

✧Special Essays✧

A Prolegomena to Contemporary Tibetan Writings

Dr. Bharati Puri
Visiting Research Fellow
Tamkang University, Taiwan
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Contemporary Tibetan writings are simultaneously, political and aesthetically complex. As genres, they project the Utopian¹ and dystopian² concerns of a community, which can be conceptualized in two ways - of 'flight against time'³ and facing reality. This study reflects on how such complex and multi-layered writings act as reminders of the politics of memory, and, how they are a challenge to the politics of oblivion;⁴ the study focuses largely on literary works (poetry and prose) in English, published post 1958 outside Tibet.

Marked, because of its concern with the solitude of exile and intense nostalgia, what emerges as significant and become noticeable in this genre however, are the oscillations between the past and the immediate concerns of the diasporic lived reality; thus founding a literary approach that transcends the past while it stays rooted to it. In this sense thus, the Tibetans have carried their native soil into their lived reality, while at the same time transcending this. This tone of 'transcending' gives new meanings to time, place and space

¹ Utopia in its positive sense refers to human attempt at creating a better or rather perfect society. In its negative sense Utopic idea are used to explain ideals which are either unrealistic or impossible to attain.

² A Dystopia is seen as the antithesis of Utopia and is symbolic of oppression and a bad place.

³ The idea is found in Emily Nasrallah's book *Flight Against Time*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998, "...yearning for loved ones from whom one will forever be separated, not by death, but by distance. In a world of global migrations, no one can be untouched by stories of separation, yearning for loved ones far away, and nostalgia for a time when parents, children, family, friends and neighbors lived in a small world of integrity and dignity." Reviewed by Suad Joseph. <http://web.cyberia.net.lb/pnsrallah/flight.htm>

⁴ Loss and control of memory are powerful anxieties. Memories are built into literature and 'spaces' thus ensuring a process of memorialization. Hence the reference to the politics of these projects of memorialization. See http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news/bulletin_mag/articles/33-2_nasrallah.html

in a new context. It is in this transcended space, place and time that contemporary Tibetan Writings formulate, problematise and enrich their lived reality, and memory.

“(The) language about Tibet not only creates knowledge about Tibet, in many ways it creates Tibet, a Tibet that Tibetans have come to appropriate and deploy in an effort to gain both standing in exile and independence for their country.”⁵ *The Third Eye* for example, is said to be the autobiography of a Tibetan Lama who had a hole drilled into his forehead that would allow him to see auras, allegedly enthralling a reader to do the same operation with dentist’s drill. The author’s name is Lopsang T. Rampa in which ‘T’ apparently means Tuesday. While Tibetans themselves have never heard of their famous religious text *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* it became the most famous Tibetan text in the West after an American, by the name of Walter Wentz, a wealthy Theosophist, who came to India in the 1920s. He commissioned a translation of *Bardo Thodol*, meaning “Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State.” This is a mortuary text, read over a dead or dying person to help him or her escape from rebirth and if that’s not possible, to have a good rebirth in the next life. Wentz added his own commentary, thereby transforming the Tibetan mortuary text eventually into a Theosophical treatise. It is in this spirit “if Tibet has what the West lacks, ironically, when the West has looked at Tibet, all that it has seen is a distorted reflection of itself.”⁶ Therefore, while many western writers experimented variously with writings on Tibet, Tibetan writers, in and without⁷ Tibet, have been seeking common threads in their current lived realities. It is these various writings, that are the focus of study here.

It is interesting to understand the expression of assumptions and feelings of a society at a particular moment in history. This stance is couched in Romila Thapar’s words:

⁵ Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Prisoners of Shangrila: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p.10.

⁶ For details also see : Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Prisoners of Shangrila: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, reviewed by Bharati Puri in *China Report*, (New Delhi: Sage), vol. 41, no.3, July-September 2005, pp. 343-345.

⁷ ‘without’ both as a pun and in the Shakespearean sense of the word as outside.

Literary texts have been used in the past largely to obtain information on a particular period of history. Fewer attempts have been made to see the text itself as a representation of a historical period, perhaps even as an historical event. I am not suggesting that a work of fiction should be read as a record of historical happenings, but rather that it should be seen as an expression of the assumptions of a particular group in society at a particular time. Fiction after all provides a clue as to how people are thinking. Literature is important to history, not as descriptive of a reality—although in some instances it could be documentary – but as indicating what has been called *mentalité* (mind set and worldview) by French historians.⁸

In analyzing the contents of these oeuvre, Tsering Shakya suggests that Modern Tibetan literature has been a largely ignored field of study. In a historical sense this literature has grown and diversified from what it originally was. Traditionally the contents of literature generated, focused either on Buddhism, philosophical texts, and liturgical and biographical accounts of the lamas. Even though secular literature did exist, various types of histories (*lo rgyus*, *rgyal rabs*, *chos'byung*), biographical literature (*rnam thar*), aphoristic writings (*legs bshad*), oral folk songs (*glu gzas*), bardic tales and folk tales (*sgrung gtam*)- had the common strand of Buddhism within them. “Buddhism cemented all literary creativity in Tibet.”⁹

It has been stated that “Tibetan literature, as a whole, is a typical creation of the Middle Ages and is intimately connected with the religious-didactic orientation of a theocratic state.”¹⁰ L.S. Savitsky in analyzing the contents of 18th century Tibetan literature speaks about the Ge-lug-pa sect, supported and patronized by the Manchus, which eventually led to development of Tibetan literature. Even though there are no sure ways of taking this hypothesis further,

⁸ EEA Interview with Romila Thapar, “education About Asia,” Michigan: Association for Asian Studies, vol.10, no.3, Winter 2005.

⁹ Tsering Shakya, “The Waterfall and Flowers,” *Tibetan Bulletin*, vol.5, issue.3, July- August 2001, p.20. (Tsering Shakya was born in Tibet and attended the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University, where he is currently a research fellow in Tibetan Studies. He has authored *Fire Under the Snow: The Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner* and *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*).

¹⁰ L.S. Savitsky, “Tibetan Literature of the Eighteenth Century,” trans. Stanley Frye, *The Tibet Journal*, (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala), vol.1, no.2, April/June 1976, pp. 43-46.

still, it cannot be denied that secular aspects in this literature also evolved at the same time. This aspect has been taken further in Shakya's analysis which is given below in detail:

The *Mirror of Poetry (snyen ngag me long)* written by Dandin's (pronounced Dan-di) who was a 7th century Sanskrit scholar, served as a paradigm according to Shakya. It was poetry that inherited the style and content of Indian Sanskrit conventions and poetry (*snyen ngag*) that dominated the secular literary tradition.¹¹

According to Shakya:

The sole example of a premodern secular novel is an eighteenth - century work, *The Tale of the Incomparable Youth (gzhun nu zla med kyi gam rgyud)*, written by Dokhar Tsering Wangyal (mdo mkha tshe ring dbang rgyal). The novel is composed in a classical style drawn from such Indian epics as the Ramayana. The primary focus of the secular narrative, however, has been shifted from religion to romantic adventure. For the first time, the adventures of the protagonist are at the centre of the story, with religion forming only the subtext. Indeed, if we use a modern western definition of literature, virtually no secular literature existed in Tibet until very recently. Most critics in Tibet would tend to say that fiction as modern western author would define it began only in the early 1980s.¹²

Shakya argues that it was the notion of "underdevelopment" that impelled the growth of a new literature in Tibet. In the process of 'civilizing' an underdeveloped region it was strategic to take advantage of the traditional literary elite for the reactionary cause. In understanding and assessing Cultural Revolution's "destruction of the four Olds," that saw the ceasing of all Tibetan publishing activity in Tibet :

...under Deng Xiaoping (did) unprecedented change come to China. The Party's policy towards intellectuals underwent a transformation, and, at the

¹¹ Shakya, n.9, p.20.

¹² Shakya, n.9, p.20.

same time the Party's policies toward so-called minorities began to change as well. The policy of overt assimilation was abandoned, to be replaced by policies of cultural autonomy. These changes had far-reaching consequences for Tibetans. Tibetans generally agree that when the authorities started to allow Tibet some degree of autonomy in expressing its cultural identity—shortly after the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, in 1979—modern Tibetan literature began. Tibetan Buddhism, was also revived.¹³

In 1980, the first journal devoted to new writing was *Tibetan Literature and Art* (*bod kyi rtsom rig rgyud tsal*). The first edition of *Tibetan Literature and Art* initiated a burning debate. What is Tibetan literature? What should be the defining factor: the ethnic origin of the author, the subject matter, or the language? This edition of *Tibetan Literature and Art* seemed to suggest that subject matter and the author's ethnic origin defined Tibetan literature.¹⁴

It was however the publication of *Light Rain* (*sbrang char*) which defined the authenticity of Tibetan literature by subject matter, ethnicity of the author, and, the language (Tibetan). This time saw the emergence of a number of magazines cited by Shakya as the following: *New Moon* (*zla zer*), *Tibetan Popular Arts* (*bodkyi mang tsJiogs sgyutsal*), *Youthful Sun* (*nye gzhon*), *Lhoka Literature and Arts* (*Lho kha'i rtsom rig rgyu tsal*), *Kyichu River of Lhasa* (*Lha sa 'i skyed chu*), and *Snowy Mountains* (*gangs dkar ri bo*). Stories written in this period says Shakya, focused on the theme of the evils of old society.

In 1985, the second Tibetan novel, *The Turquoise Crown* (*gtsug gyu*), appeared as part of the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) and was serialized in *Tibetan Literature and Art*. The author was Paljor Lapgdun, a great-nephew of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. During the eighties there was a revival in Tibetan publications, and a large number of rare manuscripts and texts began to enter the public domain.

¹³ Shakya, n.9, p.21.

¹⁴ Shakya, n.9, p.21.

In what Shakya calls ‘innovation’:

...a group of young intellectuals believed that the main task facing Tibet was what they called "innovation." They believed that Tibet had suffered under the hands of the Communists not only because of the military and political might of the Chinese, but also because there was an inherent weakness in Tibetan culture: its inability to confront and integrate the forces of change. Among the writers of the Tibetan intellectual community to emerge from this debate was a young man named Dhondup Gyal (1953-1985).¹⁵

Shakya as a historian attributes it to the innovative genius of this writer, that literature began to glean new meanings. While Dhondup Gyal made a plea to fellow Tibetans to embrace modernism, it was basically to regenerate their culture and national pride. Indeed political as it seems in its intent, it was the works of Gyal that gave according to Shakya, a genuine discourse on Tibetan modernity. Writings that took inspiration from this debate of Tibet as subaltern¹⁶ became intrinsic to a debate about modernization and Tibet.¹⁷ This audacious writing thus, became many pronged. As Shakya says:

Dhondup Gyal's work was a turning point because, while criticism was unacceptable to the Chinese authorities, he showed that it was nevertheless possible to speak implicitly about the "wound inflicted on the mind of the Tibetans" (bod kyi sems kyi rma), referring to the period under the leadership of the Gang of Four.¹⁸

¹⁵ Shakya, n.9, p.23.

¹⁶ ‘Subaltern’ is a term used in postcolonial theory to refer to marginalized groups and classes considered lower in hierarchy.

¹⁷ Shakya, n.9, p.23.

¹⁸ Shakya, n.9, p.23.

“While the Beijing government celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its "liberation" of Tibet in the summer of 2001, a selection of fiction about this autonomous region of China by contemporary Tibetan and Chinese writers, entitled *Tales of Tibet*, was first published in English. Originally writing in Chinese, the authors are credited with their use of traditional Tibetan culture to create "an oriental alternative for China as it confronts the incursion of Western rational materialism." Dichotomous as it may seem to be, some narratives collected in this book, plus a few more I found from other sources, indeed exemplify a new generation’s literary efforts to question and supplement the official history of Tibet invented by the Communist Party, or, in Tsering Shakya’s words, "the rejection of the colonizer’s linear view of history."

However while Gyal and other writers critiqued the old system,¹⁹ they did not comment or provide political justifications for the present. While his writings favoured modernism he did not authenticate in his characterization, Tibet, as underdeveloped:

The thousand brilliant accomplishments/ of the past/ cannot serve today's purpose,/ yesterday's salty water cannot quench today's/ thirsts,/ the withered body of history is lifeless/ without the soul of today,/ the pulse of progress will not beat,/the blood of progress will not flow.²⁰

Literature, while it is repetitive, didactic, under party control and still in its infancy, has become the main arena for intellectual confrontation among competing ideas in Tibet today. Shakya observes:

Since 1994, control over work produced by Tibetan writers has become

“In this paper... six texts by two Tibetans, namely, Tashi Dawa and Alai, as well as one Han Chinese, Ge Fei. Tashi Dawa’s three magic-realist stories bend the linear twentieth century into a circular life span but blank out when the British and Chinese forces invaded Lhasa. in the first decade of the 1900s and early 1950s respectively. The 1903–4 military expedition led by Col. Francis Younghusband, however, is picked up in Ge Fei’s novella, which ends in a Buddhist monk’s assertion that the Earth is triangular, suggestive of the tripodic Sino-Tibetan-British relations. Infused with tears and blood from 1950–51 to the Cultural Revolution, Alai’s intertextual biographies of his father, who is a fallen noble, and his father’s foe and friend, a wandering Red Army veteran, are personal searches for identities and memories lost under Chinese rule. These pieces, complementary to each other in the time frame, at once rewrite the local history of the plateau and present alternative models for Chinese historiography.”

<http://www.aasianst.org/absts/2002abst/China/sessions.htm#101>

<http://www.aasianst.org/absts/2002abst/China/sessions.htm>

www.aasianst.org/absts/2002abst/China/c-toc.htm

Another analysis of Dhondup Gyal's writings is brought out in the following lines:

The late Dhondup Gyal's novels are one such quintessential symbol. His stories abound with conflicting nuances, in characterization as well as social depiction, set against a realism that is tragic and humorous by turns. Their brilliance is best captured in passages detailing the intricate complexity of ordinary human angst. In the words of Tsering Shakya, a clever use of a double-edged sword with which to prod at the imperfections of one's socio-economic past and cut through the hypocrisy of Communist China's "progress" in present-day Tibet.

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Topden Tsering, “English Writing on Tibetan: An Overview,”

<http://www.timesoftibet.com/articles/58/1/English-writing-on-Tibetan:-An-Overview>

²⁰ Shakya, n.9, p.23.

increasingly strict. The creative energy that was released in the early eighties has been suppressed, making writers more cautious than ever.²¹

It is here that contemporary literature by Tibetans outside Tibet raises a compelling new voice.

Literary Expression

Essentially Tibetan writings are not remarkable for their literary content or context. But what does break through this typified genre is Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*.²² Clearly a classic in this generation of writings the book has been a huge literary success.²³ It is this significant work that is being reviewed below briefly, as a conclusive sign of this yet developing topos:

“The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes” is the story of Holmes' lost years in India and Tibet. Out of the many manuscripts attempting to illuminate this period, only this one, by Jamyang Norbu, a Tibetan-in-exile who lives in Dharamsala, India, is endorsed by Doyle's publishers for its merit. This is also the story of the narrator Huree Chandra Mukherjee, the Bengali babu and scholar-spy from "Kim," Rudyard Kipling's masterpiece. A Norwegian named Sigerson lands at Bombay's Sassoon docks, and is greeted by Huree, who is investigating Holmes for his department. Not long after Holmes' arrival at the Taj Mahal Hotel, there is a bloody murder in his room, an attack originally intended for him. Laced with fascinating esoterica and tantric trivia, the reader is led on the trail of the assailant, whom Holmes suspects is an envoy of the late professor [Moriarty]. The trip leads him to Simla en route to Lhasa, where he is sucked into a

²¹ Shakya, n.9, p.24. See also:

http://www.tibetwrites.org/articles/tsering_shakya/

²² Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, Delhi: HarperCollins India, 1999.

²³ “In 1891, fans were horrified to learn that Sherlock Holmes, along with his arch-enemy Prof. James Moriarty, had perished at Reichenbach Falls, Switzerland. The outrage of Holmes' fans, however, caused Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to resurrect the world's greatest detective in "The Empty House (The Return of Sherlock Holmes)." Holmes describes the missing years in the passing: "I traveled for two years in Tibet ... and amused myself by visiting Lhasa and spending some days with the head Lama. You may have read of the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson, but I am sure that it never occurred to you that you were receiving news of your friend."

conspiracy to kill the Dalai Lama by Chinese imperials. It is now Holmes' onus to protect the 14-year-old god-king and wipe out the vengeful Moriarty, who returns with strange occult powers.²⁴

In many writings, Tibet and its religion have been imagined geographically where landscape, culture and place have been inextricably enmeshed.²⁵ The *Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* while being the story of a journey which moves around different routes and different events; what underlies the book is the mystic of the spiritual. And even while the chief protagonist, is Holmes himself, this journey becomes a mystical journey. The sojourn he undertakes is marked by several references to geography and the terrain- while they describe, the intent of the descriptions is to invoke the sacred in geography rather than the physical features of the landscape. To cite from the book:

Then, as we were approaching the Tasam at Barga, a chain of glaciers, gleaming in the evening sun, came into view, and with it the towering

Review of - Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, by Rohit Gupta in Flak Magazine <http://flakmag.com/books/mandala.html>

Also read the following review (text quoted):

"I CAME late to Sherlock Holmes. The whirring whodunit mechanics of Agatha Christie and the flamboyant ingenuity of Hercule Poirot's grey cells acted as effective red herrings early in my mystery-reading life, leading me away from the two usual suspects — Conan Doyle and Holmes. I wanted plot and cleverness and Christie supplied that; Doyle and Holmes provided elegance, style and suspense, but I didn't see that until I discovered Jeremy Brett. Brett's wildly stylish and yet precise interpretation of Sherlock Holmes in the Granada television series (televised in the 1980s by Doordarshan on Sunday mornings and later on cable) was mesmerising, addictive fun. His intense, stylised performance that didn't shy away from the detective's drug dependency — and the meticulous, atmospheric production of the series — made Doyle's originality and intellect come alive. (My favourite Watson was the later one played by the gentle Edward Hardwicke.) And so it was Brett and the television series that led me finally to the Sherlock Holmes stories, and to the realisation that Doyle and Holmes were far superior company to Christie and Poirot.

Since the time Doyle killed Sherlock Holmes in **The Final Problem** and later resurrected him, contemporary mystery writers have been paying their own homage to Doyle and Holmes by featuring the great detective in original stories, novels and essays. These take the form of Holmes pastiches to imaginary versions of Sherlock Holmes' life after retirement to the long lost adventures of the detective. (The very best example — and very close to home — being Jamyang Norbu's **The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes**, the detective's long lost adventure in Tibet). As one critic from *Publisher's Weekly* observed, "Writing a Sherlock Holmes tale is, for popular writers, equivalent to playing Hamlet for male actors: a challenge that few refuse and many regret." Nevertheless, the fantasy these pastiches fulfill are not just for Sherlockians (who very often scrutinise — more than read them — for mistakes; though the efforts of the newer pastiches should please them because they reflect a deep knowledge of "Holmesiana") but for all of us who yearn for more cases that break the canon by taking the great detective from Victorian London and placing him in the modern world with newer and more baffling problems to solve."

²⁵ Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989, p.41.

Gurla Mandatha peak and the most holy mountain of Kailash. This mountain is sacred not only to Buddhists, who consider it to be the abode of deity, Demchog (Skt. Chakrasamvara), but to Hindus as well, who regard it as the throne of Shiva. Because of this many Buddhist and Hindu ascetics and pilgrims have been drawn to the area for the past two hundred years or so, to worship the mountain, to practice austerities by it, and to go around it in holy perambulation. The Tibetans call Mount Kailash, Kang Tise or Kang Rimpoche, the precious mountain, and it plays an important role even in the pre-Buddhist shamanist religion, Bon. Mount Meru, the central mountain axis of Hindu and Buddhist cosmology is probably founded on the unique physical and geographical properties of Kailash.²⁶

Sherlock Holmes makes connections between Buddhism and logical reasoning (that he employs so regularly in his profession). To report a conversation between Huree Chunder Mukerjee and Sherlock Holmes:

SH. You are right, Huree..Science alone cannot answer all the questions of life. Man's higher destiny can be discovered only through religion.

HCM. Precisely so Sir!...Though it trouble me...How the deuce an' all could you know my innermost thoughts?... How do you think? Through magic? Clairvoyance maybe? Or just through a simple sequence of plain, logical reasoning?... Probably you enlisted the help of some mind-reading djinn like Buktanoos or Dulhan- maybe Zulbazan, son of Eblis.

SH. The trick is to construct one's chain of reasoning from the initial premise of..."dependent origination", to use this profound Buddhist concept. Then from a drop of water you could logically infer the possibility of a Pacific or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known wherever we are shown a single link of it.²⁷

On reaching Lhasa he realizes that the Chief secretary to His Holiness the Dalai Lama already knows about him through the prophesy of the Great

²⁶ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.142.

²⁷ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.144-146.

Seer of Taklung and that he has been chosen to protect the life of the Dalai Lama.. There is an element of surreal when the young 14 year old Dalai Lama walks by and even a restless tiger stops its pacing to settle down peacefully.²⁸ The Dalai Lama he is told has a contingent of monks protecting him and Norbu here raises a question without asking one: "...you have also raised a contingent of...umm...warrior monks to protect him."²⁹ And later: "I have heard that certain monasteries in China have the reputation of training their members to become skilled assassins rather than holy men."³⁰ An element of humour is always visible in the work and while describing the sojourn that Holmes, Huree and Tsering take in the middle of the night through the jewel garden and into the palace:

The door swung back somewhat awkwardly on its clumsy wrought- iron hinges. A shaft of light from the lantern cut through the darkness of the room to reveal a terrifying red face with long fangs sticking out of a grimacing mouth. I gave a little start. Actually, I nearly screamed, but recovered my wits sufficiently- and in the jolly nick of time –to realise that the fearful apparition was nothing but the idol of yidam, a wrathful deity of the lamaist pantheon.³¹

He also makes cultural quips like "...may I be born as a louse in the baluchi's beard if I am lying..."³² A definite sense of Holmes adventure gets in especially when reacting to gruesome situations, as the following macabre scene depicts: "The warrior monk- brave fellow- was dead as a door-nail. The sword had gone right through his heart. But he died partially avenged, for the masked intruder too –we discovered on investigation – was dead."³³ In the same episode it is also found out that a very old thangka of the mandala of the Great Tantra of the Wheel of Time was missing. This had originally belonged to the first Great Lama, and thence of great spiritual value.

A mandala is a circular of many colours and great geometrical

²⁸ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.154.

²⁹ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.158.

³⁰ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.172.

³¹ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.168.

³² Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.170

³³ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.172

complexity, and is a symbolic map of the world and the various circles and squares it is composed of represent the various stages of psychic development on the long journey from ignorance to ultimate enlightenment. The final stage is arrived at the centre of the circle where Buddha or Bodhisattva reside representing the final goal of the spiritual quest.³⁴ This particular thangka had been brought from Shambhala which Norbu describes in the following words:

Shambhala, in the Lamaist world system, is regarded as a wonderland similar to Thomas Moore's Utopia, the New Atlantis of Francis Bacon, or the City of the Sun of Camanella, where virtue and wisdom had created an ideal society.³⁵

As a symbolic language to address the many issues that affect the Tibetans, literary expression is one of the means available to Tibetans beyond Tibet. An observation made about contemporary literature inside Tibet³⁶ is true, of literature that is being written and circulated outside Tibet; that writers consciously populate their works with only indigenous characters. One observation which is common to the writers within and beyond Tibet is that their description of Tibetan society is actually a manifestation of their longing, largely undefined, of definite return to /return of homeland. One detects in this phenomenon a conscious effort to keep alive the idea of "virtual Tibet," that seeks a total absence of any Chinese character.

Poetic Expression

A number of poets have been writing in English. Their poetry speaks from the heart of agony. Even though there is a visible generation of this

³⁴ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.176.

³⁵ Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, p.177.

³⁶ "One hardly comes across any Chinese in any short story and novel. In a sheer departure from reality, even offices and other public institutions are portrayed as devoid of any Chinese, either bad or good. While reading works on topical issues, one comes across accounts of corruption and other social ills, but there too, both the protagonists are portrayed as Tibetans. Literature therefore serves for them as a subtle vehicle to assert their identity as being separate from the Chinese. Though issues of nationalism and, sometimes, provincialism remain the main pre-occupation of such writers, a strong belief in progress and modernization for their people also drives their voices. A frequent subject is the cost involved in the shift from a traditional to a modern society, whether because of Chinese influence or otherwise. Irrespective of the ambiguous nature of such external forces, change remains an overwhelming impetus for these writers."

Ronald D. Schwartz, "Evolving Patterns of Tibetan Resistance," *Tibetan Bulletin* (Delhi), July- August 2000, p.30.

genre, few have been noted for their sheer skill and poetic beauty.

Lhasang Tsering, in his poem “No Country,” goes back to his school days and talks about a situation where he was accused of insolence and then unfairly beaten with a stick. Caning marks have vanished from the poet's body. What perhaps remains is the mark it indelibly left on his mind, of what he feels, on being Tibetan:

That it was not the bamboo stick,/ But the injustice that really hurt,/ And
what hurt me still more,/ Was to know that to have no country,/ Means you
also have no rights,/ And when you have no rights,/ You can have no
justice. ³⁷

In “Tibet! O Tibet!” he says:

Land of gentle Lamas/ Now teeming with soldiers./ Land of holy Temples/
Now Bristling with Weapons./ .../ Land of Truth and Peace/ Now torn by
Death and Destruction./ Land of Pure White Snow/ Now bleeding Red
with blood./.../ Land of the Buddha Dharma/ Now devoid of spiritual
power./ Land of Tradition and Colour. Now made bland with
Communism.³⁸

In a way Lopez' Shangri-La lives in these lines where he explains not simply “how knowledge is tainted but how knowledge takes form.”³⁹ “We are captives of confines of our own making” he says and reveals the extent to which scholars have behaved like intellectual colonialists while also showing how Tibetans too have quite literally sought and attracted foreigners into their patronage sphere through a version of colonialism which is their own.

In “An Ode in 21 Verse” Lhasang Tsering says:

Spring in Tibet is a beautiful time,/ The air is crisp-all peaks clad in snow,/
The valleys are bursting forth with renewed life,/ Everywhere birds and
beasts are singing again.”

³⁷ Lhasang Tsering, “No Country,” *Tomorrow and Other Poems*, New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2003, pp.20-21.

³⁸ L.Tsering, “Tibet! O Tibet!” *Tomorrow and Other Poems*, p.23.

³⁹ Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

In this beautiful portrayal of Tibet, the poet is again invoking the charm of Tibet. And also the nostalgia for it. At times you sense the dissident voice. And while the politics of Tibet has taken new turns what makes the poignant reality of this is the voices that are many times unheard in the din of many confounding perplexities that Tibet has come to be. Tsering's poem resonates this very briefly and very succinctly in the following lines:

There's one way now- the peaceful way./ And compromise the order of the Day!/ Freedom fighters have now no role./ Association with China is our new goal./ Your deeds forgot, your name unsung./ A new history we have begun./ Seek not rebirth, O Warrior dead./ Freedom is a dirty word, you'll find to your regret!⁴⁰

Some poems of his are rich descriptions of the geography of Tibet; while at the same time invoke political geography. For example in the following poem he says:

On top of a high pass,/ I offered fragrant incense/ .../ From Dartsedo in the East,/ To Ngari in the far West,/ From lake Tso-ngon in the North,/ To Kongpo's forests down South⁴¹

And:

"Tibet today is also an extensive base,/ It is no longer a buffer and a zone of Peace,/ The danger of a conflict between India and China,/ Must not be overlooked until it is too late,/ For it will involve almost half of humanity,/ And may well engulf the rest of the world."⁴²

There is tone of tragedy albeit not heroic in one of his poems:

I know these days my head is bowed,/ But that's because I really feel down./ I know these days my eyes look vacant,/ But that's because I see nothing ahead of me.⁴³

But the utter dejectedness comes out here:

⁴⁰ L. Tsering, "Ode to A Freedom Fighter," *Tomorrow and Other Poems*, pp.28-29.

⁴¹ L. Tsering, "Tibet Belongs to Tibetans," *Tomorrow and Other Poems*, pp.37-38.

⁴² L. Tsering, "Why Tibet," *Tomorrow and Other Poems*, p. 49-50.

⁴³ L. Tsering, "Purposeless," *Tomorrow and Other Poems*, pp.53-4.

It is not that there lies ahead,/ Too many peaks to climb./ It's just this feeling that,/ I've climbed them all before./ It is not that I'm reeling under,/ All the tasks that lie ahead./ It's just that I cannot help feeling,/ I've done them all before./ No. it is not that there lies ahead,/ Too many peaks to climb./ It's simply this gut feeling,/ I'll be climbing them back again./ Peaks I am still prepared to climb,/ As long as it leads somewhere./ But then I've already seen that,/ It's really leading nowhere./ Yes, it is in this realization that,/ My best years have gone by./ And all the peaks I have climbed,/ Have finally led – NOWHERE.⁴⁴

Perhaps one of the most dynamic poets whose poems have been widely appreciated is Tenzin Tsundue. The poignancy of his experience comes out more clearly because he succeeds in many ways as a writer whose pen has great strength and his verse is pure music. As a poet his expression does not meander into excess nostalgia, but what it brings forth is clearly a sign of remarkable poetry.

In his “A Personal Reconnaissance” Tsundue writes:

From Ladakh/ Tibet is just a gaze away./ They say:/ From that black knoll/
At Dumste, it's Tibet./ For the first time, I saw/ My country Tibet./ In a hurried hiding trip,/ It was there, at the mound./ I sniffed the soil,/ Scratched the ground,/ Listened to the dry wind/ And the wild old cranes./ I didn't see the border,/ I swear there wasn't anything/ Different, there./ I didn't know/ if I was there or here./ I didn't know,/ If I was here or there./ They say the kyangs⁴⁵/ Come here every winter;/ They say the kyangs/ Go there very summer.⁴⁶

While many poems and other writings describe the geography of Tibet and its breathtaking descriptions of the mountains, Tenzin Tsundue in his remarkably stirring poem describes them differently by contextualizing them:

Through many monstrous mountains we crawled,/ whose death-blankets

⁴⁴ L. Tsering, “Too Many Peaks To Climb,” *Tomorrow and Other Poems*, p.2.

⁴⁵ Kyangs- wild ass found in herds in Changthang (northern plain) region of Tibet and Ladakh.

⁴⁶ Tenzin Tsundue, “A Personal Reconnaissance,” *Crossing the Border*, self published, 1999, pp.11-12.

often covered travelers passing by.⁴⁷

However, what can be seen as an interesting pun on Tibetan ness or for that matter any ideational description of identity, seems to be summed up in the following lines from “Looking For My Onion”:

I peel and I peel and I peel/ Looking for my onion./ And when my eyes
are full,/ Hands stained,/ Scattered peelings stare at me,/ I realize I
actually had one.⁴⁸

What is remarkable however, is the manner in which he seems to sum up the Tibet question in one single masterful stroke. In his “The Third Side Of the Coin” he writes:

The Head,/ The tail/ And the Ring/ Are the three sides/ Of a single Coin./
Its extremely difficult/ To sit on the Ring/ (the third Side)/ Of the single
Coin./ It wouldn't stand on its ring,/ If it did,/ You couldn't sit on it./ If
you managed to,/ To do that too,/ You couldn't see/ At the same time/
Both sides/ Of the single Coin./ While in a single gaze, You'll fall,/ Soon
and surely,/ To one side/ Of the single Coin./ Good-Bad, True-False,/
Patriot- terrorist,/ Mostly form/ The two sides/ Of the single Coin./ But
the Third Side? Nobody knows,/ And nobody wants to know./ As for me, I
can't see/ More than my sphere/ Within the horizon-ring./ Now don't tell
me/ To see through/ To the other side./ Even in my own sphere/ I am quite
myopic/ I can't even make/ A Coin stand on its ring,/ And you're asking
me/ To ride it!⁴⁹

His poem “Losar Greeting⁵⁰” is a very important attempt at portraying what ‘Tibetanness’ may have come to mean:

Tashi Delek⁵¹!/ Though in a borrowed garden/ you grow, grow well my
sister./ This Losar/ when you attend your Morning Mass,/ say an extra
prayer/ that the next Losar/ we will celebrate back in Lhasa/ When you

⁴⁷ T. Tsundue, “Crossing The Border,” *Crossing the Border*, pp.13-15.

⁴⁸ T. Tsundue, “Looking for my Onion,” *Crossing the Border*, p.32.

⁴⁹ T. Tsundue, “The Third Side of the Coin,” *Crossing the Border*, pp.40-42.

⁵⁰ Losar-Tibetan New Year, which coincides with the month of February or March of the Christian calendar.

⁵¹ Tashi Delek- a greeting in Tibetan, said especially on New year (*poets remark*).

attend your Convent classes/ learn an extra lesson/ that you can teach/
Children back in Tibet./ Last year/ on our happy Losar,/ I had an
IDLI-SAMBAR* breakfast/ and wrote my BA final exams./ my IDLIS
wouldn't stand/ on my toothed steely forks./ but I wrote my exams well./
Though in a borrowed garden/ you grow, grow well my sister./ Send your
roots/ through the bricks,/ stones, tiles and sand./ Spread your branches
wide/ and rise/ above the hedges high./ Tashi Delek!/

In a very poignant stanza he says:/ Our tiled roof dripped/ and the four
walls threatened to fall apart,/ but we were to go soon...”⁵²

He emphasizes his sense of identity:

I am Tibetan/ But I am not from Tibet./ Never been there./ Yet I dream/ Of
dying there.⁵³

The sense of place and time is remarkably different in the description .
Says Tsundue: “Ask me where I am from and I don't have an answer. I feel
that I really never belong anywhere. I was born in Manali but my parents live
in Karnataka. I like to speak in Tibetan but prefer writing in English. I like to
sing in Hindi but my tune and accent are all wrong. I have nowhere to call
home...”⁵⁴ In his writings as of other writers there is a state of constant
movement, of journeying towards home:⁵⁵

Pick the white pebbles/ and the funny strange leaves./ Mark the curves/
and cliffs around/ for you may need/ to come home again.”⁵⁶

This sense of place and the sacred sense of location and geography is
repeated in other writings. Gendun Choephel invokes sacred geography in his
“Mansarover”:

* Idli-Sambar is a Southern Indian Dish.

⁵² Tenzin Tsundue, “Exile House,” *Kora: Stories and Poems*, Dharamsala: Choney Wangmo, Delek Hospital, 2002, p.23.

⁵³ T. Tsundue, “My Tibetanness,” *Crossing the Border*, p.17.

⁵⁴ T. Tsundue. “My Kind of Exile,” *Kora*, p.30.

⁵⁵ Sonam, Bhuchung D., (ed.), *Muses in Exile: An Anthology of Tibetan Poetry*, New Delhi: Paljor Publications, 2004, p.xvii.

⁵⁶ T. Tsundue, “Horizon,” *Crossing the Border*, p.11.

“Mountain- wave, mystic and dreamy...”⁵⁷

And, again in the following lines:

Flags flutter on a cairn/ On a red rock peak where the vultures nest./ From the black tent amidst dark old yak folds/ Smoke rises gently/ And the echo of conches and drums of/ Invited lamas is heard./ Irrepressibly happy and sad to see the/ Highlands of Tibet.⁵⁸

The beauty of this oeuvre is brought out in the following verse of Chögyam Trungpa:

On the right, a mountain with juniper trees – at its foot a/ farmhouse topped with white prayer flags-is like a/ minister on a tiger skin seat./ On the left, a mountain covered with tamarisk trees –at its/ foot a farm filled with beautiful green wheat and barley-is like a queen on a silken throne./ Straight ahead, a rocky mountain rises above a monastery/ With glittering gold roofs like a king on a throne of gold./ An old pilgrim feasts his eyes on the richness of some/ merchant’s camp, and patiently continues towards Lhasa.⁵⁹

The mystical analogies above resonate the essence of what the poet sees as both symbolic and real movements. He seems to be musing on how to deal with his reality when he says: ...Should I run away or should I stay?/ Buddhism neither tells me the false nor the true:/ It allows me to discover myself./ Shakyamuni was so silent:/ Should I complain against him?⁶⁰

‘Back in Lhasa’ is a constant theme in many Tibetan writings. There is this amazing nostalgia constantly at work in the writing like a simple common thread.

But the sheer beauty is the manner in which Tsundue takes up the theme about an identity that has come to be assimilative. An example that can be

⁵⁷ Choephel, Gendun. , “Mansarover,” *Muses in Exile: An Anthology of Tibetan Poetry*, New Delhi: Paljor Publications, 2004, p.5.

⁵⁸ Trungpa, Chögyam, “Highlands of Tibet,” *Muses in Exile*, New Delhi: Paljor Publications, 2004, p.18.

⁵⁹ Trungpa, Chögyam, “Tibetan Pilgrim,” *Muses in Exile*, New Delhi: Paljor Publications, 2004, p.11.

⁶⁰ Trungpa, Chögyam, “As Skylarks Hunt for their Prey,” *Muses in Exile*, New Delhi: Paljor Publications, 2004, p.11.

cited here is when he asks his sister to take back lessons, learnt in a Convent, to be taught to children in Lhasa, which means an essential acceptance of the Christian idea which comes across as a very striking note in this oeuvre of writing. His describing his idlis not standing on his steely toothed fork is a very perplex combinations of identities. For example idlis are not eaten with a fork (traditionally they are eaten either with the hand or a spoon). But Tsundue has assumed a Western habit here as he eats his idli with a fork. He is making a statement about how the Tibetan identity could have come to mean.

Gendun Choephel is considered the first Tibetan poet to write in English. Also one of the first refugee Tibetan poets, what is described of Chögyam Trungpa Rimpoche, is also true of a large number of Tibetan poets, whose poetry has been fine-tuned to the Western thinking, while it has remained essentially and intrinsically Tibetan. He left Tibet on his self imposed exile in 1951 and wrote in nostalgia:

“Rebkong, I left thee and my heart behind./ My boyhood dusty plays in
far Tibet/ Karma, that restless stallion made of wind/ In tossing me: where
will it land me yet?”⁶¹

Assimilation is another visible theme of Tibetan Writings in English and obvious in his poem:

I’ve drunk of holy Ganga’s glistening wave,/ I’ve sat beneath the sacred
Bodhi tree,/ Whose leaves the wanderer’s weary spirit lave./ Thou sacred
land of Ind, I honour thee,/ But, oh, that valley of Rebkong,/ The sylvan
brook which flows that vale along.⁶²

K. Dhondup speaks of hope in his poem:

But leave us/ our dreams of the future/ yet to come and our/ visions of
hope and realization./ Do not tell us/ ‘you are rootless, far removed from
the sacred/ glory of your heritage...’/ Leave us alone!/ Give us the chance
to pursue/ our search for our/ shores and shapes./ Do not tell us/ ‘your

⁶¹ Choephel, Gendun. , “Rebkong,” *Muses in Exile*, p.3.

⁶² Choephel Gendun, *ibid.*, p.4.

philosophy is thin/ songs stale/ and beliefs tainted'⁶³

This particular line, mentioned above, becomes almost a plea and a pledge, at the same time to let him resurrect his sense of self. In invoking the sacred in geography, he says in the following lines:

While words are printed/ The best poems are written not on papers/ But
by the swans on the shores/ the winds on the highway⁶⁴

Here swans and winds become symbolic for the land he comes from, where the wind is not just a natural phenomenon but an integral part of lived life. But talking about this he is imparting a meaning to the word drawing out its symbolism.

There is another analogy that comes across as both significant and interesting:

In my journey/ from here to eternity/ I often sing the cold mountain songs/
I often watch the white crane fly/ Wishing they would lend me wings/ For
my homesick soul.⁶⁵

Perhaps in what can be seen as a profoundly sad story of the death of his compatriot the poem invokes both grief and hope:

...the dead have been led to their/ kingdom of peace/ We have nothing/
Save the joy of joining/ The ceremony of birth,/ The melancholia of
dragging our days/ through the scathing stretch of/ our existence,/ Our
kingdom of life –birth and bread./ His was the existence of peace/ Read
magazine stories/ Ate at restaurants/ Slept on the asphalt road Till he
joined the ceremony of death/ On a silent night./ With hardly a soul
mourning

A prayer- wheel turning/ For his rebirth...⁶⁶

⁶³ K. Dhondup, "Fresh Winds," *Muses in Exile*, New Delhi: Paljor Publications, 2004, p.19.

⁶⁴ K. Dhondup, "A Poet's Poetry," *Muses in Exile*, p.20.

⁶⁵ K. Dhondup, "Cold Mountain Songs," *Muses in Exile*, p.23.

⁶⁶ K. Dhondup, "Existence Anonymous," *Muses in Exile*, p.27.

The poem also renders the profound sense of loneliness that he experiences in being ‘anonymous.’ The word is intended as a pun. However the lines that do not resonate with nostalgia, apathy, and hopelessness are as follows:

Read half a poem of Walt Whitman/ When I caught myself
escaping/ ...And when in the evening you return/ I see an injured
poem/ Bleeding like the dying soldiers/ On the faraway hills of the
Northern land/ In the distant days when you were only a child/ You
used to dream of being a man of war/ Now after losing all the battles
you have fought/ You still long to be a better soldier/ After years of
escape and separation/ You will recollect those native hills/ Those
prayer- flags, the echo of/ the conches and highland dogs/
Disturbing the still night/ O the nomad valley⁶⁷

Again in these lines by Ngodup Paljor you can feel the sacred geography being invoked by the poet in imageries of prayer flags and the echo of conches on the highland. However he takes it ahead in the following verse:

Denali –the mountain endowed/ With beauty and charms/ The queen
of the mountains/ In North America/ When I see your bright face/ I
remember the smiling face/ Of your sister Jhomo Langma • .../ The
queen of the Earth/ I grew up in her lap/ And I played with her
children.⁶⁸

The refrain Paljor make to the two mountains both to reminisce about his childhood mountain shows the constant dynamism of the interplay of many moments coming together. Diasporic time has this essential character of being pulled by various time realities, all at the same time. Time seems like the major consonant in the theme of his poem here as well as many others.

However, it is in Lhasang Tsering’s poem that gender reference is made.

⁶⁷ K. Dhondup, “A Poem of Separation,” *Muses in Exile*, p.29.

• Tibetan for Mount Everest (*Poets note*)

⁶⁸ Ngodup Paljor, “Mountains,” *Muses in Exile*, New Delhi: Paljor Publications, 2004, p.32.

He senses gender inequality; refrains from denouncing what he senses as unequal treatment, yet says boldly:

...their vows are the same./ Why then is one of them-/ The ample bellied one/ Dashing around in a Toyota?/ And why is the other one-/ The frail, sad looking one/ Selling postcards by the roadside?/ Well, That is simply because/ The one is a monk/ And the other is only a nun./ And while it is not true –/ That all monks are rich,/ Nor all nuns poor,/ Yes, between the monk and the nun –/ There seems to be a discrepancy,/ Which does not favour the nun.⁶⁹

Lhasang Tsering wrote this poem in response to an incident reported to him, in which the witness saw a monk whizzing by in a car while a nun silently sold postcards. The theme of the poem explores the irony of the situation and is critical of the gender bias that is visible in Buddhism.

At times political correctness is lost in the creation as is seen in the following poem:

torn between two countries/ separated by boundaries/ one gave me birth / the other hearth/ one gave me my heritage/ the other my children's parentage/ one taught me theocracy/ the other gave me democracy/ shattered dreams in one/ in the other a life in the sun/ for whom shall I loyalty reserve?/ Which country shall I loyally serve?/ Torn between two countries/ Separated by boundaries/ My heart will die in America/ My soul will live in Tibet⁷⁰

Here even if the poet is using poetic license to talk of separation of boundaries between Tibet and America, the symbolism does not reach out clearly in the entire poem. However the following provocative poem symbolizes a new oeuvre altogether:

Baba sells dreams at the steps of a masjid/ among the squalor rises an archaic memory/ if this stench of low-ebb humanity repulses you/ know also that the song-birds play in the filth/ and bring with them

⁶⁹ Lhasang Tsering, "The Monk and the Nun," *Muses in Exile*, pp.40-41.

⁷⁰ Tsoltrim N. Shakbaba, "Torn between Two Countries," *Muses in Exile*, p.45.

the perfume of the hills.../ and there are dreams to be brought at the
baba's masjid⁷¹

The poem speaks about the emergence of a multiple identity that in many ways is used as a reminder of the poet's real identity, which ironically, surfs on many identities. The conceptualization of time in these poems gets a voice in the following untitled poem:

I am just a soul in a fix/ Crying for the right direction/ My mind is
so mixed/ It's a total confusion/ Time is made of tenses/ But
moments are gone when it's gone⁷²

Pathos seeps into the following lines:

We have climbed the mountain/ passes, offered prayers and
ruminated/ on the possibility of tumbling over/ the edge, Many hours
of rain and the road/ is a river. Grasslands bronze as the nomads/
move close to their winter holes./ This world is a lie. I think of all/
the futures you will miss. Life goes/ by the centre. We are drinking./
We are eating.⁷³

Representing perhaps the most radical voice of the Tibetan youth, says
Tenzin Tsundue:

Our tiled roof dripped/ and the four walls threatened to fall apart/
but we were to go home soon,/ we grew papayas/ in front of our
house chilies in our garden/ and changma's for our fences,/ then
pumpkins rolled down the cowshed thatch/ calves trotted out of the
manger,/ grass on the roof,/ beans sprouted and/ climbed down the
vines,/ money plants crept in through the windows,/ our house
seems to have grown roots./ The fences have grown into a jungle/
now how can I tell my children where we came from?⁷⁴

You virtually pass through time as you read this poem, where normal

⁷¹ Tenzing Sonam, "Burlesque," *Muses in Exile*, p.77.

⁷² G.C., "Untitled," *Muses in Exile*, p.90-91.

⁷³ Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, "A matter Not of Order," *Muses in Exile*, pp. 92-96.

⁷⁴ Tenzin Tsundue, "Exile House," *Muses in Exile*, p. 103.

activities of life, divide and explain time. Pumpkins roll down and calves trot in the manger while grass grows on the roof until the house he lives in symbolically, grows roots. 'Roots' is the key word here. But then he gives the simile of a 'fence' which is symbolic of borders and divisions as also identity, grows into a jungle. The explanation being that the fences have grown stronger. As also bringing into play the reality being fenced. Description of time finds a beautiful reference in his poem titled 'Spider webbed':

The hostel mess is closed/ And I got no money/ ...haunting the empty corridors/ and the dozing old man./ Dried eyes, pale, as if sucked in/ By the multitude of empty rooms,/ Goggling at each other in a ring/ As if to say 'I am here'./ .../ Before I swallow my next glob/ of saliva, I need some water./ My water bottle on the table/ Is spider webbed to the table lamp./ A mosquito caught, flits and freezes./ A clock reads six/ Is it morning six o'clock?/ Or evening six o'clock?/ Where is that bloody sun!⁷⁵

The expletive is source and sound of absolute rage and desperation coming from an individual who has even lost count of time.

Helplessness is again visible in the following verse:

I direct my scream heavenward,/ Yet a solitary echo do I hear./ My world is my cage./ Solitude my only friend/ For I'm but a barred bird./ Cut off from freedom I long for.⁷⁶

But the poets fire finds true sublimation in the following lines:

Oh! Dhondup Gyal.../ Death hath not done to ,/ For thy verses are full of life/ And transcend the earthly bounds of time and space...⁷⁷

Again the sacred is invoked with:

...Their boats, lapped/ By the waters, dance./ In the distance, the Potala/ Place of the Lord./ All around them, birds/ Sing the summer

⁷⁵ Tenzin Tsundue, "Spider-webbed," *Muses in Exile*, pp. 109-110.

⁷⁶ Tsamche Dolma, "Freedom," *Muses in Exile*, p. 126.

⁷⁷ Kalsang Wangdu, "Ode to Dhondup Gyal," *Muses in Exile*, p. 150.

song.⁷⁸

Invoking sacred, yet again another poet says:

In the foreground of the Potala/Flows the great Kyichu/Her banks
are lined with boatmen.../...Beneath the blue sky,/And the boatmen
sang/In tune to the ripples./...Gently making its way/Under the
willows grey/With all our care left far behind.⁷⁹

“And “home” is no longer a geographical place, but a two dimensionality of memory and nostalgia,” says Karamcheti⁸⁰ and speaking about the Indian Diaspora says that “Reworlding” helps to bring a global community into being. It functions she says, as a cultural act and as an intervention that aims to ‘world’ by textualizing; usually the text, textuality, and the theory are placed in facile opposition to politics, practice, “fact,” “life,” or “reality.” But the two opposed poles mutually engender each other, so that theory “organizes’ practice, text enables act.

The repertoire of poems, and novels and essays has grown over a period of time post 1958 and imbued with many meanings, this literature keeps growing into its maturity. The roots that gave birth to this literature of angst and at time literature of hope traces its origins and history right back from where it actually traversed on its different sojourns the world over; but what it has carried with it, although in a very tertiary sense, are the longings, despair and hope that in the first place gave it birth. It is in this sense that each time Tibetan literature harvests a new essay, a new poem, a new oeuvre, a new genre, a new generation of meanings; their pregnant prose and verses will owe a debt to their origins:

“My legs carried me, but my spirit remained with her

⁷⁸ Gyalpo Tsering, “Boatmen of Kyichu,” *The Tibet Journal* (LTWA, Dharamsala), vol.1, no. 1, July/September 1975, p.106.

⁷⁹ Dhondup Dorje, “Sailing on the Kyichu,” *The Tibet Journal* (LTWA, Dharamsala), vol.3, no. 4, July/September 1978, p.47.

⁸⁰ Indira Karamcheti, “The Shrinking Himalayas,” review of *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* by Emmanuel S. Nelson (ed.), CT: Greenwood Press, 1992 in *Diaspora*, vol.2, no.2, 1992, pp260- 278. also see: <http://www.cyberdiva.org/erniestuff/Cyborcosaw.html>

...Every night I light a lamp for her,
and her brothers join me in prayers.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Tenzin Tsundue, “Crossing the Border,” *Crossing the Border*, p. 15.