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"People of a Lost Country, Citizens to No Nation": The Subaltern Voice in Contemporary Tibetan Literature in English

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Within the last few years writings in English from Tibet have indeed come to a long way thanks to the publication of new poetry volumes, essay collections, short story compilations, novels and the like. This emerging and rapidly developing body of literature has been enriched by the works of some of the present generation of wonderful writers such as Tenzin Tsundue, Jamyang Norbu, K Dhondup, Thubten Samphel, Dawa Norbu, Tsering Wangyal etc. Tibetan Writing in India is also a very much significant field of study. The Tibetan writers in India were also very much alert to the rapid growth and the emerging popularity of postcolonial Indian writing. Jamyang Norbu's Pastiche of Sherlock Holmes, The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes are some of the notable works of literature by Tibetan writers from India.

Tenzin Tsundue, the celebrated Tibetan poet and writer residing in India has immense contribution towards the development of Tibetan literature in English. The winner of the Outlook Picador Award for Non-Fiction in 2001, Tsundue is the first Tibetan poet writing in English who has been drawing global attention. His poetry seems to be a mission to give voice to the marginalized Tibetan community, especially the refugees. His literary works convey the angst of the Tibetan refugees in India and their dilemmas, their sense of displacement, isolation and their identity crisis. He has been influential in inspiring a generation of Tibetan diasporic writers also. He is also a well-known activist for Tibetan independence, and has a significant presence in both Tibetan and Indian literature. He frequently gives readings at universities across India. He's particularly recognized for his activism and the highly visible protests he stages whenever Chinese officials visit India, which really solidifies his reputation as a revolutionary poet. In one of his poems titled "Betrayal" Tsundue says:

My father died

defending our home,

our village, our country.

I too wanted to fight.

But we are Buddhist.

People say we should be

Peaceful and Non-Violent.

So I forgive our enemy.

But sometimes I feel

I betrayed my father. (Tsundue, 2021)

Tsering Wangmo Dhompa is another celebrated Tibetan poet in English known mostly for her widely appreciated travelogue, *Home in Tibet* and a non-fiction titled *The Politics of Sorrow: A Story of Unity and Allegiance Across Tibetan Exile*. This non-fiction is a landmark historical analysis of the Tibetan diaspora. It uncovers the internal struggles of the exile community, revealing how the Tibetan government's demand for a unified national identity often marginalized regional cultures, including those of Khampas and Amdowas. This book poses a challenge the monolithic narrative of Tibetan exile history. By elevating these alternative visions of governance and identity, the book tries to address several crucial issues such as identity crisis, exile and displacement of the Tibetan people.

Bhuchung D. Sonam of Dharamshala, is another Tibetan poet of repute. He is also a prolific translator who translates poems from Tibetan into English. Along with him there are writers like Amdo Gendun Choephel and Chogyam Trungpa who write in English. Choephel's poem "Repkong" is an expression of homesickness that echoes a heartfelt yearning for going back to homeland from exile. for Tibet. Trungpa too has many poetry collections to his credit.

Yet another Tibetan writer is Thubten Samphel. His novel *Copper Mountain* and *Tibet: Reports from Exile,* is a collection of articles which is published by Blackneck Books. Samphel is best known for his novel *Falling Through the Roof,* which deals with the plight of the Tibetans living in India. Another of his novel is called *Another Place*, which is set in the exiled capital of Dharamshala of India.

The first work of English fiction by a Tibetan writer is *Idols on the Path* by Tsewang Yishey Pemba and published in 1966. Not many Tibetans had read about him or his works until the publication of his second novel, *White Crane, Lend Me Your Wings*. This novel is about the Christian missionaries in Tibet that makes quite an interesting read in understanding a defining moment in contemporary Tibetan history. This novel tells of two invasions of Tibet: one is religious while the other one is political. The first invasion the novel talks about is by the Christian missionaries who tried to convert the Tibetans to Christianity from Buddhism, and the second one is by the Chinese troops. The title of the book, which is borrowed from a famous song by the Sixth Dalai Lama, has a great significance for Tibetans. It echoes the yearning of the exiled, displaced Tibetans to return to their homeland.

Some of the significant works of contemporary Tibetan literature in English, to name a few, include *Old Demons, New Deities: 21 Short Stories of Tibet,* a short-story collection edited by Tenzin Dickie, *Penguin Book of Modern Tibetan Essays*, also edited by Tenzin Dickie, *We Measure the Earth With Our Bodies*, a novel by Tsering Yangzom Lama, *Echoes from Forgotten Mountains: Tibet in War and Peace,* a novel that deals with literary history and collective memory by Jamyang Norbu etc. In *We Measure the Earth With Our Bodies*, Tsering Yangzom Lama vividly captures the trauma and pain of a person displaced his homeland, a sad feeling of belonging nowhere. That person is in a crisis of identity torn between an inaccessible ancestral homeland and a foreign world that never truly feels like home:

"This is a familiar threshold, facing in opposite directions: Toward a country I cannot truly enter. And back to a world that cannot be my home. Forward or back, no step makes sense. So I must remain between two realms." (Lama, 2023)

The corpus of Tibetan literature in English can also be seen as a strong postcolonial voice of resistance, assertion and a journey in search for identity. It seems to claim a space as well as a place for marginalized, subaltern voices. Tibetan history has always been a history of resistance as well as assertion especially against the Chinese hegemony. Contemporary Tibetan literature is a reflection of that resistance. It is felt that Tibetan literature bears a spiritual feeling to the concept of homeland and thus a powerful voice of protest is heard when this spiritual relationship is denigrated by a political, economic, social and cultural hegemony. It is quite significant to note that despite many challenges the voice of resistance has not been faded at all in the works of contemporary Tibetan writers. The works of these writers demand more serious academic attention. Varied approaches are to be applied for studying the multidimensionality of this powerful body of writing. Amongst them, an approach with postcolonialism in perspective will open up newer avenues in understanding the trauma

and suffering of those people, who are, in the words of the Tibetan poet Tenzin Tsundue, 'People of a lost country, citizens to no nation".

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