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Life in Samtha

by Mutik

Borderlands, a place to stay, determined by karma. Sort of. Borderlands, a location for realizing future desires. Kind of. Having lost their fatherland—*phayul*, refugees amid Samtha's pitiful life lift their spirits, rising like flames.

Life in Samtha lacks visible happiness. But since coming to the borderlands, a warm feeling comes swirling on a screen of thoughts, and all the threatening fears disappear into the distance like a rainbow.

Samtha. Before, it was unfamiliar. But since being immersed in borderland life, I grapple with burdens on my shoulders heavy as mountains. In my mind, I sense new dreams. When I think of this responsibility and these dreams in Samtha, sleep won't come to me. In Samtha, my mind is uneasy.

Prior to arriving in the borderlands, this Samtha, I heard it was like a heavenly palace where food and clothing appear instantaneously. Samtha. I thought this place was like Naga's treasury with limitless wealth to be enjoyed.

Upon arriving in the borderlands, Samtha was not at all like the fables I had heard before. This Samtha was not at all similar to the illusion born in my imagination. Samtha. In my chest, hope swells upward like a volcano. Borderlands, a place to heal the long-festering wounds of my mind.

Life in Samtha. Life in Phayul. Never the same. Samtha's time and Phayul's time. Nothing is the same. In the borderlands, feelings of happiness and suffering are intense. In Samtha, before my eyes, time rushes by so fast. In Samtha, one gets old and dies quickly.

In living this life in Samtha, body, speech and mind dissolve into hopes and aspirations. Youth and beauty gradually wane. Similar to how the wind fades everything, even the redness of my cheeks is fading somewhere. Amid this situation, a few are resentful and frustrated, but I find pride and encouragement in it. For this reason—since going through these changes, I know that I myself am taking steps on a path where I am no longer the child near my Ama. I know I am welcoming a life of self-sufficiency.

In Samtha, despite wild cries of scarcity and despair, a portion of those cries—each and every one—motivate us with endless encouragement to be brave and to think about our dreams. In the borderlands, we cannot lose courage; that's useless. In Samtha, we hold our heads high; that's necessary.

A wanderer in the borderlands becomes a refugee—inner, outer, and secret. A refugee in the borderlands grows old with weariness for the happiness and suffering of all sentient beings. One

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day, like the goal of all refugees, if the whole world becomes a large family on planet earth, then the word “samtha” will die out. Wherever refugees go, it will be phayul.

Samtha’s sky. Phayul’s sky. Similar. Samtha’s sun, moon, and stars resemble those of phayul and everywhere. But in the borderlands there is no warm, cozy home. The soft voices of mom and dad are missing. In Samtha, there is something—homesickness and a longing to meet again.

Translated into English by Nicole Willock with assistance from Dhondup Tashi Rekjong and the author, Nyima Tso