

# Writing as a Therapeutic Agent for Collective Healing in the Poems of Tensin Tsundue

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## **Abstract**

*Almost all people experience trauma in their life. Surviving in the era that has witnessed a lot of trauma, a millennium composed of two world wars and cold wars, has made every human being experience chains of trauma. Traumatic problems affect a person mentally and physically. There is a long history of human associating himself through a way or therapy to find himself out of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD). This paper projects the importance of writing that serves as a therapy, with the backdrop of the Tibetan writer Tensin Tsundue. Tibet at present undergoes the tough situations due to the Chinese invasion and Tibetans are mostly away from their homeland and staying as refugees in other countries. Tensin Tsundue is a Tibetan activist and writer, and his works bring out the reality of the Tibetan struggle, where his poems stand as a placard for the readers to identify the lost identity of Tibetans. This paper brings out the importance of writing as a therapy to overcome the traumatic stress, and it analyses how an individual writing brings the impact of collective healing into action.*

## **Keywords**

*writing, trauma, PTSD, Tibet, collective healing*

## **1. Introduction**

This paper discusses on the power of poetry which transforms collective trauma into collective healing. Writing emerges from the society defining the reality and holding itself as a mirror reflecting the society. The powerful words in the poetry have the ability to heal and transform. This paper projects the writings of the Tibetan writer Tensin Tsundue. Tensin currently lives in India. Tibet at present undergoes the tough situations due to the Chinese invasion. Tibetans are mostly away from their homeland and staying as refugees in other countries. Tensin is a poet, writer and Tibetan activist. This paper peruses *Kora*, the collection of poems, which reflect the pathetic condition of the lives of the Tibetan community. Tensin Tsundue has been actively participating in the Tibetan independence

movement. Tibet faces the dark situation and some Tibetans have been shattered as refugees staying in various parts of India.

## 2. About the Author

Tensin Tsundue describes the land of Tibet and the struggle of Tibetans for the freedom and independence of their nation. The works of Tensin has the power and ability to bring out the readers to understand the real situation prevailing over Tibet for years. His first book *Crossing the Border* received Outlook-Picador award for Non-Fiction in 2001 and his second book *Kora* is a collection of poems which shows the experiences of Tensin Tsundue in the quest for freedom, his third book *Semshook* is a collection of essay. His poems powerfully impose the world to know the deep struggle and also the will and determination of the Tibetans in the run for free Tibet. His works stand as a voice of the Tibetans shattered around the globe. His parents were forced to move from their homeland and it made Tsundue and his family to settle in India, he completed his studies in India. Tensin Tsundue is actively involved in the Tibetan independence movement, and his writing contains the spirit of Tibetan freedom.

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1 Why to Voice Out?

Judith Herman in her book titled *Trauma and Recovery*, states “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims (Herman, p. 1).” At the outset, Tibet is at the verge of need for solutions and a way to look back and turn their agony and pain into a way of positive outcome. To organize and project the pain and to find a way for the betterment is the need of the hour, and Tensin Tsundue does this through his poems. Tensin uses his own life incidents to bring out the quality of verisimilitude in his poems. Tensin was born alongside the road when his parents were forced to leave the country. Tensin has faced a lot of struggles and he feels as a stranger in India. In his poem *My Tibetanness*, he explains it as

At every check-post and office  
I am an “Indian-Tibetan”.  
My Registration Certificate  
I renew every year with a salaam.  
A foreigner born in India. (Tsundue, p. 13)

Tensin also explains how the loss of identity has affected him in a foreign land. Tensin accounts Tibetans as people of no nation, and also in India, as a refugee he feels the loss of identity, which he expresses as

I am more of an Indian.  
Except for my chinky Tibetan face.  
“Nepali?” “Thai?” “Japanese?”

“Chinese?” “Naga?” “Manipuri?”

but never the question- “Tibetan?” (Tsendue, p. 13)

### 3.2 Writings as Therapeutic Agent

“All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.” -*Isak Dinesen*

The writings of Tensin echo the reality of Tibetans scattered all over the world. It testifies the trauma all Tibetans undergo collectively. Tensin works act as a catalyst to portray his life ordeals and to voice out the truth behind the current scenario of Tibetan struggle. Poetry helps him to convey his feelings and also a chance to give a vista to his own community. This paper analyses the power of poetry, which emerges as a therapeutic outcome, to heal collectively. Mark Doty says, “what is healing but a change in perspective (Harris, p. 29)”. Tensin’s poetry changes the perspective and strengthens the hope of every Tibetans.

Judith Harris in her book “Signifying Pain” states that “one may write privately and intimately and still give resonance to public concerns (p. 14).” Tensin stands as a representation of every Tibetan refugee scattered. His works depict the truthful visuals of struggle and hope of regaining the identity. His poems project the helpless condition of the community and act as a source of hope and strength to the Tibetans. In his poem *My Tibetanness*, he expresses the harsh reality in the life of every Tibetan, thus he says,

We are refugees here.

People of a lost country.

Citizen to no nation. (Tsendue, p. 13)

The above words reflect the true condition of Tibetans’ traumatic issues like sense of not belonging, lost identity and detachment. Tensin reflects on the struggles he has to face as a refugee in a foreign country. In the poem titled *Refugee*, he says,

When I was born

My mother said

you are a refugee.

Our tent on the roadside

smoked in the snow. (Tsendue, p. 14)

Tensin explains the struggle starting the life as a refugee and growing up on the road sides where his parents worked as road construction workers.

On your forehead

between your eyebrows

there is an R embossed

my teacher said

I scratched and scrubbed,

on my forehead I found  
a brash of red pain.

I am born refugee. (Tsundue, p. 14)

Gregory Orr writes, "Poetry offeres us story, conflict moving towards some kind of resolution (Harris, p. 19)." Tensin produces strength through the power of the words. Through poetry Tensin transforms the readers to attain the dream about regaining the forgotten land. Tensin's poetry works as a therapeutic agent and works as a collective healing for the group through poetry, where he offers different perspective that helps to regain the hope in the tremulous situation. People were forced to leave Tibet and they faced a lot of issues, but Tensin through his words builds the hope and strength to claim it once again. In his poem titled Horizon, Tensin pictures the reality that how people miss the country and have a sense of not belonging.

From home you have reached  
the Horizon here.  
From here to another  
here you go.

From there to the next  
next to the next  
horizon to horizon  
every step is a horizon. (Tsundue, p. 9)

People of Tibet are far away from the country, and Tensin also depicts how people suffer and how they are scattered and collectively affected by it, where they are strangers in other nations. Tensin also uses the power of his words to regain the hope. In the same poem titled Horizon, he writes,

Count the steps  
and keep the number.

Pick the white pebbles  
and the funny strange leaves.  
Mark the curves  
and cliffs around  
for you may need  
to come home again. (Tsundue, p. 9)

The above lines insist and force the Tibetans not to forget about the destiny and it also demands them to act with hope. Tensin reiterates the words of going back to their home land, his poems give the vista for the Tibetans to look back what they have left and what should be done. Tensin's words have the healing effect as it brings a change to the perspective of the problem and also focuses on lighting up the spirit

of the readers. Tensin in the poem titled *My Tibetness* concludes with the words of hope,

I am Tibetan.  
But I am not from Tibet.  
Never been there.  
Yet I dream  
of dying there. (Tsundue, p. 13)

Tensin sows the sense of hope through his words to the readers. Tensin's writings serve as a therapeutic agent for the readers. Though affected by identity loss and a feeling of refugee is haunted inside the heart of every Tibetan, Tensin's writings work as catalyst for healing. Tensin offers a perspective of hope and a vision of positive insight. In his poem titled *Refugee*, he explains how he felt the Word R is inscribed on his forehead and made him felt like a stranger and Refugee,

On your forehead  
between your eyebrows  
there is an R embossed  
my teacher said.  
I scratched and scrubbed,  
on my forehead I found  
a brash of red pain.

I am born refugee ... (Tsundue, p. 14)

The reality behind the letter R may showcase the struggle he faces as a refugee student in a school, a search of a lost identity, but Tensin ends the poem with a gentle touch of recovery and healing and that would transform to the readers. He writes,

The R on my forehead  
between my English and Hindi  
the Tibetan tongue reads:  
**RANGZEN**

Freedom means Rangzen (Tsundue, p. 14)

Tensin records the word R in a different context with a positive note, a sense of hope and to regain the shattered dreams through his words. Tensin says R as *Rangzen* which means *freedom*. Tensin in his poems depicts the reality of a Tibetan refugee, the struggles and oppression faced by him in a foreign land. His poems also offer a range of hope, and a sensitivity to acquire the freedom that was lost. His words have a power to revive the Tibetan readers' minds and hearts by giving a different perspective to the problem.

#### 4. Conclusion

Poetry as a form of confession has been there for lots of years. Keats and many confessional poets have used it as a tool for self construction and a way to enhance the life. To force out the solution or a perspective, one must understand the problem in a deeper way. James Pennebaker in his book titled *Opening up* says, “By talking about upsetting events, people achieve insight into the events and learn more about themselves (p. 11).” The works of Tensin Tsundue holds the backdrop of the problems Tibetans face as refugees, the struggles and extreme anguish, and it also gives the hope of dream and great insight, and a vision about the future. Tsundue’s works help his community to bring up a brighter decision for future. The above arguments state how the writings of Tensin Tsundue provide a healing potential to his own community.

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