

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #11 – Tashi (alias)
June 29, 2007

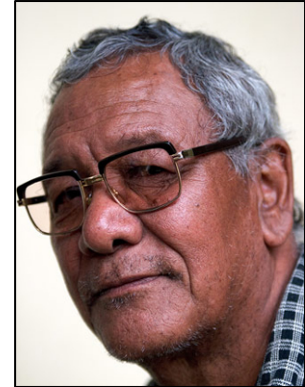
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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #11
2. Interviewee: Tashi (alias)
3. Age: 69
4. Date of Birth: 1938
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Ne-nyi, Gyangtse District
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 29, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged and Disabled,
Lugsung Samdupling Settlement,
Bylakuppe, Mysore District,
Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 20 min
12. Interviewer: Martin Newman
13. Translator: Lhakpa Tsering
14. Videographer: Tsewang Dorjee
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

At the age of nine, Tashi became a monk and remained at the monastery for ten years. During this time many people from the region of Kham moved to Tashi's region of Gyangtse in order to escape Chinese atrocities and ongoing battles. Later, the Chinese also overtook Shigatse and Gyangtse. Food shortages became a problem after the Chinese invasion and many children were taken away from their families, never to return.

When the armed conflict started in 1958, Tashi and a monk companion joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force in Tsethang, where the biggest Volunteer Force camp was based. Tashi describes the Tibetan guerrilla force, its formation and equipment. He also gives an account of how the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas challenged the Chinese army with their limited manpower and inferior weapons.

Tashi and many other *Chushi Gangdrug* fighters fled to India under fire from the Chinese. Tashi describes early life in exile. He later joined the Indian Army where he served for 20 years.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, religious festivals, invasion by Chinese army, forced labor, oppression, *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #11

Interviewee: Tashi [alias]

Age: 69, Sex: M

Interviewer: Martin Newman

Interview Date: June 29, 2007

Question: What is your name?

Interviewee #11: Tashi.

Q: Tashi, do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#11: Yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story.

#11: Okay.

Q: During the interview, if you wish to take a break or stop the interview at any time, please tell us.

#11: Okay.

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or discuss an issue, please let us know.

#11: I can say I do not know?

Q: Yes and if this were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#11: There would be no problems. My name has been changed.

Q: So let us begin. I'd like to learn as much as I can about what your childhood was like in Tibet before the Chinese invasion. Perhaps you can start by telling where you were born.

#11: The name of my birth place is Gyangtse.

Q: How big a place was Gyangtse?

#11: It was big, it was a district.

Q: Were you born in a particular town or village?

#11: I was born in a village in Gyangtse district.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#11: My family members were my father, mother and five children younger than me.

Q: What did your parents do for work?

#11: They were farmers.

Q: What kind of crops did they raise or animals did they farm?

#11: We grew grains, peas and wheat.

Q: Did you go to school or did you have to work with your parents?

#11: At the age of nine I became a monk.

Q: Before that, do you have any special memories of your village, herding your animals or any games that you played?

#11: I do not remember working. Since I had wonderful parents, I used to play all the time.

Q: What were the kinds of games that you remember playing?

#11: We used to play skipping and...[not discernable].

Q: Did you do that with your friends or by yourself?

#11: We used to play with the boys, but not with the girls.

Q: Did your parents or any of your relatives or elders in the village ever tell stories of the Tibet of the past?

#11: No, there was nothing to tell because we lived in an isolated area.

Q: Were there ever any wandering entertainment troops that came around the village to perform that you remember?

#11: Yes, during festivals we used to have *cham* 'religious performance by monks' and during *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year' we would go to nearby places.

Q: Did you enjoy watching those ceremonies?

#11: Yes, I enjoyed it as I was a small child then.

Q: At nine you went to the monastery. Did your parents send you or did you ask to go?

#11: My parents sent me.

Q: Did you want to go?

#11: Yes, I wished to go.

Q: When you got to the monastery, what was the name of the monastery that you went to?

#11: It was called Ne-nyi Sidhing.

Q: Was this a big monastery or a small monastery?

#11: It was a main monastery but there were only 80 or 90 monks.

Q: Was it medium sized?

#11: It was a large monastery but there were only 80 to 90 monks.

Q: What was a typical day for you in the monastery life?

#11: The happy days were when there was *cham*, *Losar* and the parties during the *yarnay* 'summer festival.' Other than that we spend our days in religious practice.

Q: Those sound like special days. What was your average day like?

#11: Every morning and evening we attended prayer assemblies. During the day, the teacher taught us the scriptures.

Q: Do you remember what the monastery that...the smells of the monastery? What it smelled like?

[Translator to interviewer] Please repeat the question.

Q: Do you remember what the monastery smelled like? Did it have a particular smell you still remember to this day?

#11: In general, it was cleaner than home. There were no bad smells. However, unlike here, we did not have perfumes or any sweet smelling applications. It was neat in general.

Q: I wasn't thinking that it smelled bad. Just that did it have a particular smell that when you have that smell today, you think of that monastery?

#11: I do not remember any special smells. However, there was not much hygiene as we have here. There were some smells on our bodies.

Q: Like the smell of incense?

#11: There were no bad smells.

Q: Your bodies smelled?

#11: Slightly.

Q: Yes, there were many people living together in the winter.

#11: In general, hygiene was not there. The climate was so cold, you couldn't take a bath.

Q: It was very cold and how many years were you in this monastery?

#11: From the age of 9 to 19—I might have been there for about nine years.

Q: During that time, did you; I don't know how to say this; did you rise in rank in the monastery? Did you start from a low monk and gained some kind of stature?

#11: There was no rise in ranks. In our monastery after two years, you were a *shondang*, which meant doing the cleaning stuff for one year and then you had to work as a cook for one year. After that there were no promotions. That was it. Then you spent your time in practicing the dharma, with the teacher.

Q: What was the thing you liked most about being in the monastery?

#11: At that time, I was quite intelligent, so I liked to practice the dharma. When I was assigned work to do, I didn't do that. When I was given the choice between studying the texts and working, I preferred studying with my teacher.

Q: What was the thing you disliked the most about the monastery?

#11: What?

Q: When you were in the monastery, what were you angry at, what did you not like the most?

#11: At times when we children used to fight among ourselves and when the teachers had arguments among themselves, I used to feel sad. In general, there was nothing bad about it.

Q: When they were quarrelling? What were they fighting about?

#11: At times, there would be arguments regarding things that someone had borrowed and didn't return. At times someone would say that his things were missing. It was these reasons and nothing else.

Q: You mean things were missing from someone and somebody took it and so they started fighting?

#11: Yes, like that.

Q: You said you were there until you were 19 years old. Were you also able to visit your family frequently while you were in the monastery?

#11: When there were big prayer assemblies, we had to be in the monastery as we had to attend it and study our scriptures. Sometimes, all monks had a holiday for a month or 15 days. During this time we went to our home.

Q: 15 days or a month?

#11: Yes, 15 days or a month.

Q: During the year?

#11: Yes, in one year.

Q: When did you notice things were changing?

#11: Things started changing when the Chinese arrived. People went to work on road construction for the Chinese. When people traveled, they were observed. Such changes took place.

Q: You noticed them making roads. When you saw them what did you think was going on?

#11: I thought that soon Tibet might be occupied by the Chinese. Then the Khampas [people from Kham-eastern part of Tibet] arrived and lived in our region. They said that they faced difficulties in their region. That the Chinese caused atrocities and that one day they would do the same in our village. They spoke such things.

Q: What kind of problems did you hear?

#11: They said that the Chinese had occupied their region and made it their own. That more and more Chinese were arriving in the land, that fighting was going on, that they had also fought and people on both sides had been killed That one day they would do the same in this place.

Q: Then you saw the Chinese in your area. How long was it before they came to the monastery?

#11: They didn't come immediately to the monastery. They stayed in tents in the plains of Gyangtse District. They gradually started purchasing grains from the people and when grains were scarce, they paid extremely high prices. They took it for themselves and caused problems for the people.

Q: They paid high prices? I'm not sure I understand.

#11: They paid extremely high prices for the grains. So they [the villagers] sold to the buyers and finally there was nothing left to eat in the village. The sellers took the money, and the poor became poorer.

Q: High prices or low prices?

[Translator to interviewer] **High prices.**

Q: So they gave a lot of money?

#11: Yes.

Q: You felt that was a good thing?

#11: I did not think it was good. That was money just for the present and in the end, our people faced problems.

Q: I understand it was good for the short term, but not for long term.

[Translator to interviewer] **Yes.**

Q: Were you left with any food yourself?

#11: In the monastery we had enough.

Q: So the situation was the Chinese were there. So far there was no major problem, they were buying food and they were leaving you alone?

#11: When they first arrived, there were no problems, but step by step when they paid high prices for the grains and bought all the food for themselves, the people became poorer and poorer.

Q: Then what happened?

#11: Then when the harvest was not good, the people were facing trouble. In a year or two the Chinese made roads and then countless numbers of them arrived. We became disturbed. The Khampas had told us that we would face problems just as they had in their region. In our hearts we felt that one day we would suffer.

Q: How long was it before problems occurred?

#11: For about six to seven years, they were fine. Perhaps they were preparing to make war as Lhasa was filled with Chinese, so were Gyangtse and Shigatse. They became more and more powerful and their numbers kept increasing. They had made drivable roads and their vehicles had arrived. They were an extremely mighty country and we were overpowered.

Q: For six or seven years? What year did they first come? Do you remember?

#11: It must have been around 1951 or 1952 when they first came to Gyangtse.

Q: 1952, so they came very shortly after the revolution.

#11: They must have come around that time.

Q: During those first years, life in the monastery was it very normal?

#11: What?

Q: Life in the monastery was as usual, the Chinese didn't do anything?

#11: When they first came, they didn't do anything.

Q: So you were living in the monastery and the Chinese were in their camps, but there were no problems.

#11: At that time, the Chinese didn't. When they first came, they didn't do anything. In fact they were helping us, taking the people to the hospital and treating the sick. Later gradually they became worse and worse.

Q: How did they do that?

#11: They said they would take the children to school and took them to Gyangtse and from there to Lhasa and then sent them to China. They [the children] were deceived all the way. First to be taken away were the children from the high families. They were misleading them. They said that they would be provided with education. Then they separated the parents and the children.

Q: You saw them do that? They just took children away?

#11: I didn't see but we heard talk. I was living in the monastery. We would hear that children were taken away in two vehicles or in three vehicles. First they provided education and then gradually took them away.

Q: Those were the rumors that you heard?

#11: What I had heard was the truth.

Q: Yeah. I'm not saying it's not true but this is what you heard. You didn't see this yourself.

#11: I didn't see, but I heard. Some children from my village were gone. First they were taken to school at Gyantse and then taken further and further away and in the end they did not return.

Q: Tell me what happened next after that?

#11: Then after that, from 1958-59, the turmoil started. Then with their might, they battled in every corner.

Q: Right. And how did you hear about that?

#11: At that time I was at Tsethang. I was with the *Chushi Gangdrug* Resistance Force.

Q: Were you a *Chushi Gangdrug* guerilla?

#11: I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I ran away from the monastery and joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I was at Tsethang when the war began in Lhasa.

Q: How? So, okay, let me understand. At first you were in the monastery. Is that true?

#11: Yes.

Q: And then when you heard that the Chinese had attacked Lhasa and you saw what they were doing, you joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#11: I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*. There was a Khampa monk with me. He was from my monastery and we went together.

Q: I see and how did you know where to find them?

#11: First we went to Gyantse, and then Nangatse. From Nangatse we went to Dhuwazong. From Dhuwazong we came to Tsethang.

Q: And then Tsethang; were the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Tsethang?

#11: The biggest army camp was at Tsethang.

Q: And when you arrived there, what did you see?

#11: What?

Q: When you reached Tsethang, what did you see?

#11: I didn't see anything. My colleague, the Khampa, took me to the Lithangpa division. We stayed here. We went wherever we were ordered to go. At night, if we were asked to stand guard, we did that.

Q: What I would like to know is when you first arrived in the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp, what did your eyes see? Did you see many people on horses; did you see...what did you see?

#11: There were horses and many people. Then suddenly one night, leaving the horses at the camp, the men rushed to a place where there was a Chinese army camp at Gonpori.

Q: Who is the leader?

#11: What?

Q: You joined the army. Who was the leader?

#11: In the Khampa group, each division had its own head. For our division the leader was Ratuk Ngawang. He lives in Delhi now.

Q: You were assigned to his group.

#11: Yes, I was in his division.

Q: Were you a rifleman or a swordsman or a horseman? What did you do in your group?

#11: I was a swordsman as I did not have a gun or a horse. My Khampa colleague also did not have one. Those who were from the army earlier on had horses and guns. While we had escaped from an isolated place and did not have anything.

Q: I didn't hear that. You were what kind of man?

[Translator to interviewer] A swordsman.

Q: Did you have a horse to ride?

#11: I did not have a horse. I did not have a gun. I carried a sword.

Q: How soon was it before you were in your first battle?

#11: I do not remember the date of the first battle. They were shooting below while we were keeping watch on the hill.

Q: So the Chinese were chasing you?

#11: The Chinese were shooting with guns as well as bombs. Our people who had guns were firing and some were picking up the bombs thrown by the Chinese and hurling them back. We were on the hill keeping watch.

Q: And what happened?

#11: We were there just watching the whole thing.

Q: You were a scout? You were watching the battle?

#11: Yes, I was watching. I was spying on them.

Q: I see. So when you say a spy, you mean you went out to see as a scout; to see what the Chinese were doing and then back and reported?

#11: During the day I spied and in the evening I returned and told them what had happened.

Q: What?

#11: In the day time, I was on the hill and in the evening I reported to the leader about the Chinese movements as well as our troops' movements.

Q: And then reported.

[Translator to interviewer] Yes.

Q: The Chinese when they were firing at you, did they continue to chase you or did they stop and withdraw?

#11: They fired from their guns and once the people had scampered away and they couldn't see anyone, they stopped. When they again saw people, they resumed firing.

Q: They remained that way?

#11: On our side too, those who had guns, if they saw the Chinese, they fired and if they couldn't see the Chinese, then they didn't shoot.

Q: They remained that way?

#11: Yes, we remained that way.

Q: They didn't try to attack further. They just attacked from a distance?

#11: Yes, they fired from a distance.

Q: What kind of actions did you go on? Were there night actions where you went out from your camp and attacked the Chinese?

#11: We fired when we saw them. The Chinese would be hiding in the crevices and if they moved around, they were fired at. If our men moved and were seen by the Chinese, they fired.

Q: You fired at them day or night whenever you saw the Chinese?

#11: Whenever we saw them.

Q: So how long did this go on, I guess we will call them skirmishes between the Chinese and the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#11: It must have been more than a month. It went on for quite a long while.

Q: Did you think you had any chance to defeat the Chinese?

#11: No, I didn't see that.

Q: What did you think would happen to all of you?

#11: I thought one day we would be defeated because their arms and ammunition were unending. In our case, some had guns and about 50 to 60 bullets while some of us had nothing. We were just staying there and there was going to be no outcome.

Q: Did you feel that you yourself might die fighting?

#11: At that time I thought that one day I would die and it never crossed my mind that I would escape because they had bombs and shells and unending bullets. They had more people and I thought that one day, I was sure to die. I never thought that I would be in India.

Q: At this time, did you have any word from your family how they were?

#11: Never, there was no way I would hear about them.

Q: These skirmishes went on for a month and then what happened?

#11: Then one day His Holiness the Dalai Lama left from Lhasa. The war was going on in Lhasa and in the end we heard His Holiness had left. We were told that that night a large number of Chinese would be arriving through the waters by boats and that we had to be alert. We were to keep the saddles ready on the horses and stay prepared. Then finally just before dawn we were told to move and then we moved along escaping.

Q: So you heard that the Dalai Lama had escaped?

#11: Yes.

Q: And what were your thoughts when you heard that?

#11: When we heard that His Holiness had left, everybody said that if we did not follow him, we wouldn't be able to escape once the route was blocked. Then we followed him slowly.

Q: So what did you do then? What happened next?

#11: Now everybody had assembled there. I did not have a horse and proceeded to walk. All those who were fighting had assembled there and Ratuk Ngawang told us that each had to ride his horse and should block bridges if there were bridges and block the mountain passes where there were mountain passes. That we would have to fight even if for a day or two or as much as we could. Our division was given this message. The divisions started moving. There were many divisions, not just the Lithangpa division. At Tsethang there were many divisions, it was the largest army camp.

Q: Your orders were to keep fighting as long as you could?

#11: We were told that we had to block mountain passes and bridges and that we should fight as much as possible. If we couldn't then each had to think for himself, so we all started out from Chungyay.

Q: So what kind of battles followed this? What happened?

#11: Some of the guerrillas were engaged in blocking routes, but it was impossible because those with guns and horses stood around the bridges while we were up in the mountains spying. The Chinese starting firing shell after shell. They kept shelling on the first day. On the second day, they were firing shells and their troops were pushing forward. Planes flew in the sky and dropped big shells of this size [gestures].

Q: If you would please continue to describe what happened.

#11: Some people died and some were able to escape. The airplanes came and they dropped bombs and big bullets.

Q: The Chinese fired guns?

#11: They fired guns from the airplanes.

Q: What were you doing?

#11: We continued to flee. They came fighting. We were fleeing ahead. We had nothing to ride on. So we were walking and escaping.

Q: Because the Chinese were chasing?

#11: Yes, everybody was fleeing. Those who had no guns were fleeing; we were forced to. We had our swords in our hands.

Q: So where did you run to?

#11: From Tsethang, we went to Khemay Shika. At Khemay Shika, there was a monastery and we passed it. Then a place called Ter Lagyari and then...Shika [mentions only part of the name of the place]. We escaped following the route that His Holiness the Dalai Lama taken.

Q: Which was the final place you reached when you escaped?

#11: The final place we reached was a big place called...Shika [does not recall the full name] and then we reached Mangola.

Q: Mangola was in Tibet or was it another country?

#11: Mangola is the exact border between India and Tibet. His Holiness took the route through Tsona; we came through Mangola, crossing the mountain pass and the snow. That was our escape route and we escaped for good.

Q: Did you and your fellow soldiers regroup there?

#11: Not all together but one by one, all assembled there. All the soldiers from Tsethang took the route to Mangola.

Q: And at that point were you trying to cross into India or did you still, trying to stay there saying you could fight another battle with the Chinese?

#11: There were no preparations for a battle. All those who had guns and horses were fleeing ahead. We who were on foot followed them slowly.

Q: Right but were you waiting there for everyone to come back so that you may fight another battle? Did you think now we must cross the border and get away because we cannot win?

#11: At that time I did not know about India. Some colleagues told me that we were about to reach Mon Tawang. Except for escaping, there were no plans to fight. Those in possession of arms and horses had fled earlier. Those of us on foot walked slowly a day or two later, following in their footsteps.

Q: Was the monk, who joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* with you, did he survive?

#11: He was with us. These days he lives in Shillong, Assam.

Q: You still have contact with him?

#11: We do not have contact. It has been a long time since we were separated. After coming to India, we went our different ways.

Q: During the time you were with the *Chushi Gangdrug*, did you kill any Chinese with your sword?

#11: I haven't killed anyone. It was not possible to kill. Except for those few Chinese I saw at Tsethang, there were none. In Tibet, it was very famously said that if a Khampa showed his sword, the Chinese cried. That on seeing a Khampa, the Chinese shed tears. Children would say such things to each other. In actuality, when I saw them [the Chinese] once or twice, it was from afar and I wasn't close enough to kill them.

Q: Let me see, we were in the town of...before Tawang, we were in the town of...

[Translator to interviewer] Mangola.

Q: Mangola. From there you went to Tawang?

#11: From Mangola we came to Mingon. From Mingon, those who had horses went ahead slowly. Then later we reached Tawang.

Q: What was it like there?

#11: At Tawang the Indian government provided us with food rations, so we had something to eat. After facing hardships along the way, some had something to eat while others did not have anything. At Tawang they gave us rations of rice and *dhal*.

Q: How long did you stay there at Tawang?

#11: We stayed there for 10 or 15 days.

Q: Were you happy to be there?

#11: While we stayed at Tawang, we were happy because we had enough to eat.

Q: Did you think that you would only be there a short time and then you would return to Tibet?

#11: I didn't think that. Then the government announced that we had to go to the plains. The government confiscated the arms from those who had them.

Q: Did you ever think you would see your family again?

#11: No, I never saw my family.

Q: How did that make you feel?

#11: I did not feel sad at that time. I was young and had forgotten my family.

Q: Yes but how did you feel thinking that you might never see your family again?

#11: At that time I did not feel sad as I was young in age and I had enough to eat. So gradually I came here.

Q: You were happy to be alive?

#11: Yes, I was happy.

Q: And what were the conditions like in Tawang?

#11: Tawang's climate was moderate at that time. There was a slight drizzle. In Tawang there was a good monastery and a good *stupa*. On seeing these I was very happy. There was no fear. There was no fear of being killed by the Chinese. There was no fear of dying from starvation. I was happy there.

Q: Because you were among the monasteries and the *stupas*. And you said it was rainy season?

#11: There was a slight drizzle.

Q: Did you have shelter?

#11: We didn't have houses. There were plastic covers and in Tawang we could split bamboos and make the roof [indicates a roof]. There was nothing on the sides, just a roof.

Q: And you were there 14 days, not a very long time. Where did you go from there?

#11: Then from Tawang, we were sent to Bomdila, slowly on foot. We were sent in groups. If today it was the monks, the next day would the soldiers and the following day, the general public. We went in groups of two hundred, three hundred or four hundred people a day.

Q: You went walking?

#11: Yes, by walk.

Q: How was your health?

#11: Mine?

Q: Yes.

#11: I was fine because I was young then.

Q: What happened when you got to Bomdila?

#11: We spend a night in Bomdila and then we proceeded onward. On the way we were provided with food and tea. The army prepared tea in huge vessels and we were given a mug full each and we kept moving. Then we reached a place near Missamari in Assam. The place was called Phonday. There was a large Indian army camp there.

Q: What was the name of that place again?

#11: Phondayla. It was called something like Phonday. It was a small place and there was an army camp.

Q: And what happened next?

#11: Then the next day we were sent in a vehicle to Missamari. Everyday 10 to 15 people were transported to Missamari, which is the place where all the people had assembled.

Q: You were sent to Missamari?

#11: Yes.

Q: Keep going. You can just tell us the story what happened when you got to Missamari?

#11: The government had readied huge bamboo huts and each hut was allotted to a 100 people. Everyday food rations were provided and we stayed there.

Q: Shelter and food were given?

#11: They had constructed good bamboo huts.

Q: What happened next?

#11: I stayed for about six to eight months at Missamari.

Q: Six to seven months?

#11: We received aid in the form of food rations.

Q: What kind of work did you do there?

#11: There was no work. They provided free ration and free medical treatment by the government. We received soaps and toiletries.

Q: Yes but how then for six or seven months; how did you spend your days?

#11: Time just passed. We strolled up and down. People were arriving in large numbers. People from everywhere gathered in Missamari.

Q: You used to roam? You mean you used to walk a lot?

#11: I didn't roam a lot. I would walk around to see if people I knew had arrived or not. I used to make inquiries and at times I found people I knew and at times no one.

Q: Did you find any?

#11: Not at that time, only later. After about six months, some people from my village arrived.

Q: How did that make you feel to see people you knew?

#11: I felt happy when I saw people I knew. I inquired about our village and they replied that the Chinese had caused havoc there and that they had just about managed to escape. They said that they faced a lot of hardships crossing over the mountain passes with scarce food. We exchanged such talks. At times these discussions made us laugh and at times they made us cry. We spoke of such things when I met the people I knew.

Q: Yes, you heard all different kinds of experiences that people have.

#11: Those who arrived later knew everything. I told them about my hardships and they told me about theirs. At times we were happy and at times it made us cry.

Q: Was there any story you heard that you felt was the saddest of all?

#11: I didn't hear anything like that.

Q: So in Missamari after seven months of roaming around and meeting people and getting to know everyone, what happened after that?

#11: Some people went to work as coolies to Gangtok and other cooler places. Those who were younger were taught Hindi and Tibetan and I was among them. I stayed for about three months studying.

Q: You were taught Hindi and Tibetan?

#11: Yes, I studied in Missamari.

Q: For what purpose were you taught Hindi?

#11: They taught Hindi for us to manage the basics in the country. They gave us information about hygiene.

Q: Did you see any or experience any sickness in these camps or people were suffering from disease?

#11: In Missamari you couldn't count the number of sick and the dead. People had come from Tibet and did not have hygiene. People ate stale meat, stale *tsampa* 'roasted barley flour' and stale cheese. India was a hot country and perhaps due to the difference in climate, numerous people died.

Q: Due to the heat?

#11: Yes, the heat. It was extremely hot there.

Q: How did you feel when you saw all these people dying?

#11: I felt sad for the poor Tibetans who came and were not clean, who ate stale food and died.

Q: How did you deal with the change in climate?

#11: I did not face any problem because I was young.

Q: So from Missamari, where did you go?

#11: When the food ration relief was closed in Missamari and when most of the people had left for Gangtok, Darjeeling or Kalimpong, there were about 700 to 800 youngsters left behind and we were sent to Balingpur as coolies.

Q: Balingpur?

#11: You had to travel about three hours by vehicle from Missamari. We went as coolies to work on road construction sites.

Q: How long did you spend there as a road worker?

#11: I spent over two years there.

Q: What were your feelings there? Were you happy or were you wondering where you were going to end up?

#11: In the jungles, it was hot and there were insects that sting us. We had to keep working. If we didn't work we would not receive the two *rupees* per day, so we stayed that way.

Q: So it was very difficult there?

#11: We had to work here. If we didn't work, there was no food to eat.

Q: You wouldn't get paid if you didn't work.

[Translator to interviewer] Yes.

Q: Tell me again how long were you in Balingpur?

#11: I might have been there for a little over two years.

Q: Once again after two years, then what happened?

#11: After that we were sent for training. It was around the end of 1962, November or December. The training was started. The army training was started like joining the ITBP [Indo-Tibetan Border Police].

Q: This was a police force of the Tibetans and the Indians together?

#11: There were only Tibetans. Tibetans troops being trained by the Indians, in the ITBP.

Q: Under the authority of the Indian government but it was a Tibetan unit?

[Translator to interviewer] Yes.

Q: Okay, got it. Why did you join them? Were there particular reason?

#11: I was sent by the government.

Q: The Tibetan government?

#11: The Tibetan government. The army unit was starting.

Q: Why did they send you instead of other people? Was there a particular reason?

#11: Many people were sent.

Q: Why did they send?

#11: All the Tibetans were given training to be able to confront the Chinese.

Q: They sent you because you were young?

#11: They sent the young. There were many like me.

Q: And what did you think you would be doing in the ITBP?

#11: First they gave us training on how to fight a war and how to handle guns and the nitty-gritty. They taught us such things. There were many Tibetans like me. All the youngsters were sent there.

Q: Did you think that at some point you would be able to go back and fight the Chinese?

#11: I thought so.

Q: How big was this unit that you were in? How many people?

#11: Each division had 120 men.

Q: Each division had 120 men?

#11: Yes. There were many who were all undergoing training. All the young Tibetan men from everywhere were there.

Q: 120?

[Translator to interviewer] Yes.

Q: So for what period of time, how long were you in the border police?

#11: I was in the ITBP seven years, undergoing training.

Q: Seven years?

#11: [Nods]

Q: You found a home in ITBP?

#11: It was like home.

Q: Why did you leave?

#11: My leaving?

Q: What was the reason for your not staying on at the ITBP?

#11: There was the other army unit, the main unit. We were transferred from the ITBP to the main army unit.

Q: And you stayed in the army?

#11: Yes.

Q: How many more years?

#11: Twenty years in the main army unit.

Q: Twenty years! You did have a home!

#11: Yes, it was home. I stayed because I thought we would get a chance to confront the Chinese. If we got the chance for a confrontation, all of us there were young and we had good backing, mainly the Indian government and other foreign countries provided help in the form of arms, food rations and shelter. We thought we would get to fight.

Q: But after 20 years in the army, did you still think you would be fighting; that you'd get a chance to fight China?

#11: I remained because I thought I would get the chance.

Q: After 20 years, did you retire from the army? Why did you leave?

#11: From the age of 51, you are not allowed to remain in the army.

Q: So you retired at age 51?

#11: Yes, I was sent out.

Q: And then how did you get to Bylakuppe?

#11: In 1989, I came to Bylakuppe to see my relative.

Q: During all the time you were in the army, did you ever marry?

#11: I never got married thinking that I would go back to Tibet. I thought of going back to fight.

Q: Once you came to Bylakuppe, did you marry there?

#11: I didn't get married. I always thought that after training I would go back. I never thought of settling in India as I was young at that time.

Q: Are you still thinking of returning to Tibet?

#11: Not any more. Now I am 69 years old and I live in the Home for the Aged.

Q: If you could return to Tibet, what would you do?

#11: Now with age, I won't be able to go back because the climate is very cold. I had an ardent desire to go back earlier but I couldn't.

Q: It's too cold for you and you've adjusted to the climate here. How had life been for you here in Bylakuppe?

#11: In Bylakuppe, there are many Tibetans, and the food and climate are good. Now it's been almost 17 years here.

Q: It's been 17 years?

#11: Yes, it's been 17 years; since 1989.

Q: Do you feel—this may be a difficult question to translate, but I will try anyways. Do you feel that there is any contradiction between your being raised in a monastery and being a religious person and then being turned into a fighter, person wanting to fight.

#11: When you are young, you feel like a fight. Now that I am old, I feel uninterested thinking of it and all the training I have undergone has been worthless.

Q: You had been a monk in a monastery and fought as a soldier; what is the difference between your life as a monk, a soldier and your life now?

#11: The difference was great as a soldier. I was happier because I was more fit. After coming here my health has become weak.

Q: I'll try again with the question. Do you think being in the army and going to fight is very different from the teachings you learned in the monastery?

#11: In the monastery, if you learned your scriptures, it was good. Otherwise, your teacher would scold you. In the army no one scolded you. If you were able, you fought; if you could flee, you did and life was happy.

Q: It sounds like you were scolded more in the monastery than you were in the army.

#11: Yes, that is right.

Q: That's very interesting. What do you now know about your family in Tibet? Have you ever learned anything?

#11: I have not heard anything. A year or two earlier I tried to telephone, but it didn't connect. Perhaps it's because our village is in an isolated area.

Q: So do you know if they are alive or not; if anyone is alive?

#11: My parents are no more. Perhaps those siblings who are younger than me are alive.

Q: Your brothers and sisters.

#11: My younger siblings are there but not my parents.

Q: If you were healthier and younger, would you still want to fight the Chinese now?

#11: If I were younger and my body healthier, I still have the will to fight.

Q: What advice would you like to give the younger generation of Tibetans if they need to know?

#11: If I had to give advice to the youngsters, I would tell them to study hard, think about their country and behave well.

Q: What do you think needs ... is most precious about Tibet that must be preserved for the future?

#11: I think we have to clean our country [the environment?] and protect our animals and protect the wild animals.

Q: The animals?

[Translator to interviewer] Wild animals.

Q: I've never heard that before. Which wild animals?

#11: Those animals that are precious and banned from killing.

Q: For example?

#11: Those wild animals that are precious and banned from killing.

Q: Names?

#11: Tigers, antelopes and wild sheep.

Q: Antelope. Oh really! Now this is very interesting. And when you were younger, did you see these animals in Tibet when you were a child or younger?

#11: I have seen tigers and leopards, but not the wild sheep and antelopes.

Q: That must have made a very big impression on you.

#11: The tigers and leopards?

Q: Yes.

#11: They were beautiful to see, with their coats. What I say is that it is good to not kill them.

Q: Do you still think about those animals a lot?

#11: I think of them. I used to go to Mysore to see the zoo.

Q: You like to go to the zoo?

#11: Yes, I like it.

Q: This is so nice. So for you the most important thing is the natural environment of Tibet that, if I understand correctly, in which the spirit of Tibet lives among these animals?

#11: Yes, it is.

Q: And which animal do you think you are most like?

#11: Which I like?

Q: Yes. Which animal is the most beautiful?

#11: Tigers and leopards which have beautiful coats.

Q: Name one animal.

#11: Tiger.

Q: Very good. How are you like a tiger, do you think?

#11: The tigers have good fur.

Q: What?

#11: They have good fur and beautiful designs.

Q: That's very, very interesting. Thank you very much for sharing your story. Please sit for a while. We have a few things to do.

END OF INTERVIEW