Chapter 3

A History of Tibetan Literature

The kingdom of Tibet situated on the roof of the world was a kingdom forbidden to all persons for a very long period. The people and the land were self-reliant and self-sufficient and had no need for contact with the external world. Only a few intrepid adventurers dared to enter this land of snowy mountains and rugged people. This was the condition for long years until the arrival of the Manchus and the Mongols. The foreign invasion broke the seclusion of Tibet and the external world began to enter the land and the minds of the people. The land and its literature slowly began to reach out and also began to be influenced by the world outside. In the twentieth century with the invasion of Tibet by China, the world entered the land with a vengeance and Tibet lost its previous exclusivity. Many of the Tibetan people including their leader the Dalai Lama had to seek refuge on the other side of the Himalayas. Some others took refuge in various countries around the world. The majority who fled to India settled down at Dharmasala in Himachal Pradesh, India, which later became the seat of the Tibetan Government in exile. Here they have lived for more than half a century, preserving their rich heritage and dreaming of the day they can go back to the land of their birth.

The history of Tibetan writing goes far back into the seventh century AD. Thonmi Sambhota is believed to be the inventor of the Tibetan script. He was the minister of the Tibetan king Song-tsen Gam-po, and was sent to India to form a script for the Tibetan language. The script has striking similarities with the Indian
The establishment of a separate religion, a separate kingdom and a separate script promoted genuine studies in Tibet, particularly, studies in medicine and philosophy after the seventh century AD. Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, the Elder, who is regarded as the founding father of the Tibetan school of medicine, is of special importance. His *Rgyud bzhi Gyüüschi* is the seminal text regarding Tibetan medicine. By the eleventh century Tibet saw the rise of another great sage – Milerepa. He is second only to Padmasambhava in the Tibetan tradition. He has written a number of songs of philosophy and devotion. Significant developments in the other schools of Buddhism were the product of this century. The age also saw the systematization of the Tibetan Buddhist texts. Nampar Nangadze Lotsawa, Lochen Ringchen Tsangpo, Drogmi Lotsawa are some of the prominent translators of the Buddhist texts. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Tibetan_writers). However, nobody has yet written a literary history in English; what exists is mainly in Tibetan and has not yet been translated to English. The most informative texts on the matter are published by the Wikipedia and similar online sources. Internet sources like www.tibetwrites.com and
blogs like www.friendsoftibet.blogspot.org are used for referential purposes. Hence much of the information in this chapter is taken from online sources.

The foundations of Tibetan literature were laid between the seventh and the eleventh centuries. The following centuries from the twelfth to the nineteenth saw the production of texts like commentaries etc. During this period Yuthong Yoten Ganpo, the Younger, has given significant contributions regarding Tibetan medicine. Chekwa Yeshe Dorjee’s *Seven Points of Spiritual Training* and Drakpa Gyaltsen’s commentaries on Aswaghosha are two other major works in the twelfth century (http://en.wikipedia.org/List_of_Tibetan_Writers).

The institution of Karmapa Lama began during this period. Sera monastery and the Kagyu sect were the home and family respectively of the Karmapa. Karma Pakshi, the second Karmapa, may be considered the most prolific writer of erstwhile Tibet. He has written over a hundred texts on Buddhism which are preserved at the Tsurphu monastery in Tibet. In the same century Buton Rinchen Drub, abbot of the Shalu monastery, had catalogued thousands of Buddhist doctrines. The Phagspa script devised by Drogon Chogyal Phagpa Lodro Gyaltsen was also a product of the period. Longchen Rabjan was a famous writer of the fourteenth century, who wrote on Buddhist philosophy. Tshalpa Kunga Dorje’s *Red Annals* and Go Lotsawa Shonnupal’s *Blue Annals* are two important works of the age. In the same century the short poems of Rolphe Dorje, the fourth Karmapa, also gained much importance (http://en.wikipedia.org/List_of_Tibetan_Writers).
The monasteries of Tibet like other monasteries all over the world became renowned as important seats of learning. Thus the monasteries of Ganden and Sera played a very important role in the Tibetan community. The institutions of Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama who were abbots of the monasteries of Ganden and Tashiluhnpo and the heads of the Gelugpa sect originated during this period. In a short time these institutions gained much political importance over the rest of the country. Many foreign rulers like the Prince of Mongolia and even the Chinese emperor of the times recognized their greatness. Tsongkhapa the abbot of Ganden was a great scholar and a reformer of Tibetan Buddhism. Tsongkhapa was also the founder of the Gelug School. Gyaltsab Je the second abbot of Ganden is well known for his commentaries on the works of Santideva. The many works of the first Dalai Lama Gendun Drub were written in this century including his masterpiece *Training the Mind in the Great Way*.

The fifteenth century was known for the Mahamudra invocation written by Pengar Jampal Sangpo. The biographies of the saintly teacher-disciple pair, Marpa and Milerapa, by Tsang Nyon Heruka is another achievement of the same century. The seventh Karmapa, Chodrak Gyatso, wrote several commentaries on the Mahayanasutras and the Pramana literature. Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen’s text books for the monastery of Sera were also written during this period. The second Dalai Lama, Gendun Gyatso, produced a number of mystical verses during this period. The *Red Annals* written by Panchen Sonam Drakpa, the fifteenth abbot of the Ganden monastery, and *Three Visions* by Ngorchen Konchog Lundhrup the tenth abbot of
The sixteenth century saw the beginning of works which dealt with the history of the land starting with the works of Tsuglag Trengwa. Tharanatha, another famous Tibetan historian, chronicled the history of Indian Buddhism. *The Five Teachings of Maithreya* is his most important work. The third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso, was known for his literary renderings of which *Stages of the Path: Refined Gold* is a good example. The Mahamudra incantations of Wangchuk Dorje, the ninth Karmapa, are worth mentioning here. Writings on special subjects like the instructions on tantra originated during this period. Mikyo Dorje, Pema Karpo, Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen are famed writers of the time (http://en.wikipedia.org/List_of_Tibetan_Writers).

The seventeenth century saw the beginning of creative writing. Though many stories and songs exist in the oral folk tradition of Tibet, Dokhar Tsering Wangyal’s song *gzhon nu zla med kyi gtam rgyud* is considered the first of its kind to be written in Tibetan. The age also saw the literary renderings of the fifth and the sixth Dalai Lamas. The fifth Dalai Lama Ngwang Lobsang Gyatso’s *Twenty Five Sealed Teachings* is a work of a prophetic nature. The sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso, is known for his amorous songs on physical love. Love, for the sixth Dalai Lama, was a mystic experience; unfortunately he was misunderstood by his peers who subjected him to great criticism. However, the sixth Dalai Lama was one who had a romantic spirit of freedom which paid no heed to criticism. Hence he was able
to write without bothering about the restrictions of tradition. Sangye Gyatso’s sutras *Vaidurya-Karpo* and *Vaidurya sNgon-po* are two famous works of the same age. The eighteenth century saw the rise of grammar texts for the Tibetan language by Chokeyi Jungune. The seventh Dalai Lama Kelsang Gyatso’s tantric text *Explication of the Mandala Rituals of Vajra Akshobhya Guhyasamaja* and the seventh Panchen Lama Palden Tenpai Nyima’s *Rinjung Lhantab* were two other great works of the age (http://en.wikipedia.org/List of Tibetan_Writers).

The nineteenth century also produced some great writings in Tibetan. *The Treasury of Rediscovered Teachings* by Jamgon Kongtrul Lodo Thaye is the most important work of the century. Jamyang Khantse Chokyi Lodro and the *ri-mé* movement was a significant event of the age. The word *ri-mé* in Tibetan means non-sectarian. It is the movement which incorporated the Buddhist Nyingma, Kagyu and Sakya traditions with the ancient Bon religion. This movement is considered an encyclopedic movement unbounded, all-embracing, unlimited, and also impartial. The Wikipedia defines it thus:

Rimé is a Tibetan word which means “no sides,” “non-partisan” or “non-sectarian”. In a religious context, the word *ri-mé* is usually used to refer to the “Eclectic Movement” between the Buddhist Nyingma, Sakya, and Kagyu traditions, along with the non-Buddhist Bön religion, wherein practitioners “follow multiple lineages of practice.” The movement was founded in Eastern Tibet during the late 19th century largely by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro
Thaye, the latter of whom is often respected as the founder proper.

The Rimé movement is responsible for a large number of scriptural compilations, such as the *Rinchen Terdzod* and the *Sheja Dzö*. (http://en.wikipedia.org/Rime_movement)

Ringu Tulku also contributed much to the same movement in the following century. Rimé was initially set up to counteract the growing suspicion and tension building up between the different traditions in Tibetan Buddhism. Tension had grown so much in many places as to forbid the study of one another’s scriptures. Tibetan Buddhism is known for vigorous debate and argumentation between schools for which students had to undergo rigorous training. This led a practitioner to believe that only his school has the best approach or the highest philosophic view and others have a lower understanding. The Rimé approach cautions against developing such a viewpoint. It appreciates debate and discussion as important and argues that differing points of view is still a valid discourse.

The twentieth century saw the publication of several noted treatises on Lamaism and its diverse commentaries. These were written by many of the noted monks of the different monasteries. The works of Tenzin Cheodrek and Pasang Yonten on Tibetan medicine are worth mentioning. Sogyal Rimpoche’s famed work *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, gave rise to a new understanding of the Tibetan faith by the West and the East alike. His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, is the most celebrated of the Tibetan writers of this century. He has written on a wide variety of subjects in the form of speeches, poems,
treatises and the like. Translation emerged as a powerful branch of literature during this century. Kenchen Palden Shehrab’s translations of several Nyingma texts into English are a good example (http://en.wikipedia.org/List_of_Tibetan_Writers).

Writing and producing works for the media became a powerful way of expressing the soul for twentieth century Tibetans. Though the pre-exile life was unknown to many outside Tibet, thanks to the media life in exile is known to many outside and inside Tibet. Articles like “Little Lhasa” by Tsering Namgyll turned out to be path-breaking revelations about Tibet. Tenzin Chokley, Tenzin Sonam and Ritu Sarin’s documentaries on Tibetans too have the same effect. Writings in English also were popular during this period. Many of the Tibetan writers in English are bilingual and able to converse with the world both in English and Tibetan. Several writers used English as their medium like Rinjing Dorje who wrote the famous “Uncle Tompa” series of tales.

Ani Pachen’s autobiography was one of the first of its kind in Tibet. So was Palden Gyatso’s Fire under the Snow. Palden Gyatso was in fact an escaped convict from the infamous Drapchi Prison in Lahasa and had been sentenced to life imprisonment for his anti-China attitude and his firm faith in the Dalai Lama. When he escaped from prison he smuggled out a number of instruments used for torturing the prisoners. He was the first to bring to the notice of the world what was actually going on inside the Chinese prisons. Tashi Dawa’s A Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong is another book worth mentioning. Historians like Dawa Tsering, Jamayang
Norbu, Tsering Shakya and W. D. Shakpaba also wrote during this period. Novelists like Tsering Dondrub were new to the twentieth century.

Romantics like Gendun Cheophil and Dhondup Gyal wrote during the twentieth century. Cheophil is probably the most celebrated poet in exile. His *White Annals* and *The Tibetan Art of Love* are well known for their superior quality. He is still the only Tibetan poet on whom the largest number of web pages has been created. Yangdon Dhondup’s biography *Gendun Cheophil* celebrates him as the founder of modern Tibetan poetry. Dhondup Gyal who is considered as the father of modern Tibetan literature was also a poet of the same period. He has captured the beauty of Tibet through his wonderful poems like “Waterfall of Youth” and others. The writers of this century have an international reach and are able to influence people with their mystic understanding of the world.

**Tibetan Poetry in Exile**

Tibetan poetry found its finest expression in the twentieth century after the Chinese occupation of the land. Among the many Tibetans who took refuge in other countries there were several poets who found themselves unable to comprehend the reality of exile. Many of these poets were monks. In exile many of the monks renounced their monastic vows and led a rather worldly life. Many of them are known for their controversial attitudes towards sex, drugs and everything that is supposed to be taboo. Perhaps this falling from the values that they had cherished for generations was due to their strong disenchantment regarding their life, the status of their country and the possibility of a return. Exile tasted bitter to all who were
now “forbidden” to enter the forbidden kingdom. The world outside Tibet was a new experience to them – a confusing reality far removed from their earlier pastoral experiences. The only way most of them were able to express their tryst with the new destiny was through poetry.

A brief analysis of Tibetan poetry in exile from the 1950s onwards shows us a lot of poets eager to pour out their thoughts into creative writing. Even though many of them have published only one or two or even three to five poems, they have expressed their own self through poetry. Tenzin Tsundue, Lahsang Tsering, and Tsering Wangpo Dhompa are the leading poets of this group. The themes that keep recurring in their poetry are related to home, homeland, exile/return and existential angst.

It is possible to trace 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 Buddhist studies and the secular heritage of Tibet was 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 medium most used so much so that it had become a major part in the secular culture.

The first generations of poets were the elders who had seen Tibet in all its glory and were brought into 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. They were forced into exile in their old age. The poetry of these writers expresses the bygone era of Tibet. As they had only started experiencing the reality of exile they 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 age. They so yearned to return to Tibet that many of them joined the armed resistance. The failure of their armed resistance was a great disillusionment to them. This is very intense 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. Unlike the poets of the first and second generation, those of the third generation are perplexed and were unable to accept either exile or 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 against 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)

This disenchantment between reality and dream is always present in all the three generations of poets. The experience of these three generations varies along with their poetic expressions. The three generations thus represent the various phases of Tibetan poetry in exile. A closer look into the poetry of the three generations of Tibetan poets is undertaken here.

**First Generation Poets**

Gendun Cheophel, better known as Amdo Gendün Chophel (1903-1951), was a creative and controversial genius. He was a monk and the friend of 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 the Vajrayana. Gendun Cheophel 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:
org/Genden_Chophel).

Apart from a few poems, Gendun Chophel 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), erotic
literature (Tibetan Art of Love), 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 apart from poems in Tibetan and English (http://
www.gdqpzhx.com/english/).

Chogyam Trungpa Rimpoche (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 Trungpa’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).

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 “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. 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_).

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).

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).

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).

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. Reading 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 Lhasa. 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 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).

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) was a finalist for the Asian American Literary Awards in 2003. Her other publications include the 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

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 Jiabao 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).
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, Ahmadabad, 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_).

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).

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 Lhasa* 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, Scotsdale 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).

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 Tibetan Children’s Village 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 at the same time activist, graphic designer and writer (*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 Tibetan Children’s Village 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 form their theme (*Muses in Exile* 191). Namgyal Phuntsok is yet another minor poet in exile. His poetry is known for its 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 Woeser, 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 become reality. This thought not only agonizes 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 promise of becoming powerful exponents of the Tibetan community in exile touching the hearts of an uncaring world.

Attempts are made by China to demoralise the Tibetan writers, which is embarrassingly outspoken. 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 Tibet as a refugee you are controlled from writing about Tibet due to the international relations of the host nations with China. Hence one finds Tibetan poetry published in the print media much less in number than the poetry of many others suffering the same conditions like Palestine. But the internet has come to the rescue and most of the Tibetan poems are being brought to public notice through the worldwide web. The Tibetan poets today are able to express their thoughts through blogs like http://peoplefortibet.blogspot.in and websites like http://www.tibetwrites.com. Unfortunately this limits the readership to a restricted private sphere and consequently not considered with the gravity they merit.

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 and vastly different from the poetry of those who do have an undisputed identity of their own.