Chapter 7

Conclusion

Exile is a constant reality faced by the Tibetans today. Exile which has been forced upon the Tibetans has taught them not only to make a home for themselves in different parts of the world but also keep alive the memory of their own homeland. Though many of those who had directly experienced that homeland have moved on, they have left behind a heritage of waiting, of longing to go back to their own land. Fifty years and more in exile have nevertheless kept this desire ever fresh, a dream to be realized. The Tibetans look forward to the peaceful realization of this dream. Faithful to the tenets of the Buddhist faith which preaches non-violence and which believed in the happiness achieved by the giving up of all desires and by being obedient to the wishes of their spiritual father the Dalai Lama, the Tibetans did not resort to brutality to achieve their goals. They have differed vastly from other exiled people who sought to gain their ends by violent means like terrorist attacks and guerilla warfare. Terrorist outfits all over the world are united in their desire for homelands of their own, like the Palestinians who fight to preserve their land from Israel, the Al-Qaeda which fights against the oppressive measures of the United States, and the splinter groups that fight for an independent Kashmir. The list of discontented and displaced people is long and painful.

Tibet and its exiled people are the only exception. They haven’t yet rendered themselves to the path of violence and destruction. Perhaps their close associations with the mighty Himalayas and their Buddhist heritage have given them the gifts of
patience and hope. Even though half a century has elapsed since the Chinese
invasion of Tibet and the consequent loss of their homeland, the Tibetans are waiting
patiently, waiting for a better tomorrow or perhaps for a tulku or an incarnate, a
messiah who would save them. Tibet remains one of the difficult riddles in world
politics, a riddle whose very easy solution can bring about a total change in the
permutations and combinations of international diplomacy.

It would be wrong to think that Tibetans have accepted exile as their fate and
meekly submitted to it. On the other hand, they are using every non-violent means in
their power to awaken the conscience of the world to understand the plight of the
Tibetans. The cultural output one receives from the people is a testament for the
hope that sustains them. Tsoltim Shakbpa’s poem “I have a Target” is a good
testament for such poetry. The poem sounds very similar to the famous “I have a
Dream” speech of Martin Luther King Jr. and just as King’s dream remains
unrealized to this day, so does the target spoken of by Shakbpa remain unachieved.
However this does not lessen the optimism of the poet. Shakbpa is among the most
active second generation poets whose poetic output continues at a steady pace even
today. His poems like “Defining a Nation” is expressive of the rejuvenating spirit of
freedom.

Exile is a profound feeling which erases one’s own identity and reworks it in
such a way as to produce powerful results like literature. Among all genres of
literature poetry is the most poignant and therefore the most powerful. Like honey
oozing from the cracks of rocks, poetry is torn out of the agony of the poet’s soul.
Since the Tibetans have undergone these trials for the last fifty and more years their poetry has become synonymous with the anguish of exile. Literature, poetry to be specific, is a sort of resistance for the Tibetans in exile. It has become an expression of their identity as well as ethnicity. For them poetry becomes a specific reverberation of protest, resisting the colonial onslaught of China. Hence poetry for Tibetans is the form of sustained protest – a form of resistance in exile.

From the very early times the magical mantras of tantric yoga had influenced the Tibetans so profoundly that poetry became the natural vehicle of the expression of their soul. Besides, rearing yaks and goats alone in the grassy meadows and in the high valleys as well as meditating in the windy mountainous terrain, songs might have become part of the psyche of the Tibetans. This has percolated to the later generations. Thus for them poetry is an essential tool of representation. The same poetry is used to represent their ideas, emotions, even their protests. Modern poets use it to resist Chinese hegemony in and out of exile. Hence poetry for the Tibetans is the soul of existence.

A study of the Tibetan poetry gives rise to seven major tenets which together make up an essential Tibetanness. These seven tenets are

1. Deep association with religion and culture
2. Specific ethnic identity
3. Presence of three generations
4. The right to exist and express
5. The desire to return
6. The presence of a strong voice of hope.

7. The voice of a political orphan.

Exile is the one common factor that runs like the string that threads through all these facets like pearls in a necklace. The reality of exile is the basis of all the activities of the Tibetans whether they have to do with poetry or not. Exile has reworked the whole Tibetan psyche. What was once the forbidden kingdom is now no longer so both physically and otherwise. Today the kingdom of Tibet and man’s understanding of it has enlarged through the looking glass of Tibetan poetry.

Ethnically too Tibetans form a race different from the races in the countries around. Even when they are part of the greater Mongoloid family, they are a more developed race than their neighbours. Their philosophy of life has its basis on the Buddhist beliefs that originated in India. They have taken elements from the lands all around them and assimilated these elements into themselves. This amalgamation with the world around without losing their own essential identity is the secret of their development. The Tibetans who were merely a hunter-gatherer race progressed into a race based on the Buddhist faith. The same process happened in a slightly different manner in their exile also. Exile turned out to be a positive force in that it forced the Tibetans to make use of every non-violent means in the form of peaceful protests and marches or through blogs and websites to express their resistance to the Chinese aggression. The three generations of poets have made it a point to use the reality of exile as a tool of resistance. For the first generation it was celebrating life in the forbidden world as they had personally experienced it while for the second
generation it was conscientizing the world about the Tibetan exile and for the third
generation it was resisting the bitter reality of exile through poetry. The very young
poets of Tibetan literature are taking this feeling to an even higher extent.

The political changes witnessed inside Tibet have kept the Tibetans well out
of the limelight. What one might think as a very firm means of protest like armed
resistance over foreign rule is unknown to them. They undertake resistance in a very
different manner. For the past one year about thirty monks and others have set
themselves ablaze protesting against Chinese hegemony. Thus we can say every
Tibetan, poet or not, keeps the spirit of Tibetan freedom alive and shining
throughout the world. A new action forum “Enough! Campaign for Global
Intervention to Save Tibetan Lives” founded during the 2011 summit of G20 nations
requested the whole world to work together for the freedom of Tibet. However, not
even in India that has given refuge to thousands of Tibetan refugees, has any
government come out in full support of the Tibetan cause.

China now holds the status of the “Most Favored Nation” given to it by
India. It is a trade partner for India as well as a nuclear threat over the Himalayas.
China is able to exert pressure upon the Indian government which is detrimental to
the Tibetan cause. A recent example of this is the censoring of the Hindi movie
“Rockstar.” In the movie a sequence of just a few seconds showing a banner with
the wording “Free Tibet” as well as a flag of Tibet was censored and removed from
the film. The reason for this action was due to the pressure by China on the
Government of India. The presence of China as a nuclear enemy in the backyard is
also a headache for the Indian government. Since India too has nuclear weapons in
its arsenal, a war between the two could end up in a modern day nuclear holocaust.
The diversion of the rivers and glaciers in Tibet could be fatal for India. They could
block the water supply to the lower areas of the Indian plain. Great rivers like the
Brahmaputra, the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Sutlej and the Indus could end up as
mere trickles as they too are fed by the mighty glaciers of the Himalayas. The Three
Gorges Dam project built in Tibet and the Parichu lake crisis of recent years were
the beginning of all this. The mineral wealth of Tibet has been looted by the Chinese.
Excessive blasting in the region could destroy the ecological as well as geographical
balance of the area causing severe landslides and earthquakes even on the Indian
side. Again it is known that China has turned certain remote areas of Tibet as a
dumping ground for hazardous waste. This could also directly cause a problem for
India. The flooding of counterfeit Chinese articles in the Indian markets has already
destroyed many of the Indian household entrepreneurial joints like toy making. The
Quinghai-Golmund-Lhasa railway line has brought tourists and with them associated
vices to the land. On a close observation this has also triggered the movement of
troops to the Indo-Tibetan borders. China is also fast building up a huge military
base in Tibet. Being in one of the highest areas in the world fit for human habitation
it is possible for the Chinese to destroy any city in the world from this vantage
point. Hence demilitarizing the Tibetan plateau should be the concern of the entire
world, especially for India. The Dalai Lama has advocated this cause in all his policy
statements. After a quick analysis of these facts one can very well feel the Chinese
pressure on India and the need for an independent buffer state like Tibet established between the “elephant” (India) and the “dragon” (China). Hence it should be the duty of India to support the Tibetan cause.

For the Tibetans in exile the reality is different. The loss of identity is so great that each Tibetan is dissatisfied with his lot. With the Chinese being involved unduly in every matter existence has become a great problem for the Tibetans. The present Dalai Lama has transferred his political powers to a democratically elected “Kalon Tripa” (Prime Minister) and has already stated that he is not going to take a rebirth. In “Blue Skies and White Mountains: Tibetan Poetry in English,” an essay published in the journal Indian Literature, Buchung D. Sonam has written about the situation of the Tibetan exile in India. He says that he could convey his thoughts to the outside world only with the help of the borrowed English tongue. This is the condition of the third generation Tibetan who has never seen his homeland of Tibet. He is doubly dislocated and doubly marginalized. Being a Tibetan he is in exile and being in exile he is always considered as a lesser human being by the citizens of the lands where he has obtained refuge. Tenzin Tsundue, another powerful poet, has used his skills to present this subject. This is the exile’s public face, the face he shows the world outside. He is not content even in his private world, since he has no clear image about his homeland. It is transient and fluid. This kind of double marginalization is what Sonam, Tsundue and many others express through their poems. So do other Tibetan poets in exile. Each poem presents a reality different from the other.
The poem “Verdict” by Tenzin Dickyi is a good example of how the modern Tibetan poets express the searing reality of their lives. He talks about the way dinosaurs have become extinct and observes that Tibetans in exile too have come to the verge of extinction. Tsamchoe Dolma’s poem “The Love Story of a Snail Queen” too tells of the same condition. Tibetans moving slowly to independence are squashed down by international politics just like the slow moving snail queen. Powerful poems like the ones written by G. C. (Gendun Cheophel) speak of the fate of Tibetans who are doomed to live and die in exile as in his poem “If I Die”. Yet every individual poet is hopeful of a brighter, better future.

Buchung D. Sonam’s essay, “Blue Skies and White Mountains: Tibetan Poetry in English,” observes that:

> From exilic pains to eventual disappointment, from near-social commentary to cryptic verses, from angry lines to love poems, we write knowing full well that poetry salves the pain of dislocation. The power of poetry to ease suffering has proven true for over a thousand years in Tibetan civilization. (Indian Literature 69)

Tenzin Tsundue pleads with his Indian associates to give a space to the Tibetan refugee in his poem “Space Bar: A Proposal,” Life as an exile has become a burden which has made him perplexed and hopeless. Tsundue’s “The Terrorist” and Sonam’s “Banishment” are good examples. Many other poets can also be considered as examples for Tibetans writing in exile.
Poetry is therefore certainly a tool for resisting the hegemonic overlordship of the People’s Republic of China. The seven elements of “Tibetanness” which have been identified have found their place in one way or the other in all the poems. These poems are marked by their close association with religion and ethnic identity. The poets are classified into three generations representing their right to exist and clamouring for a return to their homeland. The presence of the strong feeling of hope and optimism in the voice of the political orphan is representative of this reality.

Finally poetry is the soul of each Tibetan and Tibetanness is the soul of his poetry. Poetry shows the myriad facets of Tibetans in and out of exile. It steps out among the crowded realities of existence and represents the lone forsaken reality of being a Tibetan. When topped with the feeling of exile Tibetanness becomes more poignant. It is a feeling which guides the Tibetan spirit into ever rising possibilities of resistance. Experiencing exile as a factor of social change is seen in modern Tibetan poetry. Thus poetry becomes a means to resist the exile, in fact poetry becomes the only means to resist exile through the non-violent methods preached and practised by Buddhism which lies deeply embedded in the very psyche of every Tibetan. Hence Tibetan poetry in exile is rightfully called resistance in exile.