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Dolma

INTELLECTUAL EXPRESSION OF AND FOR TIBETAN WOMEN

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Tibetan Women's Association

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ལྷ་ས། ཨོ་ཤ། Lhasa-Tibet

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The palpable perseverance of Tibetan women forms a distinct current in the history of Tibetan struggle. The indomitable role and spirit of Tibetan women saw through the darkest phase of Tibetan resistance in March 1959 and the exodus that followed. Amidst

the mounting crisis, instead of grieving and lamenting the travesty of justice, Tibetan women connived to form the Tibetan Women's Association (TWA)- the political organization that established the political participation of Tibetan Women in the important affairs of the country.

The increasing clampdown inside Tibet and the consequent escape exile did not deter the spirit of Tibetan women who worked to reinstate TWA in exile India on September 10 1984, thus paying a sublime tribute to the sacrifices of our Tibetan sisters while reiterating the invincible role and participation of Tibetan women in the political struggle.

Today, TWA is the first women's organization in Tibet's history and it one of the most active socio-political organization in the international ambit. Headed by a directly elected leadership of eight women at the central executive office in Dharamsala, TWA's expansion and impact is visible through the accomplishments of its 16,000 members in the international network of 56 chapters spread across the globe. Political, social, economic and educational empowerment of Tibetan women in exile forms the purview of TWA's goals and activities while women inside Tibet form the core and crux of TWA's vision and mission. TWA's tagline and slogan is '*Advocacy for Home and Action in Exile.*'

The journey of *DOLMA* since its beginning in 1989 has been an exhilarating and a progressive one. From being a compilation of report on the activities of Central and Regional TWA, and its publication after every 18 months, *DOLMA* faced a complete makeover in 2006 in matter and manner and has since then become an annual literary magazine that illustrates the ‘intellectual expression of and for Tibetan Women.’

Since 2009 and as of December 2013, 125 Tibetans including 20 women have burned themselves alive. TWA laments the loss of these precious lives and while we revere their supreme sacrifices, we express our deep solidarity with the martyrs and their surviving family members... Moreover, TWA extends the deepest gratitude to Tibetans inside Tibet for bravely struggling to preserve the language, identity and culture – even under the duress of occupation.

Holding the preservation of Tibetan language and culture the most important, TWA earnestly requests Tibetan youth to preserve and practice the values that exist in our culture besides learning the best of the western culture.

The intellectual female spirit perseveres in women from all walks of life who prove themselves to be agents of positive change and seekers of world peace and *DOLMA* stands as an earnest portrayal of the ‘Intellectual expression of and for Tibetan Women.’

I thank the ardent readers of *DOLMA* and welcome your feed-forward in furthering the scope and scale of this literary magazine.

With prayers for the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and for the peaceful resolution to the Tibet issue.

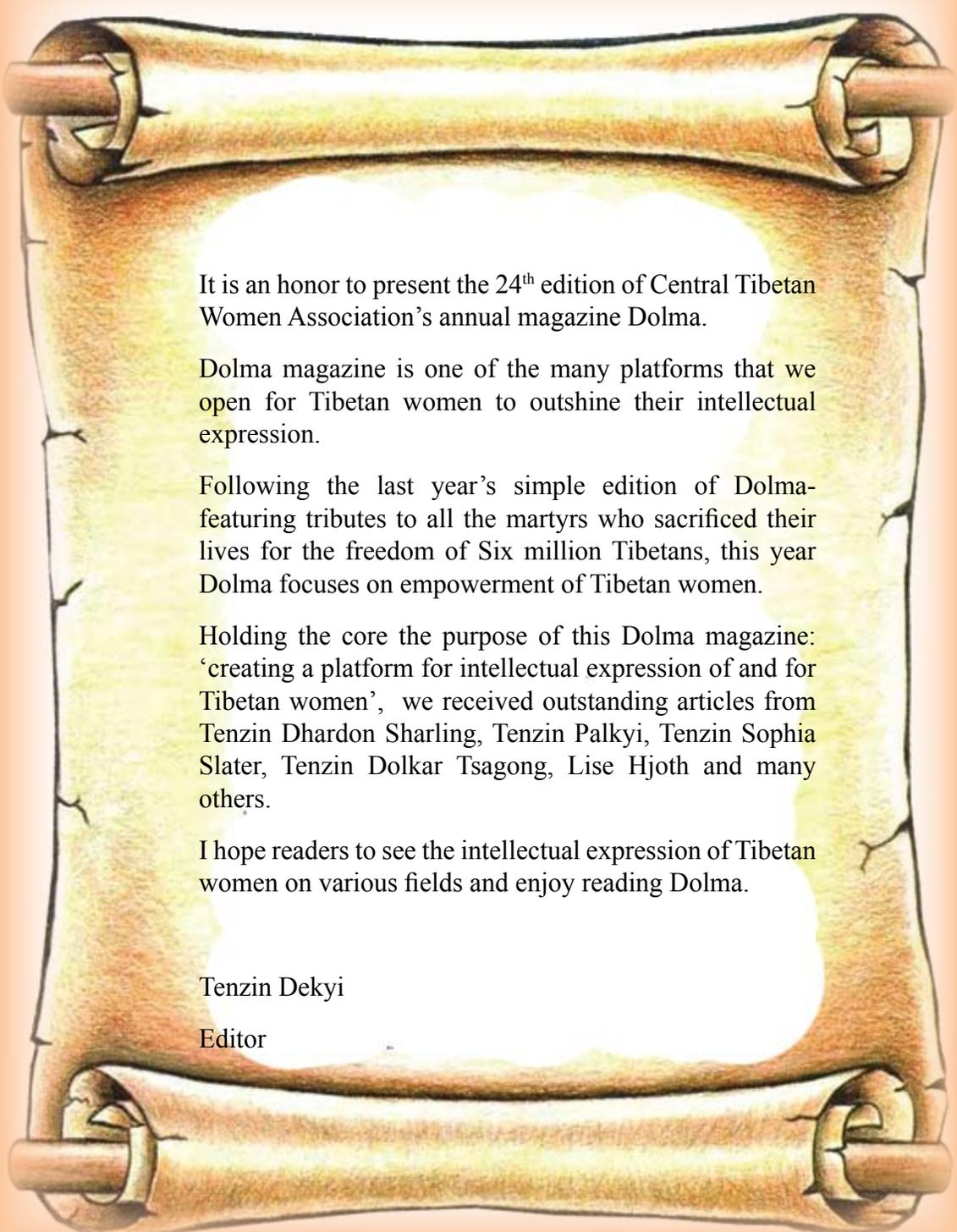
Tashi Dolma

President

Tibetan Women’s Association

November 2013

__end_____

A scroll with text on it. The scroll is unrolled, showing a central white area with text. The scroll is made of a light brown, textured material, possibly parchment or paper, and is held together by four wooden rollers at the corners. The text is written in a simple, black, sans-serif font.

It is an honor to present the 24th edition of Central Tibetan Women Association's annual magazine Dolma.

Dolma magazine is one of the many platforms that we open for Tibetan women to outshine their intellectual expression.

Following the last year's simple edition of Dolma-featuring tributes to all the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of Six million Tibetans, this year Dolma focuses on empowerment of Tibetan women.

Holding the core the purpose of this Dolma magazine: 'creating a platform for intellectual expression of and for Tibetan women', we received outstanding articles from Tenzin Dhardon Sharling, Tenzin Palkyi, Tenzin Sophia Slater, Tenzin Dolkar Tsagong, Lise Hjoth and many others.

I hope readers to see the intellectual expression of Tibetan women on various fields and enjoy reading Dolma.

Tenzin Dekyi

Editor

WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF SNOWLAND



A serene smile for her last picture: Haunting story of nun, 17, who scrawled final message on her hand and then set herself on fire in bid to free Tibet

Days after photo was taken, Sangay Dolma went to a Chinese government building, in eastern Tibet, doused herself in petrol and light a match

In a note she wrote the words: ‘Sons and daughters of the Land of Snows, Warriors of the snow mountain, don’t forget you are Tibetans’

It is accompanied by a poem in praise of the Dalai Lama and a free Tibet

Since March 2011, around 90 people are known to have set themselves on fire in protest against the Chinese occupation of Tibet

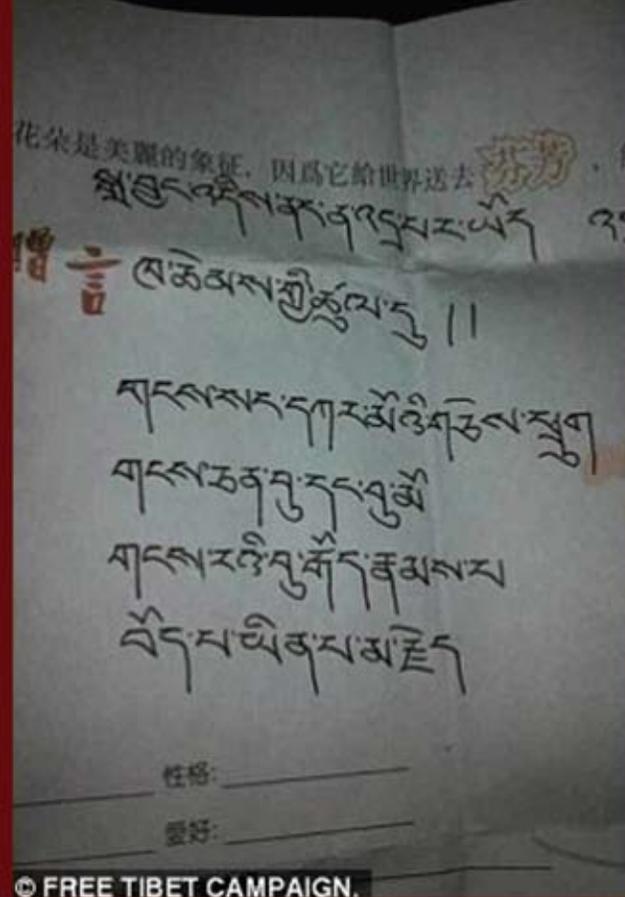
Martyr: Sangay Dolma betrays nothing in this picture of her plan to set herself on fire in the name of home and country

Peering thoughtfully into the camera, her mouth curved into the faintest of smiles, 17-year-old Sangay Dolma looks the picture of youthful promise.

But by the time she took this photograph in the darkness of her bedroom, her plans were already in motion to travel to a Chinese government office building in eastern Tibet, douse herself in petrol and light a match.

The only clue to her final act are the haunting words, scrawled roughly on her hand in Tibetan script: ‘Tibet is an independent nation’.

By then she knew this act of self-immolation would be her last, so she left a will in an envelope, alongside this picture, written in the form of a poem.



in November alone, according to campaigners.

This wave of self-immolations reveal the desperation among Tibet's youth after 60 years under Beijing's thumb and underlie a harsh crackdown in recent years by the Chinese government any who dare question its sovereignty over the mountain nation.

Until her tragic and violent death, Sangay Dolma had been a nun at the Gonshul Nunnery near the Sangag Mindrol Dhargeyling Monastery.

She left a note with the picture, in Tibetan script, which included the words: 'Look up, Tibetans, look at the snow mountains. The snowland's era has begun. And Tibet is free and independent'

At the head of the note, she wrote:

'Beloved children of the Snow Lion, sons and daughters of the Land of Snows, warriors of the snow mountain, don't forget your are Tibetans.'

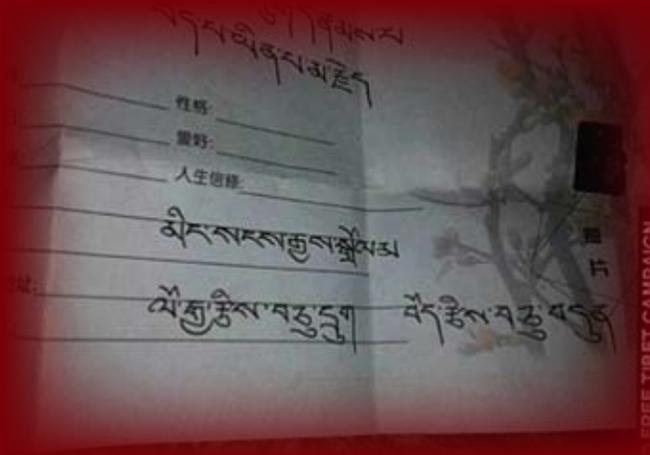
She became the latest of a string of young Tibetans to set fire to themselves in the name of independence when she took her life in a ball of flame on November 26.

Since March 2011, around 90 people are known to have set themselves on fire in protest against the Chinese occupation of Tibet. There were 25

There she would have been well schooled in Buddhist teachings, in particular its emphasis on non-violence, even in the face of conflict. Indeed, the first of the five precepts that all Buddhists should follow is 'avoid killing, or harming any living thing'.

Her death serves as a stark reminder of the passion that fuels this spate of self immolations and the lengths young people in Tibet are prepared to go in order to raise awareness of their region's plight.

She goes on with a call to arms to her countrymen to join her fight for a free Tibet.



‘China is trying to crush protest through arbitrary detention, collective punishment, communications blackouts, bribery and much more – this has only strengthened the resolve of the Tibetan people in their struggle for freedom.

‘Free Tibet is receiving reports of protests inside Tibet on an almost daily basis. These protests will only continue until each and everyone one of us stands with the Tibetan people in their struggle for freedom and our Governments stop kowtowing to an unelected Chinese regime.’

But it is also a moral and policy dilemma for Tibet’s spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and a new generation of exiled politicians.

The Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 with hundreds of followers and they set up base in Dharamsala, a town in the

Himalayan foothills about 400 km (250 miles) north of New Delhi.

The deaths raise theological questions about non-violence and highlight a long-standing schism between the elderly Dalai Lama’s softly, softly approach to China and activists who want to fight for independence.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2242808/Last-words-Sangay-Dolma-Tibetan-nun-set-protest-We-warriors-snow-mountain.html?ito=feeds-newsxml>



Author:

Lhadon Tethong is one of the most recognizable faces in the Tibet movement. She has traveled the world to build a powerful youth movement for Tibet, training and inspiring young people to become committed activists for human rights and social justice. She has spoken to countless groups big and small about the situation in Tibet. Currently, she is the Director of the Tibet Action Institute, where she leads a team of technologists and human rights advocates in developing and

advancing open-source communication technologies, nonviolent strategies and innovative training programs for Tibetans. She received the first annual James Lawson Award for Nonviolent Achievement from the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict in 2011.

INSIDE JOB: BEIJING'S NEW ALLIES IN ITS WAR ON TIBET

When the University of Sydney canceled a scheduled talk by the Dalai Lama it revealed the threat that the Chinese state's growing influence on Western campuses poses to academic freedom and highlighted Beijing's behind-the-scenes campaign to undermine the Dalai Lama's legacy. What happened next served to remind Tibetans and supporters of the importance of making these battles public and fighting them using the power of the grassroots.

What happened in Sydney?

The controversy that played out at the University of Sydney last month is nothing new. For years, the Chinese government has protested any institution that dared to provide a platform for the Tibetan cause, whether it's a talk by the Dalai Lama, a film screening or a photo exhibit.

But times have changed. Today when it comes to academia, Chinese officials no longer have to go public with their opposition. They are able to wield influence behind closed doors, through individuals and institutions embedded on university campuses. Directly or indirectly, these individuals and institutions are dependent on Beijing for financial support and research access (visas can be denied if someone's work displeases Beijing).

In the case of the University of Sydney, acting as Beijing's proxies were the China Studies Center, Vice Chancellor Michael Spence and, in all likelihood, individual researchers and professors whose careers rely on their scholarly pursuits in -- and funds from -- China.

The China Studies Center, with close ties to the Chinese government and funding from organizations like the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China, was "involved" in the discussions that led to the cancellation of the Dalai Lama's talk.

Vice Chancellor Spence, as revealed by leaked emails, was leading the charge to cancel the event. He had just returned from one of his many trips to China -- this time for a major Chinese business forum with Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard. During his tenure, Spence has prioritized close relations with China, and launched a \$20 million Centre for Carbon, Water and Food at

Sydney University in collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Agriculture Science.

"Thank you so much for your skill in dealing with this situation so effectively and in the best interests of researchers across the university. I think that the negotiated solution meets all the concerns."

When the Vice Chancellor wrote these words to the director of the university's Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR) after the IDHR's decision to move the Dalai Lama talk off campus and withdraw official support from it, he thought they were cleaning up an awkward situation, avoiding a backlash that could either jeopardize the university's funding, hamper researchers' access to China, or embarrass the university in the eyes of the public.

By dealing with the situation in this quiet and civil way, Spence was removing the need for Beijing to launch an aggressive attack on the university, and ensuring that the university's attempt to muzzle the Dalai Lama was kept out of the public eye. Why draw more attention to the issue and risk all the bad publicity when it could all be taken care of behind closed doors with a few emails and phone calls?

What may have happened elsewhere

When the University of Tasmania canceled plans to give the Dalai Lama an honorary degree in 2009 it was receiving nearly \$30 million a year in revenue from Chinese students. Though there was no hard proof linking Chinese pressure with the university's change of heart, officials did admit that the issue had been discussed in a meeting with Chinese officials.

That same year, North Carolina State University canceled plans to host a talk by the Dalai Lama in Raleigh. University officials claimed the cancellation was due to organizational issues but admitted they were concerned about upsetting Beijing and had been warned by the head of the Chinese government-funded Confucius Institute on campus that hosting the Dalai Lama could undermine relations with China.

More recently, there have been whispers at the University of Notre Dame that initial plans to award an honorary degree to the Dalai Lama were replaced by suspicious silence. Now, it seems, Gu Bing, the President of Tsinghua University, will make the trip to Indiana to receive his own honorary degree.

These incidents, seen together, reflect an emerging pattern: behind-the-scenes pressure from the Chinese government and its agents, in conjunction

with preemptive self-censorship caused by a fear of retaliation by Beijing, is keeping some universities from recognizing or even welcoming the Dalai Lama on campus.

This campaign represents a new phase in the long-standing effort by the Chinese authorities to erode widespread global support for Tibet. In the eyes of Beijing, the Dalai Lama is the primary source of this support and therefore his activities and meetings must be curbed.

It's all a part of the plan

A telling passage from a speech entitled "Tibet-related external propaganda and Tibetology in the new era" by Zhao Qizheng, former Director of China's State Council's Information Office, leaked to the outside world in 2001, illustrates how Beijing views the Dalai Lama's global public appearances as a threat:

"During public gatherings, the Dalai [sic] portrays himself as a humble spiritual teacher and pretends to be seeking dialogues and autonomy. He lays pretense to non-violence and makes utmost efforts not to mix politics in his talks. He speaks on religion, ethics, culture, democracy, freedom and human rights. This has gained him unprecedented international support and solidarity."

Discussed explicitly throughout Zhao's speech is a plan to erode support

for the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan issue through long-term strategies that call for proactive engagement with international NGOs, Western academics and intellectuals. This engagement will be carried out primarily by Tibetologists, both Chinese and foreign, who are favorable to Beijing. The minister lays it out clearly, stating: “External propaganda struggle for public opinion should be treated as an important work, requiring relentless attention. We should launch a coordinated assault on different fronts.” In the years since this document was leaked, we have witnessed Chinese authorities executing almost all of the tactics outlined in Zhao’s speech, most recently at the University of Sydney. Just last year, the school was again embroiled in controversy when the Confucius Institute on campus hosted a lecture entitled “The Selection of the Dalai Lama and its Political, Religious & Social Influence on Tibet” by Zhang Yun, an academic from the Chinese Center for Tibetan Studies who is widely known as a mouthpiece for the Chinese government.

Ultimate access

While Chinese leaders are far from destroying support for the Dalai Lama and “winning over” global public opinion on Tibet as a result of these strategic efforts, they are clearly making progress in their attempts to gain influence over Western audiences -- most notably with the

establishment of more than 400 Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms at university and secondary schools around the world that are operated by a branch of China’s Ministry of Education.

Confucius Institutes are the flagship of Beijing’s global soft power strategy, designed to promote a positive image of China by purportedly spreading Chinese language and culture. By offering a packaged deal of curriculum, teachers and funds to increasingly cash-strapped universities and colleges, Beijing has gained considerable access to -- and influence over -- Western academia.

The establishment of Confucius Institutes has been met with opposition because of fears that they will compromise academic freedom. Free and open discussion on topics that China considers sensitive -- like Tibet, Xinjiang and Falun Gong -- is essentially forbidden and there are reports that Chinese government propaganda has been offered up as fact on topics such as the Korean War and Taiwan. McMaster University in Canada will soon shut down its Confucius Institute because of the requirement that instructors not have any association with groups like the Falun Gong spiritual sect which is banned by the Chinese government.

Yet in spite of the controversy surrounding the proliferation of Confucius

Institutes, they are now firmly established on over 400 campuses worldwide and the Chinese government aims to reach 500 by 2020.

When you misbehave

With China's influence growing on so many university campuses around the world, how long can Chinese government pressure be held at bay in these institutions? If university officials risk provoking Beijing and host the Dalai Lama, what happens afterwards, when the spotlight goes away?

One telling scenario occurred at the University of Calgary, where administrators went ahead with plans to confer an honorary degree on the Dalai Lama in 2009, only to discover later that the school had been removed from the list of accredited universities in China. At that time, a spokesperson for the University of Calgary publicly stated: "We have offended our Chinese partners by the very fact of bringing in the Dalai Lama, and we have work to resolve that issue." In April 2011, the university was re-accredited after what was described as "great relationship building" by the new President with the Chinese consulate.

Of course, it's not only academia on which the Chinese authorities are exerting pressure; it's everyone, everywhere. Most recently, British Prime Minister, David Cameron, was targeted by Chinese

authorities following his meeting with the Dalai Lama last year. Already forced to cancel a scheduled visit to China in April when it was made clear that he would not be allowed to meet with senior Chinese leaders, Cameron is now being pushed to apologize for the meeting .

Wielding this powerful combination of rewards, threats and punishment, the Chinese government is becoming more and more capable of bending the world to its will on Tibet. This disturbing trend makes one worry about the future of the Tibetan struggle.

For more than two decades, His Holiness has enjoyed tremendous global support. Many of us take it for granted that this will always be the case, that most doors will always be open to him. But Chinese leaders have been working relentlessly to close those doors and roll back support for Tibet.

It's clear we need to fight back. But how? What strength do we possess that can help us protect the political influence and access that the Dalai Lama has built over the decades?

The answer lies where it always has -- with the grassroots -- and the incident at the University of Sydney shows us the way.

Grassroots power

In spite of all the time, effort and money the Chinese government has spent trying to forward its political objectives abroad, the Sydney incident shows us that Beijing is vulnerable in the face of mobilized grassroots power -- citizens who speak out and take action to do the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do.

The University of Sydney has a Confucius Institute, a China Studies Center and a vice chancellor who has secured millions of dollars in Chinese government support and is clearly interested in strengthening this lucrative relationship. But all of these forces combined were not enough to stop the power of the popular grassroots opinion once the issue of the Dalai Lama's exclusion was publicized. And herein lies the key: the issue had to be exposed in order for the grassroots to mobilize. If a handful of individuals at the University had not taken action to expose the injustice taking place behind the scenes in real time, we would not have had the time or the ability to mount the campaign.

In the end, Tibetans and supporters were able to build awareness and ignite global support through mainstream and social media, and to use this collective power to create momentum and political capital to pressure the university into doing the right thing.

A single Tibet supporter (Sophie Bouris) and the lone Tibetan student at Sydney University (Yeshe Palmo) working together with the national Tibet Support Group (Australia Tibet Council) as well as international Tibet Support Groups (Students for a Free Tibet and the International Tibet Network) along with thousands of individual activists online became a force China could not overcome. In a few days, 15,000 individuals signed a petition urging the university to welcome the Dalai Lama. A campus protest was planned and publicized, unnerving the administration. As criticism grew from all corners, the university buckled, and announced it would host the Dalai Lama. It was the Tibet movement at its finest.

Protecting the Dalai Lama's legacy

Grassroots organizing is nothing new for the Tibet movement -- it is the way that support for the Dalai Lama and the Tibet issue was built in the first place.

The Dalai Lama has spent the better part of the past four decades traveling the world spreading a message of peace and nonviolence and highlighting the immensity of Tibetan suffering under Chinese rule. Individual citizens have embraced him, turning out in the millions to hear his words. Against all odds and in spite of China's incredible economic, political and military might,

the Dalai Lama has become one of the most influential and beloved spiritual and political figures of the 21st century.

With little more than the concern and support of these people of conscience, the issue of Tibet has been kept alive in the international community even after six decades of merciless Chinese repression. Countless awareness-raising events have been organized, petitions signed, letters written, legislation passed, documentaries and movies made -- all because the injustice in Tibet has been exposed and people have been organized to take action.

The Chinese government knows the power of the global grassroots. They may never understand its true source -- the basic kindness and goodness of ordinary people -- but they have had to contend with its maddening force time and time again. It's not surprising then that in the past two decades, Chinese authorities have made undermining support for the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan issue a top priority.

It is critical that Tibetans and Tibet supporters remember these roots and confront China's attacks head-on, wherever and whenever they appear. It is not in Tibetans' interest to keep these discussions quiet and hidden away. Burying these issues in the back rooms and subjecting them to the slow death of silent diplomacy only serves the interests

of the Chinese government and takes away much of the power that the Dalai Lama and Tibetans have.

There are some people who believe that we are living in a "post-protest" world when it comes to Tibet. This view is based, in part, on the belief that since the Tibet issue has not been resolved to date, all of the campaigns and demonstrations carried out over the years must have failed and Tibetans now need try something new -- something more quiet and comfortable for the Chinese and their allies. It also stems from the fact that the Chinese authorities have been relentless in their opposition to Tibet support activities and have successfully scared many people, including Tibetans, away from speaking out and taking action for Tibet in concrete political terms.

This "throw the baby out with the bathwater" mentality misses two critical truths: 1) the situation in Tibet remains unchanged because the Chinese government is an authoritarian regime that is unwilling and, some would argue, unable to budge on the issue; and 2) Tibet is a pressure issue that has advanced on the global stage largely because of grassroots protest.

Governments and other institutions pay attention to and take action on Tibet primarily because citizens demand it, not because they believe they are serving any core economic or strategic interests. Quite

the contrary -- the Chinese government can make life so uncomfortable for anyone who sticks their neck out on Tibet that there is strong incentive for any person, government or institution with interests in China to keep Tibet out of the spotlight.

This is precisely why Tibetans and supporters of human rights and academic freedom must be vigilant and expose any attempt to shut down the Dalai Lama or discussion of the Tibetan issue -- whether it be on a university campus, in a public forum or in the highest offices of political power -- such efforts need to be seen in the daylight of publicity and media scrutiny so that global citizens of conscience can help us demand justice and unleash their grassroots power.

Certainly for Tibetans living in free countries, this is our primary obligation -- perhaps even our *raison d'être* -- to speak truth to power and further strengthen global support for Tibet while pushing for real and meaningful change inside our homeland. This is His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama's greatest legacy and we must never allow the Chinese government to silence his voice, or ours.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lhadon-tethong/inside-job-beijings-new-a_b_3353844.html

About the author

Lise Hjorth



Born in Denmark Lise moved around a lot. Life and Jobs gave an opportunity for her to live in London, Paris, New York City, Brussels, Ontario, Oslo and Copenhagen. Most of her professional life has been spent in retailing, in very large department stores as personnel and personnel training director, and later for many years also as sales director in Copenhagen. Lise's life has been blessed with two wonderful children, Cristina who lives in Luxembourg with her husband, son and daughter, and Casper, who lives in Copenhagen with his wife, two sons and one daughter. Lise lives her life to the fullest, engaging in photography, writing, reading, and her exciting board membership of the oldest Arboretum in Denmark . While one of her recent extended travels took her across the Himalayas from Manali over Rohtang Pas to Leh, her latest trip embraced Dharamsala and Dehradun and last but certainly far from least TCV School at Selakui.



WOMEN OF THE WORLD-TEAMING FOR TIBET

WOMEN OF THE WORLD - TEAMING FOR TIBET

So what is this Danish woman doing here again in Dolma, a magazine for Tibetan women, primarily by Tibetan women and about Tibetan women. I am honored to have been invited again by The Tibetan Women's Association, maybe because I am, as my Tibetan friends so aptly put it, a Tibetan in my heart.

Recently, I travelled to Prague in the Czech Republic to attend the teachings of His Holiness Dalai Lama and to visit the Forum 2000. The Forum 2000 was founded in 1996 on the initiative of the late Czech President Vaclav Havel, supporting the values of democracy and respect for human rights, assisting the development of civil society, and encouraging religious, cultural and ethnic tolerance. It provides a platform for global leaders, as well as thinkers and courageous individuals from every field of endeavor, to openly debate and share these critical issues. His Holiness participates every second year alternating with the Sikyong.

In Prague, I met four amazing women, who all work for bettering the lives of Tibetans, a German, a Brazilian, an American and a Canadian woman. We have since held almost non-stop talks on the internet about how we can join forces. We want to be compassionate and helpful, not only in words but also in action. We will inform about Tibetan issues, we will post information about Tibetan culture, ecology, history, and life in Tibetan settlements, and we will do our best to put compassion into practice. Please take a look at our brand new Facebook group WOW-TFT, and join us, if you like.

So let me introduce us:

Shauna Allen who lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, America.

Shauna remembers a day in her life:

"It was a bitterly cold day as I stepped out of my car on March 10 in Salt Lake City. I gathered my banner, my Tibetan flag and my speech to give to the Utah Tibetan community, commemorating the Tibetan Uprising Day. Pride swelled in my heart as I approached the crowd, the brightly colored chupas and numerous Tibetan flags brightening up the chilly



When the speeches concluded, we marched around the city center as a strong, proud flag-waving group. This is always my favorite part, as it gives me the opportunity to talk to the people I love and fight so hard for. As we walked, I talked with a young mother. Her gorgeous son in a stroller with his little flag. Then a young husband told me about the school for the youngest Tibetan children to learn their language and invited me to attend. For a few minutes I chatted with one of the few other Westerners there about how frustrating it is not to get other people to listen to the cause for Tibet.

morning. I am always a little nervous, as I attend these events by myself having no one in my immediate life that shares in my passion for Tibet. That nervousness quickly evaporated as I was warmly greeted with smiles and appreciation.

The events got quickly underway and I delivered my speech trying to keep my voice strong and clear even though I was shivering from the cold. I could not help but notice the lovely crowd in front of me. Tibetans of all ages remembering the sacrifices of those who gave their lives for their country, for their language and their rich culture. I was saddened to realize how few westerners had chosen to attend, to speak up for these peaceful and kind people. That only fuelled my fire to keep fighting.

We ended up back where we started and a bit solemnly everybody hung around. The event had concluded, yet it was almost as if we did not want to leave this feeling of solidarity. I sat quietly next to two older women who have shared their stories with me at other events. We were in the one part of the area where the sun was shining, trying to have it warm us up. My big Tibetan flag was between us, waving slightly in the breeze, almost glowing in the sun. Almost at once we seemed to become mesmerized by the flag, when I noticed both of these amazing women had tears running down their cheeks. Softly one of them said 'Our flag is the most beautiful.'

It was at this moment, that I felt the sadness of a people that is not able to live in their own land, the fear that their



culture is being lost, and that no one is listening to their calls for help. I vowed to myself that these people will have a voice as long as I am alive. Then I snapped a photo to remember this vow, to never forget my promise to the most beautiful flag.”

In Prague, I also met a monk, a wonderful greek man, who is also a Buddhist monk. Tsering Topgyal Wanpo. He told me a story, that the German woman Lilli Sangay Palmo loves and wants to share with us: Lilli lives a very active life in Berlin where she takes part in many pro-Tibet activities, Lilli is also a member of our WOW group.

“Some years ago, my Lama asked to collect some spoonful of soil from important monasteries in Buddhist countries that I would visit. He wanted, you see, to teach me how to make ‘tsa-tsas’. Sometimes I would also collect water from certain springs, and I always

left a little something behind as a thank you to Earth, a biscuit for the ants and the birds, or a few grains of rice/wheat or even a coin.

Just now in august, I was able to travel inside Tibet where I collected small bags of soil from five monasteries: Sakya, Perkor Cheode, Trandruk, Drepung and Sera. When in Lhasa, I visited His Holiness Dalai Lama’s Summer Palace Norbulingka and collected a few needles from two pine trees His Holiness had planted at the entrance to the palace when he was a teenager.



I cut these pine needles into smaller pieces and inserted them into the mud. My molds are made of metal so that I can

bake them even though modern molds are made of silicone and other materials. My molds are old, maybe 80 years. A Tibetan granny sold them to me 12 years ago.

I put the mud mixed from the five monasteries and the pine needles from Norbulingka into the molds and baked them for about 3 hours. After they had cooled off, I polished them slightly. If tsa tsas are made of clay, they look even and easy to handle, however, if they are made of soil, and there are small stones and other particles, then it is much more difficult to smoothen. I wrapped the tsa tsa carefully in layers of soft paper and brought it with me to Prague for Forum 2000.

And this is how the monk Tsering Topgyal Wanpo got to present the wonderful gift of a small stupa made out of soil and needles from Tibet to His Holiness The Dalai Lama. It was given to a staff member, and we pray that everybody realized what a treasure this is.”



Cristina Valente is from Brazil. She was not in Prague but is a longtime friend of ours on Facebook and an avid fighter for Tibetan rights. She is also a member of WOW and looks forward to working for Tibetans in South America.

“I was just seven years old when my life changed in Brazil and took a whole new direction for generations to come. I was preparing to go to school when the news arrived that tanks had taken the streets of Rio de Janeiro, near the presidential palace, to initiate a military operation that culminated in a coup. Eventually, the economic growth that ensued has been called the Brazilian Miracle, characterized by



the modernization of industry and the construction of large infrastructures. But such economic development was accompanied by censorship of the media, closing academic courses, associations and violent political repression. This is a very brief summary of that traumatic moment that accompanied most of my life and motivation to dedicate a year in volunteer work in a pro-Tibet network in Brazil. Knowing that despite differences and dimensions of the problems of Tibet, I understand exactly how it is to live without rights to a Constitution designed to ensure the exercise of social and individual rights, freedom, security, well-being, development, equality and justice as supreme values of a fraternal, pluralist and unprejudiced society, founded on social harmony.”

On the northwest coast of Canada, in British Columbia by the Pacific Ocean we find Vita Adair, a strong freedom loving Scottish woman who loves life in the wilderness close to nature. A short while ago, in November of 2013, Vita had gone to the nearest small town to protest against the Intercontinental Hotel being built in Lhasa.

“It was a cold, bright, sunny day here in the north of Canada, and I set off to the nearest town to distribute posters and to inform the local people about the Intercontinental Hotel I Lhasa. I hoped to get some support and even have some of them sign the petition. I wore my Save Tibet T-shirt with a woolen sweater underneath to keep the cold out and the Tibetan flag was flying on a pole on my car. I was hopeful that I would arouse some interest. I spoke with shopkeepers, bank tellers, people in the street, --- anyone who would listen, but it was obvious that my protestations were falling on deaf ears. Few people even knew about the situation, many did not even know where Tibet was and the majority did not want to listen.

So, it was with a heavy heart I returned to my car to begin the drive home. I felt useless, hopeless and like a lone voice crying in the wilderness. On the way home, I stopped and picked up 3 hitch hikers, 3 native people from a local Indian reservation. As I drove them back to their reserve, they asked me what the flag was that I was flying on my car, and what was the writing on my T-shirt. What is Tibet? they asked. All my life I have felt alone in my love for Tibet. Always I have done solitary demos, and since I was a little girl, I have been touched by the plight of the native American Indians....even had an Indian doll, a Teepee and a little outfit.



The fact that I met those natives meant I felt included. Part of something that was not Tibet, but a very similar situation

So I explained, and the conversation quickly turned into an exchange of history and personal experiences they had had. They told me that Tibet was like their own country, Canada. They had suffered the same way as the Tibetans. Their land was taken away from them and they were forced to leave. Their children had been taken away by the government and sent to catholic schools where their Indian names were removed, and they were given English names. Brothers and sisters had been sent to different schools to break down the family ties. They had not been allowed to speak their native language, nor wear native clothes or follow their own religion. They saw their parents only once a year.

But they also told me, that their nation the North American Indian nation of Canada is now trying to restore their culture and customs. They hope to gain their lands back. We met on the highway that day, as strangers, but we parted as friends, having shared our stories."

And in Copenhagen, you find me, Lise Hjorth. I am privileged to live in a democratic country, the oldest kingdom in the world, the land of free speech, and an almost 165-year old constitution that all men and women are equal. I do not often participate in demonstrations, and when

I do, I usually hide behind my camera. More or less being a one-woman army. I did however feel that something had to be done, when the President of China was invited to visit Denmark last year. Denmark has countless groups working for Tibet and Tibetans, some are political, some are cultural, some are Buddhist, some are a mixture of all of this. The Chinese president was in Denmark to talk about Greenland, among other topics, and we felt, of course, that the Danish government should talk with him about Tibet, knowing very well, that this would not happen and international trade relations weighed heavier than the fate of Tibet. But never in my wildest imagination could I have foreseen what happened. Feeling that the occasion called for something special, I tried to have as many people in Denmark as possible wear a white scarf also known as khata in Tibetan. During the visit I felt certain, that even the president of China would notice it if a lot of people wore khatas. So I went to town with a stack of khatas that I handed to passers-by. I had a little fun on the way, as I passed 3 Chinese gentlemen, obviously in Denmark as part of the entourage, I stopped, said Nihau and offered them a gift of friendship. They looked pleased, until I continued, I am sure you know that the khatas are an important Tibetan symbol of peace and harmony. They got up, one of them quickly photographed me, and they left. Shortly after, I joined

the demonstrators, Danish groups, expat Tibetans in Denmark, many with children, some Vietnamese people and a group of Falun Gong who sat in deep meditation. I kept handing out khatas while we waited for the cortege of cars to roll up in front of the Christiansborg Palace, seat of the Danish government, where that night Queen Margrethe II of Denmark would give a State Dinner for the president of China. Suddenly, four police vans rolled up, right in front of us, blocking the view. A number of police jumped out and faced us.

To me, the question was, were they blocking us from seeing the car with the Chinese president, -- or were they there to prevent the president from seeing us and we knew already that he had insisted, that he not be exposed to the Tibetan flag while in Denmark. Tibetan flags were seized by the police, but with Danish ingenuity, a huge Tibetan flag flew over Copenhagen, hanging from a number of balloons. The people, only about 150 strong including children and the meditating Falun Gong had been very orderly, naturally with flags, posters and singing. Now however, because of the police van, so uncalled for, somebody was about to get mad. I heard angry shouts, 'Police Pigs' and similar strong expressions and I being the flower power generation felt that there was no way this should be allowed to develop into something nasty.

I knew I could not let them have the satisfaction of us turning violent. So, I stepped forward and went from one officer to another, introduced myself, and offered each of them a khata. They declined, but almost all of them told me, that they hated the situation, that they agreed with me, and that they would have loved a scarf. When I came to the second to last officer, he accepted my khata. I was allowed to hang it around his neck. This was an absolutely wonderful moment. The demonstration stayed calm and dignified. After having kissed my new friendly officer on the cheek, I proceeded to the next in line who turned out to have more stripes than the others. He asked me in brusquely, in no uncertain terms to 'clear off or else.' I cleared off.

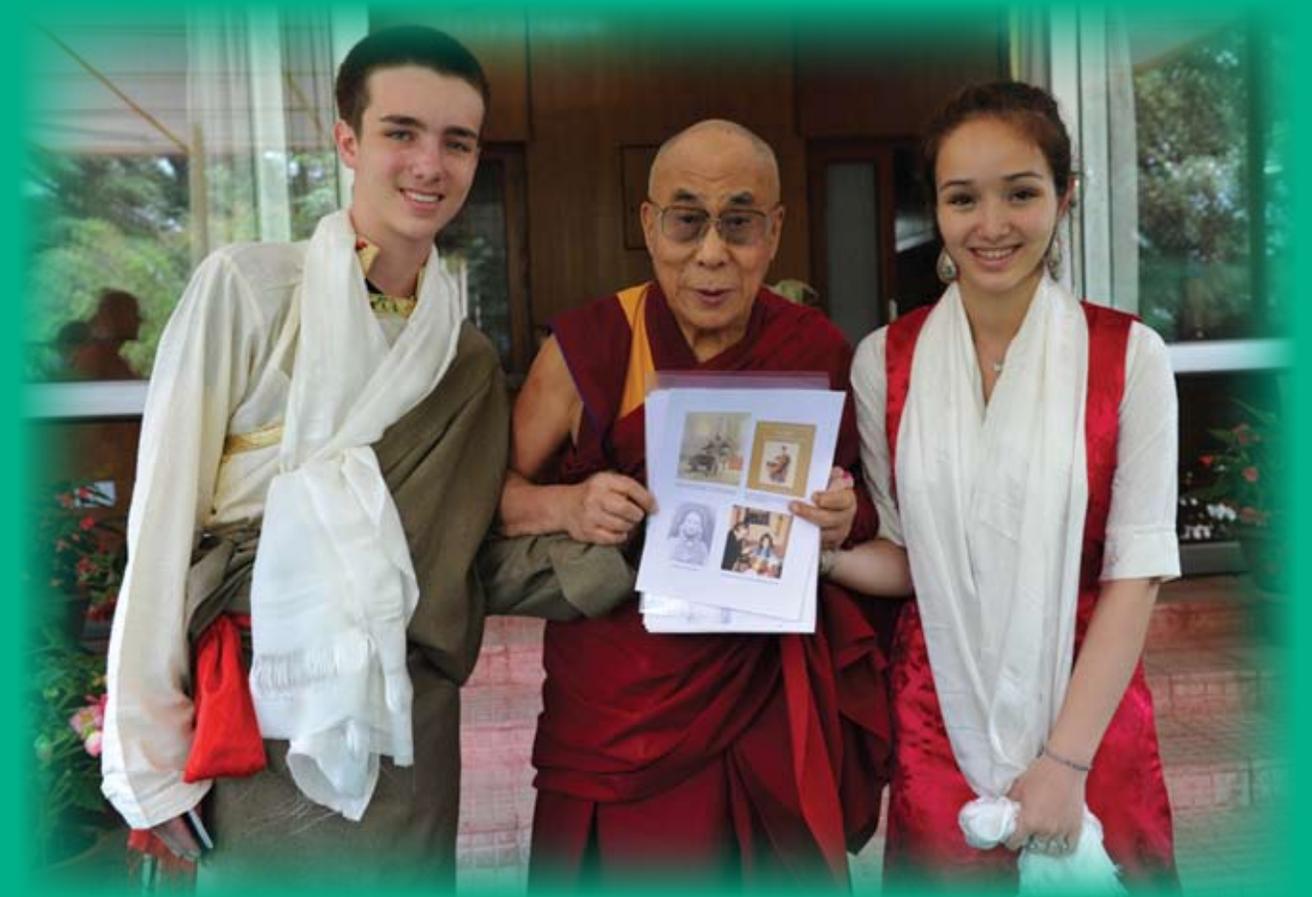


photo@ Claus Hansen

But as I told you, Denmark is my country, where promises of free speech and free demonstrations are part of the Constitution. We will not accept being asked to clear

off, when walking peacefully in the street, or having our personal belongings seized, especially not the Tibetan flag. So we have sued the Police and the Ministry of Justice. The outcome of the case is still pending.

So this is five stories of five women. Five women who lives miles apart but with a strong feeling of togetherness. We work in different ways but all for the same cause. Our group 'Women of the World, Teaming for Tibet,' will grow, when more women from around the world join us – 'WOW-TFT.' We come from very different backgrounds, we are aged between 40 -75 years old, and we are friends looking for more friends. If you have enjoyed reading our stories and hearing a little about what goes on outside Dharamsala in terms of 'Teaming for Tibet,' please join us on Facebook: WOW TFT. We know you too have stories to tell, and together we may create fairy tales and make some dreams come true.



Finding My Tibetan Roots and Taking My Own Journey

Tenki was very bold from her childhood. When she left Calcutta in the 50s for medical school in New York and Pala and I broke down in the airport, she said, "Don't be sorry. I'll be perfectly all right." And she cried not one tear, just left saying, "Bye-bye."

This is what my Tibetan great-grandmother said about her second daughter, my grandmother. My grandmother was ambitious, but not unlike my great-grandmother herself. Born in Kalimpong in 1905 and raised in Darjeeling, my great-grandmother studied hard at school; unlike many girls at the time, she was highly motivated to get an education and threw herself into all of her subjects. She also played basketball and took violin lessons. When she was 18, she rode on her pony to Lhasa from Darjeeling to join her father, S. W. Laden La, who was working as Chief of

Police for His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama. And throughout her life, my great-grandmother kept Tibetan culture and traditions alive even though the family had settled permanently in India.

My grandmother was like her mother but pushed it a step further and crossed over to America. “Motivated” and “driven” are two of the words that best describe her. Born and raised in Darjeeling, she was the first Tibetan to go to the U.S. to study medicine. In New York, she attended Barnard College and then the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University, where she met her future husband, an American from New Jersey. They traveled the world together during my grandfather’s years as a Navy flight surgeon and later when they were in the Peace Corps in Nepal. They then settled in New Jersey and later, California. Like my great-grandmother, my grandmother believes in the importance of preserving Tibetan culture and is active in her local Tibetan community.

Throughout the years that my grandparents were traveling the world, they had four children. The second was my mother, one of the first generation of “halves”. My mother inherited my great-grandmother’s and grandmother’s ambitious nature, attending Princeton and getting a graduate degree from the University of Michigan. Like them, she set out on a journey of her own, leaving

the U.S. after college to spend time in Darjeeling with my great-grandmother and then move to Japan to become a writer and university professor. Her first major publication was the translation of a novella by Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas in *Old Rosa* (Grove). She went on to write stories connected with her heritage, publishing a Tibetan American story in *American Dragons* (HarperCollins). She is working on a travel memoir about a trip she took to India and a novel related to our family in Darjeeling.

In Japan, my mother met my father, an American, and my brother and I were born in Tokyo, part of the family’s first generation of “quarters”. My great-grandmother’s, grandmother’s, and mother’s traits have been passed down to me; I’ve learned the importance of working hard in pursuit of what matters to you as well as staying connected to your heritage. This is what led me to volunteer in Dharamsala last summer, teaching at the Tibetan Children’s Village. When I first arrived, I was really happy to be here and devote myself to a good cause, but I didn’t feel an immediate connection. Although from the age of three I’d been visiting my Tibetan relatives in Darjeeling, I strongly identify with American culture, and to a certain extent with Japanese culture, since I’ve grown up American in Tokyo. As I spent time in Dharamsala, however, I began to connect more to my Tibetan heritage.

Family in America, friends in Tokyo, and people here are always asking me why I've come back this summer for a month and a half. In the beginning, my answer was that I'd heard about all the wonderful work TWA is doing and wanted to intern with them; I also talked about wanting to take part again in the amazing Lifeworks International community service program. Both of these things are true. But as I keep working at TWA and interviewing members of the community, as well as teaching at the Tibetan Children's Village, I'm realizing what's at the heart of why I feel such a strong connection here: the people. This is an entire community of people in exile, people not able to return to their home, people who have given birth to children who have never seen the snow-capped peaks and rushing rivers of the country their parents love so much. The people of Dharamsala are working hard to continue their struggle and keep fighting peacefully for their country, and they inspire me every day to do my part in helping preserve the culture of my ancestors.

Like my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, I want to set out on my own and explore the world. I want to travel and leave everything that is familiar to figure out what kind of life I will lead. But one constant in the lives of the ambitious women in my family is how they have remained connected to their Tibetan heritage. No matter how far they

go, no matter what career they choose, no matter what paths they decide to take, they stay rooted in Tibet. I want to do this, too, and working here in Dharamsala will help make this dream a reality.

Author:

Sophia Slater is part Tibetan and was born in Tokyo to American parents. She is a senior at the American School in Japan, where she belongs to the National Honor Society and plays basketball on the school team. She is the founder of CharmWorks, an initiative to help a Tohoku town devastated by the earthquake and tsunami of 3/11. Volunteers taking part in the project paint slate charms made from the roofs of the wrecked houses and the charms are then sold to raise money for the town. Sophia loves travel, whether it's visiting a new country or going back to the States to visit family. Food is another area where she loves to explore, and her favorite cuisine by far is Japanese. When she's not studying or practicing her jump shot, she enjoys playing the piano and baking rich, gooey desserts.

Finding Positivity and Meaning in Exile

Exile. This single term conveys so many troubles and hardships a collective group encounters. It connotes the lack of a land, a sense of banishment and isolation. It signifies how a group is forced to desert their homes and all that is familiar and comforting, and must instead enter and navigate new and unfamiliar territories, cultures, and language, and find their place within it.

We Tibetans are certainly familiar with living and surviving in exile communities. Since the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, there has been a diaspora of Tibetans all over the world, including but not limited to Nepal, India, the United States, Canada, and Switzerland. However, Tibetans have proven that they can only survive in exile but thrive as well. Thus, while it is important to recognize the hardships that Tibetans have faced over time, it is just as crucial to acknowledge the resilience and bravery that Tibetans have displayed

in the past fifty years. More significantly, through the establishment of Tibetan communities worldwide, we Tibetans have been able to not only spread their culture to others, but also expose ourselves to new cultures, beliefs, perspectives, and opportunities.

One positive outcome of the establishment of exile communities has been the worldwide recognition that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has garnered. Viewed by the world as a beacon of peace and compassion, His Holiness has spread his teachings and shared his spirituality with people all over the world. By doing so, he has not only helped many people, but also increased the publicity of Tibetans and our political struggle.

The experiences of government repression and impingements of basic freedoms, and living as a minority can also inadvertently instill a greater appreciation for our own unique culture. When we are a majority group, and surrounded by many others like us, we are not as likely to have a great sense of self-awareness of our culture in a global context. However, when we have to exist as minorities, and interact with other cultures, we thus become immediately more conscious of our unique identity and culture, and how we are different. Aware of the fragility and uniqueness of our minority culture, we thus strive greater to preserve our own culture.

Having said that, I would like to make clear that by no means am I characterizing life in exile as a desirable state of existence. I am simply highlighting the silver lining that can be found amidst the history of Tibetan struggle.

Unfortunately, the Tibetan struggle is not over, and continues to play out as indicated by the many self-immolations that have taken place over the past few years. And this is where the greatest asset of a Tibetan exile comes into play. The greatest tools we have as members of an exile community are the basic

freedoms and rights that are afforded to us. We must thus take advantage of our situations as free people of the world to speak for our Tibetan brothers and sisters who cannot voice their pains and opinions without encountering state repression. This responsibility is especially greatest among the younger generations who are afforded the luxuries of education that many members of the older generations have not had. We must thus use our educational opportunities to acquire useful skills and specialize in fields and subjects that interest us so that one day, when Tibet does become a free and independent, the hundreds of thousands of us Tibetans in exile can return and join our brothers and sisters in what is rightfully our home.

Tenzin Tsagong

Brooklyn, New York

Sophomore at Bowdoin College, in Brunswick, Maine



Reaching for the Sky: A Policy Solution to Gender Inequality

By Tenzin Palkyi and Tenzin Dickyi

Some years ago, the Tibetan Women's Association (TWA) organized a gender sensitization workshop for Tibetan youth in Chennai, India. The student leader working with the TWA, a well-meaning young man who was president of the Tibetan Students' Association of Madras, had a question before the workshop. "Do the girls have to wear chupa to the workshop?," he asked. The TWA staffer fielding the question responded with a question of her own. "Do the boys have to wear chupa to workshops?" "No," said the student leader. "Well then," said the staffer, "the girls don't have to wear chupa to the workshop either."

This Chennai workshop was one of a series of such workshops held for Tibetan communities across India. For the staff giving the workshops as well as for the young men and women who attended,

it was an eye-opening experience. At the beginning of the workshop, the majority of the participants confidently said, of course there's gender equality—phomo dranyam—in Tibetan society. They were then asked to consider certain numbers: how many women in the Tibetan parliament versus how many men, how many women as departmental heads versus men, etc. They were also asked questions about their home life—how much of the housework their mother did versus their father, their sister versus their brother. In most cases, it turned out that the women did almost all the housework. But, the young men protested; don't women enjoy doing the cooking and cleaning? When their female counterparts said they very much didn't, they seemed genuinely staggered. After reflecting on these statistics and trends, the participants usually qualified their opinion. Maybe, they tentatively suggested, we don't have gender equality in our society.

That we lack gender equality in Tibetan society is not our thesis. We take that for granted. Indeed, all human societies in the world today suffer from a degree of gender discrimination that limits the society's true potential. However, at present, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) is hampered by a weak Women's Empowerment Policy that doesn't even acknowledge the existence of gender discrimination in our society. Our argument is that the present gender

inequality in Tibetan society is a serious problem that Sikyong Lobsang Sangay's Kashag has a real opportunity to address by implementing a credible Women's Empowerment Policy that can be a lasting legacy.

We propose a revised Women's Empowerment Policy that actively seeks to increase women representation in CTA leadership; promote a gender sensitive environment at school, increase the enrollment of girls in the science and technology fields, and reserve scholarship seats for girls and women; and facilitate gender sensitization workshops for the community and eliminate all forms of violence against women.

As of 2009, women made up only 3% of the decision-making bodies of the CTA. Roughly the same number of boys and girls graduate from the schools across our community and roughly the same number of men and women enter the CTA as civil servants, so from the posts of settlement officer on to the departmental secretary, why are the vast majority of these seats filled by men?

The Good Tibetan Women

There are of course talented, capable women who are role models for girls growing up these days; in arts and journalism, Jamyang Kyi, Tsering Wangmo Dhompal and Woenser, the voice of a generation; in

education, Jetsun Pema and B. Tsering; in activism and social justice, Lhadon Tethong and Losang Rabgey; in politics, Dicki Chhoyang, Youdon Aukatsang and Dhardon Sharling; in academia, Tashi Rabgey and Yudru Tsomo...but the list is short.

At school, girls are expected to be more obedient and quiet, more passive and pliant, than the boys. As adults, we are held to a different standard of behavior as well as social, cultural and familial responsibility—a double standard that we ourselves subscribe to without question. Why is it more shocking for women to smoke and drink? In the offices of Gangchen Kyishong, why is it only women who are expected to wear chupas, a routine yet important manifestation of culture, and not men? How is it possible, in this day and age, for Tenzingang to happen?

There is a story about the late Dawa Norbu, one of our foremost and beloved Tibetan scholars. He was always nose deep in a book and not much help around the house. One day his wife, who was cooking and also attending to their crying baby, snapped and said to Dawa Norbu, "Can't you at least watch the baby while I am cooking?" Dawa Norbu replied, "Then who will read the books? Will you?" This is probably an apocryphal story and we don't mean to make a straw man out of a funny story, but the idea of

the wife reading is what makes this story funny. But if you really think about this, if you really think about why the wife reading is a funny thing, and how maybe we should no longer hold current practices to the judgment of our grandparents' time, then the joke deflates a bit.

Violence Against Women

Perhaps the incidence of violence against women is infrequent in our society, but we see the Tenzingang case as only a symptom of a larger disenfranchisement of Tibetan women. The violence against women isn't always obvious, but slowly and steadily, case by case, it adds up to an almost systematic disenfranchisement.

We grew up in Patlikuhl school in north India near the river Beas, which grew in strength every monsoon and threatened to flood the school until the year it finally did. We also grew up in Lower TCV School in Dharamsala, which was almost overrun by a mob of angry local Indians in 1995. But in retrospect, these were not the real tragedies that befell our schools.

In Patlikuhl, there were several cases of male teachers having affairs with female students and one, in fact, a monk and the sternest discipline master Patlikuhl ever had, impregnated a girl and ran off with her. In Lower TCV, two young girls were sexually assaulted by men who were members of the tight-knit community.

Both were very young, around ten or so. In all of these cases, the local Indian police were not involved. The men received no legal punishment—they were forbidden to enter the school again but they spent no time behind bars for their crimes.

Recently in Tenzingang, one of the remote Tibetan settlements, seven people, including a woman named Kunsang who was the key instigator, stripped another woman naked, dragged her out of her home, beat her entire body, blacked her face with ink and tried to cut off her nose with a pair of scissors for having an affair with Kunsang's husband. The CTA official involved in settling the case produced this startling resolution: Kunsang paid a fine of Rs. 30,000 to the local monastery and her brother, who was one of the perpetrators, paid a fine of Rs. 5000. The brother was a member of the local assembly, from which he was not expelled, but suspended.

What Kunsang and her goons did to this woman is tragedy, but what the rest of us did is farce. We, her local community, her greater community, our government and our officials, our people, all of us, failed her. The only group that acquitted itself was the Tibetan Women's Association, which must be commended for its swift and concerned response to the case. And so our society has repeatedly failed such people, girls and women who are victims of violence; by handling such cases within the community instead of

enforcing the host country's laws, instead of safeguarding the victim, we protect the perpetrator. What is this if not systematic disenfranchisement and system failure?

Women's Empowerment Policy

The establishment of a Women's Empowerment Desk (WED) in the CTA, in 2006, marked our national awakening to the issue of gender as a policy matter. For this, and for writing the first Women's Empowerment Policy in our history, Samdhong Rinpoche and his Kashag should be commended. Unfortunately, this policy, dated October 14th, 2008, began with these indefensible words: "Since the beginning of human civilization in Tibet, Tibetans in their entire history have not experienced problems such as gender inequality or gender oppression and exploitation." Considering that there was not a single woman official at any level in either the courts of the Tibetan kings or during the four hundred years of Ganden Phodrang rule until the forcible dissolution and takeover of our government in 1959, this was not an auspicious beginning for a document intended to empower and equalize Tibetan women.

This policy has eight points, two of the more salient points being Point 1, that "CTA should also continue its on-going efforts to restore the Bikshuni Sangha ordination of Tibetan nuns" and Point 3, that "CTA should make every

effort to encourage more women to be elected as local settlement officers in the Tibetan settlements." These are important items that we hope the CTA holds itself accountable for.

Two more problematic items are Point 5, that "CTA should make efforts to implement the provision that states that 'priority shall be given to female candidates for the post of pre-primary teacher', as enshrined in the Basic Education Policy of CTA" and Point 6 that stipulates for workshops for women to become "ideal mothers". While certainly actionable, the field of pre-primary teachers is already primarily female. Point 5 would make more sense if it targeted fields lacking in women. For instance, as we mentioned earlier, as of 2009, women made up only 3% of the decision-making bodies of CTA. Efforts to increase female representation in these bodies will be highly welcome. Additionally, workshops on how to become "ideal mothers", though not intentionally discriminatory, reinforce gender stereotypes and ignore women's capacity in other regards. We also believe that the one thing that would allow all women to become better, effective mothers is for their husbands to take equal responsibility in child rearing and household duties. Certainly many mothers would agree that there is a more urgent need for an "ideal fathers" workshop.

The Women's Empowerment Desk has made some significant strides

in the last few years. The desk produced a manual for the women's empowerment program as a result of the symposium it organized in March 2010. Although this manual hasn't yet been made public, we believe this is the kind of work the WED should be doing more of.

In 2011, the WED also contracted seasoned researchers and field researchers to conduct a qualitative research into the lives of Tibetan women in exile and identify their needs and challenges. The findings from this research will be laid out in a report entitled, 'The Present Status of Tibetan Women in India.' This report is under production and will be released soon. We are confident that the report will debunk the original assumption that gender discrimination does not exist in the Tibetan community, which seems to be the foundation on which the first Women's Empowerment Policy was written, and in fact highlight areas of discrimination faced by Tibetan women. We hope that the research findings will inform a significant revision of the policy.

We also hope that Sikyong Lobsang Sangay's Kashag will upgrade the Desk to meet current needs. A WED staffed with one person and armed with a weak policy cannot effectively address the gender gap in the Tibetan exile community. We are also curious about why the WED is placed under the Department of Finance. Wouldn't it make

more sense to house the WED under the Department of Home, which oversees the settlement offices and thus can facilitate WED to conduct programs in settlements more effectively?

A credible Women's Empowerment Policy is essential to resolving societal and institutional gender discrimination and will help Tibetan women and men recalibrate our expectations and our duties. Our community and our cause need the capacity and commitment of all our citizens. With renewed energy and optimism, we can double the pool of people to draw on for the posts of not just pre-primary teachers but also Parliamentarian, Departmental Secretary, Tibetan Youth Congress President, Tibetan Justice Commissioner and the Political Leader of the Central Tibetan Administration.

Tibetan women are beginning to understand that our dreams need not be so small nor our obligations so heavy. We need not reach for the ceiling when we can touch the sky.

Tenzin Palkyi was formerly Research Officer at the Tibetan Women's Association, Dharamsala. She is an Assistant Program Officer at the National Endowment for Democracy, and co-authoring this piece in her personal capacity. Tenzin Dickyi worked as Special Assistant to His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Representative at the Office of Tibet, New York, and is an MFA candidate at Columbia University.



GROWING UP A GIRL IN INDIA

In the wake of the recent alleged rape of a Tibetan minor in the Mundgod Tibetan settlement, my girlfriends and I talked one evening about incidents of sexual harassment and intimidation we had experienced growing up in India. The fact that each of us had multiple stories to share is a reflection of how pervasive the problem is in both Tibetan and Indian communities. I was 18 when I first left India to pursue higher studies in the United States. Now as a 31-year-old, when I look back at my pre-teen and teenage years in India, I shudder to realize how close, on more than one occasion, I came to serious harm.

Silence is a Crime

My first recollection of inappropriate behavior includes a visit to the barber when I was twelve years old. The barber took me to a back room while my mother and her friend waited up front. The two rooms were separated by a flimsy cardboard box serving as a wall with a curtain drawn across the opening in the middle. I had always been a timid and shy kid, so I was too terrified to even call for my mother when the barber repeatedly brushed his hands over my chest under the pretense of fumbling with my hair. I was too scared to say anything. I silently walked out of that room after my haircut, waited for my mother to pay the barber, and never went back to that place again. I also never told anyone about it.

When I was fifteen and was traveling by myself on an overnight bus, I sat next to a Tibetan nun whom I met on the bus. In the middle of the night, the bus stopped for dinner and a bathroom break. I asked a man for directions and learned that the bathrooms were at the opposite end of the bus stand where it was darker and quieter. I went alone. As I was trying to find a cleaner stall to use, I heard the main door to the bathroom screech close. I turned around and was shocked to find the man who I had asked for directions standing inside the women's bathroom. I screamed very loudly, ran past the man and pushed myself through the tiny opening he had

left between the wall and the door. I was a scrawny kid and the man could have easily overpowered me if he had wanted to. I do not know what saved me that night, but I am grateful that nothing worse happened. The sight of the sleeping nun next to me calmed me a little bit, and reflecting the social norm that I had internalized over the years, I again did not discuss this incident with anyone. I did not go to the bathroom for the rest of the ride either.

The final incident I will mention here is when I was chased by three men in broad daylight as I was going back home from a trip to Nechung monastery to pray for high exam scores or something silly like that. Luckily it was on my downhill trip when they chased me. I kept screaming like crazy as I outran them. Finally when I reached a corner with some houses close by--and I knew they would stop chasing me--I turned around to see all three men smiling smugly at me. I was shaking with fear when I finally stopped running and felt safe enough to sit down.

I have listed only three out of the unfortunately many incidents of sexual harassment and intimidation I dealt with in the first 18 years of my life. Sadly, mine is not a unique story. In each case, my own response was to stay silent, never fighting back or seeking help from adults or authorities. Part of the reluctance stemmed from not having full confidence that adults around me would help me. I

never felt comfortable enough to share these deeply traumatic incidents and always found a way to blame myself for creating these situations. It was only much later in life that I learned that this was not my shame to carry.

Touch Me and I'll Expose You

After finishing my Bachelor's degree in the U.S., I returned to Dharamsala to work in the Tibetan community in exile. A very important item I took back with me was my pepper spray. Luckily, I never had to use it on anyone, but every time I had late nights at the office, I walked home with the spray in my hands. I also noticed a change in my reactions to incidents of sexual harassment. I no longer felt shame for being attacked, but felt furious. I no longer felt like a victim who had no choice, but instead an independent woman who had a voice. While sexual violence is far from adequately addressed or prevented in the U.S., the time I spent there taught me a great deal about how individuals and communities can work to prevent, protect, and heal victims of gender-based violence. It was not one single moment that transformed how I felt. Instead, it was living and working in college in an atmosphere of zero tolerance for sexual violence, harassment, and intimidation. It was example of many strong female role models, be it professors or resource persons who are outspoken in their rejection of sexual abuse.

A few years ago, on a bus ride with a friend, the man sitting next to us kept touching my friend's thigh. As soon as she told me what the man was doing, I stood up and loudly asked the conductor to seat this man somewhere else because he was touching my friend. I did not care if he was travelling with his family. He was deeply embarrassed and I have no doubt that he will think twice before bothering another female in such a way again. I think one of the most effective tools in discouraging men from such behavior is to expose them and shame them in public when they are doing something inappropriate. We have to remember that it is never our shame to carry. Another time, when a man grabbed my behind on a crowded street, I held on to him immediately and told him I was taking him to the police. And I would have done exactly that, except my girlfriend got involved and slapped him hard across the face. Eventually, I had to let go of him as I thought my friend might get in trouble for hitting him. I understand that we do not always have the time or energy to stop and take every one who grabs our behind on a crowded street to the nearest police station. However, it is worth our time to do so when possible, and we should at the very least call attention to their inappropriate behavior and disempower the perpetrator, however briefly. I also call on other women who have suffered similar incidents of sexual harassment and intimidation to share their experiences as well and break the silence on this issue.

Deeper Solutions Needed

Informal ad hoc remedies can only go so far in fixing deep-rooted problems of gender inequality and gender-based violence in the Tibetan and Indian communities. Instead we need systemic institutional changes that acknowledge and address sexual harassment and gender-based violence issues. Public outrage in India last year in the wake of the Delhi gang rape that killed a 23-year old medical student brought women's issues to the forefront. Soon after the Delhi gang rape, Indian police issued advisories for women to go straight home after school or college and to wear decent clothes and not invite attention. However, the younger generation rejected such patriarchal efforts to blame the victim. The Indian government quickly formed a committee to recommend amendments to the criminal law that will allow the legal system to deal more swiftly and effectively with criminals accused of sexual assault against women. The committee produced a 600-plus page report containing a long list of recommendations, some of which have already been enacted into law. It is an encouraging trend to see that the number of complaints made in relation to molestation and rape have also increased in the last year. Sexual assault and rape under-reporting is a major issue in India.

Although creating laws to safeguard women is a promising first step to

addressing sexual abuse cases in a serious manner, social prejudices and biases cannot be reversed by laws alone. Instead, we must change society's attitudes about women by deconstructing and eliminating the patriarchal values that are deeply embedded in the religious and cultural traditions of both Tibetan and Indian communities. It is only through conscious effort and dialogue at all levels of society that we can alter the social environment that trivializes sexual and domestic violence. In particular, the education system, institutions and the media can play an integral role in transmitting new value systems and setting social norms that respect women's autonomy and reject gender-based violence.

The Delhi gang attack raised India's national consciousness on sexual assault and intimidation that women face regularly and highlighted the crucial need for a change in the national discourse surrounding women's rights. This national awakening presents a unique opportunity for the Tibetan community in India to also critically examine sexual assault and cases of gender-based violence that occur in our society and to create space for dialogue about such issues. The Tibetan Women's Association (TWA) has an ongoing project that is geared towards raising awareness on women's legal rights in India. Such empowerment is necessary for both the women and men in our community. The Central Tibetan Administration's

(CTA) Women's Empowerment Desk also continues to implement series of workshops on women's empowerment including raising awareness on sexual harassment and laws put in place to protect victims. It was also highly encouraging to see the CTA's Home Minister, Gyari Dolma, display personal commitment and visionary leadership in the urgent and proper handling of the alleged rape case in Mundgod. The department of home also issued orders to all Tibetan settlement offices to report such cases to the local authorities without any exemption. To build on this momentum, the CTA and other educational and business institutions and civil society organizations can initiate or further strengthen its awareness programs on 'sexual harassment at workplace', and adopt a clearly defined zero tolerance policy on it with specific mechanisms put in place to penalize the perpetrators.

We must, as individuals and as a society, categorically reject sexual harassment and intimidation, and end the culture of impunity and secrecy surrounding it. Sexual offenders do not deserve anonymity. We should cultivate an atmosphere at home, at work and in public spaces that does not trivialize or tolerate sexual harassment, intimidation and assault. Let us empower our women and men to stand firm against perpetrators of gender-based violence.



About the author:

Tenzin Dhardon Sharling is a second generation Tibetan born in exile after her grandparents was forced to escape into exile, India in the aftermath of the illegal occupation of Tibet by the Chinese Communist regime in 1959. She is today the youngest elected member of the Tibetan Parliament based in exile India. Dhardon served at Tibetan Women's Association as the Research and Media head, for six years before and after her post graduation studies at the prestigious

University of Edinburgh. Besides being an avid spokesperson for the Tibetan movement, she is the co-chair of the steering committee of International Tibet Network, a global coalition of Tibet-related non-governmental organization. Besides being featured in leading journals and newspapers, she is one of the contributing authors of the book 'A Force Such as the World Has Never Known: Women Creating Change,' published by INANNA Publications and Education in 2013.

Her maxim in life is to 'strive and struggle but not yield.'

Tibetan Women: off field, on field....

This topic gained visual depiction when I sat watching the fitting finale of 'Dhasa Women's Basketball Tournament' on the evening of October 27 this year.

Two reasons why I accepted this genial invitation to be the chief guest at the final series are-firstly, my dear friend Tseyang¹, backed by her devout friends had taken the onus to organize a series of civic initiatives in Dharamsala² oriented

- 1 30-year old Tseyang is also the chief of Women's Empowerment Desk of Central Tibetan Administration
- 2 Home to over 10,000 exiled Tibetans is also the seat of exile Tibetan Government.



photo credit: Ngawang Sherab

towards enhancing female participation in myriad avenues, and this basketball match for which she had worked painstakingly hard is a point in case. Secondly it's a women's match and I, for one would not miss witnessing women's mastery descend on men's field.

Sitting at a special custom-made guest's podium along with Tenzin Jigme, president of Tibetan Youth Congress, the largest Tibetan NGO with a predominantly male stronghold, at the famous Gangkyi³ Basketball ground, the only leisure spot in the otherwise solemn space that hosts the Central Tibetan Administration⁴, I

3 Abbreviated name for Gangchen Kyishong, a Tibetan name for the Secretariat campus of Central Tibetan Administration

4 the recognized name for Tibetan Government in exile

felt ecstatic and excitable upon seeing hundreds of male spectators throng the ground. As the match progressed with the two male referees frisking about and ten women warm-up, I realized that this was going to be unique evening, beholding a spectacle, showcasing an hitherto latent talent of women, while men watched chanting boosterish slogans, thus shoving the usual flagrant reaction of booing into oblivion.

Prior to the match, four young, beautiful and talented women led by Dolkar⁵ put up a spectacular Bollywood dance performance, grooving to the rhythm of the songs-Taal se Taal Mila, manifesting the graceful demeanor Aishwarya Rai embodied in the film

5 28-year old professional dancer, runs the D'shala Dance Arts in Dharamsala

Taal⁶ and Maya Maya, an enchanting belly dance number from Guru.⁷ Seeing that the scintillating show staged right in the middle of a ground guarded by men, was received with the same gusto and grace it was being displayed with, left me feeling elated. The usual barbs and jibes gave way to applause, accolades and adulation. Looking at the performers, my friend Victoria who had accompanied me to the event, commented amidst the jarring cheering noise... ‘this is women’s leadership.’

Ensnconced on the edge of the lower terrain of Dauladhar hills, the basketball court measuring the dimensions 8.65m x 15.24m, has witnessed countless matches played on its terra firma, but between men. A comment by an expat Tibetan attests to this. “When I was a young man at Gangkyi, there was neither a basket court nor enough young ladies to field a team! I call it progress! Keep it up, ladies,” he posted online under a Facebook photo of the winning team holding the trophy, a photo that rightfully went viral.

The magnitude of this milestone event went notches higher when Radio Free Asia’s⁸ Tibetan section reporter Yangdon Demo hosted a feature length

6 A 1998 Hindi love story film directed by Subash Ghai

7 A 2006 Hindi drama film directed by Mani Ratnam

8 A private, non-profit corporation broadcasting news and information in 9 languages.

interview on this. Along with Tseyang and two players, I took part in the discussion. Tseyang presented a deeper insight into how sports and recreation bolsters a woman’s psychological and physical wellbeing and how this should be a daily feature in a woman’s life. I spoke about the significance of this event, and ended up deliberating, although inadvertently, on how this particular event actually effectuates the three guiding principles of a non-violent movement: unity, planning and discipline, as espoused by numerous strategists and visionaries. I concluded saying that this could potentially serve as a runway for a future events such as National Tibetan Women’s Basketball League (NTWBL) or an International Tibetan Women’s Basketball League (ITWBL).



photo credit: Jampa and Wen King

During the course of watching the vigorous match, I realized that my mind was diverted, away from the match, away

from being in the present to journeying between the past and the future. Besides the resounding cheers and the scoreboard carrying varying scores, I struggled to concentrate, as my usual dreamy side took over and I envisaged the recreation of this momentous equation at every spectrum of the exile Tibetan Diaspora: at grassroots, civil society, monasteries, workforce, education and matrimony.

My mind rattled between imagining the imposing vignettes of film footages, book excerpts and news headlines, all encompassing the portrayal of women rising above their domain. A strikingly powerful resonance is a tagline from a Bollywood film *Lajja*⁹ - ‘where tears stop, there, a revolution begins.’

A part of this euphoric feeling can be attributed to the changing global trend witnessing a palpable shift in recognizing women’s status as precipitant of a society’s commitment towards progress and prosperity. I have been particularly inspired by an increase in atypical news narrating women’s rise in the society, particularly in the religion and male dominated societies. The recent appointment of Isra al-Modallal, a 23-year-old female as a spokeswoman for Hamas, by the male Gaza authorities in Hamas, speaks to the effect of the invigorating movement, wherein men

are being the catalyst in this social and political transformation.

A sense of accomplishment ran through me as I basked under the prospect of being in both the center and the periphery: in the center of powerful developments taking place in the Tibetan community and in the periphery of a global transfiguration, witnessing the end of an era, where females are treated as a chattel and considered a collective liability. The ushering in of a promising epoch, where women are recognized as forces to reckon with, is impending and inevitable.

Reverting back to my senses of being a guest at a match, and entrusted with the responsibility of giving away the trophy to the winning team, I felt bemused and wore a smile that didn’t wane down with the evening sun. My smile was sustained by a sense of infinite pride and hope, because I was not just merely watching a women’s basketball match but I was, bearing witness to a significant unfolding in the Tibetan community, for and of women: women at the forefront of unchartered territories and essentially women’s footsteps becoming visible and pertinent..... from off field to, now, on field.

_____end_____

⁹ A 2001 Hindi drama film directed by Rajkumar Santoshi.

Bringing Tibet Into Broader Focus

Wendy McDowell

11.15.2006

Janet Gyatso is the Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies at Harvard Divinity School. Her most recent book is *Women in Tibet*, which she edited with Hanna Havnevik. Wendy McDowell spoke recently with Gyatso about the book, which was published by Columbia University Press, and about the field of Tibetan Buddhism in general.

Q: Why did you and your co-editor decide to do a book on women in Tibet?

A: It was my colleague's initial idea, and after starting the project she asked me to join her as co-editor. Hanna Havnevik is a Tibetologist who teaches at the University of Oslo in Norway. She had written an earlier book on Tibetan nuns. When she contacted me, she had gotten the contract with Hurst and

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Columbia already and had a number of the contributors lined up. I was glad to do it, though in some ways it's harder to edit a volume than to write one yourself. One has a big responsibility to one's contributors, in addition to the usual question of one's own expectations and wishes when writing a monograph.

Actually, I edited one volume before, on memory, and I vowed then that I would never again edit another volume. But now that it's done and out, I'm very glad we did it.

- Q: In your introduction, you talk about the complexities of the book's topic, and say that, with multiple contributors, the subject matter can be addressed from many different angles. Is that the advantage of an edited volume?
- A: Exactly. You don't have to do all of the research yourself, so you can gather other people with their specific areas of expertise, and get them to write on a particular theme. The nice thing is that as editor you have the chance to pull these disparate pieces of research together and think through their implications as a whole in the introduction. On the other hand, sometimes contributors don't write things the way that you would want them to be written! Most of the scholars in this volume are Tibetologists with little training in feminist theory or interpretation and they were wary of offering much theorization. As editors, we were interested in feminist issues, but most of the scholars treated such issues very lightly.
- Q: I was interested in the decision to include articles from "old" and "new" Tibet. Was that because of the scholars themselves, or was that a conscious decision by the editors? What does that allow for the reader?
- A: One of the things that inclusion of recent material from the new Tibet allows is anthropological research. One of the whole problems in studying Tibet is that our sources are very limited. You can't do anthropology of the past very well. Study of contemporary realities can also help us to imagine the larger social context of the past, at least in some cases.
- One of the larger agendas of the book was to address the unfortunate imbalance in the fact that the study of Tibet is almost entirely about Tibetan religion, and from an almost exclusive perspective of normative Tibetan religious writing. I feel very strongly that in order to understand religion, you need to know about a wide range of practices as well as their social place. For Tibetan studies this is not only a problem of sources but also a problem of the kind of scholarship that's done about Tibet. In many cases, it's as if Tibet only exists for our interest in religion. While it's true, of course, that Tibetans had a very highly developed religion and there is a substantial amount of complex and subtle religious literature, it's a huge distortion to think that Tibet was an entirely religious society, as many sources in Tibetan studies still portray it.

Q: Why is it a distortion?

A: The literary accounts of religion can be very idealistic as well as ideological, and it's often hard to get a sense of who people actually were. There are historical resources that can be revealing, however, and for this book we did get a couple of scholars to start combing through the literature looking for references to women. But the main place where you can get the nuts and bolts of women's situations, the nitty-gritty of real lives, is by looking at people living now. That's why it was so important to include contemporary sources. People have tried to write historical studies about the women of Tibet, but that is difficult to do well. What they came up with is still very general, because it's hard to find detailed material. This is true for the history and sociology of women in most other parts of the world too, of course.

Q: You talk in the introduction about the difficulty of finding "genuine women's voices."

A: That's a very complicated problem. I often feel nervous about the very conception of a "genuine woman's voice." People sometimes assume that if something is authored by a woman, that's a genuine woman's voice, but that's a very problematic

assumption. It's a kind of trap to start to think about it that way. Who is to say what is a genuine or typical woman's voice? I don't think anyone actually knows, or that it even exists. Women can write like men do without realizing they are doing that. Men can write works that are cast as the autobiographical work of women, or they can attempt to write devotional poetry in what they think of as a woman's voice. They do so for a variety of reasons.

Nonetheless, it is important to gather those works that are attributed to female authors, just to get a sense of how women did write and to assess the claims of authorship in each case. It is true that in traditional Tibet, far more biographies of men were published than of women. So, on the one hand, we do see a highly androcentric literary culture in Tibet. On the other hand, the more we look for it, the more we're starting to find manuscripts recounting various women's lives; some women's writing is there. It just didn't get as much attention in traditional Tibet, and didn't get much attention from modern scholars, either.

We are starting to find more and more. How far it will go is hard to know. I have one doctoral student here, Holly Gayley, who is doing

research on a female religious leader who just died in Tibet, and there's another student I'm working with at the University of Virginia who is studying a famous woman visionary at the end of the nineteenth century. There is a fair bit of work being done now on particular historical women. So, more is coming to light as people start to pay attention to different kinds of archival sources.

Q: In this volume there's an essay on the autobiography of Orgyan Chokyi [a Buddhist nun, 1675-1729, who composed the oldest known autobiography by a Tibetan woman].

A: That's right. The author, Kurtis Schaeffer, is a graduate of Harvard. I also encouraged him to publish a translation of the whole autobiography, which he's done recently, with Oxford University Press. I actually used it for a class this past semester. Hanna [Havnevik] herself did her doctoral dissertation on another exceptional Tibetan nun and leader of the twentieth century, Ani Lochen.

Q: You say that there are a few studies that have been done on women in Tibet, but it sounds like there is a real dearth. Have there been any larger sociological or historical studies? What have studies about

the female in Tibet tended to focus on?

A: There have been very few historical studies of women or images of women in Tibet. There is a fair bit of ethnography on nuns today, and the new ordination movement is a big topic for the present time. For the past, the studies have tended to focus on the ideal image of the feminine and certain theoretical passages on an imputed feminine nature, the so-called dakini figure. But that's not about real women, it's about an ideal, an exemplary model for what people think of as a kind of ideal feminine role. That ideal itself is actually questionable for its implications, that is, from a feminist perspective.

In any case, entire books that are devoted to women or anything female in Tibet are very few. In Tibetan studies there are five or six at the most and then a few other articles. Most of the work is addressed to a popular audience and is not historically or theoretically rigorous.

Q: Can you talk a little more about the dakini? I know there's not much about it in this book, but I was interested in how you understand this female model.

A: The dakini is a complex and in many ways intriguing ideal of a type or style of being, a kind of trickster-cum-angel-type figure. She uses a kind of allusive, connotative way of talking in order to convey ideas that pertain to perceptions that are hard to put into conventional language. That's a special power, but it also would appear to limit the ideal female to a kind of communication that is not entirely public or recognizable. It is true that certain high-ranking Tibetan laywomen are characterized as dakinis; the label is one of the ways that Tibetans conceptualize what an enlightened female would be like. And even today, certain very highly regarded women in Tibetan religion will be called dakinis. It is an operating cultural value.

One problem is that while there are statements in the texts that say "all by women are by their very nature dakini," that doesn't describe day-to-day women's realities where they weren't treated like dakinis at all! They were just treated like women with all the problems and usual kinds of roles and forms of oppression and marginalization. It's a misreading and a gross exaggeration to think that Tibet was such an enlightened society since women were treated like dakinis. That's really not true.

Q: That plays into what you were talking about earlier, which is the very pervasive idealization of Tibet.

A: Yes, the Shangri-La factor. It's not helpful to anyone, except, perhaps, tourist agencies.

Q: A number of the essays and your introduction talk about alternative patterns for women, which suggest that gender roles do not always determine the lives of all women. In the introduction, you discuss yogic communities in that light, and also women who rely on the support of powerful people. How much of that insight came from the essays.

A: In writing the introduction, I was fortunate to receive detailed comments from my husband and fellow scholar, Charles Hallisey, who talked with me about it at length and helped me to conceptualize a number of issues more clearly. This is one of the points in the introduction that was actually his idea. There has been a tendency in the study of women to reduce everything to the fact of being a woman. But it is important to see that women are not only women. In other words, women participate in all kinds of activities and situations which don't necessarily have to do with their gender, or which intersect

with other segments of society. In particular, it's very helpful to notice that problems such as marginality, reduced status, and so on that we attribute generically to being a woman, in fact, are not exclusive to women. One example that is illustrated in the essays by Dan Martin and Kurtis Schaeffer in the book is the very long-standing place in Tibetan culture for a subculture of yogis, who are marked as kinds of rebellious, maverick figures outside of normal society. Women were perhaps well-poised to tap into the status of that position because they were already outside of the center of conventional power and conventional institutions due to androcentrism and misogyny. But the important point is that this place was not reserved only for women, and many men made use of it as well, in fact more than women did. In other words, the yogic subculture is not essentially about gender. But it is something that women could make use of, and it was a way for them to get power and recognition that was not the standard route. It was more open and flexible than was normally the case in the more centralized and institutionalized foci of power in Tibetan society.

Q: Can you talk about what was available to women historically in

Tibet in terms of power?

A: There were some women in positions of secular rule. There was an old tradition of inherited status on the part of local rulers and kings and lords and nobles; women could sometimes take such status and use it to control regions or local political institutions. As for the huge structure of Buddhist monasteries and monastic institutions, this was almost completely dominated by men. There were some female convents and there were a few hierarchs who were women, but there weren't many. Monasticism in general in Buddhism came to be dominated by men, especially in northern Buddhist countries. But in secular life, there were queens, and as one article points out, there were probably more routes for female power outside of religion than there were inside of it, either through inheritance or their husband dying, or because women were especially strong in their characters and in charisma.

There is also an article in the book on female shamans and oracles, who make use of a different kind of power. There are women that are privy to certain types of communication with the spirits that men are thought not to have access

to, for a variety of social and other reasons.

Q: You say in the introduction that women's roles as shamans and oracles might have to do with a double-edged vision of women. What is sometimes considered a negative characteristic—that they can be in touch with the darker, “impure” sides of life—is a positive virtue in the case of shamans and oracles.

A: That's right. This is something that I think about a lot, and it is a problem for feminists. It is the case that because of women's disadvantages and the prejudices against women, they're consigned to certain levels of realms of society that, ironically, can sometimes become a source of strength for them. But to make this a strength still doesn't put them in the center of conventional power, though it can give them a different kind of status. It's something women can use. Whether that's ultimately good or not is a big question, because some people are uncomfortable with the fact that the only kind of power that women can have comes by virtue of operating beneath the radar screen and cultivating creative, nonstandard means of communication and exerting influence. That doesn't

often get sufficient recognition, economically or otherwise.

Q: Or status?

A: Well, status is a very complicated question. Who has status and who does not is sometimes not so easy to discern. On the other hand, one doesn't want to be an apologist and say that status doesn't matter. Some kinds of feminists do take this route. They say that we should pay attention and notice that women in fact have far more power than we recognize. And that's true, but that still doesn't help the fact that there are important realms to which women have great difficulty gaining access. On the other hand, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the places where women actually do dominate, and to notice them. Sometimes we don't have the words or labels for such a phenomenon, or we don't know to value it. That's a personal interest of mine, to recognize different types of agency.

The question of different kinds of agency also relates to an idea in some of the articles in this book that there are tricky and dangerous places with which women in some ways are more familiar than men.

It's complicated, because such a proposition can be read as an

essentialist view of women, but that is far from what I would like to argue. For example, Robert Barnett's article talks of special ways that female nuns "perform" a message of political resistance, but it's not true that it's only been nuns that have been doing this; it's the monastic community more generally. One of the most interesting articles in this book is the one by Charlene Makley, who is developing a point about the gender of the monastic, which is a kind of interesting, in-between gender. Actually, she is not arguing that monasticism represents one single gender; rather, for her, male monastics have a different gender than female monastics, but nonetheless from a more general perspective, all monastics can be located in a kind of interim gender location. In Tibet at the moment, monastics are the ones who are leading the way in political resistance. They're the ones who've been standing up and they're the ones who've been going to prison and being tortured. That's true for both men and women.

But it is interesting that women have taken as much of a role as men in this. There's a fine film on this that I've shown in my class this past semester, *Satya*, about Tibetan nuns in particular. It's very moving. Nuns

are going out to protest oppressive rule in Tibet with their brother monks. If we were to talk about a specific gender that's associated with monasticism, one that is neither fully male nor female, I believe that the gender of being a celibate cleric makes you more willing to take risks, and it also signifies a certain strength, an ability to resist torture and indoctrination. Tibetan nuns and monks also say very specifically that they have the special advantage of not having children, and therefore do not have the same responsibilities as other do. That means, for them, that they are more willing to risk being arrested or hurt.

Q: You do make clear that these issues are complicated, yet also say that shying completely away from a feminist perspective can be a problem.

A: I definitely feel that I am looking at these questions with a feminist perspective, but that means, too, that I want to nuance what it means to be feminist. The label "feminist" is still up for grabs, still being negotiated in terms of what it means—and what it can mean. I've been talking with some of our colleagues here at HDS about this question. What does it mean to be a feminist? Does it mean to be pro-

woman? I don't actually think so. I think one of the most important tasks of feminism is simply to draw attention to the complexity, but also the promise, of thinking through gender. The concept of gender in the postmodern era was developed due to issues of inequity relating to women, but in fact the study of gender, and feminism, and sexuality itself, are not only about women. I think these terms of analysis make a contribution to the study of culture and history on a very wide range of topics that we might not immediately associate with women or sex. That's not to say that we should stop worrying about the specific inequities and prejudice faced by women in the world. I'm not saying that at all. It's just that it's not so simple, and there is a troubling tendency for women to assume that all of their problems can be blamed on misogyny, androcentrism, and patriarchy. Personally, I don't feel caught in an identity as a woman. There are many contexts when sex and gender are hardly the overt issue at all. But on the other hand, the insights of feminism can be translated usefully in dealing with other kinds of bias, stereotyping, and prejudices.

Q: I'd like to talk about your own research and interest in Tibetan

medicine. The article in this book by Tashi Tsering suggests that medicine was another site where women have been able to have productive roles.

A: This article talks about female physicians in Tibet and in exile in the twentieth century. There have been some women who were physicians in Tibet in the past, but not very many, as far as I know. My own interests in medicine are not because women practice medicine, but because medicine describes the body and human beings in a way that more mainstream and scriptural Buddhist sources do not. Traditional Tibetan medicine is much more scientific and pragmatic about the physical body than classical Buddhist descriptions, and I find that a welcome addition to the more idealist versions of the body that Buddhism provides. Tibetan medicine is very influenced by Buddhist intellectual culture, so it's hard to distinguish them, but medicine really does attempt, in some important senses, to look empirically at bodies and talk about how they work from a physical perspective. And that's interesting to see happening in the highly religious culture of Tibet. One striking example of this is that Tibetan medicine is much more comfortable with inter-sexed people

than is Buddhist doctrine. This is not in the book, but is coming out of my own research, which found that whereas monasticism saw anatomical deviance as anathema, medicine has long recognized that sexual identity is a spectrum, rather than there being only two ideal types. There is a wide range of possibilities in sexual identity, and medicine is not judgmental about them. This is true of Indian medicine as well.

Tibetan medicine also describes gynecology in much detail. Not all of it accords with modern science, but it is an attempt to be specific about women's bodies. Theorists of Tibetans medicine actually took a bold step by insisting that women's medicine had to be treated separately from that of men.

Q: You're now working on a book on this topic, right?

A: Yes, it's on Tibetan medicine. One chapter will have to do with sex, gender, and women, but I haven't written that yet. I've been working on other parts of the book.

Q: What is the focus?

A: It's about Tibetan medicine coming to terms with empirical evidence and empirical thinking. It's about the seventeenth century, when medicine

in Tibet interestingly coincided with certain things that were happening in Europe. Tibetans didn't develop modern medicine in the way this happened in the West, but they did take a few moves in a similar direction. It was during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama that this tendency really came to the fore. I'm interested in that moment. Again, I'm trying to see more of Tibet than its religious side, to try to fill out the picture. And medicine happens to be a major place where Tibetan society developed in interesting ways, and there's a huge amount of literature on it that scholars have not studied. Medicine provides another angle to look at history and culture, and that sheds important light on Tibetan religion in the end.

We're just beginning to study Asian medical traditions from this perspective. All of them had some interest in empirical questions, but from what we can tell, Tibetans were especially adept in certain types of surgery. Some of that probably came from Arabic and certain Greek medical traditions that eventually found their way to Tibet. Tibet was a kind of melting pot of various medical traditions in the Asian world. It included Chinese and Indian medicine, as well as Greek and Arabic medical traditions, and

a variety of other threads from Central Asia. Historians of Tibetan medicine, such as a doctoral student of mine, Yang Ga, who is here now from a medical college in Lhasa, are still trying to disentangle all the various threads that were there in the eighth century. I'm not doing that myself so much, but rather looking at medicine as a scholar of religion from a cultural and historical perspective. Part of this for me is an interest in the way that the practice of sex is figured. In Buddhism, sex is something harmful that we get attached to, while in medicine, sex is something that normal people do. Sex is good for you, it's a normal part of life. I'm curious about how they talk about that.

Q: How does medical thought end up reflecting back on Buddhist thought? Can you see shifts?

A: That's a question that I'm really interested in. But to begin with, what do we really mean by "Buddhism"? That's a Western term. The Buddhist world is more expansive than we think it is. In this I am again drawing on some ideas that have been developed by my husband in an influential article he wrote with Frank Reynolds on the notion of "Buddhist civilization" for the *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

I think the notion developed there about Buddhist civilization as a category of analysis is particularly useful to thinking about medicine and Buddhism, and I'm expecting that category to help me think through the larger issues of my book. Certainly a place like Tibet fostered many Buddhist institutions and traditions, but with the idea of Buddhist civilization we can learn to think about how those were part of a larger phenomenon that included what is often considered to be secular. The domain of medical knowledge and practice is one good example of that, I think. It is true that in Tibetan medical ethics we can see much influence of Buddhist ideas and practices. We see it in the way that teachers instruct disciples, in ideas about the nature of apprenticeship and the importance of direct experience, about compassion, and in notions about death. All of these were influenced by Buddhist educational practices, both in the monasteries and more unconventional settings, but it might well be the case that the burgeoning profession of medicine in Tibet also nudged Buddhist monastic culture in certain directions. In other words, there was a fruitful conversation in two directions, especially once medicine really began in some ways

to separate itself from Buddhism. In medicine there was a lot more freedom to experiment and to question authority in ways that are not governed by doctrine, as the monastic curriculum was. That's where empirical evidence came in. If something that the physicians experienced in their practice or saw in a patient's body contradicts what the texts say, they were more likely to be willing to question the texts, and less beholden to doctrine than I see in monastic literary and educational cultures. But in the end, the monastic institutions appreciated the prestige of medical expertise, and it may even be the case that the entire approach to knowledge and conceptions of virtuosity in Tibetan Buddhism was influenced in turn by the development of Tibetan medical professions.

Q: I think most Americans know very little about Tibet. We seem to get two impressions of Tibet, the Shangri-La vision, and the political occupation. As a scholar of Tibet who knows more, what do you think about what gets reported on Tibet, and how accurate do you find it?

A: It's very hard to assess, from what gets reported, what is really going on in Tibet. There are two big propaganda machines, one in the

exile community in Dharamsala and one in Beijing; actually, both distort the facts.

It is difficult to get reliable statistics and figures about Tibet, socioeconomically or politically. Even experts can't make general statements beyond what they've observed, because the census data from China is not reliable. Meanwhile, we are preoccupied with Tibet functioning as our symbol of an exotically enlightened society. Journalists are interested in realities to a certain extent, but it is hard for them to obtain information. But the majority of people are not interested in the reality of Tibet, they're interested in their fantasy of Tibet. And that's not only true of the West, it is true in Asia, too. The Chinese romanticize Tibet as much as we do, even while they're suppressing it. They think it is the source of powerful medicinal herbs and esoteric teachings.

Q: All of this makes your role as a scholar of Tibet particularly interesting and important, and probably frustrating at times!

A: Talking about something that has so many fantasies attached to it is sometimes complicated, but it's also fun. I just taught my general course on Tibetan religion, and

I'm always trying to wake students up to the strong expectations and preconceptions that we—all of us, not just students, but also scholars like myself—bring in studying Tibet. I encourage students to stop generalizing, and especially to stop thinking things like “All Tibetans are only interested in enlightenment,” and just to realize that Tibetans are normal human beings, and that Tibetan society had politics and corruption and everything else. But that does not mean we must be entirely disenchanted. Traditional Tibet was an amazing place, with a fascinating educational system and a highly developed literature in what was a quite difficult climate. I don't want to write off its intrigue at all. One has to balance these perceptions.

Q: How long have you been in this field?

A: I've been studying Tibet for a long time, since the early 1970s. I've been to Tibet five times, and I've been working with Tibetans in Northern India, Nepal, and the United States.

Q: You note how important it is to study the Tibetan exiled communities, as well.

A: They are not represented well in this book. There are very few

publications on women in exile, such as the Tibetan Women's Association in Dharmasala, India. Most research on Tibetan women outside China has been done by anthropologists and has focused on nuns.

Q: Why is that? Is it that nuns are easier to study?

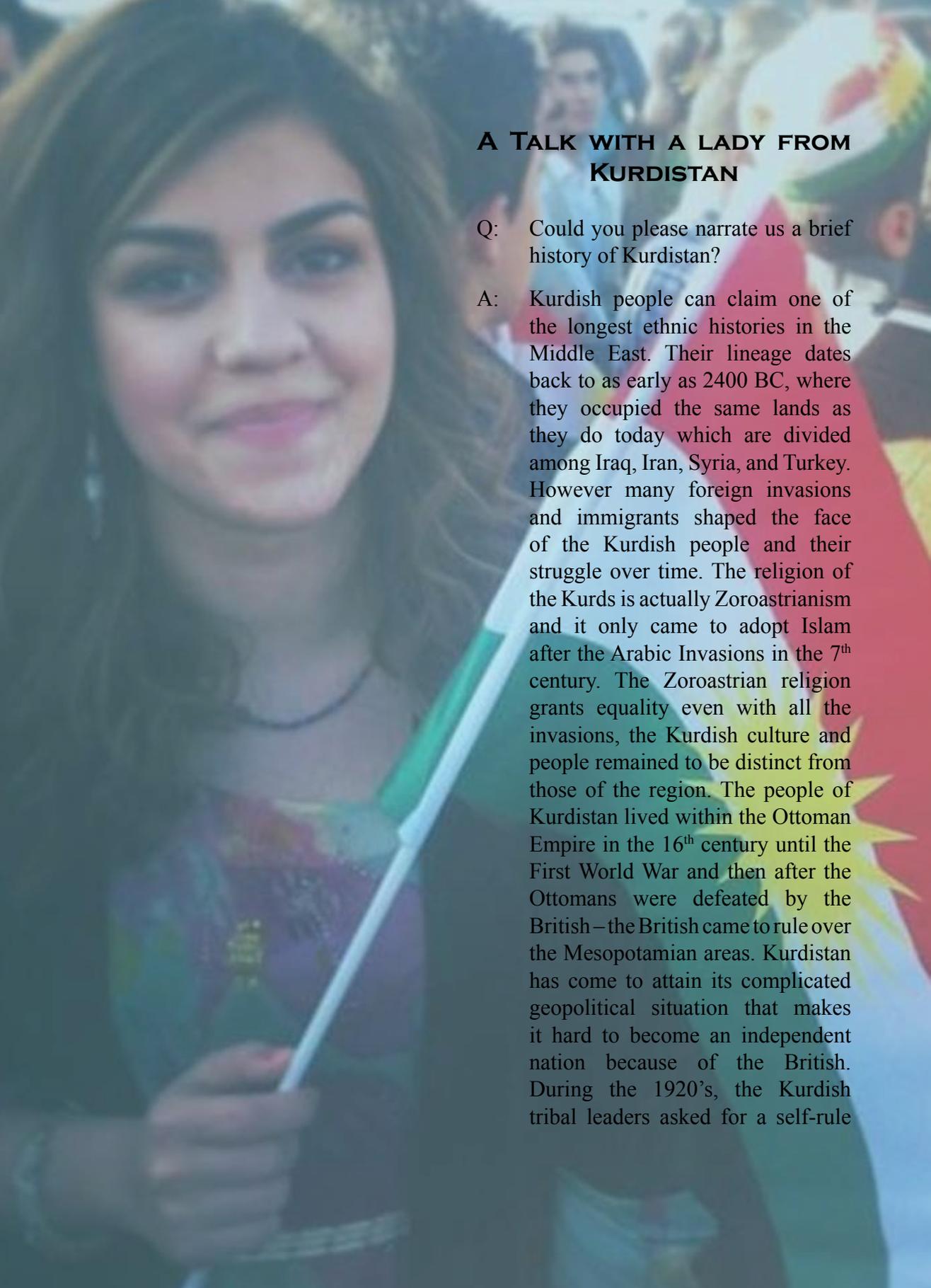
A: In some ways they are easier, because they're already on display. They are already acting as exemplary figures and they know they're in the public eye. I wouldn't walk down the streets of New York and walk up to some random woman and ask her about her life. A nun is already dedicated to helping others and is trained to be patient with people curious about what she is doing and why. That's part of what it means to be Buddhist cleric, male or female, in fact.

But as I was suggesting before, most foreign observers are not so interested in average Tibetan people. They're interested in “enlightened” people. Some anthropologists are working on Tibetan secular society today, both inside China and in exile, but it's hard to have the linguistic capacity to do that kind of work well. It is difficult to be fluent enough to understand the nuanced jokes and people's personal interactions, which are

so intricately coded. That is at least one reason why we gravitate toward studying Buddhism more theoretically. Buddhists have texts, and that at least would appear to be a safer and more determinate thing to study than living communities. But I'm sure there will be more work on Tibetan lay life. There is a new generation of Tibetans accommodating themselves to the new realities in China, and they are being very creative in inventing new kinds of cultural practices that still make them feel Tibetan. I look forward to research on those groups, and already know a number of young Tibetan anthropologists who are studying the latest developments in Tibetan cyberspace inside China.

Janet Gyatso:

Professor Gyatso was president of the International Association of Tibetan Studies from 2000 to 2006, and is now co-chair of the Buddhism Section of the American Academy of Religion. She teaches lecture courses and advanced seminars on Buddhist history, ritual, and ideas, and on Tibetan literary practices and religious history. She is also spearheading a new initiative for the teaching of Buddhist ministry at the Divinity School. In both teaching and writing she draws on cultural and literary theory, and is concerned to widen the spectrum of intellectual resources for the understanding and interpretation of Buddhist history. She leads an ongoing reading group for graduate students in Buddhist studies, and is the faculty director of the Buddhist Studies Forum. She has also chaired the Committee for the Study of Women and Gender. She is helping to develop a track for the training of Buddhist lay ministers and leaders in the master of divinity program at the Divinity School. Professor Gyatso taught at Amherst College before coming to Harvard as the Divinity School's first Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies.



A TALK WITH A LADY FROM KURDISTAN

Q: Could you please narrate us a brief history of Kurdistan?

A: Kurdish people can claim one of the longest ethnic histories in the Middle East. Their lineage dates back to as early as 2400 BC, where they occupied the same lands as they do today which are divided among Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. However many foreign invasions and immigrants shaped the face of the Kurdish people and their struggle over time. The religion of the Kurds is actually Zoroastrianism and it only came to adopt Islam after the Arabic Invasions in the 7th century. The Zoroastrian religion grants equality even with all the invasions, the Kurdish culture and people remained to be distinct from those of the region. The people of Kurdistan lived within the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century until the First World War and then after the Ottomans were defeated by the British—the British came to rule over the Mesopotamian areas. Kurdistan has come to attain its complicated geopolitical situation that makes it hard to become an independent nation because of the British. During the 1920's, the Kurdish tribal leaders asked for a self-rule

state governed by the British but the British rule objected to the idea mainly because of the fear of two other cities in South of Iraq – they were afraid that the two cities would look at the Kurdish people and would also want to rule themselves, and that would weaken the British rule over Iraq and Mesopotamia – so it took them two years to divide up the Kurdish regions in a way that would make it hard for Kurdish to ever become a nation. And that's what the Kurdish nation is suffering from at the moment. When did Kurdistan become an autonomous region?

The Iraqi government passed the Autonomy Law in March of 1970 that ensured Kurds their basic rights and control of their own affairs. The law was passed but the reality was far more different. One of the main reasons as to why the law was passed had underlying political aims to it. Saddam Hussein, the former dictator of Iraq, attacked the Kurdish lands and villages constantly. The Iraqi regime even tested their chemical weapons on the Kurds, which led to the genocidal attacks of 1980 that killed 5,000 people from a village called Helebce. The genocide was later on followed by series of genocidal attacks on several Kurdish villages and it resulted in

the death of 10,000+ Kurds. And the Kurds who did survive still suffer from disabilities of the chemical weapons that were used at the time. The law, though, was again brought up in 2005 and has been practiced ever since then, giving the Kurds an autonomous region with rights to obtaining their own constitution and government to run.

Q: Why? And how did Kurdistan become an autonomous region?

A: The Ba'ath regime had just taken over control through a revolution in the 1970s and they were still building their way up so they didn't want conflict with any minorities – especially not the Kurds since the Kurds were actually powerful and had a lot of money to support themselves by. They thought that if they give the Kurds an autonomous region – or at least, make it look like they're giving them an autonomous region – then the Kurds would be out of the picture – at least for a while. The answer as to why the Kurds were given autonomy was because it was their main demand. The Kurdistan's Democratic Party (KDP – which was the main party at the time) and their main leader – Mala Mustafa Barzani's demand was to give autonomy to the Kurds and to give Democracy to Iraq.

The Kurds didn't want to separate at first but it's changed now and even though through politics it's all become diplomatic – what the Kurds basically want is independence since they're the largest nation without a state. After Saddam Hussein's death and the removal of the Ba'ath regime (the regime through which Saddam Hussein came to rule by) – the law, as I said before, was brought up again in 2005 and has been practiced ever since then giving the Kurds a federal, autonomous, self-ruling state. What powers does the autonomous region have?

As a region, the federal autonomous region the Kurds have at the moment consists of having a president, currently Massoud Barzani, a parliament, and a constitution along with an official language. Problems are constantly arising with the current government of Iraq, though, especially on topics of oil and exporting it. The Kurdish people export and trade oil the way they want to because the constitution they've written and the one that has been approved by the Iraqi government promises them to do so. So they believe that they're entitled to have that right. But the Iraqi central government is against that and says that since the oil is, technically, within the borders

of Iraq, then Kurds shouldn't be able to trade the oil with foreign companies outside. The Kurds, nevertheless, trade and export oil with major companies the way they want to but the problems with the central government make it harder. The fact that the Kurds know they have oil in their lands is a power that this autonomy has given the Kurds – before, the Kurds didn't know of how rich their lands were. Also, the Kurdish language is now the official language within the autonomous region along with all of Iraq – and so each document that exists within Iraq has to have both languages.

Q: What is the present situation of your country? Is the autonomous status giving a happy livelihood to the people of Kurdistan? Is the situation stable or unstable?

A: The autonomous region has given stability to only the Iraqi part of Kurdistan and it has, most importantly, provided safety to the people of the region because we are guarded by our own Peshmergas which literally means 'those who face death' and they're the main military system in the autonomous region of Kurdistan right now. The autonomous region, however, has made the Kurds in Iraq forget about the main struggle, which used to be

an independent Kurdistan. Kurds in the autonomous region, which is in the northern part of Iraq, have divided up politically. The Kurds have three main political parties called the 'PDK' – Party of Democratic Kurdistan which was the main party at first and was founded in 1946 in Iranian Kurdistan but then got divided up into 'PUK' which stands for Party Union of Kurdistan which was founded on June 1st of 1975. And the last political party, which has gained a lot of followers over the recent years, was first established in 2009 and it's called 'Gorran' which stands for movement for change. The autonomy in the region has blinded the people because of the oil money and trade, and it's made the people forget their main goal, which is an independent Kurdistan. If you were to visit the autonomous region in Iraq then you'd witness the division amongst the people – everyone says that they want an independent Kurdistan but each one follows their own political party. The political parties were in a bloody internal civil war in 1994 where brother would kill brother 'cause of their political affiliation – this was between the PDK and the PUK. About 2,000 people were killed because of these political fights on both sides, and it only came to stop

in 1995 after both the party leaders made truce and attacked the central, Ba'athist government so they could gain back Kurdistan from the Arabs. The situation within Iraqi Kurdistan is stable but some claim that it may have ruined the peace within the other states because the countries feel threatened all the time, especially Turkey.

Q: Are the people of Kurdistan struggling for independence at the moment?

A: If you ask a Kurdish individual in any of the countries of Syria, Iraq, Iran, or Turkey – their answer would almost all be that yes, they're struggling for independence. But the reality is far from it for the autonomous region in Iraq. The autonomous region in Iraq is causing trouble for their own selves because of the different political parties – it's keeping the people divided and so it's hard to attain independence with such a division. The Syrian Kurds are currently dying off on the border of Iraq-Syria because of Turkey paying the Al-Qaeda to kill off the Kurdish rebels. During the civil war against the Syrian dictatorship, the Kurds were actually able to take over a big part of Syria and it has ever since then, been ruled by the Kurdish rebel groups. There

have been talks of what they'll do with the state though, whether it'll be an autonomous region or an independent state. Until now, though, they've established their own government and are still ruling within the borders of Syria. Turkey is looking for every single way to kill off Kurds and destroy their nationality – they're making treaties with a terrorist organization such as the Al-Qaeda only to kill off the Kurds. The Kurds in Iran are over 7 million in population and certain studies have shown that the Islamic Republic of Iran has targeted the Kurds over the years – repressing their economical, political, cultural and social rights. Kurdish nationalism actually rose from Iranian Kurdistan in the 1940s with the formation of the KDP. Thousands of intellectual Kurds who have spoken out have been killed off. EhsanFattahian was a Kurdish activist in Iran – he got executed in 2009 and wasn't given a fair trial or the right to a lawyer. This was an action that was strongly condemned internationally by activists and human rights organizations. The Kurdish people in Iran continue to suffer from Iran putting Kurds on death row because of their ethnicity, and killing them off without fair trials. The Kurds in Iran also have

their own political party that they follow which is named PJAK –Party JyanaAzada Kurdistan which means Free Life Party of Kurdistan. Their leader, Haji Ahmadi, was arrested in Germany and Iran requested the German government to hand him over to Iran but Germany declined the request because he is a German resident. The Kurds in Turkey suffer the most and only want peace between the Kurds and the Turkish people, and mostly from the Turkish government since it's always after destroying the Kurds. The Turkish constitution actually prohibited the Kurdish language, Kurdish names, Kurdish political parties, and Kurdish publications between the years of 1983-1991 despite the fact that the Kurdish population is the second biggest population within Turkey. What happened during those years was considered a 'cultural genocide' because the Kurds and their main identity was slowly disappearing because of the rules and regulations the Turkish government had made. The Kurds in Turkey follow the PKK (PartyeKrekarani Kurdistan) which means Kurdistan's Workers' Party and their main leader, Abdulla Ocalan still doesn't know the Kurdish language because of the cultural genocide in Turkey against

the Kurds. Each of the Kurdish states struggle in their own way but the autonomous region in Iraq – which should have tried most to establish an independent state for each of the four states – is the one with the most internal political problems, and so, is far too distracted to actually work for an independent state rather than just say that it is.

Q: Why is the International community not recognizing Kurdistan as a nation?

A: First of all, because of the political ties that countries like the United States, Russia, China, and the EU have with the neighboring countries of Kurdistan (as in Kurdistan in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey) restricts the acknowledgements the international community can give the Kurds. Second of all, it's the opportunities that the Kurdish leaders haven't taken to obtain a nation of our own. In 2003, after the Ba'ath regime collapsed and the United States' invasion into Iraq – Kurdistan had the chance of becoming a country but didn't decide to take the necessary steps. In 2005, the question again was brought up with the politicians and the Kurdish leaders and 97 people voted for a Kurdish nation of our own but only in Iraq – the politicians who had the

most power, though, chose to ignore the people's voices and agreed to be a part of Iraq and only attain autonomy. The two main reasons are basically the complicated geopolitics that were based by the British rule in the 1920's and the current political leaders of the region. Is there unity within people of Kurdistan? Is there one common goal for all the people of Kurdistan under four different nations? (Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Turkey)

Kurdistan has been scattered all around for so long that the people have lost their passion for the one main goal of uniting Kurdistan and becoming an independent country. Only last March, the Kurdish president was actually going to announce the Iraqi part of Kurdistan to be independent – forgetting about the other parts. The idea of independence is still on the mind of every Kurd in all the regions but the Kurds have gone through so many internal battles and still have so many political issues that, yes, they all say that they want independence but no one is really working for it. The Kurds in Iraq are at peace now and the younger generation isn't well informed about the Kurds' past and so it's hard for them to think of the idea of fighting for a nation that's scattered in other countries

other than their own. Of course, though, there are Kurds who are ready to fight, if needed, but as the years go by – it's become a talk of independence rather than a move towards independence especially in Iraq since the Kurds have all the safety they need – at least momentarily. The Kurds in Turkey don't even speak Kurdish because of the Turkish rules that have prohibited the Kurdish language. The Kurds in Syria are completely in ruins because of the Assad regime and the current situation in Syria, and now they're being attacked by the Al-Qaeda who have recently made destroying the Kurds one of their main goals with assistance from Turkey. And the Kurds in Iran suffer a great amount of reduction in their population because of the Islamic Republic's fight against the Kurds as an ethnicity and anyone who speaks out. There was once a time where all the Kurds, anywhere in the world, wanted a united independence but now, some may even claim it, it's not the case anymore. A lot of the Kurds still want independence but there are certain debates going on over the fact that since decades have passed by ever since Kurdistan was ever united – the people have grown apart and even if Kurdistan was to be independent, then problems would

be caused because of the difference of language and the leaders each one follows. The Kurds in Iraq follow the two main political parties, the PUK and the PDK. The Kurds in Turkey, however, follow Abdulla Ocalan and they follow him without questioning any of his methods – he's like a deity to them. That brings up the question of whether who will rule if Kurdistan was to ever be united. There was a 68-day hunger strike that ended by Ocalan just saying 'stop the hunger strikes' and the people instantly stopped. People were dying off of this hunger strike. This took place in November of 2012. The Syrian Kurds follow their own political party whose founder is a Kurd and it's one of the main rebellion groups in Syria – thousands and thousands of this groups followers died during the revolution that took place in Syria. Do people think that getting an autonomous region is a step to achieve independence? Yes, the Kurds believe that getting an autonomous region is a step towards independence but the independence can only be achieved if the Kurds unite and have one main goal which would be an independent Kurdistan. Otherwise, it's so easy to be distracted by the internal political situation within the borders of 'Iraqi' Kurdistan. Second Part:

Q: Are there any women leaders in the struggle of Kurdistan?

A: Yes, most of the Peshmergas ‘ones before death’ were actually women and they were one of the main reasons Kurdistan became independent. The women were involved in both, politics and education. They were fighting alongside the men and providing shelter for them but were also giving trainings to women and were opening up schools. And the PKK, Partye Krekarani Kurdistan which means Kurdistan’s Worker’s Party, who were formed in the 1980s and whose main leader is Abdulla Ocalan, the leader of the Kurds in Turkey, primarily consist of women who fight alongside the men. All the women and men in the PKK have taken an oath of no-marriage until Kurdistan becomes independent. Who are they? And Could you tell us the development of the women leaders in the struggle?

Leyla Zana, Peshmergas, Hapsa Khani Naqib, and Leyla Qasim and Margret. These are the names to be exact. The Peshmeragas ‘those who face death’ consisted of many female fighters who provided for the men fighting and fought the Ba’ath regime itself. A symbol of education is Hapsa Khani Naqib, who was born in 1891, and is one of the main

reasons for educated women in the Kurdish region. She set up schools and used the connections she had, since she was from a well-known family, to help the community and improve the situation for women. Leyla Qasim and Margret are known as the face of introducing women to warfare since they fought against the Ba’ath regime and through them, more women began to join in the revolution which ended in the Kurds succeeding. With modern politics though, Leyla Zana, is a source of inspiration for all Kurdish men and women – she’s a symbol of peace amongst all Kurds. She was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize twice and won several peace prizes throughout her lifetime. She was elected to be a part of the Turkish government and while taking an oath in the parliament in 1994 – she said the line ‘I hope that Turks and Kurds can finally be at peace’ in Kurdish and was imprisoned for 10 years for that. Her diplomatic immunity couldn’t even save her despite the fact that she was a part of the parliament. In 2005, she founded her own democratic party but three years after that in 2008, she was again sentenced for 10 years by the Turkish court. But this time, the international community interfered along with the European Union

and with their interference she was released. In 2009, however, she was again sentenced for 15 months by the Turkish court and was finally, along with 30 other Kurdish politicians, banned from politics for five years. In 2011, though, she was still in prison but she was re-elected in the Turkish parliament and the Turkish rule couldn't deny her that right because of the enormous amount of votes she had received. And now since Turkey is working with the Al-Qaeda to fight off the Kurds on the Syrian border, the men used to be the prominent part of fighting but now the women have joined in and there's a statement that a woman made when interviewed, she said that 'if the men can't fight, then we will'. There are countless women leaders in the Kurdish struggle who fight on a daily basis to provide rights to women but mostly to the Kurdish struggle as a whole.

Q: What is their goal?

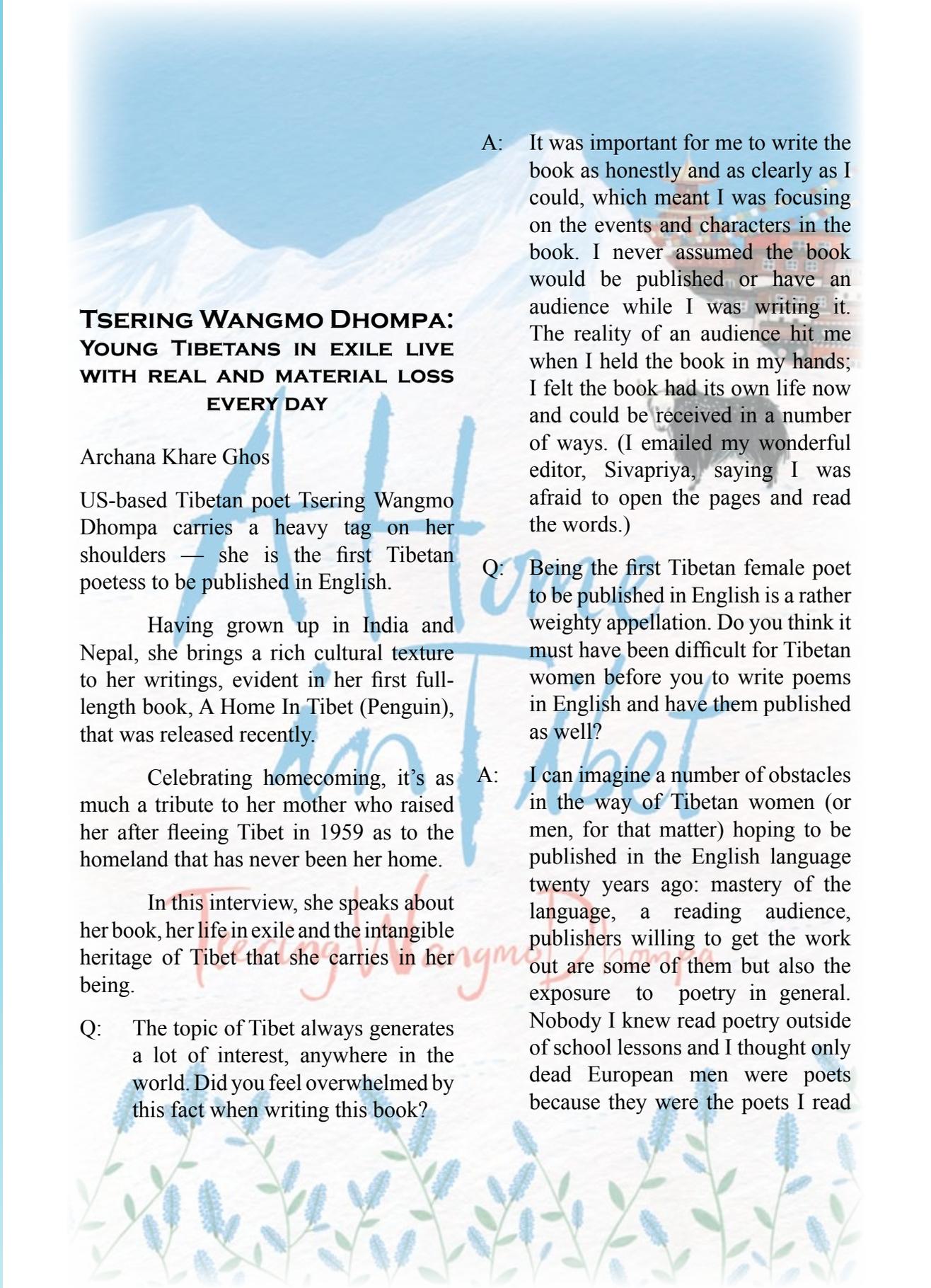
A: Their main goal is to increase women's rights and spread awareness on the Kurdish struggle – this is mostly the case with Leyla Zana but with the others – their main aim was to keep the Kurds alive and heard because of the amount of Kurds who died in Kurdistan under Saddam's rule. There also are unions, political

unions, created by the political parties only for women and their leaders are all women who fought during the Kurdish struggle and fight with Saddam and the Ba'ath regime.

Q: Present social status of the women leaders?

A: The women leaders in the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Iraq are of higher status the ones who have a voice and go into the parliament and work as representatives are of higher status. However, with the Kurdish-Turkish struggle, there's Leyla Zana who can be considered of lower status when compared to the politicians in the autonomous, federal state of Kurdistan in Iraq. There are, however, women of lower classes who have made their way up to being parliamentarians and activists but it's not a high amount – it's still developing. What is the gender ratio of leaders in the struggle?

The men and women fought alongside each other – it was a 40% participation of women providing help and food, and fighting against the Ba'ath regime. These mostly took place in the Iraqi region.



**TSERING WANGMO DHOMPA:
YOUNG TIBETANS IN EXILE LIVE
WITH REAL AND MATERIAL LOSS
EVERY DAY**

Archana Khare Ghos

US-based Tibetan poet Tsering Wangmo Dhompa carries a heavy tag on her shoulders — she is the first Tibetan poetess to be published in English.

Having grown up in India and Nepal, she brings a rich cultural texture to her writings, evident in her first full-length book, *A Home In Tibet* (Penguin), that was released recently.

Celebrating homecoming, it's as much a tribute to her mother who raised her after fleeing Tibet in 1959 as to the homeland that has never been her home.

In this interview, she speaks about her book, her life in exile and the intangible heritage of Tibet that she carries in her being.

Q: The topic of Tibet always generates a lot of interest, anywhere in the world. Did you feel overwhelmed by this fact when writing this book?

A: It was important for me to write the book as honestly and as clearly as I could, which meant I was focusing on the events and characters in the book. I never assumed the book would be published or have an audience while I was writing it. The reality of an audience hit me when I held the book in my hands; I felt the book had its own life now and could be received in a number of ways. (I emailed my wonderful editor, Sivapriya, saying I was afraid to open the pages and read the words.)

Q: Being the first Tibetan female poet to be published in English is a rather weighty appellation. Do you think it must have been difficult for Tibetan women before you to write poems in English and have them published as well?

A: I can imagine a number of obstacles in the way of Tibetan women (or men, for that matter) hoping to be published in the English language twenty years ago: mastery of the language, a reading audience, publishers willing to get the work out are some of them but also the exposure to poetry in general. Nobody I knew read poetry outside of school lessons and I thought only dead European men were poets because they were the poets I read

in school, so I wrote with these facts in mind.

Location and the opportunities that come with it are important too; I was exposed to poets who were published when I came to the US and I realized I too could get my work out.

When I was living and working in India and Nepal, I never knew any living poets, and did not think my poetry could be taken seriously.

Q: You grew up in India and Nepal, studied in the US and now live there. How different is it to be a Tibetan in India than being a Tibetan in the US? Have you ever been at the receiving end of racially-inspired negativity anywhere that you've lived?

A: I always felt I was on the periphery of the communities I lived in whether I was in India or Nepal and that feeling has not altered living in the US. Racially-inspired negative feelings are bound to arise anywhere and sometimes they come in the form of innocent remarks or questions. Just last week I was in the Santa Cruz farmer's market and a vendor asked, "Where are you from? Your accent does not suit you." I explained I had grown up in India and only later I thought to myself how strange the question

was. It would never occur to me to ask a Caucasian where he or she is from because her accent does not match her appearance. Being Asian in the US, and having always felt as an outsider, I readily answer queries about identity and place. I never question the privilege that such questions are prompted from.

Q: A strand that I felt throughout your book, *A Home In Tibet*, was that your life has made you a different kind of Tibetan than those who continue to live there. Do you think there is a big gap between the Tibetans at home and non-resident Tibetans?

A: It is natural that there be different languages, realities and experiences that mark the lives of Tibetans who live inside Tibet and those who live in exile (most importantly, we have to keep the political conditions of life in Tibet in mind). Almost all diaspora communities in the world struggle to articulate such differences and the shared imaginations, history, or cultures that inform the conversations around nation, nationality, culture and nationalism.

In my book I have attempted to point out the deep cultural and emotional contents of identity as well as the ties to Buddhism that help create Tibetan nationalism despite the

gaps. We may articulate different ways of being Tibetan, but they are identified as Tibetan nevertheless.

Q: Your description of the physical features of Tibet—its landscape, the rivers, the wind, the sun, and even the people — is so mesmerizing that one almost views your book rather than just read it. Would you like to turn your book into a film someday?

A: Thank you, I am thrilled you can view the book as you read it. I think in images as a poet so perhaps that translates itself in the book. But no, I am far from seeing a film in my book.

Q: What is the most touching Tibet story that you think the world doesn't know despite so much hype around Tibet and the espousal of its cause by the global celebrities?

A: The love the ordinary Tibetan nomad has for the land and for the wellbeing of the land. It is difficult to put that relationship into words.

Q: Do you get to read literature in Tibetan? Is there enough native literature available to non-resident Tibetans to stay in touch with their roots?

A: There are wonderful texts available in Tibetan and written by writers

living in Tibet. The books are not always available to non-resident Tibetans but I think there are more ways of getting access to the writings these days. Unfortunately, I do not read Tibetan very well, but I am studying it when I can so that I will be able to read the texts without relying on translations.

Q: How do third-, fourth-generation Tibetans in exile view their relationship with their motherland?

A: Young Tibetans I meet feel a tremendous responsibility to understand Tibetan history, to know where they come from and to strengthen their emotional ties to the country. Many of them have never seen their relatives in Tibet or been to Tibet but I think the emotional bond with the motherland is palpable. Young Tibetans who have escaped into exile in the last twenty years live with the real and material loss every day. They know what it means to be uprooted at a young age in this present age and they live with the knowledge that they may never see their loved ones who they left behind in Tibet. So even among the young, there are different relations or realities that make up their relationship to Tibet.

Q: What are you writing next? Is there a fiction based in Tibet in the

pipeline?

A: I have lived with *A Home in Tibet* for so long... and I have not made the transition to thinking about other texts. I am determined to get back to writing poetry soon, every morning, I hope. I love fiction and I would love to write short stories based in India and Nepal. I have many unfinished short stories.

Q: Who are the authors/ poets you like to read? And what are you reading now?

A: I love fiction and some of my favorite authors are Marilynne Robinson, JM Coetzee, Amitav Ghosh, Jose Saramago and Marie Helene-Bertino. At the moment I am reading Tibetan history so I'm looking at Tsering Shakya, Wang Lixiong, Melvyn Goldstein among other texts. I am also teaching creative writing this quarter and some of the poets I am reading for class are Sherman Alexie, Mahmoud Darwish, Shakespeare and Naomi Shihab Nye.

Author:

Tsering Wangmo Dhompa (born 1969) is the first Tibetan female poet to be published in English. She was raised in India and Nepal. Tsering received her BA from Lady Sri Sram College, Delhi

University. She pursued her MA from University of Massachusetts Amherst and her MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Her first book of poems, *Rules of the House*, published by Apogee Press in 2002 was a finalist for the Asian American Literary Awards in 2003. Other publications include *My Rice Tastes Like the Lake* (Apogee Press 2011), *In the Absent Everyday* (also from Apogee Press), and two chapbooks: *In Writing the Names* (A.bacus, Poets & Poets Press) and *Recurring Gestures* (Tangram Press). In *Letter For Love* she delivered her first short story. In 2013, Penquin India published Tsering's first full length book, "*A Home in Tibet*" where she chronicles her successive journeys to Tibet and provides ethnographic details of ordinary Tibetans inside Tibet.



**‘MY NEW BOOK,
“IMMOLATIONS IN TIBET:
THE SHAME OF THE WORLD”,
RELEASED TODAY IN FRANCE’ BY
WOESER**

High Peaks Pure Earth has translated a blog post by Woeser written on October 17, 2013 announcing the publication of her new book in France by publishers Indigène Éditions.

In a separate short statement published in French on the website of the publishers Indigène Éditions (and also on Woeser’s blog in the original Chinese), Woeser also writes:

This is my second French-language book. The first, “Mémoire interdite, Témoignages sur la Révolution culturelle au Tibet”, was published by Gallimard in 2010. In contrast to my former French-language book, I wrote “Immolations in Tibet: The Shame of the World” by contract with Indigène Éditions, meaning that the first readers of this work will be French-language readers. This has made writing this book a unique experience for me.

This new French-language book

has immediately attracted attention from many international media organizations. The Guardian, Agence France-Presse, Radio France Internationale, Deutsche Welle, the United States’ Radio Free Asia and others have all reported on my book and conducted interviews with me, even as I have been residing in Lhasa. This has perhaps drawn some unwanted attention to myself, as well. However, for a long period of time, I have felt as if I have been teetering on the edge of a cliff, liable to fall at any moment. To publish a book outside the country, especially an exposé of this type, a certain amount of danger is inherently involved. So far, I am still unsure how big that danger is. However, I have been emboldened by the courage displayed by all of these Tibetan immolators, and I am therefore unafraid.

October 24, 2013

Currently, I am in Lhasa.

The two months I spent writing “Immolations in Tibet: The Shame of the World” <http://www.indigene-editions.fr/ceux-qui-marchent-contre-le-vent/immolations-au-tibet-la-honte-du-monde.html> (my title for the book was “Tibetan Phoenix”), on which I began working this April, left me physically and mentally exhausted—even though the work

is only just over 20,000 characters long.

Paris-based publisher Indigène Éditions has closely followed the Tibetan self-immolation issue—especially the fact that the world has remained largely silent in light of these numerous immolation cases.

Previous releases by this publisher include “Indignez-vous!”, a booklet written by one of the drafters of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” great French human rights and social activist Mr. Stéphane Hessel. This booklet enjoyed worldwide sales and was translated into 35 languages, including Chinese.

Because my book includes commentary from another great human rights activist, world-renowned artist Ai Weiwei, the publisher invited him to design the book’s cover. Ai’s comments quoted in the book are as follows: “Tibet represents the harshest test for China, for the international community and for world standards of justice. No one can avoid it; no one can sidestep it. By now, no one is without shame; no one is without disgrace.” Ai Weiwei immediately responded to the publisher’s request writing the following to me in a message:

“I would be happy to make this contribution, for the Tibetan people and the publication of your work. Whether you look at it from a philosophical standpoint

or a religious standpoint, these self-immolations are more meaningful than any survivor can attempt to understand or express. People [tend to] only see the direct political causes... However, I am willing to give it a try—although I am fully aware of the hopelessness [of this endeavor]...”

Indeed, Ai’s cover design conveys great amount of meaning and features the name of each Tibetan immolator written in the Tibetan script. In the cover’s centre, a stunning flame design exudes the beauty of their sacrifice—as opposed to the tragedy of their suffering. The cover’s clean design resembles the purity of a white Tibetan khata—a khata which is offered to to all the Tibetan immolators. In a message he wrote to me after completing his design, Ai wrote that he “struggled [with the design]. I wanted to treat the deceased Tibetans in a tranquil manner. Courage, spirit, memory—and my own level of ignorance... There were many factors.”

Here, I would like to extend my special thanks to Ai Weiwei!

I also want to thank Mr. Robert Badinter, who wrote the book’s foreword. According to Wikipedia, Mr. Badinter is a French lawyer, professor, essayist and politician. He is also regarded as “the father of the abolition of the death penalty” in France. On the website of the book’s publisher, I read Mr. Robert Badinter’s comments regarding the Tibetan self-

immolations:

“Here is a dense and tragic book. [...] What the flames that burn their bodies proclaim is that they can no longer bear the aggression committed against their people, the eradication of its customs and its language, and overall the cultural genocide that the Chinese authorities perpetrate in Tibet while world governments remain cowardly silent.”

I would also like to thank my friend, the founder of the website High Peaks Pure Earth (which continuously translates my blogs into English), Dechen Pemba. She has been invaluable in helping me communicate with my publisher throughout the whole process. She also provided photographs of the book.

To be clear, the Chinese-language book “The Tibetan Self-Immolation Files”, which I edited and which was released by Snowlands Press in Taiwan last month, is a separate work from the French-language book “Immolations in Tibet: The Shame of the World”, which was released today in France. The former Chinese-language book is an 200,000-plus-character record collection that features nearly 200 photographs. That book is comprised mainly of records that detail the lives of each Tibetan immolator and copies of official Chinese Communist Party policies that relate to Tibet.

The significance of the French-

language book *Immolations in Tibet: The Shame of the World*, on the other hand, lies in the explanations, painful analysis and forthright criticism that it attempts to present.

The following is a list of the book’s chapters:

- * Opening
- * An Overview of Tibetan Self-Immolations
- * Self-Immolation is a Form of Protest
- * Why Tibetans Protest Why the Protests have Trended Towards Self-Immolation
- * Considering the Demands of the Self-Immolators from Two Mountain Peaks
- * The Testimony of the Self-Immolators
- * How Self-Immolations Are Recorded
- * The Protest Must Be Supported
- * The Slandering of Self-Immolators by the Chinese Authorities
- * Lhasa “Regressing Back Towards Racial Segregation”
- * The Chinese Authorities’ “Anti-Immolation Campaign”
- * The Long Road of Shared Agony
- * Concluding Remarks

Finally, the concluding remarks of my new French-language book are as follows:

For so many days and so many nights, I have pored over online photographs of self-immolators. Some of the pictures show them living vibrant lives; others show them engulfed in flames, dying as heroic martyrs. Each of these people possessed a proverbial “bone of the heart” (སྣོད་རྩལ།), a trait highly revered among Tibetans. Their faces all seem familiar, as if we once exchanged a smile as we passed each other on the road one day, back when I was visiting their hometown or temple. Indeed, I had visited the vast majority of these places, including the place in which I was born and raised. I therefore feel a responsibility to record this all—to speak out about all of this, to tell each immolator’s story and all of these memories that must not be forgotten.

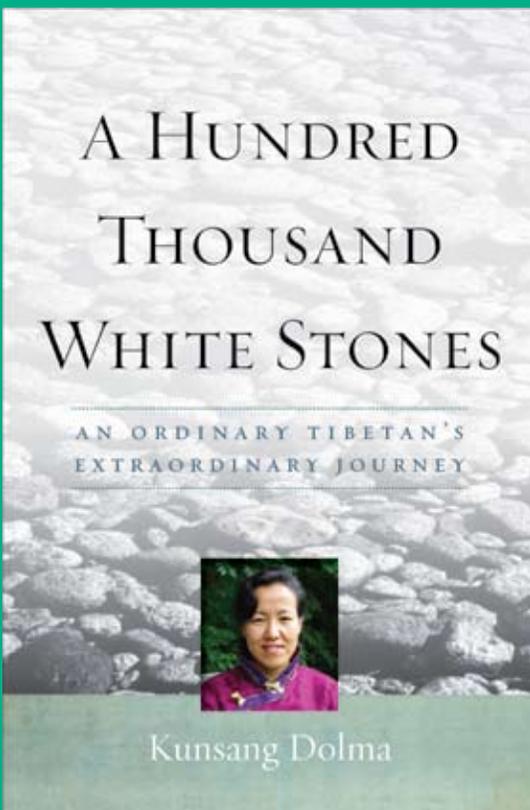
Indeed, the “bone of the heart” is both an idiom and a metaphor. These heroic sons and daughters, who bathed themselves in fire, are all “bones of the heart” from the deep interior plateaus. Tibet does not perish, even in the midst of catastrophe, because of them. But self-immolation as a form of protest is too tragic and too painful. Because of this, I previously called for the end to all self-immolations. Even in the face of greater oppression, we must still hold steadfast to our lives. However, these calls were

ineffective—a fact I understand very clearly. On one hand, the self-immolation movement resembles an earthquake or flood—it is not something that can be affected by someone’s support or disapproval; rather, it subsides only after all of its energy is exhausted. But, more importantly, the key to the problem centres on the officials and military police who continue to commit evil acts throughout Tibet. Only after their evil stops will Tibetans take their self-preservation into account.

These memories are all related to the flames of suffering. Only through persistent remembrance can those who gave themselves up in fiery sacrifice continue to live infinitely amongst us in this vast land called “The Land of the Snows.” I hold my hands in prayer and offer the Tibetan immolators my highest admiration.



**A HUNDRED THOUSAND
WHITE STONES BY KUNSANG
DOLMA**



“A Hundred Thousand White Stones” is the story of Kunsang Dolma, it is about her life as a Tibetan woman and refugee.

The average rating of this book in ‘goodreads’ is 3.22 and the book is introduced as *“A Hundred Thousand White Stones is the fearlessly told, unvarnished story of life as a Tibetan woman and refugee. Kunsang Dolma writes from her heart of the hardship and struggle she experienced as a girl in Tibet, as a woman in India, and as an immigrant refugee in America. Yet despite the many moments of sadness her story contains, she manages to find hope and levity in her memory of even the worst of circumstances. A Hundred Thousand White Stones offers an honest, first-person assessment of what is gained in pursuing life in the developed world, and what is lost.”*

“Especially now, when Tibetans are sacrificing their lives for their collective story to be heard, it is important that Kunsang Dolma so honestly shares her personal story. This ordinary Tibetan’s extraordinary journey opens our hearts wider with each step in her shoes.”

-Kathleen Willis Morton, author of *The Blue Poppy and the Mustard Seed*

A Hundred Thousand White Stones: An Ordinary Tibetan's Extraordinary Journey

by Claire McAlpine

Kunsang Dolma might have had a more ordinary life, if it hadn't been her turn to be the family representative at the annual ten-day prayer session at their local village temple when she was 15 years old. An event peripheral to that obligation changed the path she was on, which would have been an arranged marriage to a local boy and raising children to help with the farm work. For those of us reading it however, this is no ordinary life, but an insight into an ancient culture and one courageous woman who survives its harshness, revels in its deep, spiritual wonders and travels outside all that she knows to become the wife of an American citizen.

The consequence of that event sets her on the path towards becoming a Buddhist nun, something she had previously considered but had been rejected by her parents, so she and a friend decided to run away from their village to ensure it happened, without parental consent.

While she doesn't remain a nun all her life, ironically the second major turning point in her life that moved her away from being a nun towards marriage and a life in America was not dissimilar to that which motivated her action towards pursuing a monastic life in the beginning. This is a true story, however I am reminded of all those turning points in the life of the fictitious character Ursula's in Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* and the significant power that one event can have to alter the direction of a young woman's life.

Kunsang shares her upbringing with a quiet, practical, honest voice and it is a childhood and adolescence we see as difficult, though in the context of where she lived, a small Tibetan village, it was quite like many other villagers and something she now looks back on with appreciation and an incessant longing, having left it all behind. It is in leaving a difficult way of life and family behind us, in making it no longer attainable that the deepest yearning for that which was willingly fled, is often felt.

Her parents married at 15 which is not uncommon, however they were unable to conceive until they were 28 years old, something that came as a relief as being farmers, children are essential to their survival as future workers. Kunsang was the youngest of 8 children and by the time she was born, there were sufficient

children to manage the farm work; it was this fact that enabled her to have an education.

At the time, there was no birth control, so after thirteen years without a child, it looked like they definitely weren't going to be able to have any children, which are essential to help with work on the farm. My father's sister already had two kids and felt sorry for my parents' situation, so when she was pregnant a third time she told my father, "Look, this is my third child. I'm going to give him to you." The baby was twenty-two days old when my parents took him home. After that, my mother started to have her own babies. My parents always thought that my adopted brother Yula had brought them good luck.

Kunsang eventually makes a pilgrimage to Dharamsala to see the Dalai Lama and during her time here she meets her future husband, narrating the heart-breaking, tedious administrative process they must overcome to be together and the struggles she will face even when they succeed. It is a moving story of a life we can hardly imagine and a journey that crosses many boundaries most of us will never have to traverse, to hike over terrain while risking one's life, to encounter a revered spiritual leader, create a way to support oneself financially in a foreign country alone and to raise your children in yet another country which will become their home, but never yours.

Reading stories like Kunsang's is not just an eye-opener into another culture and way of life and another way of dealing with life's issues, it invites us to practise empathy and patience in the way we interact with foreigners in our own country. Kindness and compassion are there in abundance if we choose to offer them to others and it is stories like Kunsang's that motivate us to want to extend it.





Alice Munro wins Nobel prize in literature, 2013

Canadian short-story writer, 82, was one of favourites to win honour, awarded in same year she announced retirement
Charlotte Higgins, chief arts writer

The Guardian, Thursday 10 October 2013

Alice Munro, winner of the 2013 Nobel prize in literature. Photograph: Andrew Testa/Rex Features

Modesty, that rare virtue, has this year alighted upon the Nobel prizes.

Physicist Peter Higgs evaporated into a Highland walking tour to evade media attention, then Alice Munro, the 82-year-old doyenne of the short story, outdid him – by being simply unaware that there was a certain literature prize in the offing.

“Mom, you won,” said one of her daughters, waking her up with the news.

“I was kind of dazed about what I had won,” Munro told the Canadian broadcaster CBC in a brief and rare interview. “I had no idea of it. I don’t think I knew I was even on a list until maybe yesterday.”

Munro is the second Canadian-born writer to win be awarded the Nobel prize for literature – after Saul Bellow – and the 13th woman. “Can this be possible?” she asked. “Really? It seems dreadful there’s only 13 of us.”

With her acceptance of the 8m Swedish krona (£775,000) prize she joins a rollcall of 110 past winners including Thomas Mann, Harold Pinter, Toni Morrison, Doris Lessing, Albert Camus and Ernest Hemingway.

Frequently compared to Chekhov and Mansfield for the deft originality of her short stories, she had always been among the favourites to win, alongside novelist Haruki Murakami and Belarusian investigative journalist Svetlana Alexievich.

It is a victory that has delighted many of her literary colleagues as well as her devoted readership – to whom she has always seemed something of a cherished secret. That she has been frequently omitted from conventional lists of the greatest writers of her age is perhaps because of her chosen form, the short story, as well as the apparent narrowness of her palette, since most of her works explore the warp and weft of smalltown life in Western Ontario.

“This is the Nobel announcement that has made me happiest in the whole of my life,” said novelist AS Byatt, “She

has done more for the possibilities and the form of the short story than any other writer I know.”

Fans praise her ability to express, in brutally honed sentences, not just the nature of small human hardships and dilemmas, but the very feeling of living within them.

Novelist Anne Enright said: “[Her characters] are like you, actually - or a heightened, more perceptive version of you - the way they think about life and realise things late and carry on.”

The writer and poet Colm Toibin described one of her stories as “tough, tough, but yet written using sentences of the most ordinary kind, and constructed with slow Chekhovian care”.

Munro was born Alice Laidlaw on 10 July, 1931, near Wingham, Ontario, and through her father, who was a farmer of silver foxes, traces her ancestry back to James Hogg, author of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

As a child “books seem to me to be magic, and I wanted to be part of the magic,” she once told the *Guardian*.

Her first story was published when she was a student at the University of Western Ontario. More followed, and even a book approaching a novel, a Bildungsroman called *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971). It contains a passage

marking out the territory of her artistic vision: “what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together - radiant, everlasting.”

Her fiction has been published in 17 volumes, including *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998) *The View From Castle Rock* (2006) and, most recently, *Dear Life* (2012) – which she claimed was her valedictory work.

Admiration for Munro is not quite universal. Christian Lorentzen, senior editor at the *London Review of Books*, recently battered *Dear Life*. “Reading 10 of her collections in a row has induced in me not a glow of admiration but a state of mental torpor,” he wrote.

He dislikes her repetitiousness of material, he told the *Guardian*: “Minor adulteries committed or contemplated; sibling rivalries; occasionally sibling rivalries and minor adulteries mixed; the slow march of dementia or cancer”. She was, he said slightly, popular among “readers of the *New Yorker* wondering what it was like living out in the sticks.” However, even Lorentzen was happy Munro had won: he took £400 at the bookie’s. International

Women of Courage Award to Tsering Woeser

The U.S. State Department announced that Tibetan writer and blogger Tsering Woeser is a winner of the 2013 International Women of Courage Award.

This year’s award at the March 8 ceremony was presented by Secretary of State John Kerry and special guest First Lady Michelle Obama.

The International Women of Courage Award recognizes women around the globe who have demonstrated courage and leadership, often at great personal risk, to promote justice and rights. Since its inception in 2007, the Department of State has honored 46 women from 34 different countries. Tsering Woeser is among 10 awardees this year (the list can be found at www.state.gov/s/gwi/programs/iwoc/2013/bio/index.htm).

“The International Women of Courage Award represents due recognition of Woeser’s courageous efforts to champion justice and rights in Tibet and China,” said Mary Beth Markey, President of the International Campaign



for Tibet. “This award is not only an acknowledgment of Woesser’s personal accomplishments, but also an affirmation of the U.S. government’s concern for the Tibetan people in their struggle for rights and dignity.”

Tsering Woesser is a writer, blogger, and poet who uses her voice to encourage a public discourse within China on Tibet and to promote Chinese-Tibetan solidarity. While living under virtual house arrest in Beijing, Woesser has used technology and her own creativity and resilience to overcome the obstacles imposed by Chinese censors and report on the Tibetan situation in contemporary People’s Republic of China. Her tweets

and blog have become a vital source of information on Tibet to analysts and government policy-makers around the world.

First given in March 2007, the International Women of Courage Award is given to “recognize women around the globe who have shown exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for women’s rights and advancement.”

At the 2012 ceremony, First Lady Michele Obama, said that, “These women committed themselves to fighting for the world as they know it should be. ...They saw violence, poverty, discrimination, and inequality — and they decided to use

their voices, and risk their lives, to do something about it.”

Secretary John Kerry, in his reference to Woesser, said, ***“For her courageous stand to improve human rights conditions in Tibet . . . for giving eloquent voice to those who otherwise will not be heard. . . this award was given to Tsering Woesser.”***

The award was presented to Woesser in person by staff of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. Those attending the private ceremony included her husband, writer Wang Lixiong, artist Ai Weiwei, economist Ilham Tohti, human rights activist Hu Jia, lawyer Ding Xikui, and 2011 International Women’s Courage Award winner, lawyer Guo Jianmei.

Woesser dedicates this award to all the Tibetans who self-immolated for Tibet cause.

“I don’t think of this as an award for myself only,” Woesser told VOA. “It is an expression of international and the United States awareness of the current situation in Tibet. I am just a writer who writes information about Tibet. And I am grateful to all my readers and to the United States for this award. . . . I thank Tibetans outside and inside for congratulating me. There have been over one hundred Tibetan self-immolators, and I want to give this award to them – I say this with great emotion and from my heart.” (ICT translation from Tibetan)

A Gold medal for my hard work

I was born in Byalakupee to Mrs. Pema Wangmo and soon moved to Pandoh, Himachal Pradesh. My father, Late Mr. Rinchen Dhondup came from Gonjo, Tibet in 1965 at the age of 30 and worked for road construction as labourer. He along with many other Tibetans constructed the road to Manali and also the big dam which proudly stands there in Pandoh today. He started his earnings with 25 paise which we can’t find in today’s currency.

With the help of TCV and gratefulness of my sponsor, Mr. and Mrs. Penilla, I got the chance to study in three branches of TCV, namely Patli-Kuhl, Lower Dharamsala and Bylakuppee. During school time, I got good opportunities to take part in all activities and gained so many experiences from the roles I took in school. I was a school prefect in Lower TCV and Captain of TCV Bylakupee from 2005-2007.

My college life started in year 2007 when I joined Ethraj College for Women to study English Literature. It was just before few days of our first semester that my father passed away and our lecturers

were so concerned that they told me not to write the exam and go home, one even handed me 500 rupees and said “Go visit Dalai Lama”. But I knew that I won’t be able to make it to the funerals and more over, my late father always wanted me to study smartly so I wrote the exam and later my result suprised my professors as I stood first rank in the class. It is not miracle that God played to sympathize me, it is the hard work and determination I hold to persue.

Later, I also became the representative of my class and received One Time Scholarship Gift Money from the college for holding the first rank in the class. The subject that interested me

the most was ‘Commonwealth Literature’ because it’s about colonialism and sufferings under imperialism, the same touch of our Tibetan story; the sufferings and struggles. At the end of three years of Bachelor studies in English Literature, I received Silver medal for excellent performance in ‘Commonwealth Literature’ paper.

With determination to persue further studies in English Literature, through entrance examination and interview, I got the seat to study in Loyola College, one of the best Colleges in Chennai. I studied with utmost interest and hardwork and at the end of my Post Graduate, I received Gold Medal for outstanding in the class.





Tenzin Chokyi Won Prestigious Sikyong Scholarship

As the Prestigious Sikyong Scholarship was announced, Tenzin Chokyi from Tibetan Homes Foundations was the first recipient of the scholarship. This scholarship was introduced as an incentive for Tibetan students to work harder and perform better in their studies. “I am very happy that the Sikyong Scholarship has found its first recipient. I sincerely congratulate Tenzin Chokyi for her accomplishment making all the Tibetans feel very proud. Hope she will be the first of the many students to excel in studies and receive the Sikyong Scholarship” Sikyong said.

Tenzin Choekyi was the first Tibetan students to score more than 95% in the All India Senior School Certificate Examination. Heartily congratulate Tenzin Chokyi for the outstanding performance.

Malala's Speech



Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban in 2012 for demanding education for girls, gave a speech at the United Nations on her 16th birthday on July 15, 2013, where she spoke about the importance of education.

Here is the full text of her speech:

“In the name of God, The Most Beneficent,
The Most Merciful. Honourable UN

Secretary General Mr Ban Ki-moon,
Respected President General Assembly
Vuk Jeremic Honourable UN envoy for
Global education Mr Gordon Brown,
Respected elders and my dear brothers
and sisters; Today, it is an honour for me
to be speaking again after a long time.
Being here with such honourable people
is a great moment in my life.

I don't know where to begin my
speech. I don't know what people would
be expecting me to say. But first of all,
thank you to God for whom we all are
equal and thank you to every person who
has prayed for my fast recovery and a
new life. I cannot believe how much love
people have shown me. I have received
thousands of good wish cards and gifts
from all over the world. Thank you to
all of them. Thank you to the children
whose innocent words encouraged me.
Thank you to my elders whose prayers
strengthened me. I would like to thank my
nurses, doctors and all of the staff of the
hospitals in Pakistan and the UK and the
UAE government who have helped me
get better and recover my strength.

I fully support Mr Ban Ki-moon
the Secretary-General in his Global
Education First Initiative and the work of
the UN Special Envoy Mr Gordon Brown.
And I thank them both for the leadership
they continue to give. They continue to
inspire all of us to action.

Dear brothers and sisters do

remember one thing. Malala Day is not my day. Today is the day of every woman, every boy and every girl who have raised their voice for their rights. There are hundreds of Human rights activists and social workers who are not only speaking for human rights, but who are struggling to achieve their goals of education, peace and equality. Thousands of people have been killed by the terrorists and millions have been injured. I am just one of them. So here I stand.... one girl among many.

I speak - not for myself, but for all girls and boys. I raise up my voice - not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. Those who have fought for their rights: Their right to live in peace. Their right to be treated with dignity. Their right to equality of opportunity. Their right to be educated. Dear Friends, on the 9th of October 2012, the Taliban shot me on the left side of my forehead. They shot my friends too. They thought that the bullets would silence us. But they failed. And then, out of that silence came, thousands of voices. The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and stop our ambitions but nothing changed in my life except this: Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born. I am the same Malala. My ambitions are the same. My hopes are the same. My dreams are the same.

Dear sisters and brothers, I am not

against anyone. Neither am I here to speak in terms of personal revenge against the Taliban or any other terrorists group. I am here to speak up for the right of education of every child. I want education for the sons and the daughters of all the extremists especially the Taliban.

I do not even hate the Talib who shot me. Even if there is a gun in my hand and he stands in front of me. I would not shoot him. This is the compassion that I have learnt from Muhammad-the prophet of mercy, Jesus christ and Lord Buddha. This is the legacy of change that I have inherited from Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This is the philosophy of non-violence that I have learnt from Gandhi Jee, Bacha Khan and Mother Teresa. And this is the forgiveness that I have learnt from my mother and father. This is what my soul is telling me, be peaceful and love everyone.

Dear sisters and brothers, we realise the importance of light when we see darkness. We realise the importance of our voice when we are silenced. In the same way, when we were in Swat, the north of Pakistan, we realised the importance of pens and books when we saw the guns. The wise saying, "The pen is mightier than sword" was true. The extremists are afraid of books and pens. The power of education frightens them. They are afraid of women. The power of the voice of

women frightens them. And that is why they killed 14 innocent medical students in the recent attack in Quetta. And that is why they killed many female teachers and polio workers in Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa and FATA. That is why they are blasting schools every day. Because they were and they are afraid of change, afraid of the equality that we will bring into our society.

I remember that there was a boy in our school who was asked by a journalist, “Why are the Taliban against education?” He answered very simply. By pointing to his book he said, “A Talib doesn’t know what is written inside this book.” They think that God is a tiny, little conservative being who would send girls to the hell just because of going to school.

The terrorists are misusing the name of Islam and Pashtun society for their own personal benefits. Pakistan is peace-loving democratic country. Pashtuns want education for their daughters and sons. And Islam is a religion of peace, humanity and brotherhood. Islam says that it is not only each child’s right to get education, rather it is their duty and responsibility.

Honourable Secretary General, peace is necessary for education. In many parts of the world especially Pakistan and Afghanistan; terrorism, wars and conflicts stop children to go to their schools. We are really tired of these wars. Women and children are suffering in many parts of the

world in many ways. In India, innocent and poor children are victims of child labour. Many schools have been destroyed in Nigeria. People in Afghanistan have been affected by the hurdles of extremism for decades. Young girls have to do domestic child labour and are forced to get married at early age. Poverty, ignorance, injustice, racism and the deprivation of basic rights are the main problems faced by both men and women.

Dear fellows, today I am focusing on women’s rights and girls’ education because they are suffering the most. There was a time when women social activists asked men to stand up for their rights. But, this time, we will do it by ourselves. I am not telling men to step away from speaking for women’s rights rather I am focusing on women to be independent to fight for themselves. Dear sisters and brothers, now it’s time to speak up.

So today, we call upon the world leaders to change their strategic policies in favour of peace and prosperity. We call upon the world leaders that all the peace deals must protect women and children’s rights. A deal that goes against the dignity of women and their rights is unacceptable. We call upon all governments to ensure free compulsory education for every child all over the world. We call upon all governments to fight against terrorism and violence, to protect children from brutality and harm. We call upon

the developed nations to support the expansion of educational opportunities for girls in the developing world. We call upon all communities to be tolerant - to reject prejudice based on cast, creed, sect, religion or gender. To ensure freedom and equality for women so that they can flourish. We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back. We call upon our sisters around the world to be brave - to embrace the strength within themselves and realise their full potential.

Dear brothers and sisters, we want schools and education for every child's bright future. We will continue our journey to our destination of peace and education for everyone. No one can stop us. We will speak for our rights and we will bring change through our voice. We must believe in the power and the strength of our words. Our words can change the world. Because we are all together, united for the cause of education. And if we want to achieve our goal, then let us empower ourselves with the weapon of knowledge and let us shield ourselves with unity and togetherness.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must not forget that millions of people are suffering from poverty, injustice and ignorance. We must not forget that millions of children are out of schools. We must not forget that our sisters and brothers are waiting for a bright peaceful future. So let us wage a global struggle against

illiteracy, poverty and terrorism and let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world. Education is the only solution. Education First”

