## Inside China's 'political re-education' centres, Tibetans are subjected to sexual abuse and torture

A first hand account written by a former detainee reveals the horror that goes on in the name of 'legal education' inside the secretive walls of 're-education centres' established by Chinese authorities in Tibet.

Written by a monk whose identity is kept anonymous for security reasons, the account validates anecdotal evidence collected by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) in recent years on the existence of such extralegal centres used to educate 'politically unreliable' Tibetans. For instance, Tibetan writer and teacher Gangkye Drupa Kyab was forced to attend <u>15-day</u> re-education classes soon after his release from prison in 2016. Likewise another former political prisoner was <u>re-educated</u> for more than two months for defying an official order that forced monks and nuns to leave monastic institutions located in Tibetan areas outside Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

The anonymous monk spent about four months in a re-education centre in Sog (Ch: Suo) County, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR. In his account, he refers to these centres as "transformation through education" (Chinese: jiaoyu zhuanhua/教育转 化; Tibetan: Lobso Yosang Teyne/???) training centres. All inmates at the re-education centre where he was imprisoned at the time were monks and nuns except for "two or three laypersons". He was among many other monks and nuns forced to return home and abandon studies in monastic institutions located outside TAR in the past several years. The monk was pursuing his education in Tsongon (Ch: Qinghai) Province when he was ordered to return to Sog County or face severe consequences:

ସ୍ଥିଷଷ୍ୟ ભુषाषाणु सम्याभयमा सम्म भाष्य स्राधिष्ठ ष्ठा स्राधिष्ठ व्याप्त स्राधेष्ठ व्याप्त स्राधे स्राधेष्ठ व्याप्त स्राधे स्

Without breaking any law and exercising legitimate rights, I had gone to pursue education in Tsongon [Qinghai]. But I was forcibly taken back to my hometown on 14 August 2017. I was told that those who did not return would have their family including their parents and siblings arrested. Children from such families will be denied school admission. Families will also be barred from harvesting caterpillar fungus. I had no choice but to return in the face of such repressive directives.

On his arrival in Sog County, an officer from the State Security Bureau (SSB) took the monk to a newly built "transformation through education" training centre. The monk was allowed to take nothing except his clothes, towel, toothpaste and toothbrush:

<u>અત્ર તર્દ્વ પત્ર ત્વ પત્ર સારે તે સાર બાકો સાજી સાંધુ પ્રાથ તે સાથ</u> ฃาริรา ฉซีสายราสาริราสิราสูรา দ'দদ'ৰ্বিমাদনৈ আৰ্যা প্ৰিয এমিনরেন্দ্র ব্যারমারিন দ্রন

The State Security Bureau officer said to me, "The place you are going to is a school, not a prison." Then he placed his hand on my head and added, "From now onwards, you are my student and I will confer you the sacred empowerment."

The monk soon realized that the re-education center was a prison and all he received in the form of education were attempts to neutralize the faith and loyalty for Tibetan spiritual leader His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

क्त देग भा भरे भू रा दे कुभाषय के द में दिया ये के के जा के के का क्रम 

After breakfast, we had to attend classes. Lessons focus more on chastising us and denouncing Rinpoche [His Holiness the Dalai Lama]. Laws and regulations are taught superficially and there was little in legal education that could actually benefit us. Sometimes the officers looked like a bunch of petulant kids. Witnessing a powerful nation [China] engage in secret denunciation campaigns against an elderly monk [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] living in distant land makes one cry and laugh at the same time.

Classes were conducted in Chinese language and involved self-criticism sessions in the style of 'struggle sessions' employed by Chinese during the early years of occupation in 1950s and also during the Cultural Revolution:

Sometimes during evening classes, we were subjected to 'struggle sessions' reminiscent of 1959 and sometimes we had to participate in military drills. I always felt compassion for the older monks and nuns. In addition to not understanding Chinese language, they were physically weak due to which they always became the target of beatings at the hands of the detention officers.

Sexual abuse is apparently rampant in the re-education centres and is particularly targeted against the nuns:

Many nuns would lose consciousness during the [military] drills. Sometimes officers would take unconscious nuns inside where I saw them fondle the nuns' breasts and grope all over their body.

...

During one of the drills, all nuns collapsed, losing consciousness. In no time, the officers rushed forward to take the nuns inside. Who knows what else they did to the nuns? But I have heard about some officers lying on the beds pressing unconscious nuns underneath.

All inmates had to wear military-style uniforms for which they have to pay from their own pockets. A set of the uniform cost the monk RMB 150. The monk's account also confirms the authenticity of a 2016 video of Tibetan nuns in military-style uniform singing a popular 'red song' of China's official Tibetan soprano Tseten Dolma:

As I was entering the centre, I saw some women wearing military-style uniforms walking out. As soon as they saw the SSB officer accompanying me, they got close to each other and sat down. The SSB officer said something to them and the women shouted, "yes sir, yes sir." I found that strange.

## हेबाह्य क्षु हुबान्वया कवा क्यें जिन्मते. सुन खेन ने न्या कंट खामर्द्य वा सेन लहु य

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Later I found out that the women in military-style uniform were nuns.

Tseten Dolma's 'red song' sung by the nuns in the aforementioned video is an important component of the 're-education' course at the detention centre:

 $\tilde{X}$ 'અત્ર'ર્द्त्व'च'द्द्द्द' gભ'ष्ट' g'અष्वद'  $\hat{\zeta}$ '  $\tilde{w}$ 'द  $\hat{c}$ '  $\hat{a}$ '  $\zeta$ '  $\epsilon$ '  $\tilde{c}$ 

When the man was gone, the [prison cell] guard asked me my name and the place where I had been and noted down the information. Then he asked, "Do you have faith in the Party?" I took sometime to respond but saw through the corner of my eyes other inmates giving me warning signs. So I said, "yes." I was then ordered to learn by heart the Chinese national anthem, a Chinese song and Tseten Dolma's "The Sun and the Moon are Daughters of the Same Mother". The guard threatened that he wouldn't let me off easily if I didn't learn them within the next three days.

Inmates were also subjected to torture and other cruel and degrading treatment including collective punishment, food deprivation, sleep deprivation, prolonged wall standing and beatings:

There were some who were singled out and beaten up so severely with electric batons that they would lose consciousness. The officers would revive the unconscious inmates by splashing water on their faces. This cycle of losing and reviving consciousness would go on for sometime at the end of which the officers would use a black plastic pipe to beat and pour water on all parts of the

body and then use electric batons to beat some more. Soon black and blue marks would appear on the victim's body and render him or her half-dead. It's strange that even after such treatment, no one's bones broke. However, after my release, I heard about some monks who sustained broken hands due to beatings.

[...]

If an inmate exhibited any signs of objection including such minor things as changed facial expression, all inmates will not be allowed to eat. Therefore there was no choice but to remain silent. Even if everyone was burning up inside, they would not dare make it visible. Afterwards, many inmates went on to develop serious heart diseases that could not be cured. For breakfast, we were given *tsampa* [roasted barley flour] and black tea. The *tsampa* was terribly stale and filled with dust, worms and stones. But it was all we had for food.

[...]

Eating that *tsampa* would upset our stomach forcing us to run repeatedly to the toilet. There was restriction on the number of times the inmates could visit the toilet. We were scared of eating that *tsampa* but if we hadn't, we would have starved to death. There were times when we had scavenged for food among the leftover meals discarded by the officers in trash cans. Soon we became used to the *tsampa*.

[...]

बार्ळव र्वे दे झानमारे शुर्घेटमारे रे रे रा झानमारे गुलेमारे। <del>ୠ</del>ୣୣ୷ଵ୶ୖଽ<sup>୵</sup>ୖ୴ଽ୕୶ୖଽୠୄ୲ୄଽ୲ୄୄୄୢୄୢୄୢୄୄୄ୶ୄୢୄ୷ୄୠ୶୴ୄୠୄ୶୴୲ୡ୶ नरुग'दर्भ'यळंद'गट'ॡ'ळॅंद'रे'गढ़ेश'कुग'दह् ग'ठेट'। य्रॅाग'गेश गुराद्दगांगीव ५८५गाम्म अवर अट के पाक्षया गहिंगवा गीव भा गलव दगां के तसुर भर जुवा ग्री तर्ग

Sometimes loud sirens would wake us up once or twice at night. If anyone slept or woke up late after the sirens had gone off, that person would invariably be subjected to beatings. The siren was a sign to carry our beds on our heads and run for an hour and sometimes two hours. Eventually, many inmates started going to bed with their clothes on and only took off their shoes.

[...]

वरात्राम्भून वया ग्रुन भर मार्ग् भाषन के खारे में गात्र भर कर त्मृत्यःर्वत्रः खेन् राम्यः क्रिंन् यहुन् कुत्तः चन् त्यम् खेम्यः रुपः ज्रुगः गेशः हृदः हेगः गर्ने दः योवः ५ द्वा दः केंवेः गर्छगः छुदः र्जय त्मायावन्वमावी मिं केंवे फ ठट दमाद वसा दहूंवा दट पठका हे बरुव-दु-रक्टेट-घेट-वर्ष-हूट-चेव-पटुच रिक्टेंवे-वयःक्रुव-बे-हूट-ฐารๆ สาซิ สารุ ราชสาย ราชๆ ที่สานัรายา เรา

Soon after having lunch, we had to stand in the sun outside our cell doors. If someone made any movement, detention officers would beat that person. If one of us moved, it would bring big grins on the officers' faces as they swooped down to beat us. It seemed like they were waiting for a chance to beat someone up.

[...]

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Later I was made to stand in front of a wall for about three hours. From the corner of my eyes, I saw on my right and left, and along the corridor of the first floor, some men and women wearing military uniform pacing the floor and looking at me from time to time. I was on the second floor and it was a two-story building.

The restrictions on the 're-education' inmates did not end even after their release. Back in their hometowns, all former inmates had to report to their respective local police stations. In some places, one had to report everyday and in other places, once every three days or once a week:

When we go to report ourselves, the police officers would make us clean up their workplace, do their laundry and wash their dirty dishes. We are always warned not to resume wearing monastic robes, not to join monasteries and not to travel outside. We are not allowed to travel outside beyond our county town. The SSB seized our national ID cards and has not returned it yet.

We have lived in this condition for almost one year and three months now unable to exercise our right to freedom of movement, education and employment. All we have got after listening to their instructions [behaving well] are not benefits but more restrictions and control. It is hard to even breathe living and suffering this kind of racial discrimination.

In his critique of the current Chinese policy in Tibet, the monk calls on the Chinese authorities to engage in dialogue as a means to resolve the issue of Tibet based on the Middle Way Approach of His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

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The policy of racial discrimination will only increase the rift between Tibetan and Chinese people. [Chinese authorities] want to achieve 'ethnic harmony' and 'unity', it must change its policy of shameless barbarity and demonstrate faith in the Middle Way Approach shown by His Holiness the Dalai Lama by initiating dialogue to [resolve the issue of Tibet]. If the repressive policy of destroying Tibetan religion, culture, and language is not ended, the crisis will only deteriorate. Moreover, [the policy] of forcibly appropriating nomadic lands, encouraging a large number of Chinese to migrate to Tibet, and destroying the environment through mining will increase the pain [discontent and resentment] among Tibetans.

Tibetans are human beings and are entitled to the right to freedom of religion and belief, freedom of movement, freedom of livelihood, freedom of commerce, freedom of education, etc. Only economic development cannot fool the Tibetans. There is not an iota of doubt that depriving our freedom of education is a policy that is repressive, barbaric and abominable.

We were arrested and detained without committing any crime. No legal proceeding according to the law of the land was observed [when they detained us]. If we had indeed committed any illegality, tell us what law or legal provision did we break!

Since 2012, Chinese authorities have forced monks and nuns studying in Tibetans areas of Amdo (located in present day Qinghai) and Kham (Sichuan) to return to their respective hometowns in TAR as part of the intensified policy to control and manage Tibetan monastic population. The most recent cases occurred during the partial demolition of the Larung Gar Buddhist Institute when monks and nuns from Nagchu Prefecture were expelled and forced to return to TAR. Upon

their return, the monks and nuns were held in 're-education' centres for weeks and months without any access to due legal process. These illegal re-education centres are another form of the dreaded 'Re-education Through Labour' system (Ch: liajiao) that Chinese authorities claimed to have abolished in 2013.

TCHRD calls on Chinese authorities to guarantee the human rights of all Tibetans including the monks and nuns illegally subjected to re-education and return their national ID cards immediately without any conditions. As provided for in Chinese Constitution and international human rights law, Tibetans have the right to learn and practice their religion, culture and language at a place or institution of their choice. If Chinese authorities are serious about establishing rule of law, then it must stop using law to protect its own interests and deprive the public of their legitimate rights and freedoms. More importantly, Chinese authorities must cease implementing repressive policies and address the underlying causes of discontent and protests in Tibet.

Note: TCHRD is unable to make available the full content of the monk's account due to security reasons. Therefore only select excerpts are published in this post.