

## **My Introspection on Watching the Movie *Balloon***

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(Translated from Tibetan by Dorji Tsering)

**Abstract:** In this review of Pema Tseden's film *Balloon*, Lhashem Gyal reflects on the relationship between the story 'Balloon' and the film, marveling at Pema Tseden's expertise of having the film reach where the story has reached and vice versa. Lhashem Gyal also asserts that the characters in the film are a true reflection of the life of present-day Tibetans.

**Keywords:** fiction, film, adaptation, representation, characters

Pema Tseden has proved time and again that by bringing the profession of a movie director and a story writer together, the result is mutually supportive, and it is a capacity-building process. After watching the movie *Balloon* directed by him, I had to ponder upon two things.

Firstly, the relationship between the story and movie. I had read his story 'Balloon' long back and had heard later that he was adapting it into a movie. Since then, I had been relentlessly waiting. Just a few days ago, I finally watched the movie. A thought struck me that the ability to make a movie reach where the story has reached and to

make a story reach where the movie has reached is a profession that demands special prowess. This movie of Pema, like his earlier movies, is marked by an air of serenity and tranquility. The images and scenes that come to life on the screen are like simple words from the pages of his story coming to life and soaring. The movie is a faithful adaptation of the story and he attempted his best to make the movie reach where the story has reached. Generally, all forms of narratives have common features, but their representational methods are different, and as a consequence, film and fiction have their own specific representational strength. The story ‘Balloon’ and the movie *Balloon* are like two parts blended perfectly into one due to Pema’s artistic competence. Thus, everything has turned into a naturally elegant artistic composition.

A story-like movie is full of thick features of an art movie, I suppose. Unlike those commercial movies that are commercial success in the movie market nowadays, there are no guarantees that everybody would accept and appreciate such movies on a grand scale. Maybe, it is due to my interest in writing stories! Somehow, I like watching those art films. Especially, their calmness that resembles flowing water, the imperceptible development of emotions, and moreover, the utter silence that follows a rapturous laughter. Pema’s movies always provide me with this experience. This time, after watching *Balloon*, I was left immersed in thinking, supporting my cheeks with my hands.

Many affairs on this planet may have no definitive answers. However, we obstinately hope for one. This is why it might be the same for Pema’s movies—after watching the movie, we may discuss the presence of a single core message that he wants to channel through his art. I too highly expect such concrete message. Those

who watch the movie may evaluate and illustrate it based on their personal impressions. Maybe, this could be the nature of all artistic compositions.

Secondly, it is about how to represent yourself. Up till now, some say when discussing Pema's movies that they aimed at other people, not Tibetans. Others say his movies incorporated Tibetan life. Others still are of the view that his movies are unintelligible. The crux of these different interpretations is all about how Tibetans represent themselves in this age. Indeed. It is only natural to have this acute sense of concern. To date, our representation and introduction to outsiders have been through others' cameras, pens, and discourses. They present us as the unfamiliar, based on their own desire and perceptions. Their portrayal and representation of us may turn us into a kind which even we would find hard to comprehend. Regarding this matter, I think we should feel grateful to Pema Tsenden. Thanks to his courage and capability, an opportunity has come for us to represent ourselves. Through the camera in his movies, he has represented a natural us, which we are acquainted and familiar with, as well as close to. When I was watching this movie of Pema, I felt, how truthful is the world in the movie frame! How artistically we are in it! At one point, when I was reflecting about watching Pema's movie as though reading a story, I finally found the problem that some people have of not being able to instantly accept his movies. Grasping the beauty and depth of artistic work is certainly not something that everybody is capable of. In particular, it is understandable that those who are accustomed to simple and superficial factual narratives may have difficulties accepting the entirety of a movie which uses fiction as its representational method.

How close the characters in the *Balloon* are to our hearts! Dargyé and Drolkar, Takbum Gyal and Jangchup Dolma, the grandfather and the grand-son, even more so Jamyang and the physician Drukto, and other characters, are the illustrations of the fate of all Tibetans of this age. Through his camera, Pema has given us a mirror to look at ourselves. Furthermore, the movie represents us as ordinary as any other people on this round planet; amidst the change of time, we too have our own share of change and stability, progression and regression, fragmentation and completeness, and smiles and tears.

In a nutshell, Mister Pema Tseden can touch through his movies those parts where fiction cannot reach, and touch through his fiction where a movie cannot reach. How could he not be our spokesperson of this age!

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