

News Updates

Information and analysis of developments in Tibet



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Phuntsog Nyidron and others, "Songs from a Tibetan Prison: 14 Nuns Sing to the Outside World" in *News from Tibet, October-March 1994*, TIN News Review, Tibet Information Network, London, 26 April, 1994, pp. 18-21. The introduction to the songs is by TIN.

Songs from a Tibetan Prison: 14 Nuns Sing to the Outside World

In June 1993 some Tibetans in Lhasa arranged for a tape recorder to be smuggled into the women's section of Drapchi, the Tibet Autonomous Prison No.1, where between 30 and 40 Tibetan women were serving sentences of up to 7 years each for having taken part in brief demonstrations calling for independence.

14 of the women prisoners recorded a number of songs on the tape recorder, mainly laments addressed to their parents and relatives or songs of praise for their exiled leader, the Dalai Lama. The women sing of their determination not to give up hope for independence, despite their prison sentences.

The tape was smuggled back out of the prison and copies were circulated amongst the underground movement in Lhasa. Under Chinese law the recording of the songs, which may have been discovered by the authorities, would have been regarded as "disseminating counter-revolutionary propaganda" or "carrying out splittist activities". In October 1993 the 14 women were re-sentenced by a Lhasa court and given additional sentences of up to 9 years each for singing the songs. The women are still in Drapchi prison. The one with the shortest sentence is not due for release till 1998; the last one will complete her term in 2006.

On the original tape several of the songs are inaudible or are cut off abruptly because of interruptions. On this tape 18 of the clearest songs have been copied. Personal messages from the nuns to the Tibetan people have been edited out. The clearest song of all is the solo, Song Thirteen. The voice of the soloist has been modified electronically to protect the identity of the singer. Several of the songs are well known Chinese or Tibetan melodies, to which the nuns have altered the lyrics.

See TIN News Update 20 February, 1994 for further details including names and details of the nuns.

The Songs

Revised translation by Youdon Lhamo, December 1994. Timings are given according to the edited version produced by TIN.

0'00" Song one (translation; lasts 1'20")

Land of snows, land of snows
My beloved country.
Religious and political freedom are the source of our happiness.
The Red Chinese have separated us from our root guru.

The Buddhas who dwell in the ten directions
Please witness the suffering of the Tibetan people.
We have to bear cruelty and violence
Which has filled our land with tears and blood.
The Buddhas who dwell in the ten directions
Please protect our mournful words of truth
Tenzin Gyatso, the heart and soul of our country
Is my root Lama, the wish-fulfilling jewel.
When all Tibetans, in Tibet and in exile, unite
The sun will emerge from behind the clouds.

1'15" Song Two: (lasts 1'03")

The all-knowing Dalai Lama
In whom Tibetans place their trust and confidence
Is forced to remain in exile,
Leaving behind his happy homeland.
His homeland has been seized by China, and Tibetans imprisoned.
Although we are destined to wear Chinese clothes (for now)
The Red Chinese should be got rid of.
Tibetan brothers from the 3 provinces of Tibet
Should unite into a single force
And expel the Red Chinese from the holy land of Tibet
Even if we have to sacrifice our lives
We want complete independence.
We should get rid of the Chinese
Within a year or two.
Within a year or two
We should get complete independence.

2'18" Song Three: (translation; lasts 0'42")

The abode of the all-knowing one (Dalai Lama)
Is the red palace (Potala) on the mountain top.
Although the all-knowing one is resident in India,
His heart and thoughts are in Tibet.
Throughout the world
The rays of the bright moon has spread.
The supreme and benevolent one (Dalai Lama)
Has granted me freedom over my own body
Has granted me freedom over my own body.
(repeat to end)

3'00" Song Four: (repeats Song Three; lasts 0'37")

At the summit of Mount Kepel
Clouds circled clockwise
Over the holy cathedral of Jokhang.
Drops of pearl are raining down.
Tenzin Gyatso, the victorious one
Is not without a home -
The Palace of Happiness (Government) is flourishing more than ever
before.

3'37" Song Five: (translation; lasts 1'36")

Although the mountains of India are high,
Is not the birthplace of His Holiness
In the Garden of Norbulingka in Lhasa?
A multitude of flowers bloom
No matter how hard the hail and frost,
Our linked hands will not be separated.
Our Tibetan family, make incense offerings and pray.
The all-knowing one (Dalai Lama)
Is coming homeward.
Bring your ceremonial silk scarves
And let's go and seek his audience.

5'13" Song Six: (translation; lasts 0'47")

Tibetan children living in India
Should study for the sake of Tibetan Independence.
Tibetan Independence will be the blessing of the victorious one.
His holiness is our supreme parent.
If you asks who is the supreme parent,
Tibetan independence is the supreme parent.
It is the parent of the land of snows.
The people of Tibet struggle for our freedom
Tibetan independence will be the blessing of the victorious one
His holiness the Dalai Lama is our supreme parent.

6'00" Song Seven: (translation; lasts 0'35")

On the roof-top of the planet earth,
If you ask whose land it is,
It is our homeland.
It is a land of Dharma.
The supreme and compassionate one
Is the king of our land.
Under the compassionate and benevolent leadership
Of His Holiness the Dalai Lama,
The people love peace and truth,
The people of Tibet love freedom.
The people of Tibet love freedom,
The people of Tibet enjoy the blessings of peace and truth.

6'35" Song Eight: (translation; lasts 1'03")

When Panchen Rinpoche, root/descended lama of Tibetans was alive,
Tibetans in the prisons were able to obtain a quicker release.
The forces of the barbaric Red Chinese
Have assassinated our root/descended lama
By giving him poison.
They have assassinated him.
In the prisons the food is like pig swill,
The beatings are violent and cruel,
The prison terms are limitless,
Are limitless.
The food is like pig swill
The beatings are violent... (repeat to end)

7'38" Song Nine: (translation; lasts 0'52")

In an iron house, a cage with iron bars
(line indistinct)
Fellow Tibetans who are outside,
The reason why Tibetans have to endure suffering in the prisons
Is because the Chinese inflict immense pain upon us.
Fellow Tibetans who do not have to endure such suffering,
We had to undergo this temporary suffering armed
With the weapons of freedom and truth.
Those of us whose freedom, happiness and peace are being trampled
upon by the Chinese
Will restore that freedom and peace as soon as possible.

8'30" Song Ten: (partial translation; lasts 0'37")

The happy snow land of Tibet
Is your birthplace, oh Supreme Protector.
Pastures of nutritious grass breed healthy livestock.
Our parents are our highest protectors -
When we think of our parents we remember you (our Parent)
So we offer you a song in your remembrance
So we offer you a song in your remembrance.

9'07" Song Eleven: (translation; 1'20")

We sing a song of sadness -
We sing it from Drapchi Prison.
With our joy and happiness high as the snowy peaks
We sing, exercising our freedom (to sing).
The former land of Dharma
Has now turned into a prison by the Barbarians.
Though we are in prison today
(We will) never lose courage.
Oh how sad it is!
The Barbarians inflict severe beatings and punishments.
Since we have no freedom
We have become oppressed and are tortured.
Our revolt against the Imperialists
Has turned into the uprising of the Drapchi prisoners.
By the grace of the all-knowing one (the Dalai Lama)
We are in a state of peace and happiness.
We are in a state of peace and happiness.

10'27" Song Twelve: (translation; lasts 1'29")

Oh this song of sadness in our hearts,
We sing this to our brothers and friends.
This feeling that we have in this darkness
Reminds us of our fellow Tibetans.
The food does not sustain body and soul,
The severe beatings and punishments are impossible to forget.
May the suffering and hardship of us, poor prisoners,
Never be suffered by any sentient being
In the heavenly realm of the land of snows
The source of limitless benefit and peace
May Avalokiteshvara Tenzin Gyatso

Reign supreme throughout all eternity.

11'56" Song Thirteen: (translation; lasts 1'09")

Solo: voice modified to protect identity of source.

Looking out from Drapchi prison
There is nothing to see but the sky.
The clouds that float in the sky
I wish were my parents.
We the imprisoned friends
Are like the flowers in the Norbulingka -
No matter how severe the hail and frost
Our linked arms cannot be separated.
The white cloud from the east
Is not a patch that is fixed -
The sun from behind the clouds
Will certainly appear one day.
We feel no sadness.
If you ask why,
Even if the day's sun sets,
There is the moon at night.

13'05" Song Fourteen: (translation; lasts 1'35")

The fragrant lotus
Has been withered by the sun.
Bees are attracted to the lotus
By its natural sweetness,
Bees are attracted to the lotus
By its natural sweetness.
The snowy mountain of the Government of Tibet
Is scorched by the heat of the sun.
The pastureland and turquoise lakes will flourish
Due to the nourishing flow of the melted snow.
The gem of eternal hope (Dalai Lama)
Protects us all.
Committed youths, take an oath for the task of
Regaining independence.

14'40" Song Fifteen: (translation; lasts 1'22")

In the direction of our homeland
We sing a brief song of truth.
Oh wind, if you are conscious,
Carry our song to our birthplace.
Oh destined parents of this life
Do not be sad -
The time will come for our reunion.
In the direction of our homeland
We send a brief letter of truth.
Dear parents, we send a few word of comfort,
Oh destined parents of this life,
Do not be sad.
The time will come for our reunion.

Song 16 is a repeat of song 13.

