

The Roof without a Top! Hi'story' of an Expelled

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Abstract

Literature of any language projects the reality of life in most of the cases. But, sometimes it ends up in getting banned in a few countries by the haters of the works of art. '*Stick Out Your Tongue*' by Ma Jian is such a collection of short stories being banned by the Chinese government due to open statement on Tibet and its culture. Each story is special in its own way, which can be understood while reading. Ma Jian – the writer – travelled to Tibet with a great expectation, but returned with a bagful of truths existed in the roof of the world. This research paper gives a thorough picture of the above mentioned statements with references.

Keywords: haters, Stick out your Tongue, Ma Jian, open statement, culture, roof of the world, Tibet.

Stick Out Your Tongue

*“Death and life have their determined
Appointments; riches and honors depend upon heaven.”*
- Confucius

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a distinguished country when it comes to food culture, language and the geographical order. It has been connected with India from the vedic days through silk route currently known as Nathula Pass. The Chinese literature is not familiar to majority of the countries except few ancient philosophers Confucius, Li Bai and the most famous military strategists Sun Tzu and Sun Bin. Despite a considerable amount of modern writers still Chinese Literature revolves around the above personalities. The writers are the thinkers, redeemers and revolutionists, responsible for many social and political changes around the world, who are crushed and squashed by the hegemonic rulers every decade.

Ma Jian – an expelled modern writer of China – assaulted by the Communist government for his magnum opus '*Stick Out Your Tongue*' (A collection of five short stories) published in Chinese language in the year 1987. The immediate reaction of the supreme power led to the lifetime banishment of the author and his work from the dragon country which never stops his Odyssey in the other soil. All these efforts are an insect's buzz that doesn't shake a forest of rich flora and fauna. However the writers handle literary devices to add aroma, truth is rooted to the extent and compromising in the work of art is not feasible. Believing to delve the ecstasy in the Buddhism and in life Ma Jian stepped into Tibet – an ancient Buddhist country with classical practices – where the horrendous scenes presented in front of his eyes resulted as a literary text of banishment.

Calling '*Stick Out Your Tongue*' merely a sex book the Chinese administration banned completely to print to publish and to circulate, that gave a backfired effect – the people and the students started reading it secretly! Though the book has a few sexual and nude narrations, keeping them aside a deep picture of Tibet is portrayed as originally observed. Unlike the other countries, the largest plateau on the Himalayan ranges follows a different culture, heritage and religious practices that Ma Jian, in each story records. The first story '*The Woman and The Blue Sky*' refers to the Sky Burial – an ancient way of disposing the deceased. The deep analysis of the story enlarges the details of Tibetan geographical structure and the customs of Sky Burial. Born in Nathula, Myima married two brothers of Nangartse before attaining eighteen, was dead at the time of delivery due to hemorrhage. After keeping the dead

body three days at home her husbands carried the cadaver and the ritual items to the temple of Sky Burial along with a priest.

Some religious ceremonies filled the surrounding and at last the corpse was cut into pieces and thrown on the sky for the falcons, vultures and crows. There is a least possibility to bury the dead bodies in a country with rocky hills. Cremation also a herculean task, as the shortage of firewood is existed. The final choice of the people is only Sky Burial in major parts of Tibet and a few places in China and Mongolia. The readers may get shocked and surprised by reading this kind of records in a literary text. Ma Jian added additional information of Tibetan customs for his readers in a single line.

'She married two brothers,.....' (Page 9)

A woman is permitted to marry several husbands in Tibet. Most probably they will be brothers. This system is called as "Fraternal Polyandry". But the Tibetan Autonomous Region government doesn't allow polyandric marriages at the present situation under family law due to the outbreaks between the husbands. The another story titled *'The Final Initiation'* reflects how a lama is being searched and indentified spending years and years after the death of the previous lama. He is a religious leader for the Tibetan Buddhists, considered as living Buddha, and has the full rights to command over the people on religious matters.

Sangsang Tashi was of only nine days old when she was spotted by the senior monks at her house as the incarnation of the previous lama Tenzin Wangdu. Taking her to Denba monastery she was taught the five major treatises and started trained on Tibetan medicine at Manrinba College located at an hour's walk of distance from the monastery. According to the rule, Sangsang Tashi should to take part in the Ceremony of Empowerment to become the supreme power of Tibet. To send off her womanish quality and to convert her into a pure lama on the day of the ceremony she was raped brutally in front of hundreds of monks as a ritual by the brother of Tenzin Wangdu from whom Tashi got her preliminary vase initiation.

After the Ceremony of Empowerment to manifest her Buddha nature she was to be meditated in the frozen river for three days and protect the mortal body with an invocation by arising the fire in her. In spite of living, she was dead the second day, unsuccessful in this attempt. The women in any religion are shown as sacred and respectful souls. But, as a fact it is an odious feel for the people to accept them as religious leaders, thus taking off their virginity, the society the society satisfies and doesn't care about the personal feelings and wishes of the female. In the selection process of a lama even the male also cannot escape from the clutch of the monks, while possessing the expected qualities. The final lines of the story details about a cup made of Sungsung Tashi's skull that once used at Denpa monastery for the Empowerment ceremonies.

The skull cup is a bowl used by both Hindu Tantra and Buddhist Vajrayana Tantra to implement some of the powerful rituals. Deep reading of this enables the readers to acquire one more detail that Sungsung Tashi was morally associated with her classmate Gelek Baljore from her entry at the college to till the Empowerment Ceremony.

To scare the people and freeze their blood the author inserted another expression of Tibetan's food culture. Yaks are widely found on the Himalayan ranges serve as main source of income. The major part of one's dining table is occupied with the domestic vegetables, spinaches and the meat of animals grown up around him. The globalization might have opened the gate for other soil taste. Yet consuming cultural cuisine is still an identity as well as inevitable for the healthy life. Cheese pieces of Yak, Tea mixed with butter are some phrases used in the book.

'The Eight-Fanged Roach' gives a glimpse of an old man searching remedy for his adulthood sins committed. To have some best photographs, while roaming on the highest Changthang Plateau situated far western border of Tibet, the narrator accidentally met the old man in a small tent at a moth hour completely ravenous. Understanding his condition the elder man went out, dragged a Yak to the

tent and pierced its neck with his knife to get a hatful of blood, which was later tasted by them.

“He yanked the yak’s head down, flicked a knife from his belt and thrust the blade into its neck. Then he whipped off his hat to collect the blood that poured from the wound.” (Page 41)

The Buddhists in the remote area of Nepal – Mustang – celebrate Yak Blood Drinking festival every six months once (April-May, July-August) by slaughtering thousands of Yaks brought from all the directions of the nation. This festival might have been inherited from the Tibetans as this part was once belonging to theirs. The Himalayan ranges have herbs in abundance, which cannot be digested by the human beings directly. At the same time Yaks eat them passionately as those herbs are their comestibles. To get the medicinal benefits of such herbs, the warm blood of bovines is being drunk by the natives on festivals and sometimes normal days. Slaying them on common days is rare for getting the blood. Only the veins are cut/pierced, taken blood and then left freely. This is a regular practice being followed by the Maasai people of African continent.

“The Yak kicked and brayed. At last, the old man released his grip, pushed the animal away and watched it stagger back into the darkness.” (Page 41)

Tibet had its own culture expected by the writer before it was occupied by the Chinese troops. The invasion of the PRC resulted in many cultural, religious and geographical changes. Hence, except its old memories and antiques Tibet doesn’t hold any ideologies by its own at the present circumstance. ‘*Stick Out Your Tongue*’ projects the real condition of present Tibet, he travelled and experienced. From Ma’s own words,

“The poverty I saw was worse than anything I’d witnessed in China. My idyll of a simple life lived close to nature was broken when I realized how dehumanizing extreme hardship can be.” (Page 86).

To conclude this research piece, the afterword of Ma Jian has to be scrutinized carefully. The great expectation he had on the ‘Roof of the World’ was extirpated the moment he got into. The country with rich culture, the great religious practices, the people of extreme moral values, the monks of enormous wisdom – All these expressions are utopian. People are still obsessed with outdated religious practices and some superstitious faiths. Every book of literature is a treasure with real portrayal in a hidden way. Merely refusing a work of art doesn’t make any sense.

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