

Journey of Resilience: Unraveling Tibetan Exilic Experiences in Tenzin Tsundue's *Kora*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 29 Dec 2024 Revised: 12 Feb 2025 Accepted: 27 Feb 2025	Exilic experiences navigate the profound journey of displacement, resilience, and the search for identity. This paper examines the varied experiences of exile, focusing on the profound impact on individuals and communities. Through an analysis of the poetic collection, it explores the complex emotions and challenges faced by those subjected to exile. The paper emphasizes the loss of identity as a central aspect of the psychological and emotional consequences experienced by exiles. The role of literature as a form of expression in capturing the essence of exile is acknowledged, with a particular focus on themes such as identity, homelessness, physical appearance, and occupation. Keywords: Exile, Identity, Physical appearance, Occupation.

INTRODUCTION

Exile, a state of forced displacement from one's homeland, has been a recurring phenomenon throughout history. This paper explores the multifaceted experiences of exile, delving into the profound impact it has on individuals and communities. Through an examination of historical literary works and personal narratives, this study sheds light on the complex emotions and challenges faced by those subjected to exile.

The discussion begins with an introduction to the writing style of Tenzin Tsundue and an exploration of the themes he has addressed in his work "Kora." The paper underscores the fact that the process of exile often entails a rupture of social, cultural, and familial bonds, leading to a profound sense of loss and displacement. The loss of identity emerges as a key focal point in understanding the psychological and emotional consequences that exiles undergo.

Analysis of Poetic Collection "Kora"

Tibetans: the world's sympathy stock

Serene monks and bubbly traditionalists;

one lakh and several thousand odd,

nicely mixed, steeped

in various assimilating cultural hegemonies. (Kora 13)

Tenzin Tsundue's work "Kora" delves into the complexities of Tibetan identity, especially in the context of exile. He explores how the experience of being uprooted from one's homeland impacts individual and collective identity. The depiction of Tibetans as a community engaged in a dynamic quest for identity, navigating the complexities of cultural diversity, assimilation, and self-interpretation, highlights their struggle. The quest involves maintaining a balance between preserving traditional elements and embracing the evolving cultural landscape.

The search for cultural identity becomes evident in the poetic lines that depict Tibetans as a diverse group attempting to interpret and define their identity. The use of terms like "serene monks" and "bubbly traditionalists" suggests a multifaceted identity that integrates spiritual and traditional elements. The reference to Tibetans being "nicely mixed" implies a complex and layered identity, shaped by historical interactions with neighboring cultures and the ongoing process of cultural assimilation. The phrase "steeped in various assimilating cultural hegemonies" underscores the challenge of maintaining a unique identity while absorbing external cultural influences. This ongoing process of self-reflection and interpretation within the Tibetan community serves as a vital component of their quest for identity, as they strive to understand and articulate their place within a culturally diverse and historically evolving landscape.

EXILE AND HOMELESSNESS

The Tibetan exile community has faced unique challenges, including experiences of homelessness due to their forced displacement from Tibet. The exile began in 1959 when His Holiness the Dalai Lama, along with thousands of Tibetans, fled to India and other countries following the Chinese occupation of Tibet. This exile has resulted in a distinct set of experiences related to homelessness, encompassing both physical and emotional dimensions.

The primary and most profound aspect of the Tibetan exile experience is the loss of their homeland. Many Tibetans were compelled to leave behind their homes, cultural heritage, and sacred sites in Tibet, leading to a deep sense of displacement and homelessness. In the initial years of exile, many Tibetans resided in refugee camps in India and neighboring countries. These camps served as temporary homes, but they lacked the sense of stability and permanence associated with a true homeland. The struggle for basic necessities such as shelter, food, and healthcare added to the hardship of exile. The condition of being homeless in exile is not merely a matter of physical displacement but also involves cultural dislocation. The Tibetan diaspora continually grapples with the challenge of preserving and transmitting their traditions, language, and customs while living in foreign lands. This cultural dislocation adds an emotional dimension to their sense of homelessness, intensifying the longing for a place to call home.

Tsundue writes:

When I was born
My mother said
You are a refugee.
Our tent on the roadside
smoked in the snow. (Kora 14)

Tsundue's poetry captures the depth of this experience, intertwining personal narratives with broader reflections on displacement. He presents the reality of exile as an inherent part of one's identity from birth, underscoring how being a refugee is not just a situational aspect but a defining feature of existence. His verses resonate with the experiences of countless Tibetans who, from the moment of birth, find themselves thrust into a life marked by homelessness and the perpetual search for belonging.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF TIBETANS

Tibetans possess distinctive physical features that reflect their rich cultural heritage and geographical origins. Their unique physiognomy is often characterized by high cheekbones, almond-shaped eyes, a flattened nose, and straight black hair. Traditional Tibetan attire, such as the chupa worn by both men and women, enhances their vibrant and colorful appearance. The intricate patterns and bright colors of Tibetan clothing not only add aesthetic value but also carry deep cultural significance. Hairstyles among Tibetans often include elaborate braids adorned with colorful ribbons or beads, with variations reflecting regional customs and traditions. Jewelry, particularly silver or gold pieces embellished with turquoise stones, is an essential aspect of Tibetan adornment, symbolizing cultural identity and spiritual beliefs.

Tsundue mentions:

He gets angry when

they laugh at him

‘ching-chong ping-pong.’ (Kora 13)

In his poetry, Tsundue highlights the discrimination Tibetans face based on their physical appearance. He portrays the derogatory remarks and racial stereotypes directed at Tibetans, shedding light on the emotional toll of such prejudices. The anger expressed in his verse underscores the impact of racial ridicule, reflecting the broader struggles of Tibetans who are frequently subjected to discrimination based on their distinctive physical features.

OCCUPATION OF EXILED TIBETANS

The economic survival of exiled Tibetans has been shaped by their adaptability and resilience in foreign lands. Following their displacement from Tibet, many Tibetans have engaged in various occupations to sustain their livelihoods. Small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures have become common among Tibetan refugees, particularly in countries like India and Nepal. These businesses include traditional Tibetan handicraft shops, restaurants, and small-scale enterprises that showcase Tibetan culture and craftsmanship.

Many exiled Tibetans have pursued careers that revolve around Tibetan arts, crafts, and cultural products. The production and sale of traditional Tibetan carpets, thangka paintings, jewelry, and clothing not only provide economic sustenance but also serve as a means of preserving and promoting Tibetan heritage. Additionally, a significant number of exiled Tibetans engage in advocacy work, contributing to social welfare, education, and human rights organizations. Monastic life remains a vital part of the Tibetan exile experience, with many individuals dedicating themselves to spiritual practices, Buddhist philosophy, and the maintenance of monasteries and nunneries.

Tsundue writes:

He sells sweaters in summer

in the shade of the Parel Bridge

They think he is some retired Bahadur. (Kora 16)

Tsundue's poetry encapsulates the resilience of the Tibetan diaspora in their economic pursuits. He portrays the experiences of Tibetan entrepreneurs who navigate unfamiliar environments and overcome stereotypes. His depiction of a sweater seller near Parel Bridge illustrates the unconventional yet necessary means of livelihood adopted by exiled Tibetans. Despite cultural misunderstandings, their entrepreneurship reflects their determination to sustain themselves while maintaining their cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of exilic experiences in Tenzin Tsundue's "Kora" reveals the profound journey of displacement, resilience, and the ongoing quest for identity among Tibetans in exile. The study has examined the multifaceted impact of exile, with an emphasis on the loss of identity as a central theme. Through his poetry, Tsundue provides an intimate lens through which the intricate dimensions of Tibetan exile are understood. His work invites deeper contemplation on the human aspects of displacement and the enduring pursuit of belonging.

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