had his schooling at the prestigious Dr. Graham’s Homes in Kalimpong, Nepal. He was then appointed as teacher in the Tibetan Children’s Village School. In 1973 he left his teaching profession to join the Tibetan resistance movement. He left the resistance movement following the Dalai Lama’s exhortation to give up violence. Later he worked at the Department of Information and International Affairs of the Tibetan Government in exile. Tsering is now settled in Canada. Gyalpo Tsering’s poems are peaceful, reminiscing about the past, understanding the present and dreaming of a bright future (http://www.tibetwrites.org/?_Gyalpo_Tsering). “The Hermit” is a poem in which he says that the Tibetan people are like a hermit sitting in a cave waiting for a better future. He writes as:

In the cage where his hearts beats,

Faint hope sleeps;
The humble Hermit dreams.
In the cave silence reigns
King of darkness. (*Muses in Exile* 66)

Ngodup Paljor (1948-1998) is called “a secretary to mountains” by Buchung D. Sonam in his work *Muses in Exile* (186). He liked hiking and rock climbing and crossed geographical boundaries by just walking across them. He had the distinction of having walked all the way from Tibet to Alaska. His poetry is like sipping hot Tibetan tea near noisy streams (*Muses in Exile* 189). His poems too have the same flavor – the warmth of the tea and the distant roar of the streams. He was a refugee, a monk and student fluent in Tibetan, Hindi, Pali, Sanskrit, Thai and English. He was for some time the official translator of the present Dalai Lama. He was an assistant Professor of Tibetan Studies in the University of Hawaii and was also instrumental in founding the Alaska Tibet Committee and Khawachen Dharma Centre to promote Tibetan culture (http://www.tibetwrites.org/?_Ngdop_Paljor).

Tsoltim N. Shakabpa is a poet who has obtained much acclaim in the West with his book *Recollections of a Tibetan*. He was born in Dharmasala in 1943 in Lahasa. He was educated in Tibet, India and America. He worked for the Tibetan Government in Exile. His first book *Records of Tibet* was published in Catalan by Page Editors. His second collection of poems *Recollections of a Tibetan* was published by Publish America in the United States. In 2002 he received the Editor’s Choice Award for outstanding achievement in poetry from the International Library of Poetry. He is at present the Executive Director of Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa Memorial Foundation; a foundation set up in memory of his late illustrious father who was the last finance minister of independent Tibet. Even in his seventies he is a strong advocate for an

independent Tibet. He publishes at least a poem a week and circulates it through the internet. Shakabpa's poems are passionate renderings coming from a Tibetan's heart. Though he belongs among the poets of the second generation many of his poems have the vigor of the third generation (http://www.tibetwrites.org/?_Tsoltim_Shakbpa). His poem "Hear Ye! Hear Ye!" is a good example for the exile Tibetan poets voicing his concerns to the world. He sings:

Hear ye! Hear ye!

Exiled Tibetans who are free

Lend me your ears

Let's give good cheers

To a free and independent Tibet

So that we can go peacefully to bed. (<http://www.peoplefortibet.blogspot.com>).

Another poet in exile is Norbu Zangpo. He is a minor poet but known for his passion for his mother land. Zangpo sings about the plight of an exile and his longing for freedom (*Muses in Exile* 189).

Third Generation Poets

Tsering Wangpo Dhompa is the first Tibetan female poet to be published in English. Raised in India and Nepal, she is a double postgraduate in the disciplines of humanities and fine arts. Her book of poems *Rules of the House* (2002) which was a finalist for the Asian American Literary Awards in 2003. Her other publications include poetry collection – *In the Absent Everyday* (2005). *Recurring Gestures* (2000) and *In Writing the Names* (2000) are two other books by her. She has also contributed to anthologies like *Contemporary Voices of the Eastern World: An Anthology of Poems*, *The Wisdom Anthology of North American Buddhist Poetry*, *Muses in Exile: An Anthology of Tibetan Poetry* and *An Other Voice: English Literature from Nepal*. She

has also written a number of articles and short stories. “Letter for Love” is her first short story. Her poetry explores in detail the feminine angles of Tibetan resistance and life in exile (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsering_Wangmo_Dhompa). Dhompa’s poem “Exile” also presents another example. Here exile is an experience where by the exiled person can only view the home land as a distant reality. Many have changed but from a distance everything looks intact. But the original land is no more. Everything is prefaced by ideologies but they hide the real issues like hunger. For Dhompa the new cities in reality are only grids in the caves. Her poem goes on as follows:

Grids in the caves
we build attest to an empire
of codes: plaster and cork keep us
afloat. Necessity deigns
the cessation of sound as nails
hold this house upright
Cities with five-year plans
dream of purchase. Allotment
of success systemic with windows
glimpsing blue ocean or unmoving
mountain, a view, in other words.
No matter we are building
on sand. We begin with certitudes

when securing our spot. (*Indian Literature*).

Tenzin Tsundue is a poet, writer and activist wedded to the cause of freedom. He won the first Outlook-Picador Award for Non-Fiction in 2001. He has published two collections of poems and a collection of essays: *Crossing the Border*, *Kora* and *Shemshook*, which have been translated into several languages. His writings have also appeared in various publications around the world including the *International PEN*, *Outlook* and *The Times of India*. The 2002 Indian edition of the international fashion magazine *Elle*, named him among India's most stylish people. He had climbed the Oberoi Hotel Tower in Mumbai in 2003 where the Chinese premier Wen Jiabo was visiting and the IIST building in Bengaluru in 2005 where the then Chinese president Hu Jintao was visiting. Tsundue had been called “the Rebel Warrior” by the Friends of Tibet, an Indo-Tibetan group of which he was the general secretary. The page starts with a quotation from an article on him by Dilip D’souza on 23 May 2005 in the Indian daily *Mid Day* which runs as follows:

Fortunately, there are Tenzin Tsundues out there, men neither craven nor willing to shut up, and unaffected by the demands of “realpolitik”. Power to your flag and banner, Tenzin. May they fly from a thousand places, unexpectedly (<http://www.friendsoftibet.org/tenzin/>).

Tsundue’s poems are powerful, full of vigour expressing his anger over the oppressing colonial rule of China over Tibet (http://en.wikipedia.org/Tenzin_Tsundue). Tsundue’s poem “Horizon” on the other side expresses the constant wish of Tibetans’ return to the home land.

From home you have reached
the Horizon here.
from here to another
here you go.

From there to the next
next to the next
horizon to horizon
every step is a horizon.
Count the stpes
and keep the number. (*Kora* 11).

Buchung D. Sonam is a poet-activist born in Tibet but migrated to India in 1984. He studied in the Tibetan Children's Village, Dharmasala; St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, and M. S. University, Baroda. He was associated with Paljor Books, New Delhi. His first collection of poems *Dandelions of Tibet* was published in 2002. His second book is an anthology of Tibetan poetry named *Muses in Exile* which was published in 2005. His poetry recalls the old Tibet in its new perspective of exile (http://www.tibetwrites.org/?_Bhuchung-D-Sonam_). Buchung D. Sonam calls exile as a kind of banishment from the mother land. He writes of it in his poem "Banishment" as follows:

Away from home
My minutes are hours
Spider travels from the window to the ceiling
Bee flies from the window to the bin
I stare out of the window
Neither speaks each other's tongue
I wish
You would go deaf
Before my silence. (*Indian Literature*)

G. C. (Gendun Cheophel Jr.) (1964- 1992) was born in Dharmasala and was educated in the Tibetan Children's Village School. Buchung D. Sonam in his collection *Muses in Exile* considers him an enigma – a dream chaser who loved songs and delved into their deeper meanings (188). He had a short tumultuous life of dreams, drugs and despair. He died in mysterious circumstances leaving behind a little book of verses showing his love for Tibet (*Muses in Exile* 190). Being a third generation poet G. C.'s poem "Untitled" is worth mentioning explaining the statelessness. He says he is "just a soul in a fix, crying for the right direction" with a "mind mixed in total confusion." (*Muses in Exile* 4). It is a total wilderness where one is standing alone in the wilderness with paining hearts and no balm to ease the pain. He says:

I feel myself
standing in the wilderness
cold
alone
empty
beauty all around me
pain constricting my heart
the road of life lies long and empty
and no balm exists to smooth me
of this loss and broken heart. (*Muses in Exile* 90).

Tenzing Sonam is a popular Tibetan film maker. Along with his wife Ritu Sarin he heads the White Crane Films which has produced some wonderful films on Tibetan themes. *Dreaming Lahasa* was nominated for world famous film festivals from IFFK 2005 to the Toronto Festival and others. He was born in 1959 in India. He graduated from Delhi University and worked with

the Government in Exile. Later he took his degree in journalism from the University of California, Berkeley. He has worked in Switzerland, New York, Scottsdale and Los Angeles. He was the founder-member of the Bay Area Friends of Tibet. He started writing poetry at the tender age of eighteen years (*Muses in Exile* 190).

Thupten N. Chakrishar was born in Sikkim, India. He was educated in a number of schools across India. He was the first Tibetan student who wrote a book in English – *Anything for Tibet, My Beloved Country*. His poetry collection *Young Tibet* won the annual award for young poets from the International Society of Poets. He is a graphic designer and the Creative Head of Young Tibet Designs, Youth Empowerment Initiative. He is the official designer for the seventeenth Karmapa. He is a profound thinker and a prolific writer (<http://art.youngtibet.com/thupten.html>).

Chakrishar's poem "A Pledge" has the same concept of freeing the motherland. He writes:

Before I fade away

I will find a way,

To make you FREE...

Wait for me MOTHER

I will set you FREE... (*Muses in Exile* 158).

Kathup Tsering was born in Tibet and he escaped to India in 1994 following a demonstration demanding the promotion of Tibetan culture. He later studied at the TCV School. He was the editor of a bimonthly Chinese magazine and had translated poetry into English, Tibetan and Chinese (*Muses in Exile* 190). Topden Tsering is a writer and activist born in India and is the president of the San Francisco Tibetan Youth Conference. He is an activist, graphic designer and writer all rolled into one (*Muses in Exile* 190). Tsamchoe Dolma is a poet from Dharmasala. She

is a graduate in science and a research assistant in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. She admires creativity, respects the arts and loves writing (*Muses in Exile* 190).

Tenzin Trinley also studied in the TCV School. He started writing poems at a tender age. At present he is an English teacher and lives in Dharmasala. His poetry is as Buchung D. Sonam comments “deeply concerned with the society and the environment he lives in, he writes to mirror his feelings and concerns from the heart” (*Muses in Exile* 191).

Tenzin Gelek is a Tibetan exile poet and activist. He was born in India. He had his schooling at the Central School for Tibetans in Karnataka. He took his degree in computer science from Mangalore and is at present working in Bangalore. His poetry is a poignant longing for a better tomorrow (*Muses in Exile* 191). Kalsang Wangdu is another poet of the age whose deeply personal poem “Ode to Dhondup Gyal” is a tribute to the father of modern Tibetan poetry (*Muses in Exile* 191). Another minor poet of the times is Ugen Cheophel who, like others of his age, was born in India and earns his livelihood as a teacher at the Tibetan Children’s Village School where he had his schooling. His poems have a mystical flavor in the myths that chiefly from their theme (*Muses in Exile* 191). Namgyl Phuntsok is yet another minor poet in exile. His poetry is known for his genuine poetic style. He considers the Tibetan movement as a struggle in the Buddhist manner of nonviolence (*Muses in Exile* 191).

Sherab W. Cheophel, Gur Gyal, Tenzin Palzon, Dawa Woesser, Wongchen Tsering, Tsering Dolkar, Dhargyl Tsering. Pema Tenzin, Cherin Norbu and Tsering Dorjee are some of the minor poets living and writing today (*Muses in Exile* 193). All of them share the existential angst of living in a country not their own. They also recognise the bitter fact that the Tibet of their grandparents has gone forever. It has become a memory which can never be realized. This thought not only agonizes them but angers them. They use their poetry as a means to question the

present order of life and also as a means to tell the world of their grief and grievance. Some of these poets show the promise of becoming powerful exponents of the Tibetan community in exile touching the hearts of an uncaring world.

Many of the Tibetan's exile experiences are written in poems which are titled "untitled". The lack of a title provides a basis for the resisting voice of exile. Tenzing Sonam, Tenzin Tsundue, Kathup Tsering, Ngodup Paljor and G. C. (Gendun Cheophel) have written poems titled "untitled" expressing the exile experience. The lack of title is because the experience of exile. Being an exile is like leading a title less life in other part of the world. There are also poems titled as "Refugee" by the poets in exile sharing the same. Kathup Tsering, Tenzin Tsundue and Buchung D. Sonam have published poems under the same title.

Tibetan literature is sharp. They are not given any prominence in the public sphere by China. In Chinese controlled Tibet such poems and their authorship could land one in for an endless period in a prison. Outside being a refugee you are controlled from writing about Tibet due to the host nations international relations with the China. Most of the Tibetan poetry form is getting noticed through internet. Hence one find such poetry coming out through the print media less than many others suffering the same conditions say for example the case of Palestine. The print media too excludes them and the only way they are able to express their thoughts is often through blogs like "<http://peoplefortibet.blogspot.in/>" and websites like "<http://www.tibetwrites.com>". This at many times makes them irrelevant and makes the readership to a limited private sphere.

Exile is an experience. It is a prism which refracts life experiences so as to produce a whole rainbow of them through the multiple poems of the exile poets. Exile is always the painful experience which the Tibetans have felt over the years. But at the same time it is a creative force which holds the Tibetan community together all these years. It has geared up the protests

worldwide against the oppressor. It has created in the Tibetans of all generations the will to fight and never to give up the struggle for freedom.

Poetry is an outpouring of the heart, a downpour of the spirit. This is true with the poets of Tibet also. The perspectives of the three generations have been modified through their experiences of exile. The first generation sings of the glorious past, the second generation sings of the refugee present and the third generation sings of the cloudy and uncertain future. It is the feeling of exile that runs through their poems that makes all Tibetan poets and their poetry special; so special that their poetry stands out from all others.

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