

Information and analysis of developments in Tibet



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## Poems and Songs

### - Ode to the Machu

by Palden Gyal

The Machu is one of the major rivers of eastern Tibet, running from its source near Kyaring Tso, southwest of Golmud in present day Qinghai, through Golok and Amdo before flowing into China where it is known as the Huang He or Yellow River.

The poem is an example of a traditional style of writing in Tibet which is used by contemporary Tibetan writers to celebrate the spirit and nature of Tibet, and its national identity. Like other poems of this genre, part of a literary renaissance in Tibet, it exhorts Tibetan youth to greater efforts.

Palden Gyal, the author, is an Amdowan intellectual who arrived in India from Tibet in 1989. The poem was originally published in Tibetan in 1991 in Jang-Zhon ("Young Sapling"), a Tibetan literary periodical published in Dharamsala. For copies of the magazine please contact the Editor, Jang-Zhon, R-8, Sunny Hostel, Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamsala, HP. 176215. This translation is by Tsering Dhundup.

Conceived by the light of the seven-horsed charioteer [the sun],  
Emerging from the womb of the snow-white mountains,  
Flowing majestically across the vastness of the plateau, Glistening in  
the light of freedom  
With waves of courage surging ever onward,  
Your name is Machu!

Since the time when this material world came into being

And the roof of the world was settled by the red-faced people of Tibet,  
You too have continued to grace the bosom of your motherland.

You give generously of yourself to all.  
The people of Tibet, drawing food from your life-giving essence,  
Raised the famous Army of the Red-faced Meat-eaters  
Whose thunderous hoofs terrorised the world.  
Time and again their banner of Victory  
Pierced the realm of Vishnu.

Machu, you have been witness  
To such momentous periods in our history  
When we covered ourselves with martial glory  
And experienced the ecstasy of listening  
To the melodious music of your waves,  
Ascending heavenwards to the music of Yangchen Lhamo.

You may also bear the wounds of historical injury  
When, in the land of snows, dark clouds of blind faith  
Gathered thick when the lightning of jealousy  
Sparked mutual hatred and internal conflict.

But the march of history cannot be checked  
Just as your majestic flow can never run dry.  
With your perennial source in the snowy mountains  
And the courage of innovation  
You will ever move onward and be yourself.

Oh Machu, the darling of the youth of the Land of Snows!  
You have the fearless courage to move ever forward  
And blaze new trails across narrow gorges and steep precipices,  
But we Tibetans neither sing your praises  
Nor feel grateful for your bountiful gifts.

It seems to be our culture always to ascribe  
Every good fortune and success  
To the blessings of the Triple Gem  
And to make much of it,  
Ingratiating ourselves still more  
With offerings of gold, silver and butter-lamps.

No-one gives you credit for your nourishment and sustenance.  
Likewise, when there is misfortune  
Or an untoward happening,  
We blame our past karma  
And shirk personal responsibility.  
We do not recognise these problems  
As huge boulders in our path towards innovation and change.

Few indeed are grateful for your soothing touch  
In the heat of the scorching sun.  
Without the wisdom of intellect,  
The courage of conviction is pointless  
Just as without the driving force of consciousness,  
Our body is merely a corpse.

Alas! Conservative ideas and dogmatic ideology  
Have brought us historical catastrophe.  
It was as though we had become oblivious  
Of your mystical waves and glistening rays of hope.

Yet, no matter how strong and evil the wind of time,  
Sentient beings will continue to share  
Thirst-quenching essence from the streams  
Of your compassion and munificence.  
The storm of history can never dry up your course  
Because your water is mixed with the blood  
Of those brave martyrs of the Snow-Land  
Who have sacrificed their all  
In the face of long torture and suffering.

Youth of the Snow-Land! Yesterday is past.  
Today is alive.  
Have you ever given thought  
To the future path?  
The river is the object  
Of my love, veneration and service.  
In sadness or glory  
The Machu is my only confidant and companion.

Is it really like asking for the lotus in the sky,  
To hope that fresh and innovative ideas  
Should replace the conservative and dogmatic stubbornness  
Of the past in the Land of Snows?  
Yes, it is.

But, we, the youth of the Land of Snows,  
Whose heart and life-blood is one with the blue Machu,  
Will take courage.  
The undying spirit of the heroes and heroines  
Who have martyred themselves in the storm of history,  
Will evoke the waves of the Machu  
To inspire the youth of the Snow-land  
To shatter the obstacles of conservatism and dogmatism and Reach out  
for progressive, modern ideas.  
This is the historical responsibility

Entrusted to youth by history.

### - Blue Cuckoo

A song from the cassette "Melody of Tanglha" by the popular Lhasa singer Chamba Tsering. The song was issued on cassette CY-9102, issued by the Chengdu Tape and Video Publishing House, probably in 1990.

This bird, this blue cuckoo  
Came from East of India  
From the midst of the green valley  
It spoke to me

Oh blue cuckoo  
Do not return to Eastern India

Take this into your turquoise thoughts  
And stay firm  
Take this into your turquoise thoughts  
And always stay firm

Sing sweetly  
and stay firm  
Sing sweetly  
and stay firm,

### - Snow Range

Two songs recorded by Da-Droen (Dawa Drolma), a famous popular singer in Lhasa, who was also well known in China. In August 1992 she left Tibet for India.

The long blue river  
Has its source  
In a single mountain range

Although the rivers divide  
Into many branches  
They all meet in the sea

The ranges of Himalaya  
Have snow mountains on four sides

The friends of a peace loving nation,  
The children of the snow white mountains.

- Lhasa, the Treasure Trove of Pilgrimage

The city of Lhasa, the homeland,  
rich in beauty,  
abundant in sites of pilgrimage

The Palace of the Potala  
Inspiring awe, attracting the eye

Its centre is a precious jewel  
It is the best for this existence

The city of Lhasa, the homeland,  
rich in beauty,  
abundant in sites of pilgrimage

Increasing the strength of mind  
Of the faithful Tibetans  
Accumulating a heap of skills  
And a wealth of knowledge

To construct our own country  
With a single mind

Sing a song of good fortune

### - My Wish

By Migmar Tsering

This poem was published in the Tibetan language version of Tibet Daily on 2nd September 1990

Instead of a bird that can soar into the heights of the sky  
I would rather be an ordinary bird than can see at night  
To awaken sentient beings from their sleep  
With my clear, crisp cries.

Any time, for me I would rather be an alarm clock ringing shrilly.

Instead of being a rich embroidered garment  
I would rather be a shabby coarse woollen wrap  
And stop the cold in the rushing cool of a snowy day.

Any time, I prefer to suffer the pangs of cold myself.

Instead of the unfathomable mood of the moon

I would rather be a chattering stream  
Quenching the thirst of all and sundry  
Echoing my mirthful laughter.

Any time, I prefer to give away in charity the flow of my wateriness.

Instead of being a hot shining light during the rainy season  
I would rather be the warmth of a spring  
To give mother earth the promise of life  
By smashing the dungeon of the wintry icicles

Any time, I prefer to give the world beauty and grace.

### - Nothing Matters \_\_\_\_\_

By Xian Ming

This poem was published in the "Xizang Ribao", the Chinese language version of Tibet Daily, on 5th May 1990.

Not cycling through the red lights,  
Nor kicking the dog that's behind you or barking on the road,  
Nor singing loud songs no-one wants to hear,

Only the air constantly catches your vocal chords.

It'll make you feel better  
To learn to sell your language,  
And to count handfuls of coins,  
Happily,  
Hiding in the corner.

It doesn't matter -  
Think of spending the money.

Only the sun was setting,  
And the man who sells clothes dresses in rags,  
The man who runs the restaurant eats poorly,  
And the man who sells fruit drinks from his thermos  
Doesn't drink wine.

None of this matters.

It doesn't matter

Being pushed around by others  
Who spit on the floor,

Throwing down fruit peel and cigarette ends,  
Greeting you with unfriendly stares,

Only you'll often feel sick in your stomach.

You'll feel better wearing a face-mask  
Soaked with perfume and a pair of dark glasses.  
Walk fast and hold your breath if you have to.

It doesn't matter

If you curse to yourself.  
Only there's still a long way to go  
And the fragrance of the perfume will disappear.

The sun rolled out and rolled in  
Near the Zhuan Jingtong,  
People were piously prostrating,  
Urine flowed out of the toilet, but that didn't matter.

It doesn't matter

If someone cleverly creates a few punctures  
In the tyre when it's being repaired,  
If someone changes the expensive parts  
Of your watch when you have it mended,  
If the packet of cigarettes you buy in the street is fake.

Only the few words  
You get when you are crushed  
Need to be reflected upon

For half a day.

### Prison Writings: - Leader's Testament

These verses are said to have written by one of the prominent figures of the pro-independence movement from his prison cell in Lhasa in August 1991. His name has been withheld to protect him from repercussions.

Whether I remain  
in prison or not,  
In my heart  
I will always be for Tibetan independence

Maybe you will kill me.

If you do kill me,  
The Tibetan people  
Must be allowed to see my body.

My imprisonment  
Is in your hands.  
But regardless  
I will continue to press  
for independence for Tibet.

Great leaders and teachers of the Tibetans  
Have always worked for the welfare of the Tibetans.  
I wish my students to be as I,  
And to work selflessly for the welfare of their people.

### - Nuns' Prison Song

In August 1990 after a year in prison six nuns in Gutsa Prison near Lhasa began to sing a song in their cell.

When guards realised that their song included pro-independence verses, the nuns were taken to a room and beaten by three Tibetan women guards and one Chinese man. The four staff beat each one of the prisoners in turn with implements including "a plastic stool and a belt", according to one of the prisoners. The six nuns were then moved to a smaller cell, where they were beaten again. They remained in this cell under strict conditions for a year, after which two of them, Ngawang Tsepak and Sonam Lhamo, were released.

The words of the song were provided by Ngawang Tsepak (also known as Ngawang Champa) in September 1991 after she had escaped from Tibet. Ngawang Tsepak, aged 20, comes from Dro village in Medro Gongkar county, 60 km east of Lhasa. She was a farm worker until 1989 when she became a nun at Chubsang nunnery near Lhasa. On 2nd September 1989 she was arrested when she and eight other nuns staged a demonstration calling for Tibetan independence, interrupting the performance of a Tibetan opera in front of officials at the Norbulingkha (Summer Park) in Lhasa. For details see "Reports of Prison Maltreatment", TIN News Report, December 11, 1991.

The other women beaten for singing this song were Lobsang Choedron, Dechen Drolma, Pasang Drolma and Dawa Lhazom. Sonam Lhamo completed her 2 year sentence in September 1991 and has escaped to India, but the other four women are not due to be released from prison until September 1992. Lobsang Choedron was transferred to Trisam prison in February 1992, but the other three may still be in Gutsa.

Tenzin Gyatso is the proper name of the Dalai Lama, also referred to here as the Yeshi Norbu, or 'the jewel of wisdom'.

Land of snow, land of snow  
My beloved great mother  
Though the Chinese have stolen  
My great mother's life force  
[We] will never let the Buddhist doctrine

That resides in the ten directions be extinguished.

Blood and tears will continue to flow  
Boundless suffering be experienced  
The Buddhas of the ten directions  
Please uphold my truth

Land of snow, land of snow  
My beloved country  
My country's life force  
He, Tenzin Gyatso  
He, my root Lama  
He, Yeshe Norbu  
Let all Tibetans be united  
The time will come when the sun  
Will shine through the clouds.

### - The Victory Song of the Tibetan People

An appeal [Tin Ref: Doc 1(ZR)] sent to the United Nations in October 1991, apparently written by prisoners at Drapchi Prison, ends with a poem urging the Tibetan people to continue to struggle for independence.

The poem has five stanzas, four of which end with a refrain calling on Tibetans to "march forward". The original was written by hand, probably in September 1991. The full text of the appeal which preceded the poem is printed in the section on Statements from Tibet.

The Victory Song of the Tibetan People:  
Fighting The Enemy and Marching To Victory

Rise up, Tibetan people, rise up.  
Let the six million people strive  
For the unchangeable truth, for independence.  
Continue our fight and go forward.

March forward, march forward,  
march towards victory.  
March forward, march forward,  
From victory to victory.

Let the people of the three provinces be united.  
We must kick out from Tibet  
The fascism that is here now.  
Although the enemy has weapons,  
The fist backed by justice is stronger.

March forward, march forward,

For the fist of truth is more powerful.  
March forward, march forward,  
Lift up the fist of truth  
And march forward.

We have a leader to be proud of,  
A leader whom the others lack.  
Nowadays his popularity is increasing  
Like the waves of the great ocean in the summer.  
Be proud! Be proud!  
The waves of the summer ocean are rolling!

March forward, march forward,  
Be proud  
And march forward.

Even the poisonous after-effects  
Of the invasion seem strong.  
Their aggression is cunning and cruel  
Yet the protectors of the doctrine [dharma],  
Led by the two main Gods,  
The white and the black protectors  
[Palden Lhamo and Nechung]  
Are punishing the invaders.  
They are sentenced by nature [rang byung]  
To severe punishment.

They are being punished,  
They are being punished by the judgement of nature.  
They are being punished,  
By the judgement of nature  
They are being punished.

Our friends are everywhere under the sky.  
The people of the world are supporting justice.  
We, the people of the mainland of Tibet,  
And the people in exile  
Must be reunited  
And rebuild our beautiful land of snow.

Rebuild! rebuild!  
We, the people on the mainland, and the people in exile  
Must be reunited.  
March forward, march forward,  
Rebuild our beautiful land of snow!

Mangalam! Good Fortune! Blessings!

*From Tibet Prison No 1.*

