

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #14 – Tashi Phuntsok
June 27, 2007

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #14
2. Interviewee: Tashi Phuntsok
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Gyangtse
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 27, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Temple of Old Camp No.1, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 19 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Lhakpa Tsering
14. Videographer: Jeff Loda
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tashi Phuntsok was born in Gyangtse to a farming family. As a child, he enjoyed loving parents and the opportunity to learn how to read and write. His education ended abruptly with the death of his teacher and his parents had him learn tailoring instead. Tashi Phuntsok's story reveals different aspects of the Tibetan way of life, including the Tibetans' concept of marriage and the marriage ceremony. He explains, for example, that when he married, rather than bring home his bride, he became a *makpa* 'man living with his wife's family after marriage.' Tashi Phuntsok shares other views on agricultural practices, weaving, and birth control in Tibetan society.

Tashi Phuntsok describes how his life changed when the Chinese arrived in Tsang after annexing Chamdo sometime in 1954 or 1955. He gives a vivid account of how, in the name of helping poor Tibetans, the Chinese forced wealthier Tibetans to hand over their possessions, including clothes, grains, and grass for their horses. If they did not comply Tashi Phuntsok's family might have been beaten or imprisoned. His family escaped one night to Bhutan and Tashi Phuntsok says he was extremely sad to leave his country. From there they traveled to Missamari in Assam and eventually settled in Bylakuppe, India.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, Chinese oppression, escape experiences.

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Interviewee: Tashi Phuntsok

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: June 27, 2007

Question: We are going to begin now. First of all, I'd like to say: please tell us your name.

Interviewee #14: My name is Tashi Phuntsok.

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

#14: Yes, it is fine. I am very grateful and I will answer all I can.

Q: Thank you. Tashi Phuntsok, can you tell me where were you born in Tibet?

#14: You can say I was born in Gyangtse.

Q: What were your father and mothers' profession or job?

#14: At that time we were farmers, and my father did a little bit of trading.

Q: Was your home in a village or in a country?

#14: The place where I lived was remote and not in a town. It was quite a long way from the town.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#14: We were about 11 family members: my parents, three brothers, three sisters and my father's parents.

Q: How many children?

#14: Mine?

Q: No, when you were growing up.

#14: Do you mean children of my parents? I told you earlier there were three sons and three daughters and including me, there were seven.

Q: Where did he come in? Elder, middle, young?

#14: I was the eldest.

Q: Of the whole family?

#14: I was the eldest and next was three sisters and then three brothers.

Q: Tell me, what was it like growing up in your family? How are your memories of your childhood?

#14: I do not have many memories. I remember playing and doing the work assigned by my parents.

Q: How did you help them?

#14: I did whatever work was assigned to me by my parents and went wherever they asked me to go.

Q: Like farming work?

#14: Farming and any work my parents asked me to do, I did. My parents also sent me to school. I attended school. I was sent to a Tibetan school. I went to school when I was young, around 13 years old.

Q: What are some of your favorite memories of your childhood when before 13?

#14: I remember working and other than that nothing much. Though of course, I know clearly the happenings in the village, like sowing the fields, harvesting and then the same thing the next year—just like we do here in the settlement. You finished one task and the next one started. That's how agricultural work was.

Q: When you worked there on the farm?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes.

Q: Were there many people nearby your farm or were you very remote?

#14: What?

Q: The area where you lived and farmed; was it very remote or were there people nearby?

#14: It wasn't secluded; there were quite a lot of people in villages nearby. If we considered all the villages around, the area was quite large. It was not on a large single plot of land. Our area was quite crowded, though in Tibet some areas are very large. Ours was a little

crowded, so in the valleys we cultivated the crops and the hills were meant for grazing animals goat, sheep, yak and *dri* [female yak].

Q: What was your father like? What kind of a man was your father?

#14: He was not an angry man. He was very good-natured. I am supposed to be good-natured. In children you find different temperaments and if you were good, your parents would not beat you. I was hardly ever beaten. They loved me very much.

Q: You were number one as a child?

#14: I don't know about being good, but my conduct was good, so I was not beaten. I was the eldest child and in Tibet the eldest child was...[audio is lost]. My parents were good to me.

Q: Can you describe your mother? What was your mother like?

#14: She was very good. She did the housework and had to bring up all the children; there were so many. She took care of the children and was very adept at household duties.

Q: Where did you go to school?

#14: From my village, if you estimated the distance by kilometers as we do here though in Tibet it was in miles; it was about two or three kilometers. There were a few families who were educated there. I went to them to study.

Q: And what did you study?

#14: I learned Tibetan, but I was not able to study much—only less than a year as the teacher passed away. If I could have studied until the end, I would have learned much better.

Q: I'm sorry. Was this a monastery school or a private school?

#14: It was a private family. As our area was not that big, there were no large monasteries and such. Though in Lhasa, they were run by the government.

Q: Was there a monastery nearby where you lived?

#14: Yes, there was.

Q: Do you know the name of it?

#14: Yes, I remember. Lekduk Datsang. The abbot of the monastery came from Shigatse. There may be around a 100 monks. The abbot came from Shigatse, where there was the monastery of the Panchen Lama.

Q: So you went to school to study Buddhism?

#14: No, I did not go to study religion. I went to learn the script, which was considered important. It was difficult in the society if you did not know the script. To be honest, in Tibet it was very rare to find such. I went to study the script, but the teacher also taught me the basic Buddhist prayers.

Q: Just Tibetan and that's it? Nothing else?

[Interpreter to interviewer] It's not related to Buddhism. He studied Tibetan.

Q: Right, the Tibetan language.

[Interpreter to interviewer] Right, the Tibetan language.

Q: How many years did you go to school?

#14: I was not able to complete one year. The teacher passed away. If not, I was to study for three, four, five, six years. The teacher passed away and we couldn't find a new teacher. Then my parents sent me to learn tailoring, you know tailoring, stitching clothes. That's the story.

Q: How did his teacher die?

#14: Which teacher? The one who taught me to read and write?

Q: Yes.

#14: He was old and died due to sickness. It was not due to anything bad.

Q: What happened to you after that? What happened after you left school?

#14: I felt a great loss on leaving the school, as I was not able to complete my studies. If I could have completed my studies, it would have been so good. My teacher passed away. My parents felt that that much education was sufficient—coming from a small region, and felt that tailoring was important and so [they] sent me there. In Tibet, family members had to stitch their own clothes. The women would weave the *nambu* 'woolen cloth' materials themselves. It was considered good to be self-sufficient, so I was sent to learn stitching.

Q: Your father knew how to weave clothing?

#14: He knew just a little because he hadn't learned it the way I did. He didn't know much. I knew it quite well when I fled [to India]. First, you have to cut the cloth according to the body measurements and then stitch, which I knew. My father didn't know much. I was sent

to a teacher to learn to stitch. I didn't learn from my father. I was sent to a teacher, who taught me to stitch.

Q: So from like age 14, what do you do with your life? You made clothes, what else did you do?

#14: From the age of 14 until I was 16 to 17, I learned to stitch, for about two to three years. I would study for about five to six months and then take a break. I learned to stitch for about two to three years. Besides learning to stitch, I had to do other works for the home. I did whatever my parents assigned me to do. When there were important works to be done in the house, I had to do that. If there was not much work at home, I was sent to learn to stitch. That was also important.

Q: When you made clothes, was it to sell the clothes or clothes for the family?

#14: Mostly they were for the family. In my village there was no one that sold clothes. Every family made their own clothes. The women would weave wool into cloth, which was dyed, then had to be cut and stitched. None was for sale as each family made their own clothes. If one didn't know how to stitch, then you had to hire someone from outside to do it. You had to hire someone.

Q: How would you describe your teenage years? Were they happy or exciting or sad?

#14: I was sad when my teacher passed away. After that, the person I learned to stitch from was a relative of my mother. At that time, sometimes I was happy and at times, when I failed to learn, the teacher would beat me. As a child, at times you were sad. That was how I lived.

Q: You were a good boy. Why did he beat you?

#14: I didn't learn stitching from my father. It was from a teacher. What?

Q: Why did he beat you?

#14: When you were not able to stitch well and made mistakes, then he beat. When you cut in a crooked way, then the teacher would get angry. It was not my father. I was sent to learn tailoring from a teacher. He was a short-tempered man. If you made a mistake in cutting, naturally he would get angry.

Q: What happened next in your life? You were a tailor, you helped your mother and what other changes happened?

#14: Then when I was 17, 18—as a youth I was sometimes happy and sometimes not. Then when I turned 20, I left my village for Nyero in marriage at age 20. My wife's family had only one daughter. In Tibet we had the system of a boy going as *makpa* 'joining his wife's family after marriage' and a girl as *nama* 'joining her husband's family after marriage.' So I married at the age of 20.

Q: Who was the lucky girl?

#14: She is here at home.

Q: How did you pick your bride?

#14: I went to join her family. When I was sent from my home, friends and relatives came for a celebration and offered me *khata* 'ceremonial scarf.' Then when I reached my wife's home, likewise we had a party with friends and relatives for five to six days, which was the tradition in Tibet.

Q: No, I mean where did he find his wife?

#14: I hadn't met her. It was arranged by our parents. It was not that we met and decided. The parents had spoken among themselves. Let me tell you the story. Our family had many sons. Their family did not have any sons, so since our family had too many sons, I was sent to their family.

Q: To meet the girl?

[Interpreter to interviewer] No, to get married. He stayed there in his in-laws' house forever.

Q: Oh, just to live there?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes.

Q: And then he married the girl?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes, certainly.

Q: But you went to in-laws' house before you were married?

#14: No, not before. I hadn't even seen her. That was the tradition in Tibet.

Q: So how did your parents arrange for you to marry her?

#14: The other parents would want a good man, not just anybody. If they thought a person was good, they would send across a proposal. The parents of this side would also ensure that that family was good enough to send your son. The parents on both the sides would make sure and then the marriage took place.

Q: Was he happy with the arrangement?

#14: First when I left from my parents' home, I did not feel very happy. I was separated from my parents and the distance was quite far. I used to feel sad. As time passed and because it was our destiny, we felt happier and love happened.

Q: He missed his family?

#14: What?

Q: You missed your parents?

#14: How? That my parents asked me?

Q: You left when you married. You said you missed your parents and felt sad. And that the place was far.

#14: Yes, I missed my parents. I had to leave my home.

Q: Was it very far from your home, this new home?

#14: It was quite far. The distance was like from here to Mysore [60 miles]. Irrespective of the distance, it was that I was leaving my home, which made me sad.

Q: So the husband goes to live with the wife's family, typically?

#14: How?

Q: You went as a *makpa*. Did that happen often or were there *nama* as well? Did everybody go as *makpa*?

#14: The *makpa* went alone. The *makpa* went alone but you could go and come on visits. The girl's family wanted a man for their daughter and I was sent in marriage and no one went with me. Then later I could visit my parents and my parents also came to see me. That was possible.

Q: Now you are married. Is your wife; is she happy to marry you?

#14: I do not know really if she was happy. She was very young. She was 18.

Q: How old was she?

#14: One wouldn't know if one is glad in the depth of the heart. In the Tibetan tradition we do not express like, "You have come and I am happy." The foreigners show their love, but we restrain our feelings due to shyness. Perhaps she might have been happy because she requires a partner. She never told me that she was happy that I had come.

Q: What did you do for a living when you moved into your wife's family?

#14: The people of the village were both farmers and nomads. This family's holdings were more extensive than mine. We also did trading, going to Bhutan. We were very close to Bhutan.

Q: So farm and then go after the animals in the summer?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes and also business. They go to Bhutan for business.

Q: His original family were not nomads. This new family were nomads?

#14: My original family did not own many animals; however, we had very fertile lands, as it was close to Gyangtse. In Nyeru, farming was risky in that if the weather was cold, the crops did not grow well. The area was vast and grass grew well for the animals like sheep and goat, *dri* and yak.

Q: But his new family?

[Interpreter to interviewer] His new family was nomadic.

Q: How did he feel about the changes to now living in a nomadic family and trade? What did he think and feel about it?

#14: Changes? The way we cultivated the lands were the same. Besides that we had to look after the animals and do some trading. As I grew older, I felt that there was a steady progress in me to do better in agriculture and trading.

Q: How old was your wife when she married you?

#14: She was 18 and I was 20.

Q: And when did you have your first child? How soon after they got married?

#14: In about a year and a half. It was quite soon.

Q: It was too soon? What do you mean by that?

#14: That was soon. Isn't that soon?

Q: Why not?

#14: That was your destiny. You call it destiny, isn't it?

Q: Why didn't you want her to have a baby so soon?

#14: In Tibet we never had birth control and we wouldn't use it [even if it was available]. So it was natural. In India and abroad, if one wanted a child, one could make one and if one didn't, then there are ways to control that for the time being. We didn't have that.

Q: But you wanted your wife to not have a baby so soon. That's what you told me.

[Interpreter to interviewer] He said it's too soon.

Q: Because?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Because his child was born within one and a half years of when they got married.

Q: Why is that too soon?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Because he didn't expect it.

Q: What happens in the next five years? Can you tell me are there any significant events that happened after your first child was born? What happens in your life that you remember as a big event?

#14: Once the child was born, you had to look after it and that was difficult. Even if you had enough to eat, you had to take care that the child did not fall ill. I gave a lot of thought to my child.

Q: You were still a big brother.

#14: Yes.

Q: You had many brothers under you?

#14: They were much younger and being looked after by my parents. Even I was young then and did not know much. We are now talking about after I was married.

Q: You were yourself also a child? You said at that time 'I was also a child'.

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes, when he was a child, his parents were looking after them.

Q: And now "I am a father."

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yeah.

Q: "And I have to look after."

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yeah. That's what.

Q: Were you worried, was there any reason you were worried your baby would get sick and die?

#14: Five or six months after its birth, the child fell ill. It was due to the harm caused by evil spirits and the child developed swellings on its cheek. We faced a lot of difficulties. When a child gets sick, we fear greatly that it will die.

Q: Did the child survive?

#14: It did. He is with me at home. He is the eldest child.

Q: How do I say, "He is a very good father?"

#14: [Smiles]

Q: So is your life peaceful at this time in Tibet? Was there anything happening?

#14: As I told you we were worried when our child was ill. Then we had a daughter. Once you have children, then your worries grow. Of course you also have to think about your livelihood. We had enough to live by and did not have extreme worries, except when our child was ill, but neither did we have great happiness.

Q: You had two children now. Was there any presence of the Chinese in your country yet?

#14: What?

Q: What feelings did you have when the Chinese came?

#14: When the Chinese came, I did not like them. They came as they fought along Kham and then Lhasa. When the battle was lost and they came to our region, I felt very anxious. People who had no rights were coming to our country.

Q: How old were you when you first heard?

#14: When the Chinese first came to Kham, I was around 18 or 19. It was said that the Chinese first came in 1949, and when the Chinese entered Lhasa it was around 1955. Then they came very fast through Tsang.

Q: What is the first thing you heard about the Chinese that made you worry or upset?

#14: The reason was that the Chinese were fighting in our country. In Kham, our Tibetan army, who was there, were killed and they occupied. When your country is occupied by people who had no right, there was no peace in your mind. Chamdo was lost. They came through Kham. They came and they fought along the way. When they arrived in Lhasa, naturally nobody liked it.

Q: Kham and Chamdo, into Lhasa. In what year are you talking?

#14: It was around 1954 to 1955 when the Chinese arrived. After the war, when they came to the villages, they were quite gentle.

Q: And he was living far away?

#14: Compared to Lhasa we were at the other end, but we heard the news and it made us unhappy.

Q: Did you think of doing anything when you heard about the Chinese coming into Tibet?

#14: The battle was already lost from early on. There were no protests, to be honest. It must have been 1954 or 1955, probably 1955 when they came to Shigatse. The Chinese came along with the Panchen Rinpoche. When they came to Tsang, they were gentle as there was no one resisting. The war was already lost. Then later they became worse and worse. Toward 1958 or 1959, their hold turned stronger and stronger and they caused a lot of suffering.

Q: When they came to where he is living? Utsang?

#14: When they came to Tsang-proper, the war was lost. There was a place called Diguthang and a lot of preparations were made there to fight. People were coming from Kham and preparations were made. There were the men of the *Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force and people from Utsang. A lot of people assembled at Diguthang and planned to go to battle. There were people from all the three provinces, Dhotoe, Dhomay and Utsang.

Q: You arranged Tibetan armies?

#14: Yes, the Tibetan army—all who had gathered voluntarily. The Tibetan government had its army, which was stationed around Lhasa area. They also went to Kham and lost.

Q: About how many?

#14: It used to be said that [in the Tibetan government's army] there were 30 divisions, each with 500 men. There might have been 15,000. Some divisions were said to have 500 and some 1,000 men.

Q: So 30 camps, about 500 to a 1000 in each camp.

#14: It had decreased at one time. The divisions were named after the [Tibetan] alphabets like, *Ka, Kha, Ga*, and the divisions were *Kadha Maga, Khadha Maga, Chadha Maga* and so on.

Q: What was the place they were going to meet the Chinese to fight? With the Chinese, is that right, to fight? What place or city; what was the place called?

#14: Diguthang.

Q: Was Tashi in it? Was he with them?

#14: I was not with them.

Q: You weren't there. Where were you at that time?

#14: I was unable to go there.

Q: And what happened?

#14: After that a large number of Chinese arrived. They came through Gyangtse and then went everywhere. They destroyed the army base and took control of Tibet. In 1959, the event occurred in Lhasa and they created havoc in many places. They then again started the war and they killed anyone who protested. If there were no protests, they carried on. They annihilated the army base and seized it.

Q: The Tibetan camps?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes.

Q: We are talking about what year?

#14: When they arrived in Shigatse, it was around the year 1955—1954 or 1955.

Q: When was the first time that your life was affected by the Chinese presence in Tibet?

#14: The war had already happened and His Holiness was about to leave for India. At that time they [the Chinese] said that they had come to revolutionize. They did that to Nyero and many other regions. The Chinese misled the bad people and made them beat and seize the properties of those who were in a higher position and were helpful. That was started in 1959. It was in my region.

Q: When was his life first affected by the fact that the Chinese were in Tibet; his own personal life?

#14: What?

Q: Your own life, how was it affected and when was it?

#14: I was 25 years old when we were on the verge of fleeing, that we faced the real problems in the family. The war was different. The war happened and Tibet lost the war. After that they [the Chinese] went to the villages and everywhere saying that “The war happened and we have won the war. However you have to remain and help us.” Whether

they needed food—in Tibet we did not have vehicles or horses to ride, we had to supply them. Then gradually they became worse and worse. They started beating the prominent people and seizing their properties.

Q: Did the Chinese personally harm you?

#14: That happened in 1959.

Q: To you?

#14: Yes, it was in the sixth Tibetan month of 1959.

Q: What did the Chinese do to you?

#14: The Chinese came in 1959 and I was 25 years old. We were close to escaping. The ideal livelihood that we had was snatched by them. They seized our *tsampa* ‘roasted barley flour’ and grains and distributed them among the poor people claiming that they were helping them. If they had brought their own things that would be helping them, but they were giving away our wealth. They destroyed our wealth, beat the people and imprisoned them. They took many away to be imprisoned.

Q: To your home?

#14: Yes, the Chinese came to my home. They came many times with their interpreters.

Q: And what happened?

#14: They told us that we had to give away the things that we had in our house to them with a kind heart—whether it was grains, *tsampa*, oil or other kinds of food. They said that they would use some and distribute the rest to the poor public.

Q: What did you feel when they came into your home?

#14: I felt a lot of hatred towards them. They were forcefully taking away all our properties that we had worked so hard for. If we refused to hand them over, they would kill us, so we were compelled to give them away. It was not just once or twice. They came many times and we had to give to them. They told us, “You have to be good. If you are good, there would be leniency. If not there is only one way for you to go”—meaning they would kill us. It was either imprisonment or killing.

Q: If you do good, what did they need to do good?

[Interpreter to interviewer] They had to give all the things to them, like eatables and other assets to the Chinese.

Q: Evils?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Eatables.

Q: Edibles. Okay.

[Interpreter to interviewer] Edibles.

Q: So “if you are good to us, if you give us edibles and other things.” What else did they take besides food, oil, food?

#14: To put it in a nutshell, they took everything. They did not even leave anything for us to eat. They took all the possessions of the well-off families, ate themselves as well as gave to those poor people who worked for the Chinese. In the end the well-off families had nothing left to eat. The Chinese gathered the poor people and would misinform them and made them beat [others], assembling all the villagers.

Q: Was your family a dignified family in your locality?

#14: Yes, we were among the better-off families considering our land holdings.

Q: Did you believe the Chinese were going to give the goods to the poor?

#14: If you look at it from another point of view, if they did give them to the poor, it was fine. Of course if you didn't ponder deeply, that didn't feel good when they initially seized our possessions suddenly. However, if they gave it to the poor, I did not think too badly of it. But the Chinese were taking them away.

Q: They kept it for themselves?

#14: When they spoke sweetly, they would say, “Lend us your things so that we can give them to the poor.” So it was best to think and smilingly give the things to them. It was good if they gave them to the poor, but even if they were going to keep them, they wouldn't leave you alone. If you gave them with a smile, they would say we were good men. If you were angry and said that the things were yours, they would either beat you, or if they didn't kill you, would take you to prison far away.

Q: Did your family give or did they resist?

#14: There was no way we could resist. It was a matter of might. They would kill like this [makes the sign of a gun]. However, they would look at your expression. If you gave with a good expression, they would say that you think well. If you gave with an angry expression, they would say that you are a bad man.

Q: What was your expression?

#14: I didn't show a bad expression. I presented a gentle expression. Showing a bad expression would in no way subdue them, instead you would suffer yourself. So at least for the time being, if you were smart and made the other person feel good, you wouldn't suffer. That was why I showed a good expression.

Q: When they came, was your family; your wife, your baby and in-laws were they there? Who was there?

#14: At home was my wife, our two children—my wife's mother was dead—my wife's father, his brother and their father. There were two elderly men. There were so many of us.

Q: Was it in the morning or evening?

#14: What? When the Chinese came? They had come so many times asking us to hand over our possessions. It was not once, but many times. In one month, they came around five to six times.

Q: Did they take different things each time?

#14: Whatever things they needed, they would demand that we handover. They needed grass and grains for the horses, food for the men. Whatever they needed they demanded of us. In the human society whatever a person required, they demanded and we had to give them. It was the case of the weak and the mighty. If you gave with a good expression, you had to give. Even if you displayed a bad expression, you had to give as they wouldn't leave you.

Q: Did they take also family valuables from the altar or anything?

#14: At that time, they didn't take the religious icons. They were smart and must have thought, "It is a matter of time before they are ours" and didn't take the icons. They took all the food away.

Q: Were there pictures of the Dalai Lama, His Holiness, in your home at that time?

#14: Of course, we had his pictures.

Q: And did they leave them?

#14: At that time they didn't say anything. I have a small picture of His Holiness, which I brought when I escaped. The poor treatment started in our village from the sixth Tibetan month for about four months. We escaped in the ninth month through Bhutan. I had the picture with me then.

Q: They tortured you. Who did they torture?

#14: Which one?

Q: In the four months.

#14: In the four months, they kept demanding food and other stuff; food did not get depleted immediately. It was not only our village. There were many families. They would go to one village for about five to six days and then another place and seize their things. They would go to another village to the well-off families and so they lived in this way.

Q: That's what he meant by torture, taking away the things, not physically? They took everything from June to September.

[Interpreter to interviewer] June to September.

Q: And that's why you fled in September.

#14: It must have been October. It was the ninth Tibetan month. Perhaps it's the end of October.

Q: Are we talking of 1959?

#14: Yes, it was 1959.

Q: Did you flee before or after the Dalai Lama fled?

#14: After His Holiness the Dalai Lama had fled. His Holiness left in the month of March. It was in March that he had left for India.

Q: After the Dalai Lama escaped, then you left.

#14: It was five to six months after His Holiness left that we escaped.

Q: How did you feel about having to leave your country?

#14: Leaving our country was the saddest thing. His Holiness had already left and we had lost the war. If we remained...they were ill-treating the affluent families and we could not live under the Chinese. In desperation, we escaped. The saddest part was that we were leaving our country.

Q: Where was he planning to go with his family?

#14: What?

Q: When you escaped, where did you think you would go?

#14: We used to have contacts with Bhutan. We hoped to be able to live in Bhutan, requesting help from some people we knew. That was our plan, but we were not allowed to

stay in Bhutan. We were told to go to India and sent to Missamari in Assam, in eastern India.

Q: Did you think that you would go back to Tibet someday?

#14: Now?

Q: Yes.

#14: I do think. Are we talking about earlier times or now? When I escaped, I thought I would stay in Bhutan for five, six, seven years and then with the grace of His Holiness and support from abroad, we would be able to go back to Tibet.

Q: When you went to leave, could you paint me a picture, were you walking, on horses, were you carrying things; paint me a picture.

#14: The weaker ones were on horseback, but the majority was walking. When we fled, we had to go over the hills. There were no plain grounds. Women and old people rode. The horses had to be carefully led while most people walked.

Q: What is yours?

#14: I was walking. I was quite young then. I was 25 years old. At that time I could do anything.

Q: Who was in the party? How many of you left Tibet?

#14: There were about 35 in the group. We left one night at about 11 o'clock. Everybody was asleep and we were about four families who left together.

Q: And who came from you family?

#14: Myself, my wife, two children, four elderly men, one person who was a yak herder and a relative of mine, who was a nomad. The nomad had left his animals and escaped. There were about ten of us.

Q: What did you take with you?

#14: We brought clothes to wear and food to eat. The most important was food because we were worried that we might starve. The *tsampa* and food stuff were heavy. We brought our clothes and a few things of value, like silver articles and women's ornaments.

Q: And how long was the journey?

#14: We left in the night and walked that whole night, the whole of the next day too, and the following night. We reached a barren place at the border of Bhutan. Then there was no worry over being captured by the Chinese.

Q: Were they worried about being pursued?

#14: At that time I thought I would leave my wife and the elderly in Bhutan with people we knew. If there was a Tibetan army ready across the mountain pass, then I thought I would join them to fight. However, there was no one because everyone had fled over into India and scattered.

Q: And did you?

#14: I thought I would join them but there was no Tibetan army in Bhutan. When we escaped we thought they might be there in Bhutan.

Q: There is no Tibetan army. So what did you do when you arrived in Bhutan?

#14: In Bhutan we approached their leader with a request to allow us to stay, as we had relations from earlier times, but they refused. We stayed for about 15 days, resting and the Bhutanese we knew gave us food. We were not permitted to remain in Bhutan and told that we had to go to the plains of India. We were sent to India.

Q: You came to India?

#14: They said we had to go to India and that we were not permitted to stay in Bhutan.

Q: What we missed that?

#14: I stayed at...

[Discontinuity in the interview]

#14: There were many monks and from there we were sent to Missamari in Assam. It is in the eastern part of India, right at the end. Most of the people [refugees] collected at Missamari.

Q: So you were 25 and now you are out of Tibet.

#14: What?

[Interpreter repeats question]

#14: Yes, that is right.

Q: Did you ever come near being imprisoned or anything like that by the Chinese?

#14: Yes, I was almost captured. If we hadn't fled we would have been captured. Those families like ours in the village were arrested and taken away. When the ill-treatment was going on and when we were about to be arrested, we could flee. We were certain to be arrested.

Q: Where were you when that happened?

#14: What?

Q: Where were you when the Chinese almost captured you?

#14: When the Chinese almost captured us, we were at our home. They had planned to arrest us the next day or the following day or in about four or five days. Sometimes they arrested suddenly. If you suddenly spoke badly or expressed anger, they arrested you immediately and took you away. If you spoke sweetly, though they considered you a bad man, they made plans and took time to arrest you. All those people of Tibet who were intelligent and could think were arrested, beaten and killed. Only a few were left.

Q: Why?

#14: We thought they would arrest us because their impression of us was bad. We belonged to the better families and they always had bad things to say; that we had misled the poor and that they were mistreated, though in actual fact the poor had been helped and not mistreated. They tell the poor that they were poor because they were subjugated. They tell such things and take away all the prominent people.

Q: One of the...[not audible] people in your locality?

#14: In our region, there were more important people than us like the private families of Takton, Takton Nyepa and the leaders of our region; they were taken away. They were taken away first and then the others.

Q: Then you heard a rumor that you were going to be arrested?

#14: It was the truth that we were going to be arrested. They arrested and took the others away. Moreover we had heard about the happenings in the Kham region. I was a hundred percent sure that we were going to be arrested.

Q: That was not a rumor...[not audible] And so where did you hide?

#14: What?

Q: Where did you hide?

#14: We were in the house and when we heard that we were to be arrested the following day, we made our escape that night. They couldn't capture us. People were sent to capture us but they couldn't catch up with us. They had made plans to capture us earlier on.

Q: You escaped to India?

#14: Yes. The reason we came at night was the fear of being captured by the Chinese.

Q: With the family?

#14: Yes.

Q: So that was the reason for the departure because you heard you were going to be arrested.

#14: Yes, the Chinese would capture us. After capture, they would have ill-treated us and perhaps killed us.

Those like us—there was hardly anybody left in Tibet. The person would have committed no offense, but they would claim that he was a bad man. Whether they were Tibetan government noblemen, families who owned estates or were prominent people they were all annihilated by them [the Chinese].

Perhaps they thought these could harm them. Those who were dull headed could hardly bring any harm. They thought if the people at the top were destroyed, then there would be no one to try and to oppose them.

Q: Why do you think the Chinese wanted to come into Tibet?

#14: There are many reasons said about why the Chinese came into Tibet. Some say that they came along with the Panchen Rinpoche who was born in China. In general since they are bad people, they overpowered many countries. They had no rights, but they invaded us because we were gentle people and harmed them in no way.

Q: Panchen Rinpoche was born in China?

#14: Panchen Rinpoche was born there, towards Dhomay.

Q: They wanted to take the Panchen Lama back into Tibet, into China? They captured him and take him to China?

#14: The Chinese came as they fought along the way and said they had to escort the Panchen Rinpoche. The Panchen Rinpoche is a Buddha and he wouldn't bring the Chinese, but that was what the people said.

In general it was because Tibet was a fine country and they overpowered it out of greediness. They had demolished the old system and begun the Communist system. They occupied many countries and step by step occupied Tibet.

Q: What did you feel about the Chinese at that time in your life? Can you remember?

#14: I thought in my heart that the Chinese were not good. Without any right, these people entered our country. They battled and snatched away Tibet and I never liked them.

Q: And what do you think today about the Chinese?

#14: Now-a-days in the world, the Chinese are considered people who do not believe in karma and whose words cannot be relied upon. It is well known that they are bad. I never ever think that they are good.

Q: What advice do you have, if any for the next generation of young Tibetans, whether they are inside Tibet or outside Tibet? What advice would you give as a father to your own children? What advice would you give to the next generation?

#14: I have my children and my children's children. The most important point I would tell the children is that they have to act according to the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Moreover, we should never forget to work towards achieving the truth about our country. Another important thing that I always say is that one should work for the society.

Q: How should they think about others?

#14: What?

Q: How should they think about working for others?

#14: You mean children in general? The children of present times, thanks to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Indian government and many others, receive an education. However, some do not know to make good use of it. Though some are exceptionally good youngsters, there are others who are a source of worry for us, whether they are my children or someone else's children.

Q: What do you hope will be preserved for ever about Tibet?

#14: The main Tibetan tradition that should be preserved is its Buddhist religion. His Holiness has said to the world that the Buddhist religion gives peace within one's heart and teaches about karma. I hope this could be done. The other one is, if Tibet as a country must survive; then we should be able to go back to Tibet as soon as possible. That is what I hope for.

Q: How do you practice your religion of compassion for all beings when you experience what the Chinese did to you and to your country?

#14: In religion it is said that we must consider others more important than ourselves. If you really practice the Buddha dharma, especially the Mahayana sect, one should consider other people more important than oneself and show compassion.

However, we cannot sympathize with the Chinese saying that they had come to our land because they did not have enough to eat, for they were a mighty country. If it was a poor country, that wouldn't matter much because they are also humans. But they were a powerful country that forcefully entered our country without any right and that was very sad for us.

Q: So if they were poor then it doesn't mind if they captured Tibet?

#14: If the Chinese had not suppressed us with their might and if they were a poor nation, I understand that everybody needs happiness. If they were in our country and if they had not been brutal, we know that humans need to satiate their hunger and need happiness, so it would not have hurt us that intensely. However, they were a mighty country and ours was a meek country and when they used brutal force that hurt us.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us before we finish our interview today?

#14: Is the interview over?

Q: We are finishing but before we do, do you have anything to say?

#14: You have come here for the cause of Tibet and also you have reported to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness has learned that you are concerned with the issue of Tibet and that it is important to hear the stories about the elders. As His Holiness has advised, it is important to preserve the stories of the elders for the younger generation. You have come here in accordance with the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and I am very happy about it. I request you to let the other countries know about the actual information and support the truth concerning our country.

Q: That will be our fondest wish to do that and we are honored to have, we are honored to thank you for your story and for your health.

#14: Thank you.

Q: And we wish you and all people of Tibet to be free someday.

#14: Yes, that is the wish of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and what is in the hearts of the Tibetan people. Those Tibetans living abroad have help and are happy while those still living in our country are under the Chinese, who during the Cultural Revolution destroyed around 6,000 monasteries and are still doing so. I have heard that they are destroying icons in Samye and this is very alarming. Our people in Tibet are suffering greatly and we request to you that it should happen as soon as possible.

Q: It is being said that they are destroying a huge icon of Guru Rinpoche in Samye at Lhoka central. So that is again like a Cultural Revolution.

#14: Yes, That is very important, the first monastery of Tibet.

Q: Samye?

#14: Yes, Samye.

Q: The first?

#14: Yes, the first. It was built by Chogyal Trisong Deutsen who invited Guru Rinpoche and Khenchen Buddha from India.

Q: Are they trying to destroy or have they already destroyed?

#14: There is an icon of the Guru Rinpoche, newly built which they want to destroy and transport it to some other place. I saw this on the news channel.

END OF INTERVIEW

[Additional questions from videographer]

#14: Six thousand monasteries were destroyed. Though we didn't see all 6,000; all the monasteries in my region were destroyed. The monasteries to which we used to go at Gyantse and Shigatse were destroyed. Lekduk Datsang which I told you about was completely destroyed. Then at Nyero, Ralung, every monastery was destroyed. No monastery was left standing. Gaden was completely destroyed.

Q: Buddhists are growing more and more in China. If there are more Buddhists, do you think that will help the Tibetans?

#14: If they become Buddhists that will help the Tibetans. The Chinese were Buddhists in earlier times; the old Chinese, the Kuomintang. Chinese Buddhism is older than ours. It was Mao Zedong who destroyed religion and brought Communism. In Tibet too, it was he who destroyed all the monasteries, during his time. The old Chinese escaped to Taiwan. Is that enough?