

Tricycle Talks
“Writing in the Bardo”
Episode #90 with Tenzin Dickie
July 12, 2023



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James Shaheen: Hello, and welcome to *Tricycle Talks*. I’m James Shaheen, editor-in-chief of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. When Tenzin Dickie was growing up in exile in India, she didn’t have access to works by Tibetan writers. Now, as an editor and translator, she is working to create and elevate the stories she wished she had had as a young writer. Her new book, *The Penguin Book of Modern Tibetan Essays*, is the first anthology of modern Tibetan nonfiction and features essays from 22 Tibetan writers from around the world. Taken as a whole, the collection offers an intimate and powerful portrait of modern Tibetan life and what it means to live in exile. In today’s episode of *Tricycle Talks*, I sit down with Dickie to discuss the history of the Tibetan essay, why she views exile as a kind of bardo, and how modern Tibetan writers are continually recreating the Tibetan nation.

James Shaheen: So I'm here with writer and translator Tenzin Dickie. Hi, Dickie. It's great to be with you.

Tenzin Dickie: Hi, James, thank you so much for having me here.

James Shaheen: Oh, it's a pleasure. So Dickie, we're here to talk about your new book, *The Penguin Book of Modern Tibetan Essays*, which is the first anthology of modern Tibetan nonfiction. So to start, can you tell us a little bit about the book and how it came together?

Tenzin Dickie: Sure. The simplest answer is really just that I wanted a book like this. I looked around, and I knew all these writers. I was very good friends with some of them. It felt like it was a possible project to do this and to pull it together and to have this book exist as a real thing for Tibetans and for others. The other part of this is I had actually just been working on an



anthology of modern Tibetan fiction, *Old Demons, New Deities: 21 Short Stories from Tibet*. So I was finishing that book, and I thought, well, what should I do next? It seemed like a natural follow-up to then work on a book of nonfiction, of personal essays. I've always loved the essay as a form. I love the personal essay for how intimate and how powerful it can be. So that's how this came about.

James Shaheen: The essays are all wonderful. They vary in length. I was especially happy to see Ann Tashi Slater in there, one of our contributors. So that was wonderful to see. So in the introduction to the book, you share your first experience trying to write an essay as a middle schooler, and your brother said to you that an essay has to be true. How have you come to understand this statement, and, to turn your own question back on you, why does it matter if writing is true?

Tenzin Dickie: Well, it matters because we can tell when something is true, can't we? We feel it. It speaks to us. We can feel its power. We can feel it affect us. You know when someone is writing something that changed them. When you are reading it, it changes you too. The best thing about an essay, especially if the writer has deeply crafted and mined and just put their whole heart and soul and artistry into it, is that it feels like a very true thing, and as you are reading, it's a truth for both the writer and the reader. The essay as a genre, I was completely unfamiliar with then. I just simply didn't know. His description of the essay as a piece of writing that is true, as a description of the essay, it still holds. It holds for me. I think it holds for other people. And the thing is when I was working on this book and when I was working on the essay, I wanted to know more about the essay. I started thinking about the Tibetan essay, and one of the things that I came across was the idea of the act of truth. That's something from Buddhist literature, *satyakriya*, *satyavajana*. So the act of truth as an idea I thought was just a really good framing for the essay in general.



James Shaheen: So what is an act of truth or satyakriya, and how does it create reality?

Tenzin Dickie: The act of truth is a Buddhist idea in Sanskrit called the satyakriya, which is basically a declaration of truth. It's almost like an oath or a statement of truth that enacts itself, that creates itself into being. It's almost like a speech act in the sense that what is being said, it's not just an expression, it's also action. Perhaps the best way to talk more about it is to talk about how Buddhist literature talks about acts of truth.

James Shaheen: That's what I was going to ask you. In the book you share two Jataka tales, or stories about the Buddha's earlier incarnations before he was the Buddha, that center on acts of truth. Can you walk us through these stories and what they've taught you?

Tenzin Dickie: Sure. So yes, we see instances of acts of truth in the Jataka tales. But there's actually also a specific act of truth that's very associated with the Buddha. So this is the Prince Siddhartha before he becomes the Buddha when he is leaving his palace to go off into the forest on his six-year enlightenment journey. So one of the first steps is he cuts his hair, and then he holds the locks and he throws them into the air and he says, "If I'm going to become the Buddha, may these just stay in the air and not fall." And indeed, the locks stay in the air, and they do not fall on the ground. The whole idea is this is an act of truth that anticipates and enacts the truth, which is that Siddhartha will become the Buddha.

In the Jataka tales, one of the stories is about a woman who goes to a teaching of the Buddha, and she becomes so entranced by the teachings that she's completely neglecting her child who's beside her. He goes off, and of course, this is India, there are plenty of snakes, one of them bites the child, and now the child has been poisoned and is in mortal danger. So now the distraught parents, the mother and the father, are trying to look for a way to save him. A monk says to them the way to save this child is through acts of truth. So the parents start one by one. The father goes, "By the truth that I've never seen a monk who was not a scoundrel, may this boy



live," and the power of his words, the truth of his words indeed have a medicinal effect. Power starts withdrawing from the boy's body. Now his legs are free of poison. And now it's the mother's turn, and she says, "By the truth that I have never loved my husband, may the child live," and the poison starts to withdraw from the boy's body. So now only the upper part of his body is still filled with poison. The remainder of his body is free. So now the monk starts, and he says, "By the truth that I've never believed a word of the dharma and thought it only to be nonsense, may this boy live." Lo and behold, the child is now completely free of poison. These are truths that cost something. They're expensive truths. It costs something to express them, to say them.

James Shaheen: You have to wonder how they'll go about their business now.

Tenzin Dickie: Exactly. So the point of the act of truth is that it works. The truth has this enormous power that no one can deny. So thinking of the essay as an act of truth has so much resonance for me because especially when it's a deeply personal essay, that can often cost the writer something, something to say, something to express that has so much power. The word has so much power. Writing has so much power.

James Shaheen: So you say this act of truth, in this case, in the form of an essay, changes both the writer and the reader. So how do essays transform their readers and their writers? And how were you changed by writing and reading the essays in the book?

Tenzin Dickie: When we were growing up in exile in India, if you wanted Tibetan essays, if you wanted Tibetan stories, we couldn't find them. Working on this book, it was a very special experience for me. Some of the essayists in this book I had read before, like one of the essayists, Jamyang Norbu, who's renowned for his essays, I deeply admire and love. He's the person that Tibetans think about when they think of an essayist. So his work I knew, but a lot of the other



writers in this book, I actually did not know of them as essayists. I had read other genres by them. I had read poetry, I had read short stories, but not really essays. So it felt very special being able to read their essays and of course to have the freedom and authority, which they were kind enough to give me, to edit and to work on these. And then the other part of it actually felt like I was privy to this hidden Tibetan history. Just to give you an example, the very first essay that the book begins with is "Nation of Two" by Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, which talks about her growing up in India and Nepal as a young girl. This is a time when Tibet in exile is still settling itself. And the thing is of that period, of that earlier, unsettled period—and this is all still recent history, by the way, of course—but of that period, there's really not much written, there's not much out there that you can read. So her essay, the essay by Tenzing Sonam about his early days in Kumbum, the essay by Pema Tsewang Shastri of that first experience of coming across, and there are other essays in here of crossing. There's Gedun Rabsal's, there's Dhondup Tashi Rekjong's of that first arrival in India. I mean, they're almost like secret histories.

There's so much that is unsaid and hidden about the Tibetan exile experience, so much that I think we are only now beginning to excavate and appreciate. And the thing is, it needs to be written now because all of that memory will be erased. So if we don't record them now, they will just be lost. It was kind of incredible for me to read these essays and to really learn what our parents went through, that older generation, the first settlers in exile, what they went through. It makes me appreciate all the more their enormous achievement in creating this vibrant Tibetan exile.

James Shaheen: One of the things that it did for me is allow me to witness this emergent group of Tibetan writers. And one of the things that struck me about Tsering Wangmo's story in the beginning is she goes to movies with her mother, and they're watching stories that are not their own. And in fact, her mother resists the ending of one love story saying, "Oh, that's not possible." So in this book, you have stories coming from Tibetans themselves rather than stories that belong to others. That was interesting to me.



Tenzin Dickie: That's very true, and I'm so glad you appreciated that. That was part of my motivation in working on this book, to have Tibetans telling their stories that other Tibetans can then read, because that is a precious experience when you can see yourself reflected in writing, in art, in entertainment, in poetry. Otherwise, that lack of reflection, it makes you feel like you're not there. It makes it hard to reconcile your own existence. So I think that's what literature gives us.

James Shaheen: Yeah, in other words, you provided the stories that you felt were lacking or the group of you did, which I found interesting. So you write that the Tibetan word for essay, *tsom*, can also mean to lie or to make up. Can you say more about this interplay between truth and falsehood? How do essays tell the truth by lying? Here, I think of a piece of art by an American artist named Peter Imago, where he says “A True Story Based on Lies.” But why don't you give us your take on that?

Tenzin Dickie: Sure. You know, people often think that all writers are liars to some extent because you're always shaping something. So the Tibetan word for the essay, *tsom*, means to create, to compose, to write, and it also means to make up and literally to lie. It's a great word for the essay because of its multiple meanings, multiple and opposite meanings. To create and to compose something always means to give a selective version of the truth because you do have to select what you are writing, what you are composing, what you are creating. I don't actually know how the etymology came about, but in general, there's really not a lot written about the Tibetan essay as such. I hope that there will be many more.

James Shaheen: In these fabrications, though, nonetheless, a truth, say in this case, the truth of Tibetans in exile, is conveyed.



Tenzin Dickie: Yes, and it's a truth that if people don't write their own stories, then we can never know that history. We can never know that experience. And I think especially for Tibetans, we're a people who so much has been said and written about us, and very often it is not by us. Especially for Tibet and especially for like modern Tibetan history and the Tibetan people now, the truth of Tibet, the truth of Tibetan life, it's so important and so crucial because of where we are in our history right now and because of all of these different narratives, one of the most damaging of which is the Chinese narrative. And there's multiple Chinese narratives, which conflict with each other, so it's all very interesting. One is that Tibet had always been a part of China. Another is that the Chinese came and peacefully liberated Tibet. But all of this makes Tibetan tellings of Tibetan stories all the more important because we have to say what happened to us. I feel like all Tibetan writing, to some extent, becomes witness statements.

James Shaheen: Right, coming away from reading them, each individually is interesting, but collectively, they convey a sense of dislocation and finding one's way in the world. It's interesting at one point, someone's at the border, and they're asked, "Are you Nepali?" and it raises a whole host of questions for that individual: "Who am I, after all?" It's really poignant and really conveys the sense of a mixed or lost identity that's being recovered. So I found that very interesting. In the book, you explore the particular lineage of the Tibetan essay, which you trace back to Dr. Tsewang Pemba. Can you tell us a bit about the history of modern Tibetan literature? How did he impact the trajectory of Tibetan writing?

Tenzin Dickie: I guess I'll speak very briefly about modern Tibetan literature first. It's something that we see emerging and growing within the last forty years, beginning with what we often point to as the birth of modern Tibetan literature with the father of modern Tibetan literature, Dhondup Gyal. So it's something that's quite recent, comparatively. But the history of Tibetan literature in general, of course, is over a thousand years old. Tibetans have been writing and composing and publishing for centuries, and the literature is vast, diverse, and very rich. But when we come to



modern Tibetan literature, it's something that now we're looking at the last forty years when Tibetans started writing poems and then stories and essays. Now, with essays, it's interesting, because when we think of the figures of modern Tibetan literature, people point to Gendun Chopel, who worked in the first half of the 20th century, and then Dhondup Gyal, who worked in the second half. People see the trajectory following from them. I think when people point to the early modern Tibetan essay, "The Narrow Footpath," by Dhondup Gyal, people think of it as like the first, and it was certainly so influential. Dhondup Gyal, by the way, didn't really write what we would call personal essays.

The thing is, it turns out that Tsewang Yishey Pemba was writing personal essays in the 40s and the 50s and 60s. He was publishing them in English, actually. He published them in England. And it's right at the juncture of history because this was after Tibet had been invaded. After Tsewang Pemba and his family had come into exile, he was writing in exile, and his essays were basically recording life in Tibet as it was, life for him and for his family. I understood that, for him, the Tibetan essay was an exercise in recovering the lost land. It was an exercise in recovery. They have to do with memory and the recovery of memory, and in exile that becomes one of the great enterprises, the recovery of memory, because what else do you have? So much has been lost. The whole project then becomes recovering, rebuilding, renewing. We see the destruction of what actually happened to Tibet and with Tibetans because even though he was writing in the 50s and 60s, Tibetans did not know about them. For Tibetans, I think we became aware of Dr. Pemba as a writer posthumously after his work began to be published much more recently in the last five to ten years. We have these genealogies that failed to regenerate, failed to exist because of this break in time that the Chinese imposed on us and its attendant consequences.

James Shaheen: So you talked about recovering the land. Of course, the geopolitical reality right now is that that's not the case. But is this connecting again to one's roots in the absence of



the physical reality of that land, or does it contain within it the hope of regaining that land physically as well?

Tenzin Dickie: I think if you were to ask any Tibetans, we would say, of course, geopolitically, things are not promising. China being the power that it is, and Tibet being this tiny nation, things look pretty bad and sixty years have gone by. But at the same time, I think for Tibetans, we are very aware that for us, this is an existential issue. It is not an issue that we can ever give up on.

James Shaheen: Yeah, I don't dismiss the possibility. After all, the Cold War ended, and I never thought that would end. I grew up in it. I always hold out the possibility that geopolitical realities shift and change very dramatically. But today, it feels that this literature is deepening the connection to that land in its absence. Is that fair to say?

Tenzin Dickie: That's absolutely correct. There is so much Chinese presence inside Tibet that I think for all of us, we're really living in some kind of exile, both Tibetans outside and Tibetans inside.

James Shaheen: That point is made in one of the stories, living in exile inside Tibet. I wondered if we could go back a little bit further. You also explore the history of Tibetan writing, and you say that one of the earliest pieces of writing from Tibet was a coded message written by a young princess. Can you tell us about Princess Semarkar's poem and the message it contained? Why is it significant that one of the earliest pieces of Tibetan writing was written in code, and here we come back to the modern reality of Tibet?

Tenzin Dickie: Princess Semarkar is a 7th-century Tibetan princess, the sister of the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, who is the great reunifier, the king who created the Tibet that Tibetans think of when we think of Tibet. He is the King Arthur figure of Tibetan history. And the story



that we all know about Songtsen Gampo is his deeds, his armies, and his creation of Tibet as we know it. But people don't really know about Semarkar, who was his sister who he married to one of the neighboring kingdoms, which he later conquered. That nation became part of Tibet. The story about Semarkar is when she was sent off to Shangshung, she was sent as the king of Shangshung's bride, but she was also sent as a spy for Songtsen. She kept in touch with something through coded messages, and one of these messages in a song in a verse tells Songtsen Gampo basically that her husband cannot be trusted, that he's refusing to have marital relations with her because he does not want an heir, a Pugyel heir to his Shangshung kingdom. Semarkar passes on this information, this coded message, to her brother, who then sends his army to conquer Shangshung and bring it into this unified Tibetan empire, which then becomes the hallowed Tibet and the Tibet nation that Tibetans think of as their heyday.

The thing that's so interesting to me about Semarkar's song is that it is a precipitating incident that triggers this whole chain of events leading to the consolidation of the Tibetan empire. It's an enormous event in Tibetan history, and growing up, I had no idea about it. Songtsen was so important. Semarkar, I never heard anything about her. So it's just so cool to know about it, to learn about it, and to know that a woman wrote this communique that was so important and also the idea of this coded message and code being so important not just to Tibetan literary history but also to national and political history. Code is still so important to the Tibetan people, especially for Tibetans living inside Tibet, where there's so much suppression, oppression, and censorship. A lot of Tibetan writing now, especially inside Tibet, people write poetry, people write short stories. A lot of them are magical realist. Why? All of these have to do with censorship and with political realities because for Tibetan writers, the line between print and prison is very fine. So all of this then means that code becomes very important to the Tibetan writer. It's very important in their arsenal of tools because they're often writing with an eye to the censor and trying to see, "What can I get across and still stay on this side of prison?"



James Shaheen: Yeah, that code that Semarkar used has resonance today. So in contrast to Tibetans writing in Tibet, you write that Tibetan writing from the outside can seem like caricature, like trying to shout and reveal the oppression they face. How do Tibetan writers navigate these conflicting demands to perform and conceal?

Tenzin Dickie: Truthfully, that is something that any Tibetan writer, I think, whether inside or outside, faces, how to navigate this line. I keep thinking of this thing that one of the writers, Bhuchung D. Sonam, said. He is a bilingual writer who writes in Tibetan and also in English. What he said was that when he writes in Tibetan, he can write about stupid things. He can write about jokes. He can write about love. He can write about whatever. But somehow when he writes in English, he ends up writing about Tibet, he ends up writing about the issue. I think all of us, especially those of us who grew up in exile, grew up with a sense of huge responsibility for our people, for our community, for the Tibetan nation. There is always that struggle of what am I writing, and who am I writing for? That's kind of what I meant when I said to some extent all Tibetan writing is a witness statement. But the other part of it is we slowly learn that when we are writing something that we really care about, perhaps it's even something that you're confused about and you're trying to get some clarity or something you care about that you want to voice, whatever it is, if it's something that you really care about, chances are that the reader will also care about it.

James Shaheen: You write that to write as Tibetans is to continually recreate the Tibetan nation. What does this look like?

Tenzin Dickie: Well, one of the things, especially for Tibetans outside, is that we don't have access to Tibet land. So what we have access to, what we can reach, what we can read, what we can play with are the other cultural contents of our lives. So for me, in this time and place,

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Tibetan literature serves as a placeholder almost for the Tibetan nation. I can't live in Tibet, but I can live inside Tibet literature.

James Shaheen: I'm curious about how all of this shows up in your own life. Can you tell us more about your own path to becoming a writer and translator?

Tenzin Dickie: I've always been a reader. I started out reading comics actually. It was actually at my aunt's house in Nepal in Kathmandu. I was on vacation. My family lived in India. This was a winter that I spent in Kathmandu, and all around me, in her home, all of my cousins spoke Nepali to each other, and obviously outside, it's a Nepali-speaking community. So there was a lot of language that I didn't understand. So I would just sort of sit off in a corner with stacks of cartoons, *Archie Comics*, *Tinkle*. I would just sit and look at those comics because I couldn't read. I couldn't read them yet. I spent two winters in Nepal, and then maybe by the second winter, I was beginning to learn how to read them. That's how my reading journey really began, I think. I mean, I loved stories, and I became addicted to them. And it was much later, probably in college, that I even really began writing the first thing that I wrote, which was a poem. What inspired me to that piece of writing was a poem by Tenzin Tsundue. He wrote about the rain in Dharamsala. I read that poem. I knew Tsundue, I knew the rain in Dharamsala, and that poem, I think, almost activated something in me, and I went and wrote a poem.

As Buddhists, we go to teachings and we receive empowerments. We receive them, and then the idea is that we're strengthened, we're empowered in some way. For me, in that moment, reading "When It Rains in Dharamsala," it was like receiving an empowerment.

James Shaheen: It rang true to you, and it acted upon you, back to what we were discussing before. You refer to Tibetan literature as written in the bardo, a literature of interrupted continuities, much like modern Tibetan people. So what does it mean to write in the bardo?



Tenzin Dickie: The bardo is this intermediate stage, the stage between life and death, or really, it's the stage after death and your next life. So it's that stage of roaming in between destinations, of homelessness, of wandering, but also of possibility. So for Tibetan literature, right now, we're literally in political bardo, and not just political bardo actually. We're in territorial bardo. That's what exile is. It's a bardo. So Tibetan writing in exile, in the bardo, it's at a crossroads. But like I said, it is a place of loss. It is a place of pain. But it is also a place of possibility. It is where change can happen. In terms of loss and missed connections and what I mentioned earlier about Tsewang Yishey Pemba, who potentially is the father of the modern Tibetan essay, but actually, who did he influence? Tibetans were not able to read him. And that was all a consequence of Tibetan literature literally being in the bardo, of Tibetans being in this bardo.

But at the same time, we look at Tibetan literature, we look at Tibet today in exile, Tibet in India, and one of the most amazing Tibetan developments has been the development of democracy, the democratization of Tibetan society. If we think of technologies that Tibetans have taken from India, like Buddhism is one technology, and it's something that's meant a lot to us and something that we took and then made our own. But actually, the idea of democracy, the practice of democracy, which we also took from India, is another immense technology that's an achievement of Tibetan bardo, an achievement of Tibetan exile that we hope will sustain our future.

James Shaheen: You know, you describe the genre of traditional Tibetan literature known as terma literature, which are Buddhist texts buried millennia ago and revealed centuries later when conditions were more ripe for the dharma to flourish. So while terma literature is concealed in time, you say that contemporary Tibetan literature is concealed in place. Can you say more about the terma literature tradition and how it helps you understand Tibetan literature today? You talked about Dr. Pemba, his works remained unknown and later became accessible in a sort of terma-like twist, but also it's different when you talk about something that's concealed in place.

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Tenzin Dickie: So terma literature is literature that we Tibetans think of as literature that figures like Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal, his consort and the Tibetan writer and great heroine figure. So it's texts that figures like them and others composed and then buried as gifts and presents for a future time. And the idea was these texts were going to be revealed and accessed at a later time when the timing was better, when the people were ready, when the texts could do the work that they were supposed to do. And so over the centuries, Tibetan treasure finders who look for texts recovered these treasures and made them available and accessible to the Tibetan people. So this idea of texts that were ahead of their time, of treasures that were ahead of their time, of ideas that were ahead of their time and then later accessed and disseminated. The sense of terma literature, especially for Tibetans, it's something that we have always resigned ourselves to but also something that we've always prepared for. With the disruptions that happened in 20th-century Tibet, a lot of what was lost then is now slowly being regained. Even if you think of modern Tibetan literature, like Gendun Chopel, who wrote his masterpiece, *The Tales of the Cosmopolitan Traveler*, that was essentially lost, suppressed, disappeared for all practical purposes, and then sort of later resurfaced in the '90s, and Tibetan readers and writers were able to read and to learn and to become empowered by that text.

James Shaheen: I'm sorry, it was Thubten Jinpa and Don Lopez who translated that, is that right?

Tenzin Dickie: Yes, that's right, it was Thubten Jinpa and Don Lopez who translated it in 2014, but for the Tibetan public, it was recovered and published in the 1990s. Before that, it was as if it did not exist. It was like a hidden text.

James Shaheen: It's like a contemporary terma, so to speak.



Tenzin Dickie: It's exactly a contemporary terma, and the same thing with Tsewang Pemba's works.

James Shaheen: So you explore the complexity of exile through the lens of what psychologists term ambiguous loss, or a loss where it is extremely difficult to find closure. So how has this shaped Tibetan writing, and what role does writing play in trying to create a sense of closure?

Tenzin Dickie: So you know how things that are born on the internet are called born digital? Tibetan writing born after 1959, I feel like it's almost born exile. There's a lot of pressure. There's also a lot of possibility. So whether for Tibetan writers writing inside or writing outside, Tibetan writing after 1959, Tibetan writers became bilingual to some extent simply because of their political situation. So I do think there's a lot more influence of other literatures on Tibetan writing after that period, on modern Tibetan literature, but at the same time, especially, I think, for exiled Tibetan writers, there's an enforced distance from older Tibetan literature simply because of the fact that we're born in exile. We grew up in these Tibetan refugee communities that were in the process of settling down, and the first order of business was to worry about survival. Literature and art and all of that came later, so to some extent, those of us born in exile grew up orphaned from our literature. A lot of writers worry about the anxiety of influence. They worry about how to escape influence. I wonder, perhaps, especially for Tibetan writers in exile, in some cases, it's not the anxiety of influence. It's almost like the anxiety of lack of influence. It's like the anxiety of distance in some ways that we are trying to breach and to reconnect. But in a sense, exile defines not just our lives but also our literature. It's something that we try to bridge.

James Shaheen: Could you help me just to clarify, what exactly do you mean by the anxiety of influence?



Tenzin Dickie: Well, say, Jamyang Norbu, who is the modern Tibetan essayist, so the writers who deeply influenced him, who he read growing up, who he wanted to emulate, Kipling, Hemingway, Orwell. Jamyang Norbu didn't read Tsewang Yishey Pemba, and for us, for Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, for me, for Bhuchung D. Sonam, for Tenzin Tsundue, we didn't read Tsewang Yishey Pemba. We read Jamyang Norbu, but there are Tibetan writers that we're not able to access because of what exile did to Tibetan literature in some way.

James Shaheen: Yeah, sort of a discontinuous break from the culture.

Tenzin Dickie: You know, even as writers, exile really permeates what we read, and it permeates what we write, even writers from inside, like Woese, who is writing about this figure, a gar dancer, the Dalai Lama's gar dancer who learned how to dance gar, and then for the next twenty years, he was in labor camps, and basically all the dance was beaten out of him. It was basically violently stripped away and then destroyed, and he couldn't even think about getting back to this dance, and not just dance. For him, it had been a way of life, and he couldn't even conceive of getting back to this because of the trauma that he had suffered and the trauma that was associated with it. It took actually coming to India, visiting the Dalai Lama, and then essentially getting a blessing from him and getting empowered from him and almost commanded to bring back this dance that then Gapon La, the gar dancer, was able to remember and renew all of this dance and not only to then dance it himself but to teach it and to revive this whole continuity of gar dance, which just goes to show that there's many different forms of exile that Tibetans suffer from. I think we're all trying to find some accommodation and to find a way to live in samsara in exile and make art at the same time. That's our act of truth.

James Shaheen: That's a remarkable story, and I wonder if the writing in this book is a similar effort to connect again, to establish the reality of Tibet again.

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Tenzin Dickie: I would say yes. Part of the reason for this book is as simple as saying we're here, we're still here, and that we will be here. That's my hope, and I trust when people read the book and people feel and understand what Tibetans go through, Tibetans from all walks of life, what they go through as they live their daily life with exile as their daily habitat. I hope that it's an assertion of our identity. It's an assertion of our existence, and it's an assertion that we will continue.

James Shaheen: Tenzin Dickie, it's been a pleasure. For our listeners, please be sure to pick up a copy of *The Penguin Book of Modern Tibetan Essays*. It's truly a remarkable book available now. Thanks again, Dickie.

Tenzin Dickie: Thank you so much.

James Shaheen: You've been listening to *Tricycle Talks* with Tenzin Dickie. We'd love to hear your thoughts about the podcast, so write us at feedback@tricycle.org to let us know what you think. If you enjoyed this episode, please consider leaving a review on Apple Podcasts. To keep up with the show, you can follow *Tricycle Talks* wherever you listen to podcasts. *Tricycle Talks* is produced by As It Should Be Productions and Sarah Fleming. I'm James Shaheen, editor-in-chief of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. Thanks for listening!