

Nostalgic Ruminations: Tenzin T Sundue's *Verses in Exile*

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ABSTRACT

The moral authority of His Holiness, The Dalai Lama has prevented the Tibetans in Tibet and in exile from taking up arms. Thus the Tibetans have the ability to keep their struggle non-violent as they intend to hold on to the roots of Tibet's cultural and ethnic identity

Keywords: Homeland, freedom, exile, refugee, struggle, non-violence.

Tibetan poems were religious only in the past. Tibetans suffered/suffer immeasurably under the illegal occupation of Tibet by China. They are being persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and murdered. Their voices stifled and their places of worship demolished they struggle for freedom from more than five grueling decades of brutal and tyrannical Chinese rule persist. The Tibetan poets and writers have sought and reached a worldwide audience in their fight for liberation through the use of the universal language.

For most of the Tibetan poets, Tibet, their homeland has never been their home. The ordinary Tibetan nomads, their love for the land and for the well-being of the land, is the most touching Tibet story. The Tibetan poets find it very difficult to put this relationship into words. It is now a tremendous responsibility for the young Tibetans to understand Tibetan history. They try to know where they come from, to strengthen

their emotional ties to the country. Most of them have never seen or visited their people in Tibet. The young Tibetans who have escaped into exile in the last twenty years live with the real material loss every day. They know what it is to be uprooted at a young age and feel that they never would see their loved ones who they left behind in Tibet.

“Tibet will not die; they would not let it die, “is the voice of many a poet in exile. They always dream of a free Tibet, to remain alive while they tend to become weak. The Tibetan youth are charged with a huge surge of energy to prepare for the dream to come true. Such is the group of poets who constitute a generation of youth in exile, who never have seen Tibet and yet incredibly passionate about it.

Tenzin T Sundue is a writer activist and a poet of rare blend in the Tibetan Community, in exile. He was born during the chaotic era of Tibetan refugee resettlement in the early seventies. His parents were refugees, who labored on India’s border roads around Manali in North India. In all his poems he has expressed the hope of returning to his homeland, Tibet. He reveals the transitory state of exile. As a Tibetan, he dreams of Home, longs for freedom and has resolved to composing poetic notes from the footpath of exile existence. He is a restless young Tibetan, who graduated from Madras, South India. He has braved biting frost weather conditions, climbed treacherous mountains, and crossed the Himalayas on foot and set foot in forbidden Tibet, his motherland. He wished to see the situation of his occupied country, occupied by the Communist China. He wanted to join the freedom struggle, but was arrested by China’s border police and sent to prison in Lhasa for three months.

In India Indians think that he is a Chinese, but the Chinese arrested him when he had walked into Tibet. They had then thrown him out, thinking him to be an Indian. He realizes that he is only a foreigner with a Tibetan nationality. His registration certificate as a refugee in India is his identity. He very open

heartedly praises India as a homeland for the largest number of refugees like the Burmese, Bangladeshis, Parsis, Srilankan Tamils and Tibetans. This he confirms because there is no refugee law prevalent in India.

The poet writer grieves that he had grown up, only with the imagination of a glorious homeland, but on his return he could experience that his home was only where his struggle for free Tibet was. He is agonized about how the Tibetans above the age of 18, irrespective of the period and position whether one is born in India, or had fled Tibet in 1959 or a celebrity escapee from Tibet in the recent years, had to make an annual pilgrimage—like visit to the local police station to seek an extension to stay in India for another year. The poet by gentle persuasion shows the state of the unity in the minds of his people in their struggle for freedom. With such a privilege to be in India, he reveals the real truth and its harshness. He writes about how the Tibetans were promised a dreamland even when he was a child and how his people had to fix Chinese guns with their prayers. He emphasizes how he tries Gandhian ways with his own Guru the Dalai Lama in his heart. Now he is confident that he can say he is an Indian more than any real Indian.

He reminisces how as school boys in a Tibetan refugee camp, he and his fellow students marched out for Free Tibet protest rallies shouting "*Tibet ki azadi, Bharat ki suraksha*" (Tibet's independence is India's security). Tibetan refugees from Chinese persecution nurtured them and reinforced them only with education and not with guns.

Ever since the first day of their exile, the Tibetans have resettled themselves. From empty handed escapees, they have become the most successful refugees with more than 100 schools and over 500 monasteries and cultural centres and a good standard of living. They hope to bring back a new Tibet from the developed exile government. They have confidence to return to

their homeland to build a new Tibet and for that they rely and trust India.

Tenzin T Sundue's poem *somewhere I lost my Losar* has a structure of a "Decima" also known as Espinela after its founder (Vicente Espinel). The theme throughout is hopes of freedom for their motherland, though there is solitude.

Somewhere along the path, I
Lost it, don't know where or when. (Lines 1&2)

The poem begins with a couplet, which forms the refrain. The refrain is in an explicit manner and portrays the poet's cherished feelings and longing about the New Year festival celebrations in his homeland. The poet shows relaxed moments of calmness and peace once his expressions are delivered in the couplet.

The poet broods on the one hand, yet cherishes the moments of Losar celebrations, when he was a small boy at the refugee school. He anguishes the way he grew up, leaving behind every thought, the great occasion of his homeland, the Tibetan New Year, that it occurred every year, but then it was only their birthday celebrations with cakes and candles, they could enjoy the tasty momo dinner lingering in their mouths, while they stood in time for their turns to get their gifts was evergreen in his heart. The genuine emotions of the poet are revealed. He takes a mind-numbing breath about his (gloomy) boyhood at the refugee camp. The childhood is very faintly remembered about where and when he had forgotten the divine occasion, the Tibetan New Year celebrations.

The poet, in his childhood is not able to make his happiness of wearing new clothes and bursting crackers, last long. He is grieved, yet renders a commendatory writing in honour of his countrymen. Also renders homage to the great patriots' Thus he agonizes at the brutality of the Chinese faced by his selfless and dutiful elders in the prison. He is a refugee in a life of harmony,

realizes the loss of his reality in his serene motherland. Being driven to a land of uncertainty and surprises, the poet only cherishes the instantaneous happiness of his sacred routines. He tends to recall the path he had treaded upon, the Tibetan New Year, with fund and traditional offerings in the holy country, Tibet.

The poet renders moments of solitude about his life as a refugee while at Bombay. He feels a heavy heart drowned in thoughts about his near and dear ones. His feelings are butchered when he recalls his duty to report to Dharamsala Police. He experiences his life with relevance to the present and subtly grieves about past. His memories are a repository of his urge for freedom for his motherland. With all the routine formalities the poet seems to have had a gloomy side of his life as a refugee for nearly twenty years without the serene country celebrations. The poet is fearless, earnest and almost in tears, is truthful and all his memoirs in vain. He expresses his feelings for such bitter experiences:

When our people rode horses,
shouting "Freedom"
against rattling machine guns, when they
died like flies in the Olympic spectacle,
but failed.
I couldn't die, it's forbidden by law. (Lines 43 to 48)

Yet hoping to return to free Tibet and not grieved. He wishes freedom and cherishes life away from home being bestowed with humanity he glorifies the sacrifices, made by his elders for freedom struggle. The poet wishes freedom, living away from home though. He experiences life bestowed with humanity and glorifies the sacrifices made by his elders for freedom struggle. Throughout the poem, the poet has suffused that Tibetans have the determination to live their lives with the hopes of going back to their promised land with oneness and peace.

In *Somewhere I Lost My Losar* every line is contextualized. The Poet seems to reveal his rationalized memory of the reality of the Arcadian quality of his motherland and the celebrations of the Tibetan New Year. He is eloquent and transmutes the tiny factions of his individual memory into a holistic collective experience. The theme of course is his experience of being a Refugee. He has replaced as memory- at- work in a simple poem of agony to remember his country and the serenity of it, the culture and the very compassionate people who never wish to harm other living beings. His thoughts about his home in nowhere in his mother land is actualized. Thus he uses his writing of poems, greatly, as a tool to protest. Thus he does not let compassion and love slip from his mind. He claims equality as it wheedles his mind. He claims equality as it wheedled his mind during the foremost years of his youth. Tenzin Tsundue lives as a poor Tibetan. He has four simple outfits, two for hot and two for cold. He wears a bandana until Tibet is free. In his poem he rightly shows that Tibetan patriotism is from within and that it is a real patriotic feeling.

‘Our jailed heroes ate in pig sties there...’ (Line 17)

He pays tribute as he grieves for his elders who fought with the Tibetanness in their blood.

Alan Gilbert states that the poem reflects some temporary ebbing of the struggle and the fire in them burns brightly. He refers to his heart as “The Fiery Invisible Sword of Non-Violence”. He says that Tenzin has lived always a refugee, his home over the mountains. His parents had given him and his sister to the Manali Kullu School, which raised them. So, always had the sense of purpose as a child, to restore Tibet. He is superstitious, about his Tibetan Community there in Dharamsala that there are no Tibetan beggars and no homeless Tibetans.

Pankaj Mishra describes Tsundue as “one of the fiercest children of Dalai Lama and that he adores the Tibetan elders as

fathers in their freedom struggle and as one who pursues non-violence.”

In another poem “My Tibetanness” “Crossing the Border”, the poet emphasizes his sense of identity.

I am Tibetan
But I am not from Tibet
Never been there
Yet I dream of dying there. (Lines 11to15)

The critic opines that the poet’s sense of place is very unique and when questioned about where he is from, he wouldn’t find an answer. He only could feel that he belonged to no place. He could only say he was born in Manali and his parents lived in Karnataka. Hence he has no place anywhere to call it his home.

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