

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #20N – Bumdar
April 11, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #20N
2. Interviewee: Bumdar
3. Age: 81
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Zamar
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1967
9. Date of Interview: April 11, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Swayambhunath Old Age Home, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 53 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Dhiraj Kafle
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Bumdar was born in Kham Province and lived a happy life as a nomad. His family reared yaks and sheep that provided them with dairy products, meat and wool. They also travelled each year to gather salt which was bartered for grains. When he was 18 his family embarked on a pilgrimage and when they nearly reached back home after a long journey, they heard the news about the arrival of the Chinese in their village. They decided to settle in Chuktsang but then the Chinese appeared in the region of Ngari in 1954.

Bumdar talks about the policies, programs and tactics used by the Chinese. In 1960 Bumdar's family travelled with many nomads from Kham towards the Nepalese border. He and his father killed a few of the Chinese troops they encountered. Bumdar's father was then killed by the Chinese and Bumdar spent three years in prison in Ngari Gar where many wealthy, leaders and lamas were being held. After confessing his crimes, he was released under strict surveillance by a committee of seven people.

Bumdar recalls the story of his difficult escape to Nepal after the Cultural Revolution was instituted and conditions in Tibet worsened. After passing through Nepal the Indians denied them entry and many Tibetans died from hunger and the heat. Bumdar later joined the resistance operations in Mustang and helped guide the surveillance teams across the Tibetan border.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, nomadic life, invasion by Chinese army, resistance, thamzing, imprisonment, Cultural Revolution, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, guerrillas in Mustang, escape experiences.

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Interview #20N

Interviewee: Bumdar

Age: 81, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 11, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:12

Interviewee #20N: Name? The name is Bumdar. In the hometown [my] parents used to call [me] Bumdar Wangchuk, but I have never used Bumdar Wangchuk. I am called Bumdar here and it is okay to call [me] Bumdar.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#20N: Yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this...

#20N: [Interrupts] If they have done something wrong, it is their—the Chinese—responsibility. If Tibet has done something wrong, that is Tibet's responsibility. I will talk about the suffering and what happened, the truth about who has done wrong and who has done right. Hence, there will be nothing unacceptable.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#20N: Okay.

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

00:02:36

#20N: There may not be any problem. If I were to speak the truth...China is a large country and not every Chinese knows, but most of those Chinese that arrived in the Thoe part of Tibet have heard of my name and know about me. They talk a lot about me. They have stated that I was a reactionary, a bandit, a thief and a bad man. It is the Chinese that made many such announcements and they know it.

To say that every Tibetan in the three provinces of Tibet know me may not be correct. But those at the higher altitude of Nepal border like Womlo, the Tibetan border, Thoe Ngari border, and among the Tibetans in Womlo, there are not many who have not heard of my name Bumdar. Even little children on the way [to exile], when I say that I am Bumdar they reply that they have heard [the name].

Q: Well, we are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#20N: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ how old are you now today?

00:04:40

#20N: [I] am 80 now. According to your western calendar [I] am 80 and as per our Tibetan calculation it is 81. I am the same age as His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: *Pa-la*, where were you born?

#20N: It was Zamar.

Q: And where is Zamar, in what province?

#20N: It is a part of Dhotoe or Kham.

Q: When you were a little boy how many people were in your family? What was the size of your family?

#20N: Initially, at the time of my birth there were my father, mother, father’s mother, my father’s younger sister and brother in my home. There was that many members at home when I was born.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

00:06:33

#20N: I have five siblings: three brothers and two sisters.

Q: What kind of work did your father and mother do for a living?

#20N: When I was little my parents and grandparents were complete nomads. There were yaks and sheep that were milked and the meat sold. Then [we] gathered salt from the salt pans of the north and sold sheep’s wool. These were bartered for grains, *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley,’ rice and such food supplies in the south. We were complete nomads for there were neither farmlands nor forests. It was a complete wilderness.

Q: And was your family average income...

#20N: [Interrupts] There is salt that can be collected in the north that was bartered for grains by transporting it down to the valley where there were farmlands.

Q: How many days journey was it for you to gather salt in the north?

00:08:25

#20N: [Speaks before question is translated] We did not have houses but lived in *ba*, which is [a tent] made from yak hair. We call it *ba* and lived in it.

Q: How often did you go to gather salt and how long...how many days' journey was it?

#20N: The journey from our hometown to the saltpans of the north took 20-odd days, 12 days to go and 12 days to come. Then one must toil at the saltpans gathering the salt. So it took around a month. The salt is loaded onto yaks. So one must drive yaks.

Q: Could you just explain how did you actually gather the salt? What technique did you use?

#20N: Salt is found in water during summertime. We dragged it out of water in little piles using a tool onto dry land and then packed it later. During wintertime the water in the lake freezes because Tibet is cold. Is it called *baraf* 'ice' [in Hindi]? It is frozen with dust having gathered at the edge of the salt. If the dust is...It is formed there. We broke it into powder with a hammer and then formed a pile. By the process of winnowing the dust gets carried away by wind. Then the powdered salt is packed. There is a difference between gathering salt in summer and winter. During summer when the weather is warm, [salt] must be removed from the water and in winter [salt] is gathered by beating the ice and dust.

Q: Did you like to go on the salt gathering journeys?

#20N: Yes?

Q: You went to gather salt...?

00:11:57

#20N: [I] did not like it much but one must go. Salt gathering is a difficult task.

Q: Yes, it sounds very difficult.

#20N: In Tibet, in our custom it was only boys that went on salt gathering and salt trading expeditions. Girls did not go as a practice. These were boys' jobs.

Q: *Pa-la*, was your family average income or very wealthy or low income? What was the, you know, the status of your family?

#20N: When I was in [my] hometown...Take this [gestures off camera] for instance, I was among this group [gestures of camera].

Q: Middle class?

#20N: [I] was not number one or wealthy [indicates thumb of left hand] but among these [indicates index finger] while this [indicates ring finger] is poor and this [middle finger] is a little better. I was among this group [indicates index finger].

In general, our family was among the leaders. My paternal uncle—you might have heard of Shada Chime who passed away in Ladakh—he reached Ladakh and passed away. My paternal uncle was younger than father. My father was a village leader. We, the Shadatsang, were the leaders of the village. My family name is Shada, Shadatsang.

Q: Shadatsang. *Pa-la*, can you tell us some of your favorite memories when you were a young boy growing up in Kham as a nomad?

00:14:40

#20N: The memories...generally, nomads were happy. There were no difficulties in regard to food. Though at that time there were no vehicles or motorcycles in Tibet to move from place to place, one rode horses. If one stayed in one place, the animals fed on the grass and once the grassland wore out, one transported the *ba* to a nice place where there was plenty of grass. One was carefree then.

A pitiful thing is that there was no school to study. Except for parents and elders teaching you, there were no classrooms or schools in our region. It is pitiable.

Q: Were your parents able to teach you any kind of lessons, reading or writing?

#20N: Though I was not taught much of Tibetan writing and reading, I was taught to read the scriptures. My very own father taught me.

Q: Reading the scriptures?

#20N: Yes.

Q: How often did you have to move your *ba* to a new location? Like during the year, how many times would that happen?

00:17:27

#20N: The grasslands were good in our region. It happened once in summer and once in winter. The large *ba* was left standing while one took the animals to graze around. One moved only twice. However, in Thoe Ngari where my wife comes from and where I moved to later, one migrated around four times or every three months, which is four times. One moved every three months. In our region of Zamar, one moved only twice because of good grasslands.

Q: You mentioned that you had to ride horses; there was no other transportation. Can you tell us about your own activities riding horses and were you a good horse rider and what you liked to do on horseback?

#20N: I used to ride horses and ride yaks. [Smiles] There were bald yaks without horns that had pierced noses. These yaks were used solely for riding. Yaks were used to carry loads from place to place. One rode a horse and drove the yaks along.

Q: Did you ever participate in any sports or festivals where there was horse racing?

00:20:01

#20N: There was horse racing. There was horse racing. There was regular horse racing. There was picking up a *khata* ‘ceremonial scarf’ [indicates from the ground] while seated on a horse. Then there was firing a gun [rotates right hand above head] on horseback. Different games were played [on horseback].

Q: You mentioned your wife. Can you tell us what age you were married?

#20N: Who?

Q: You, *pa-la*.

#20N: Here?

Q: No. You mentioned your wife’s region of Thoe Ngari. What age were you married?

#20N: When I was around 18 years old. You know Mt. Kailash? It is a pilgrim site in the Himalayas—we went to Thoe to circumambulate it.

Q: At the age of 18?

#20N: It can be said that [I] was 18 years old. I might have been around 18 but cannot recall exactly. We came driving yaks and the journey took years, and then [we] reached Thoe. It took many years. So it can be said that I was 18 years old. Then we reached Thoe and were going to return home after circumambulating Mt. Kailash. The village where I stayed was called Chuktsang. It is close to Mt. Kailash. The village’s name is Chuktsang.

Q: And then?

#20N: Yes, [I] stayed there. Then the Chinese appeared in Tibet.

Q: You got married...

00:22:03

#20N: [I] was not married then. I married much later. The marriage happened late, after the Chinese had arrived and we had undergone a lot of suffering.

Q: At what age with the wife in Thoe Ngari...?

#20N: My wife was married to another man earlier. Four months after marriage the Chinese killed [her] husband. She was pregnant with the son [I] told you about and on top

of that the father [of the unborn child] was killed. Later we were married. I was around 30 when we actually married. We hailed from the same hometown and knew each other from the past. [We] were known to each other.

Q: You came from the hometown to Mt. Kailash on pilgrimage...

#20N: Yes, on pilgrimage.

Q: ...and didn't return home?

#20N: We decided to return home and moved slowly driving the yaks. After having come a long way and just before reaching [our] hometown, [we] heard that the Chinese had arrived and that there was fighting in Kham area and people were not happy. It had been peaceful in Thoe then and we returned there and settled in Chuktsang. We had lived in Chuktsang for 2-3 years earlier [during the pilgrimage]. Then [we] went back [home] but before reaching the village heard about the Chinese and turned back and once again lived in Chuktsang.

00:24:24

We settled in Chuktsang in 1953.

Q: Do you know why the Chinese killed your wife's first husband?

#20N: [Speaks before question is translated] That year His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama were escorted to China. [They] went to China. This news worried us a lot that the Chinese would not let His Holiness the Dalai Lama come back. All Tibetans were filled with anxiety. Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama returned in '54 and the Chinese formed the Tibet Autonomous Region Preparatory Committee in Ngari Gar. Then there was the 17-Point Agreement in Tibet, which you, being well informed, would know about.

Q: But *pa-la*, if you were on your way back from Mt. Kailash and you heard that your region had been occupied by Chinese, what did you do for a living because your family and your herds and your *ba* were all back at home?

#20N: The livelihood was the same as I mentioned earlier. It was the same nomadic lifestyle of gathering salt, ...[not discernible] and acquiring grains. Where source of grain was concerned, if you lived in Thoe Ngari you could get grain, rice and such from the Nepal border and Indian border. While in our hometown, except from Lhasa, Kongpo and within Tibet, there was no way of getting grains from foreign countries. But for this difference, the livelihood was exactly the same.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Thoe Ngari was where he was staying the second time.

Q: And so how long did you remain in that region?

00:27:19

#20N: [Speaks before question is translated] I wish to say something. The Chinese arrived in Thoe Ngari in 1954 and I went to Ngari Gar to attend the first meeting between Tibetans and Chinese. The Tibet Autonomous Region Preparatory Committee was formed to prepare for Tibet Autonomous Region. Flags were raised and the 17-Point Agreement was announced to every Tibetan and published in newspapers. It was the first time newspapers were published. That was the first time I saw Chinese and the first time I attended a meeting at Ngari Gar. I attended the meeting then.

Then they [Chinese] showed [pictures of] His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Mao Zedong and Panchen Rinpoche celebrating Losar ‘Tibetan New Year’ in Peking in China. There were pictures of them sitting together with Mao Zedong, which the Chinese gave out. The Chinese stated that we must accept the Tibet Autonomous Region Preparatory Committee and adopt Socialism. The 17-Point Agreement was announced and for nearly a month we held talks...Tibet Autonomous Region...that was how it happened at the beginning. That is how the Chinese initially began. That was the first time [I] came to know about the Chinese.

At that time the Chinese talks were all sweetness and good. “If this is so, it will be happy times,” [I thought] for [the Chinese] spoke only about good things and nothing bad. [Laughs]

Q: What did you think was good, *pa-la*? What sounded sweet and good to hear?

00:30:14

#20N: “There are no machineries in Tibet; machineries will be developed. There are no good schools in Tibet; schools will be established. Where religion is concerned you shall have the freedom to practice any religion. The top most leader of Tibet Autonomous Region will be His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the second Panchen Rinpoche. Besides, there are 17 people selected from among the Tibetan Government aristocrats and lamas to head the Preparatory Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region. They will carry out the duties.”

Formerly people used to pay taxes, like we, the nomads paid a wool tax, a salt tax and such. “There shall be leniency in taxes. Nomads need not pay taxes. Farmers need not pay farm taxes. There will be leniency in taxes for everybody. No citizen need pay taxes. Where there are no bridges across rivers, bridges will be constructed. Where there are no roads, roads will be constructed. We have come to solve all the people’s problems. The People’s Liberation Army has come to solve problems and extend help. We have been sent not to give you suffering and to oppress you.” [The Chinese] talked about such nice things.

Q: Did you believe these promises?

00:32:36

#20N: At that time...on an important note, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left for Peking and on the other side, Tibetans and Chinese were living side by side. [I] thought it must be true. They had signed the 17-Point Agreement and [I] thought it must be true. One

was happy then as the Chinese did not oppress nor did the Tibetans. Everyone was free to trade where [they] wished. That year of '54 and '55, '56, '57, '58, for these few years we were happy. The citizens of Changthang, the nomads lived happily.

Q: Freedom to trade. Was that increased freedom that you had had from before?

#20N: There was more [trade] freedom than before. One was free to trade in India. The Chinese brought goods like tea that were cheaper—though the Chinese did not bring in much in Thoe—and [we] were happy. There was a bit more [trade].

There were no machineries in Tibet like it is available now. There were no telephones, no telephones and no news broadcast over radio for the nomads. You have come here today and are having a conversation. Likewise, except for speaking in person to a person there were no communications through telephone. Our people did not know what was happening in Lhasa, what was happening in China or in the next village. You meet someone and ask for news and he described what was happening in a region. Even at that time we, the nomads were living like—call it foolish or stupid.

There were no radios to listen to news, no televisions to watch, never mind working on computers! There were no telephones to communicate.

00:36:04

Then in the year '59 the Chinese sent out notices to our people, in '59 to all the nomads, "You must surrender. Surrender any guns or weapons that you possess. We are the leaders. We have conquered Lhasa." The Chinese sent out notices to all the people.

Until [we] heard this, there was no knowing how Lhasa had been conquered. We were foolish and there was no way to receive clear news except what the Chinese had mentioned in the letter.

Q: How did the...?

#20N: The influential people of Ngari among the nomads started running helter-skelter. Some nomads surrendered to the Chinese and gave up weapons. There were some that did so but the majority was determined not to surrender to the Chinese. In the meanwhile the Chinese were creating rumors, "The People's Liberation Army has lost in Lhasa. The Tibetan Army has won. It is good there." This was said so that people did not flee to the Nepali and Indian borders. Our nomads fled towards Lhasa thinking that Tibet had won.

00:38:33

Then towards the end of '59 and the beginning of '60, those escaping from Kham and the lower regions and our people converged on the other side of the mountain pass of Mustang. A large number of people got together.

Q: In Mustang?

#20N: Yes.

Q: They came together and then what did they do when they came together? What was their plan of action?

#20N: There was not anyone that could formulate a plan. Everybody knew that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had gone abroad and that many Tibetan refugees had reached India. By the beginning of '60 many of the smarter and richer people left for the Nepalese border. The nomads were left behind for [they] had no money, no other valuables except cattle, sheep and goats. In order to go to the valley [the nomads] must give them up and become beggars. Driving [the animals] would bring about their death. So unable to give up the animals, [we] stayed near Martsang for a few months.

Q: What's the name of the place?

#20N: What?

Q: What's the name of the place?

#20N: It is called Martsang. It is the source of Thachok Khabab/Yarlung Tsangpo 'Brahmaputra.' We, the nomads, and many people from Kham stayed around that region.

00:41:15

Then in the 5th Tibetan lunar month of '60—I do not know which Western month it was—the Chinese arrived in the 5th Tibetan lunar month.

Q: Where?

#20N: Chinese soldiers appeared where we were staying. There was no counting; the whole mountain and valley at the Nepal border was filled. [Chinese soldiers] arrived from Lhasa and from Thoe.

There were no Tibetan Government troops or such and we did not possess good guns or weapons. [We] carried some crude weapons like Tibetan-made guns and did not have any good weapons. The Chinese were armed with what their soldiers have now. [Chinese troops] arrived where we had pitched our respective *ba*. A large number of Chinese landed upon the 5-6 families. There were many Chinese up on the mountains and a few came into the homes. We grappled with the Chinese and killed three of them, killed three soldiers. There were my father, me and a few others.

Q: Your father, yourself and a few others warded off the Chinese, killed three Chinese. What happened next, *pa-la*?

00:43:39

#20N: We killed three Chinese troops. There was some firing and a lot of chaos. Then regardless of east or west, Chinese appeared like this [raises fingers of both hands]. We did not possess good weapons. My family owned a fairly good gun and my father got a gun called *bakbak* that was used by one of the dead Chinese.

Q: Machine gun?

#20N: A Chinese gun, my father happened to get hold of one. Then up on a mountain a few of us...I was upon one side of a mountain [indicates palm] and on the other side [indicates back of palm] father and the others sat. There was exchange of fire. My father was here [indicates back of left palm] and I was here [indicates palm] with firing from the Chinese. I was in a bad situation because I had only around 20 bullets for my gun.

We fired and then it was around sunset that [some Chinese troops] arrived right in front of me. I was sitting behind a boulder, which was hit and my face was covered with cuts and blood from the rock fragments. [I] was not hit on the actual body but did not have any sensation. [Chinese soldiers] were appeared behind me after killing my father and the other colleagues. The Chinese had reached behind me.

00:45:09

I exchanged fire with some Chinese. I was hit here [touches left side of torso] and here [touches right side of torso] but none had pierced my flesh. The face had injuries and there was not any sensation because it was like this. From my experience if there is a lot of firing and if a bullet hits a boulder, it hits you on the head *kak, kak*. There is a ringing sound in the ears from the sound of gunfire and from hitting the rock and in the nose was the lingering smell of gunpowder. One was numb. One was numb. [I] walked up the pass alone. There were sevenh bullets left in the gun. That was it.

I walked up and was the only survivor. Some of the others had run away; some had been captured and some had been killed. My father had been killed or was not there. [I] did not see him being killed. Then I went up the mountain and [saw] that our camp where mother, the children and others were, was teeming with soldiers. The army was there and there was smoke and fire. I went alone to hide in the mountain and for 22 days was alone in the mountains.

00:48:26

Then what I did was...All the Tibetans had fled leaving their tents still pitched. The region was empty. The yaks and sheep had no owners and moved about on the plains and mountains. But the Chinese were there everywhere on the mountains. During the 22 days I encountered the Chinese twice. I was alone and fired whenever [I] saw the Chinese killing one or two. [I] may have killed three, four or five Chinese and then ran out of bullets. When I left that evening there were seven bullets left. [I] had fired five and managed to kill 3-4 Chinese though I cannot say with certainty. I ran and ran for 22 days in the mountains. Then the Chinese drove all the animals towards the north and the region became totally empty.

Then I reached the mountain pass to Mukhum. I saw a dark mist rising from among snow-covered rocky mountains. Taking that path would lead [me] to Mukhum. [I] thought I would be able to reach Nepal, and sat there for a while. I missed mother and the siblings who were five in number including me. There were four of them and [I] had no knowledge

if they were killed, captured or alive. I looked towards the north, to the Tibetan side and saw the sun shining in the mist, looking so happy. I cried and slept for sometime.

00:50:21

I knew nobody in Mukhum or the place. [I] knew not one person. The region looked gloomy as [I] looked towards it. The other side looked happy. "I may not get to see my mother and siblings by going towards Changthang but I am ready to die anytime. If [I] encounter the Chinese [I] will be killed but it will give [me] happiness to be killed. I must go there," I thought. Then I turned back and retraced my steps. On the return journey [I] met some nomads herding animals. I met two relatives from Chuktsang that were herding sheep. The Chinese had established a military camp with all the people gathered together and sent out a few to herd the animals.

[The herders] said, "Your mother is there and so are the younger siblings. They are worried about you going missing. They say that both you and father might have been killed." [I] asked, "What shall I do now?" The two men replied, "Tonight the shepherd will go back first and the yak herder will return around dusk. [You] can walk with the yaks and hide in a nomad neighbor's home. This will be better for you."

One of the nomads returned ahead driving the sheep. The other waited until nightfall so I could walk with the yaks. If I were among the yaks, nobody would notice. If I entered the home of someone I knew in the night [the Chinese] would not know of it. There were Chinese all over the region. I wanted to meet mother for a little while and then decide what to do. So I agreed to do it.

Then the shepherd moved ahead. The other boy and I went back in the night driving the yaks. As I reached the door of a neighbor's home after crossing a river...as I reached the door of the family [I] knew well many dark figures appeared. [I] thought, "What do I do? The Chinese have come." [They] were not Chinese but nomads, our people. "The shepherd that returned earlier has informed the Chinese that you have come and that you wish to surrender." The Chinese had said, "He will not surrender. He is the kingpin." The Tibetans had replied to the Chinese, "It is not necessary for you to come. He is foolish and will surrender. We will be responsible." People I knew like friends and relatives had taken the responsibility by saying, "We will be responsible that he does not run away." So they had all come there.

00:53:21

They were all our people that advised that. I could not run away for they had taken the responsibility but I was scared. "Give up your gun and the Chinese will not do anything," they told me. [I] replied yes and gave the gun and the remaining two bullets and spent the night there. They gave these [to the Chinese] saying, "He wishes to surrender. He has expressed the wish to surrender to the Chinese tomorrow." The Chinese had said, "Okay. He need have no fear. He has surrendered the weapons and need have no fear. Come to the meeting tomorrow." I spent the night there.

They [Chinese] did not interrogate or scold me and said, "If it is someone else we can make a decision." There were many others that had been in the fight. "However, you are a

kingpin and the decision will take sometime but have no fear.” [I] remained there for 2-3 days. Then [the Chinese] said, “You have to go. You have to go to Ngari Gar to receive training as we cannot take any decision.” So I was taken as a prisoner to Ngari Gar.

[Discontinuity in interview]

00:57:46

#20N: [Part of interviewee’s statement is missing. The following is taken from the interpreter]: That was the first time ever that I was in a vehicle and then they took me to prison in Ngari Gar.

Q: *Pa-la*, when you surrendered, you thought you would surrender...did you think you would go see your mother and your sister? Is that part of why you surrendered?

#20N: Yes, [I] thought that and met them.

Q: [You] met?

#20N: [We] met fleetingly but I was not allowed to stay at home. [We] did meet a few times.

Q: Can you remember what you talked about in that very important meeting?

#20N: There was not anything to say. Mother was crying a lot. There was not anything to say. The Chinese were sitting there and I could not talk about the things I had done. I said that I was just hiding and did not tell them much of the story nor did they ask me. [We] did meet fleetingly during the meetings that the Chinese called everyone to attend to talk about what the people had to do. [We] met fleetingly at such times. I was not allowed to go to Mother’s home. So there was not the opportunity to talk much.

Q: *Pa-la*, how many people were in this...about how many people were there that were nomads and local people and how many were Chinese?

01:00:16

#20N: [I] do not know how many Chinese were there. There was a large military camp and there might have been 500-600 troops. The nomads were around a hundred families. There were around 100 families from Yakra, from Chuktsang and from many regions. All the escapees had collected together there. I cannot say the number of people. There were around 60 families and I do not know how many were there in each [family]. I was like a prisoner then, not allowed to move about nor was I kept there for long.

Q: So when...

#20N: [Interrupts] The name of the region is called Tsang and the place is Wangzi Dhongthong. The place is located near the source of the river in Martsang.

Q: What’s the name of the place? Tsang?

#20N: Wangzi Dhongthong.

Q: Wangzi?

#20N: The place is called Wangzi Dhongthong. It is the source of the river in Martsang. Nepal is close to the pass and the other side of the pass is Tsang. It comes under Humla.

Q: *Pa-la*, what happens to you next?

01:02:15

#20N: Then the Chinese put me in a vehicle and took me to Ngari Gar, which is located at a distance of two days drive. The Tibetan Territory of Ngari Gar is close to Ladakh. I was put in a vehicle and taken to the military base at Ngari Gar as a prisoner.

It is not in Ladakh but close to Ladakh. I came to the prison in Ngari Gar. During the journey the soldiers neither treated me well nor badly but put in the vehicle. They held guns but did not assault [me]. After arriving in the prison at Ngari Gar, [I] was handed over to their officials who were like policemen.

That day they shoved me with guns and then shackled my feet with a thick, big chain. Then hammered a nail, as [the chain] was not the type where you have a lock and key. The chain was as big and thick as this [gestures off camera]. It was clamped here and here [indicates both feet]. The feet were shackled and the hands in handcuffs [joins both hands]. Then I was put in prison.

Q: Continue.

01:04:36

#20N: Now to talk about the prison. There were two prisons in Ngari Gar, an outer prison and an inner prison. In the inner prison where I was jailed were the two leaders of Ngari Gar, their district administrators and attendants, village heads of the whole region of Ngari, the wealthy and lamas of the various monasteries. We were altogether around 100 prisoners in the inner prison.

Other than that there were just one or two poor people. There were only influential people like the wealthy, leaders and lamas. Those in the outer prison were made to work and did not have shackles on the feet and hands. They were given tasks like construction of houses and logging and were taken away in vehicles during the day. They were given tasks. Most of us in the inner section had shackles on the feet. However, only some had handcuffs while others did not. Such were the people in the inner prison.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Could you repeat that about the internal prison, Tenzin Yangchen? Could you say just what you said?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In there were only the wealthy, the leaders and the lamas and...except for one or two poor people. And then prisoners in the outside division, they

consisted of the work force. They were taken out to work on construction and other jobs and they were not shackled.

Q: *Pa-la*, can you describe more about the internal section where you were kept in? Were you kept in cells or rooms? What was that like?

01:07:44

#20N: It was a single building like this [points to the right]. There was a gate on top of which was a spot for soldiers to stand. Below that were also soldiers. At the four corners of the building were four toilets for us. Then there were the cells. Someone with a serious charge was kept alone in a cell. Most of the men were kept four in a cell while in the bigger cells were around 10. There were large cells. Altogether there were 17 cells in the inner prison.

When one wished to go to the toilet, one raised the hand like this [raises right hand] and called out ‘*pako*’ to the soldiers that were looking down from above. If they answered ‘*chuez*’ one could go and if they [waves right hand], one had to wait. That was how one sought permission. Otherwise, you stayed in whichever cell you were incarcerated. Early in the morning they read out the names during which everybody came to doors. When a name was called one shouted ‘*yo, yo*’ [raises right hand]. There was the roll call once in the morning and once in the evening. Otherwise, you remained in the cell and could not come out.

01:10:09

As for food, a so-called tea was served in the morning that was hot water bearing a slight tea coloring. Along with a ladle of this was a spoonful of *tsampa*. It was not real *tsampa* but something like wood powder that was red in color. Lunch was two spoonful of this *tsampa* and some hot water. In the evening the same *tsampa* was poured into a large vessel of water and made into gruel. We received a ladleful of it. The food was very, very poor and one was hungry. Most of the people, when they fell ill, died. Many of the leaders of Ngari Gar passed away.

Even then [the Chinese] spoke well and sweetly. [They] did not speak badly. “We will treat you well. The Dalai Lama did not go abroad by his free will but the aristocrats of the Tibetan Government and foreign reactionaries have abducted the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama wishes to return and will do so soon. The Panchen Rinpoche will serve as your leader until his return. You can join us on the path to socialism. None of you will be killed; everyone will be released.” [The Chinese] spoke sweetly.

Q: Did you believe this?

#20N: Yes?

Q: Did you believe this?

01:13:07

#20N: I did find belief because I was told [my] charges were serious and that confessing your crimes will earn leniency. Then [I] confessed that [I] had killed but not about the ones when I was alone. I said that when soldiers charged, I had killed, hit them on the heads and opened up bellies and such. “You are very brave to have confessed your crimes. Confessing to crimes will earn leniency.” So during a gathering of the people [the Chinese] announced, “Bumdar has killed soldiers of the People’s Liberation Army. Though this is a serious crime, he has made a confession. So we shall show him leniency. You should also confess to any crimes you have committed and all the prisoners will be given leniency like him.”

I was some sort of an example. They continued, “You must think carefully. Is not the policy of the Communist Party good? Be it your Tibetan Government or any other country, if a man with a serious charge like you that killed soldiers fell into its hands, you would have been blinded, legs broken or killed by removing the heart, and skinned. There is no way you would be allowed to live. The policy of the Communist Party is...you are not a leader. You have been deceived by people into believing the Communists are bad. You have confessed to your crimes and that is good.” I was said to be good. [The Chinese] said that and I thought it to be true. “If I am shown leniency being such a serious offender, the policy is really good.” I found great belief.

01:15:35

The talk was just deception. The reason they said that was because I was to tell my colleagues and other people who had gone abroad to come back because “I had committed such crimes but am released. The policy of the Communist Party is good.” [The Chinese] said, “Tell them to come back and that ‘I have been released.’ You must let this be known.” It was their... My charges were in their hands and I was released at that time but was not cleared for good.

Q: When did you find that out that you hadn’t been pardoned and what happened?

#20N: I came to realize this a year or two later. I mentioned this earlier that it was in the 8th month—it’s not the Western month for I cannot recall the Western month—I was taken as a prisoner in a vehicle in the 8th Tibetan lunar month of ‘60. I was released in ‘63 around the 11th Tibetan lunar month just before Losar. “You must serve the country well. Be cordial to the people. Return to the home of your mother and siblings. Tell friends and people you know abroad, those who have gone to Nepal or India to come back. You know our Communist Party’s policy. You must speak well of it.” Then I was released.

01:18:34

Then I was released but there was no way [I] could talk to people who had gone abroad. Other than that [I] followed whatever they ordered. There were Chinese officials like policemen in the respective regions and [I] obeyed and did their bidding. I got to live with Mother and the others. I obeyed the people and remained humble. I lived there from ‘63 to ‘66.

Q: Did you...

#20N: Then in '66 the Lopso Chenpo Sum 'Three Great Instructions' was launched. Then I realized what was said earlier was not true.

Q: What are the Three Great Instructions?

01:19:55

#20N: All the people were to study the Three Great Instructions. The Three Great Instructions were that Communist China was a great country with a huge population, its land was good and great and that the country's policy was great. They praised the greatness and taught the people.

The reason I talk about suffering is because my father and paternal uncle had been leaders in our hometown. The paternal uncle had fled abroad to Ladakh.

Q: [Your] father?

#20N: What?

Q: Father?

#20N: Father's sibling, whom we call *aku* 'paternal uncle.' Is that right?

Q: Right.

#20N: [I] mentioned that Chime passed away in Ladakh. He had escaped. They [Chinese] had sought information from my hometown, "What type of person is he? What is his family like?" [Then the Chinese] announced, "He is from the leadership class. He has committed such and such crimes. So all the people must gather and subject him to *thaptsoe* 'physical struggle [*thamzing* 'Chinese struggle session']. He has killed soldiers of our People's Liberation Army. He is a reactionary."

I was subjected to *thaptsoe* in the year '66. *Thaptsoe* means gathering all the people and telling them, "He must be beaten. Say bad things against him and deride him." The people were the people of Chuktsang. Nobody raised their hands to beat me but said, "You have done very bad things by killing soldiers of the People's Liberation Army. You were a leader in the past. While making confession in the prison, you have not mentioned that your father was a leader and that your paternal uncle was a leader. This is a crime on your part."

01:21:55

Then I was subjected to *thaptsoe*. What was done after the *thaptsoe* was this. I was placed under the supervision of a committee of seven people. I was given a letter listing five things [I] could do and 10 things [I] could not do. I had no freedom of movement. Ten things [I] could not do [included]: I could not move from a distance from here to [for example] Boudha [Kathmandu] but could move around Swayambhunath. I had to seek permission from the committee to go anywhere. Likewise, [the Chinese] had created 10 things one was not allowed to do and five things that were allowed. I did not have any freedom though I

was not a prisoner. I only had the freedom to live at home but was deprived of any rights in '66.

01:23:50

I forgot to mention something. [I] think it was around '65 that my wife and I married. To talk about how we married...we hailed from the same hometown. My wife's father was very rich and in my hometown my family was believed to be of good ancestry.

Q: The wife was the daughter of a wealthy family...

#20N: The wife...how we got married was...I mentioned earlier that the wife was pregnant when the Chinese killed the [unborn child's] father. She had a little child. That was the condition of my wife. At this time I had nothing for the Chinese had confiscated all my valuables. I was poor and working for others to feed Mother and the siblings. My wife's father who had two daughters said, "Please come to my home and live as a *makpa* 'son-in-law' and I will give my younger daughter to your mother as *nama* 'daughter-in-law' of your younger brother."

My wife's father suggested this and that's how I got married. I went as *makpa* into my wife's home and their younger daughter came as *nama* to my mother's home for my younger brother, who passed away here last year. That was how the marriage took place according to his wish and our wish. They possessed a good number of animals then while we had nothing, Father having been killed and the Chinese confiscating all the animals. He [father-in-law] was good and that was how our marriage was arranged.

To this the Chinese...My wife's father had earlier served as the leader of Chuktsang and he was the wealthiest person. "He [father-in-law] is wealthy, a leader and a *ngatsab* 'deputy to a leader.' He married a woman of such [background]." That was another charge against me. The Chinese charged me with around 26 offences.

Q: This was after you were released from prison and these crimes were being...you were found guilty of these additional crimes. So what effect did that have on how you were living in 1966?

01:27:48

#20N: That how I was living. In order to graze animals belonging to the nomads...they [Chinese] informed me that there were 10 things that could be done, 10 things I was allowed...no, it was five things allowed and 10 not allowed; 10 things not allowed and five allowed. There was a committee formed consisting of seven people and the seven people were to supervise over me. I lived under such conditions.

But for living with [my] family members, even if I had to travel a distance from here to Boudha, I had to seek the committee's permission and should they assent, I could go and should they not, [I] could not. Nomads normally had to move the *ba* from place to place for which I had to seek their permission and if they consented, "Yes, you can move and stay there" [I] could stay there and if they said, "You cannot," [I] could not go there.

“[You] cannot talk to people from other places. You cannot visit others’ homes.” [I] could not go to any place other than Chuktsang. [I] was not allowed to talk to people visiting from other places. These are the things [not allowed] but I keep forgetting since I do not have them in writing. Anyway, there were 10 things I could not do and five things [I] could.

Whatever it was, the gist of the matter is that I could do what the seven people directed and could not if they did not. I lived under such conditions. [I] was allowed to learn the policy of the Communist Party. I could learn the Chinese’ instructions. The reactionaries...the United States was called reactionary, those that left for India were called reactionaries, the imperialist United States was a reactionary and in Tibet there were the reactionary cliques of the Dalai Lama.

01:29:54

At the time of the Three Great Instructions, [the Chinese] condemned the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama. [They] were likened to wolves. [To interpreter] You know a wolf? “There is a wolf that moves outside. It goes outside and attacks sheep and everyone says, ‘That is a sheep attacker, a wolf.’ There is another wolf that dons a sheepskin. This wolf is called a sheep; it will not be known as a wolf. It wears a sheepskin and moves around with the sheep. You should understand this. The wolf that moves outside is the Dalai Lama and you should all realize that he is the enemy. The one within wearing a sheepskin is the Panchen Lama. Panchen Lama lives under the Communist Party and oppresses the people and rebels against the Communists but you do not know that.” [The Chinese] said that the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama were their enemies. Then I lost faith in the Chinese.

In 1954 when the Tibet Autonomous Region’s Preparatory Committee was established [the Chinese] claimed there would be no changes to the position of the Dalai Lama and that the Dalai Lama was the senior leader of Tibet Autonomous Region—that there would be no changes to the position of the Panchen Lama and that he was the junior leader. They had said that at the time the Dalai Lama was living there.

In prison they always told us that there would be no changes to the position of the Dalai Lama and that he was good. Then in ’66 they said both of them were reactionaries and enemies. Then they announced there would be no freedom to practice religion. One could not practice religion like chanting prayers and such. That was another thing not allowed. When such times began I lost faith. In ’66 I lost faith.

01:34:02

I can only speak briefly here. They gave a long list of the “crimes” of the Panchen Lama and the “misdeeds” of the Dalai Lama and taught these to the people.

Q: So *pa-la*, I understand we’re, you know, getting towards the end of your story and I don’t want to wear you out, but could you tell us then how do you make a decision to leave Tibet?

#20N: Yes?

Q: How did you make the decision to flee?

#20N: There was not any decision as such. It was the destiny on my forehead. It became worse in '67 than in '66; the famous Great Cultural Revolution [was launched] when all the monasteries of Tibet were demolished, the Panchen Rinpoche was imprisoned—[the Chinese] could not lay their hands on His Holiness the Dalai Lama—and completely destroyed Ngabo and all such [leaders] of Tibet. As per [the program of] “discard the old and adopt the new:” old habits, old culture, old traditions, old policies, old religion—all these had to be destroyed and new ones created.

Even the names of people that had relation to the dharma and Buddha had to be changed and even the hair on the head had to be cut like the Chinese people. The practice of adorning gold, silver, turquois and coral on one’s self had to be stopped. There was to be no lighting of butter lamps or incense or showing devotion to the images in the monasteries. Such a situation occurred and due to this, Zamar Rinpoche said it was better for everyone in Chuktsang to flee. Hence, [we] escaped.

01:36:16

When we escaped...My wife had a younger brother who had a *nama*. The *nama* had two children. [My wife’s] brother had passed away. So there were my wife’s father and mother, the *nama* and her two children---at was five—and including me, we were six people. We were under the committee of the seven people and were living at a distance with them while the others were moving around freely as nomads. “All of us are not going to remain but flee. You too should not stay back.” My siblings—one has passed away and the other who is called Lodak returned and is living under the Chinese—the two siblings arrived. We were receiving instructions from the Chinese during the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guards with armbands here [touches left arm]...

At that time each person had to carry a book by Mao Zedong. In it were the lists of activities one could carry out or could not. Each person was given a copy of this book that one had to study. They [two siblings] had arrived when [I] was studying. [I] was told about their arrival. I went home and found that my wife, her mother, the *nama* with her two children, the five of them had escaped to the mountains carrying a few things.

The two siblings too were not there. We used to own a horse but the Chinese had taken it away. There were three or four horses belonging to someone else. [I] got hold of these horses. What [I] did with the horses was that wife’s mother rode one, one of the children rode another with a few things and my sibling rode the other one. “You run away while I have to remain here. I will make an effort to flee later.”

01:38:38

Father [in-law] was not there, as the Chinese had taken him to a meeting and not sent him back. My wife had the son [I] told you about of which I was not the father, the *nama* had one of her children; the two women and two children and I, the three of us carried packs...It was a great distance from Chuktsang in Changthang to Limi. We were not able to cover the distance and slept in the mountains for a few days. [I] slept on the mountains with the two women and two children.

After our people had fled, the yaks were ownerless in the mountains. [I] mentioned about yaks with pierced noses. We had two of them. [I] put each of the two children in sacks slung on either side on the back of a yak, tied the sacks together and led the yaks from their nose rings. We hid in the mountains during the day and trekked at night and in this way reached the place called Limi.

My relatives and a large group that had fled earlier driving animals had encountered the Chinese and only those men with horses managed to escape while the Chinese had captured the aged, children and all the animals. The men and the horses were at Limi. My mother had been captured by the Chinese then. The Chinese caught her. It was not my mother alone but around five elderly had been captured then. They were old and weak like me, maybe not this old. Around five elderly were captured. I, along with the two women and two children on either side of a yak, hid in the mountains during the day, trekked at night and reached an alien land, reached Limi, Humla.

Q: What's the name of the place where mother was captured?

01:40:33

#20N: What?

Q: What's the name of the place where Mother was captured?

#20N: Mother was captured on the other side of the pass at Horpa.

Q: Horpa?

#20N: Yes, it is in Hor. It is called Horpa. The Chinese captured my mother and five elderly on the other side of the pass, which is Tibetan Territory. There were 62 people in that group whose entire flock of sheep numbering a thousand and several hundred heads of cattle were caught by the Chinese then.

Q: At Hor?

#20N: What?

Q: Captured at Hor?

#20N: Yes, at Hor. It is the territory of Hor.

Q: [You] mentioned that you were living at a distance. Were [you] there as a Red Guard of Mao Zedong?

#20N: [I] was not a Red Guard. The Red Guards were appointed to assault and capture the people then.

Q: Were those seven people members of the Red Guard?

01:41:28

#20N: No. The committee was formed before the establishment of the Red Guards specifically to supervise me. During the Cultural Revolution two of them had the armbands of the Red Guards while the other five did not have anything to do with the Red Guards.

Q: What did the Red Guards do to you? You mentioned that...

#20N: The Red Guards in general, were the destroyers of the dharma in Tibet. I already had [the committee of supervisors]. [The Red Guards] were not there for me in particular. They were the ones that demolished monasteries, captured lamas, monks, oracles, astrologers—[to interpreter] you know that there were oracles and astrologers in Tibet—the astrologers and the oracles that gave predictions. These were called demons. Religion was called blind faith. All these were banned. [The Red Guards] saw to all of these. To put it briefly the Red Guards were...The policy of Mao Zedong is red and these were the people that protected it. They are said to have been appointed by Mao Zedong himself.

01:45:32

At the time of the Red Guards, they were not only in Tibet but it had its source in China. There was the one called Liu Ruchi [Liu Shaoqi?]. Liu Ruchi was the deputy leader to Mao Zedong. His wife...those supporting Liu Ruchi had leanings towards democracy then. Mao Zedong claimed that they were overturning Communism and then those in authority in the Party...to destroy those in authority in the Party. Then banning of religious activities in society and those that acted as oracles and astrologers, not to mention the leaders and the wealthy were their enemies. The Red Guards happened all over China during the Cultural Revolution.

Q: *Pa-la*, when you were making the escape with your wife and children and your brother's wife and two children, were there many people in this group or just the few of you?

#20N: [Speaks before question is translated] Then when we reached Limi in Humla, they [the large group] had arrived before us. They had lost all the animals and the elders had been captured. Only the study men were there and including the five of us, we were 62 people altogether, both young and old.

Q: And then what happened, *pa-la*?

#20N: Yes?

Q: And then what happened, *pa-la*?

01:47:47

#20N: Then the 62 people, we had nothing to eat and nothing to drink at the Nepal border. We wished to go to India and did so with difficulty. On the way to India, when we reached Mahendranagar-Tanakpur border, the Indians did not let us through.

Q: What's the name of the place, *pa-la*?

#20N: The place on the Nepal side is called Mahendranagar, which is located this side of the bridge on the river. Tanakpur is Indian Territory. We were stopped on the bridge at the border and not allowed to go through.

Q: Is it Dimapur?

#20N: It is not Dimapur. It is Tanakpur.

Q: Tanakpur?

#20N: Tanakpur is at a high altitude to the direction of Porang region. [Points to left] It is on that side and is called Mahendranagar by the Nepalese.

It comes under the Nepalese province of...[not discernible].

Q: So what happens next?

01:49:28

#20N: We were helpless as there was nothing to eat and in the heat, people were wearing fur coats. There were the sick and the dying. Many died from diarrhea. We were helpless when stopped [at the border]. At that time I had Tibetan-style thick [long] hair. I cut my hair like a Nepali and removed the Tibetan dress and donned Nepali attire. [I] did not know the language but took along two men from Humla to interpret. I fled in the night to India. I went alone [with two interpreters].

Then I went to India to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. One could get an audience on a Wednesday. I claimed to be a Nepali because the two colleagues [interpreters] said, "These days the Indians consider all Tibetans as Chinese citizens. They will seize you if you have newly arrived. Do not reveal that you have us as colleagues. You have come here to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Tell His Holiness what you have to say." The colleagues said that. "Okay," [I] replied.

So when [I] went to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama my colleagues from Humla did not come along. I went in alone. One was frisked at that time but not questioned. On reaching there...His Holiness was not in the present palace but high up in a building, which used to be occupied by the English. It is high above the present residence in an old English house; His Holiness was living there then. We went to see [His Holiness] there. We reached the place of audience. There were a fairly large number of people. His Holiness stood on a platform and I approached from here.

01:52:02

On seeing His Holiness [I] felt tears running down the eyes and a lump in the throat and could not speak for some time. [I] told myself, "This is not right on my part. So many people are in distress and dying. I have come here with a purpose. If [I] cannot tell His Holiness the Dalai Lama it is not right." I gathered strength to tell His Holiness the Dalai Lama, "We are 62 people in a place called Mahendranagar. Some are sick and some have died. The Indians are not letting us through. There is nowhere to return with the Chinese

there. [We] have no food and valuables. The Indian Government is not letting us through. I have come to make a petition.” Then I prostrated before His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness was sitting there.

Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, “It is very sad what has happened in Tibet. If one is able to come here we can do something. We cannot help [in this case] because the Indian Government has taken the decision to not let anyone through. We will not be able to do this easily. Do not feel sad thinking, “I have informed His Holiness but did not receive help.” This will go against loyalty. Do not feel sad. We will do whatever can be done. We are here to help the Tibetans. If it is possible, [we] will do whatever can be done. Go to the Home Affairs Office. You must relay the information to the Home Office.” His Holiness the Dalai Lama said.

01:55:33

Then I went to where the Home Affairs was. I did not know the Indian Language and did not know where the Home Affairs was located. [I] asked directions from Tibetans along the way and went down Dharamsala. [I] came upon a round building with a grand door curtain. I thought this must be the Home Affairs and asked, “Who is here?” “The Trijang Rinpoche [one of the two tutors of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] lives here,” someone said. “[I] must see the Trijang Rinpoche,” and went to see him. Trijang Rinpoche was sitting on a grand seat and I received blessings. I offered a *khata* ‘ceremonial scarf.’

“Where are you from?” [Trijang Rinpoche] asked. “I newly arrived and just now went to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and have been told to go to the Home Affairs. I was looking for the Home Affairs and thought this must be it. Being told it was Rinpoche’s [residence], I have come to see you.” He said, “Poor thing, poor thing” and called out to someone. A young woman about your [interpreter’s] age appeared. “Please take him to the Home Affairs. Poor thing, he does not know the language.” Trijang Rinpoche sent a lady with me. Then I arrived at the Home Affairs.

At that time the Home Affairs was not grand. There were the Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs in two adjoining buildings. Then there was the Religious Affairs and...[not discernible], four buildings. In the center of the four buildings was a telephone. That was it. I had a *khata* and asked which was the Home Affairs. The lady told me that that was the Home Affairs. I went in. The Home Minister was Wangdu Dorjee then, I believe. I offered the *khata* and said that I had come from outside. “Oh, a call came from His Holiness the Dalai Lama now. This must be it.” There was someone called Mingyur-*la* who was told, “Note the list of names and help write an application for him.” Then the secretary called Mingyur-*la* and I went out into the garden and I gave the names of the 60 people and our story. He wrote the application and the list of names. [I] submitted this to the Home Affairs.

01:57:52

“The Home Affairs does not have any avenues. However, there is someone called Bapa Karma and a few others who are well versed in the language. They have come from that region and know the place. [They] may be able to chalk a plan of escape. Just as His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said the Indian Government has blocked [the border] and

nothing can be done. [I] will call this man to help you,” said [the Home Minister]. “Okay,” [I] replied. The one called Bapa Karma asked for a week’s time as he was the head of the road construction crew and had to complete some accounting. He said we would leave in a week’s time. I waited for a week.

After waiting for a week...I had been asked to return on a certain day of the week but the man had not come. There were two women with two children. It seemed like they had crossed the border and had been jailed by the Indians. “We are poor women. Please help get our men released.” The two women pleaded with the Home Affairs. He [Home Affairs official] said it was not possible. “What shall we do?” The Home [official] was helpless. “Will you wait if we try to find some other person?” “I have sick people. [They] do not know the language of the land and it is very hot.” It was around the 1st or 2nd Tibetan lunar month and very hot in Mahendranagar. “I will go back. They are waiting there.” “If we can send someone, we will. You go ahead.” And then I went back.

01:59:47

Some of the people had died at Mahendranagar. There was a lama with us called Shungpa Lama who said that he could not stay there in the heat and it seemed certain the Indians would not allow passage. [He] wished to return to a cooler location in Nepal, to the border. When he went back many people said, “[We] cannot stay in this heat. The Indians do not allow passage. So [we] will go back.” [They] went back. Along with them...my elder sister who presently lives in Swayambhunath was a *nama* in a family. Her whole family was going back. My brother said if she’s going back we should go together.

I had seen His Holiness the Dalai Lama and given a report. There was nothing more to do. “Please wait here while we go back to the Nepal border. It is impossible here. Someone will come [from Dharamsala].” Some poor people were left behind and some rich ones stayed back. I am not sure but more than half the people remained in Mahendranagar. There were 17-18 people with us that moved to a higher altitude at the Nepal border.

Q: *Pa-la*, did you move to the higher location or did you stay?

02:03:43

#20N: My siblings were moving and I had to go. I told [the people staying back at Mahendranagar], “Wait here for [I] have given a report [to the Home Affairs]” and then I left.

It seems someone was sent [from Dharamsala] where the others were waiting. They left in small groups across the river and purchased train tickets. Groups in 3-4, 5-6 or 2-3 escaped in the night and they reached Kulu Manali [Himachal Pradesh, India]. There was Tagyar and some others who now live in Kollegal.

Q: *Pa-la*, just so we can make sure you arrived safely, where is your final destination with your family? Do you remain in Nepal or do you eventually move to India?

#20N: Initially?

Q: You went back to the Nepal border and then what happened?

02:05:03

#20N: What happened to me was this. I went to [India] in '67 and in '68 moved to the border. After reaching the border in '68 we had nothing to eat. [We] dare not go towards the Chinese and there was no one at the border that provided food. Now we were desperate and I have only bad things to narrate. I went towards our region in Changthang to steal. There were I and two other men. The three of us went to Tibet to steal.

[We] managed to get around a hundred sheep and drove them back. On the return journey when we reached the mountain pass in Horpa, the place where my mother was captured, three Chinese horsemen pursued us. I did not have any other weapon but a Tibetan-made gun that could be fired only once [at a time]. [I] wonder if you know about the Tibetan-made gun? [I] only possessed such a gun.

I hid behind a thorny bush while [I] told the colleagues, "Both of you run away. The Chinese have come." [I] had a good sword at the waist. This was given to me by a friend when I returned from India. [I] had this sword and a Tibetan-made gun. "Today the Chinese will kill me. It matters not if [I] die for I am not happy. Dying will be better," I thought. I did not have any other thought. I hid behind the bush holding the Tibetan-made gun.

One Chinese horseman lagged behind while two came together towards me. [They] drew close, like where he is [points off camera]. I fired and it hit one on the chest. One of the Chinese fell. The frightened horse threw the other Chinese down. He picked up the gun [picks up walking stick] and turned it towards me. I drew the sword and charged. He fired but it did not hit me. I struck the sword and it landed on his hand [indicates left hand]. The gun dropped from this [indicates left hand] and holding it in this [holds walking stick in right hand] jabbed me. I struck one more time here [indicates neck] and he fell.

Then I got hold of his gun. I rushed down with the gun. The other Chinese horseman fled. One of the horsemen was killed there. The other tried to stand up and I struck one more time with the sword [indicates neck] and he fell. [I] took away the bullets at his waist. [I] got two guns and two horses. [Laughs] Then I went towards the sheep and drove them. The two colleagues were running away atop a mountain and [I] shouted. They came down. We had a good catch that time.

02:08:33

The Chinese that had been shot died. The other one was of Tibetan origin and not exactly Chinese. Though I had struck three times, he received medical treatment and survived. He spread a lot of rumors. "I shot him aiming the gun at his chest but the bullet did not cause any harm," he had said. Then the Chinese claimed that guns cannot harm Bumdar and feared me greatly. Words spread everywhere and I became famous. That is what I talked about everyone knowing me. He started it and word spread from person to person.

Then I came back with two good Chinese guns. I gave one to my younger brother who passed away here last year. I remained there for the Indians would not give passage and

one could not go back to the Chinese. I had to feed my wife and children. I felt, “Let me be killed whenever the time comes” for there was not much to think about. I lived like that for a year or two.

As the fame spread...The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] was in Mustang then. Bapa Yeshe who has passed away was there then. The military unit at Mustang had heard about me and sent a messenger. “You seem to be a great man.” The Chinese had spread the word to the people of Humla, “Anyone who can kill him will be rewarded. Anyone who catches and hands him over will be rewarded.”

The people of Limi owned large flocks of animals and needed to go into Tibet to graze during wintertime when their region lay covered in snow. “If you want lands, you shall be given lands for generations. If you want money, you shall be given money.” The Chinese spread such rumors. The military in Mustang heard and asked me to come there. I told them, “I cannot stay in the military unit because I have a wife and children. What shall I do?” “If you cannot, you can do some other work. You can leave whenever you wish. Whatever help you need, our unit will provide.” I assented and joined the military camp at Mustang for a short while.

Q: Then what happens, *pa-la*?

#20N: Yes?

Q: Then what happens?

02:13:40

#20N: Then I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*. “I have to fend for my wife and children to be able to live in the military camp like a soldier. I cannot stay but am happy to serve.” “You can stay with your wife and do not have to be a soldier. We need someone who knows the region well to go to the border for certain tasks. You will have to do that.” The American and the Indians had established a secret office to carry out secret activities in the north. It was to assess the Chinese presence in Tibet, to draw maps and to take pictures for which soldiers had to go to Tibet. I knew the region of Ngari well. So I had to assist them and did so from...

Q: ‘68

#20N: ...from ’68 to ’73.

Q: Go into Tibet to draw maps, take pictures and...?

#20N: ...and to fight if one happened to encounter the Chinese irrespective of whether you won or lost. We clandestinely moved to the top of a mountain, took pictures, drew maps and then moved to another mountain in the night and so on in every region in Tibet taking pictures. Then [we] gathered information like how many Chinese military camps were there in a region, how the people were living, what motor roads had been constructed and such. Then there were old maps from America in which names were not clear or had

erroneous names of places; these old maps had to be rectified. Then [we] took pictures and carried out such activities. Information had to be relayed back.

I did not know any of these tasks. Those that took pictures and drew maps had assistants. I guided them and gave the names of places as someone that knew the region.

Q: Do you remember *pa-la*, any of the names of the Tibetans who were involved or Americans who were involved?

02:17:09

#20N: There were not any Americans. They were Tibetans. Most of them were trained in the United States to draw maps, take pictures and then there was the instrument that could show the directions like north or south in the night. There is such an instrument, which you might know. There were many men that were trained. [I] know them because they were our people.

Q: They were trained in the United States?

#20N: [They] were trained in the United States and then had come back.

This is being said lately but in the early days even at risk of your neck being cut you never revealed that you had been trained in the United States. This was a secret. Whether this should be said or not at present, you [interview team] have to make the choice. The organization in Mustang was established with help from the United States.

Q: *Pa-la*, if it doesn't feel too dangerous today, would it be possible for you to tell us the names of some of the Tibetan men who helped in this effort?

02:18:52

#20N: Some of them are dead. The head of our secret organization was called Gen 'Teacher' Buchay. He is dead. Then there was Khampu next to him. He too is dead.

Q: Who? Kham?

#20N: Khampu.

Q: Khampu.

#20N: Khampu. Then there was one I went with to take pictures called Gyedong and another called Jampa. Jampa is dead. Gyedong presently lives in the Settlement in Bomdila along with wife and children. There was Gyedong. Then there was Jampa who was from Amdo. He has passed away. [We] went in groups of 5-6, sometimes around 10 and sometimes 8-9 that included soldiers. It will be too much to write all their names. Then there was one called Tsewang Mingyur who went to Dharamsala and died there. Everybody has aged and not many survivors are left. Most of my colleagues are no more.

Q: *Pa-la*, are there any of these men that had American given names like nicknames or code names that you remember?

02:20:52

#20N: There were but I cannot remember. At the time I went to the border, there were A, B, C...those of us from Humla were in the D company. My name is Bumdar, so I was called DB. DB means Bumdar...

Q: D group?

#20N: D is the company and B is my name. We used to be identified like that at the border. When we wished to relay information to other Tibetans...there was Kungo Lhamo Tsering, secretary to the family of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [To interpreter] Know him? He was called Dungyi Lhamo Tsering and has passed away now. He gave us some training. I do not know a lot but the others did.

Q: *Pa-la*, this was a long time from '68 to '73, that's five years you were helping this mission in Mustang area. Was your wife nearby or was it far away from the camp where you worked with these men?

#20N: My wife was at Humla until '72. In '72—I have so much to say—the Nepalese or the Chinese came to know about my activities and I was nearly caught at the border by Nepalese policemen. The place is called Musi; Check[post] Musi.

Q: Musi?

#20N: The check [post] is called Musi.

Q: Is check Musi the name of a region?

#20N: The police at this check post asked me to come there for no apparent reason. “Yes,” [I] said and went there. There was a leader with a big belly who said, “You have to speak and speak truthfully.” They were called Geling Khampa as the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas were staying at Geling. “You have information about Geling Khampa. Talk about it.” “I do not have any information about Geling Khampa.” “Do you know it?” “Yes, I do. They are called Tensung Maga ‘National Volunteer Defense Army’ or some such thing. [They] extend help to us nomads. We are humble nomads engaging in trade to fend for ourselves. We are not officials and they do not tell us anything except for doing some trade with us,” I replied. “You are not speaking the truth.” The leader hit me many times with a stick. “Okay, okay,” [I] pleaded.

02:24:38

Houses at the border are poor. [We] were on the top of such a house. There was a stack of wood and [I] was made to sit there. “Speak up. Will you not speak?” I was beaten. I was in Nepali Territory and pleaded, “Sorry, sorry.” I could not understand the language well. There was an interpreter. The name of the interpreter was Musi Dumchok. He was some sort of an official of the village of Musi. Dumchok acted as interpreter. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” He [leader] had a big stick. “Stretch your leg.” I stretched out my leg. [He] placed the wood underneath and then took another wood and did like this [raises hands]. If [he] struck, my leg would be broken. [I] thought, “Why should [I] let my leg be broken when I have done nothing wrong?” I got up. As I got up 3-4 policemen caught me. I was quite strong then. [I] pushed this way [indicates left] and some fell. Some escaped this side [indicates right]. There was a *havi...*

Q: *Havildar* ‘police officer’ [in Hindi]?

#20N: There was a policeman who was a *havildar* who I wanted to throw down from the top of the house but he clung with his hands and feet and [I] could not do so. [I] looked around...I did not have any weapons. Looking around [I] saw a big oblong rock that was stuck to the roof of the house. [I] kicked at it to see if it got loose. It moved. I picked it up and could have flung it, “Why do you trouble an innocent man?” “Get out.” Some policemen cried, “*Bas, bas* ‘enough’ [in Hindi], Bumdar.” [I] thought it was enough. [I] wanted to go down. [Laughs]

The poor house had a crude wooden ladder on which the people of the village were coming up. As I rushed down they became frightened. Those people at the top fell down and those at the bottom held up. [I] could not leave in the mass of people. The top of the house was low, so [I] jumped down and was not hurt. [I] got down at a mound. A little distance away was a large dog. [I] do not know if the people unleashed it or what happened to the dog. It bit me here [indicates right thigh] and [I] hit it on the head with a rock. The dog fell there. Then [I] walked away slowly.

02:27:08

Some policemen were blowing whistles at the people. [I] did not care whether [they] pursued or killed [me]. The Chinese rumors helped me. Some policemen cried, “Shoot, shoot.” Another policeman said, “Shooting will not help us. [We] are not allowed to shoot. If he can be killed by shooting the Chinese would have done so. Guns do not harm him.” Then I went my way. Nobody stopped [me]. I went home to where the nomads were staying at Geling and told them about what had happened to me. [They] said, “You should not stay here. Go to the military camp at Mustang.”

Once again I went to the military camp at Mustang. Then they said, “It is not good for your wife and children to stay there if you cannot visit.” So [I] shifted my wife and children to Swayambhunath where they got work in a factory. There were a few children including my sibling’s children. There were 3-4 women: my two younger sisters, my wife and [my] sibling’s wife. The four women stayed at Swayambhunath while I went to live in the military camp in Mustang.

Then in the year ’74—this is becoming a long story—the Nepalese stated our organization in Mustang could no longer operate and deployed troops to seek surrender and give up weapons. It was stated, “We will not surrender. We do not have weapons.” And then the Nepalese army approached closer and closer. Our head in Mustang then was called Gyato Wangdu. [To interpreter] You may have heard of Gyato Wangdu. He and others replied, “[We] will not surrender. [We] will not give up the weapons.”

Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s message arrived on a cassette. His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s message said, “Surrender to the Nepalese as they say. Give up the weapons. Let the Nepalese do as they please. It is not good for us to become enemies of Nepal. Do not cause enmity with Nepal.” His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s cassette arrived and all the weapons were given up.

02:29:09

Then the number of Nepali troops began to increase. Before the weapons were surrendered Nepali troops remained at Zong Sarpa. They did not come to attack us. Once the weapons were surrendered soldiers entered the camps in the day and at night. All the [Nepali] soldiers arrived. Nepali soldiers were not to come...Initially, an agreement had been signed between the Zong Sarpa official and Gyato Wangdu but they did not honor this.

Gyato Wangdu said, “It is not going to turn out well if I stay. [The Nepalese] are not keeping to their word. We have to go.” So around 40-odd of us...at that time I had a desire to return here where [my] wife and children were. But I was told to go to the border. Gyato Wangdu did not give me permission to leave. So we accompanied Gyato Wangdu towards the Indian border and then after crossing Lipila Gyato Wangdu was killed. [To interpreter] You might have heard about it.

Q: Did [you] say that Gyato Wangdu had signed an agreement with the Nepalese Army?

#20N: Yes, in the past Nepal had asked [us] to surrender. When asked to surrender, initially [we] did not. Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, “Give up the weapons. Do not cause enmity with Nepal.” So [*Chushi Gangdrug* leaders] went to the official of Zong Sarpa and said, “We will give up the weapons and surrender. You should not enter our camps for we have different kinds of men from Kham and there might be clashes, which is not good. Please do not enter. Please allow our people to continue to live as they are doing now.” [The terms of the agreement mentioned] that people be allowed to continue to live in Mustang, that [Nepali] troops not enter the camps and that we would give up all the weapons. The official and Gyato Wangdu had signed an agreement to this effect.

Q: Did [you] then go to Tibet with Gyato Wangdu?

#20N: What?

Q: Did [you] go again to Tibet with Gyato Wangdu?

#20N: We were at the Nepal border but did not go into Tibet.

Q: Was Gyato Wangdu killed then?

#20N: Yes, I was at Lipila when Gyato Wangdu was killed.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Who was Gyato Wangdu?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: One of the leaders.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: One of the leaders of that group.

Q: This was the group, *pa-la*, that was working with the Tibetans who had been trained by the Americans?

02:36:09

#20N: Yes, there were those [trained in the United States] like Amdo Jampa and Chating Gen Dawa; that is two and then the third was Chamdo Tsering Dorjee. They were among the first 60 that had gone to train. *Chushi Gangdrug* had sent them to receive secret training in handling weapons and warfare. Everything [they had learned] was not of use. Gen Jampa was one who had received extensive training. Chating Dawa and Tsering Dorjee had not trained much in warfare. There were instructors who were training us called Gen Dawa, Gen Tsering Dorjee and Gen Jampa, and also Gen Buchay. Gen Buchay was the head of the secret organization. There were four of them.

All four of them are dead. Lama *khyen* ‘Lama, think of me.’

Q: So just to go back...

#20N: Oh, that is not all. There was another instructor who was killed along with Gyato Wangdu called Rabten Gyatso.

Q: Rabten?

#20N: Rabten Gyatso was killed along with Gyato Wangdu.

Q: How did... You mentioned that you went with him and he was killed. How did that happen and what happened to you?

02:38:36

#20N: Well, it was not the end of my life that day. Normally wherever Gen Wangdu went I was taken along. However, that day we were returning from the Tibetan side and had crossed the mountain pass of Lipila. This side here [points to front of index finger] is Tibetan Territory and this side [points to back of index finger] is Nepali Territory. As [the group] was descending the late instructor was killed here [points to back of index finger].

We had been driving a large number of mules for many days and nights. It was at night and we were tired. A group of weaker men had fallen asleep in the night and got left behind. Gen Buchay who was the main head of our secret operation told me, “Please accompany me. [We] cannot leave the weaker men behind.” So Buchay and I went back to the group. Then we starting walking with the group and were trailing behind.

They [original group] had good horses and continued ahead. After the sun had risen at daybreak, it was around 8 or 9 o’clock that [they] crossed the pass and came upon a region that was like this. There was a good road and next to that a rocky area where a group of

[Nepalese] soldiers were hiding. As they [Tibetan group] came along unsuspectingly, they [Nepalese soldiers] fired and killed four men: Wangdu, his attendant, Rabten Gyatso and an attendant of Chating Dawa called Lha Tsering. Then a little further away Sonam was shot.

02:40:45

Oh, that was not all those that trained in America; there was Gen Tsewang or Dilgo Tsewang. Dilgo Tsewang is the nephew of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. Gen Tsewang had trained extensively in the United States in secret operations. He was my chief leader. He was there.

Q: So it was just by chance that you were not killed. When the Nepalese Government insisted and the Dalai Lama said you must follow them, did the group disband or did they continue? How much did they obey that request, how fast?

02:43:33

#20N: It was not stopped [immediately]. As I mentioned earlier there was a large military base at Zong Sarpa, which is at the end of Mustang. There was the official who along with Gyato Wangdu... “We will give up the weapons. Allow us to live where we are living now as we have constructed houses and cultivated lands. Your troops should not enter our camps for there could be clashes as the Khampa are bad.” “Our troops will not enter your camps. Surrender the weapons. You can continue to live where you have been living.” “We will surrender the weapons.” An agreement to this effect was prepared. After the agreement was signed...

There were 15 divisions. After around 5-6 gave up the weapons, a large number of [Nepali] troops began to arrive day and night and entered all the camps. When this happened, “The agreement is not going to work out.” There was a high commander of the Nepal Army, a man with a blind eye [touches left eye] who stated in a grand manner, “Your action in setting up guerrilla operations in another country is very grave. We shall have to put you in prison even if we do not want to.” There were such threats.

When I finally fled I was not in Mustang. Our office was at Humla and we of the D Company were sent with Gen Tsewang or Dilgo Tsewang and were staying there. There were around 40 of their men and we were 7-8. Altogether there were 42. Some men were killed and when we were sent to the settlement in Bomdila we were 39. Thirty-nine men arrived in the settlement in Bomdila. It was like that.

Q: Where was the D group then?

#20N: What?

Q: Where was the D group when the agreement was signed?

02:45:55

#20N: Then we came towards India. We came to India after Gyato Wangdu was killed. Gyato Wangdu was [killed] in Nepali Territory. At that time there was a passage through a

rocky mountain. We were unable to bring all the horses and mules. So [we] left all the horses and mules behind and carried the packs. Among the rocks were certain places where ropes could be tied. Some of the men tied ropes and [we] managed to cross the pass into Indian Territory called Lipila.

Then some intelligence people we knew came there and took us to an Indian military camp. We were at the place called Pitogarh. They [the Indians] said, “The Nepalese will not treat you well.” They [Indians] stopped us and said we were prisoners but did not mistreat [us]. The Indians stopped us at Pitogarh for around a year and then were sent to the settlement in Bomdila.

Q: The Nepalese told the guerillas to give up the weapons to which Gyato Wangdu requested, “Allow us to continue to live here.” Was the operation suspended after that?

#20N: There was not any fighting prior to that. It had been claimed, “We do not have any weapons and are living here as refugees. Do what you like.” The Nepalese said, “You possess weapons. Give up the weapons.” There were not any attacks. Then when His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s message arrived asking to stop operations, Gyato Wangdu went there [to Zong Sarpa] and said, “We will give up the weapons. We are going to give up the guns and weapons. Allow the people to live as they are and the houses and lands.” [He] said that and an agreement to this effect was signed.

Q: Was the operation suspended then?

02:47:42

#20N: The operation was suspended. After that we escaped. If we happened to meet any locals, Gyato Wangdu used to say, “Do not take any notice. Do not even pinch a Nepali. You are not to take any money from the Nepalese. If you do, we are going against the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.” They had bought a yak for 2,000 rupees at Mukhum in Nepal and led the yak away. I mentioned earlier about Musi where I was beaten and nearly captured by the police. We had to travel through that place. They did not attack us and we did not attack them. We just passed through.

Q: What happened to the women and children?

02:49:27

#20N: My wife and children were left here while I was there. From ’74 until I came here in ’93 or so, for 18 or 19 years my family was separated. The wife and children were here while I had gone to Bomdila. I was scared of returning to Nepal and lived there.

All my siblings and relatives are here. I have two younger sisters, two sons and all their families here.

Q: I’m happy that you are able to be reunited with them after all those years and is there anything...

#20N: Okay, thank you.

Q: Thank you. Thank you. Bumdar-*la*, I can understand why your name became so famous.

#20N: Okay. [Laughs]

Q: We very much appreciate your story about an important part of Tibetan history. So I want to conclude by asking if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

02:51:45

#20N: There might not be any problem. I have undertaken such activities. These days when relatives go there the Chinese say, “Oh, he was a very brave man. Is he your relative?” Sometime back the Chinese sent a message through someone, “Come back. There will be no...[not discernible] for what you have done in the past. You will be given a rank.” I received messages and letters to that effect. Now they have undergone many changes and these stories are old and meaningless.

My story is like that. Nepal also has undergone changes. In those days there was a king. The earlier king died and his son was killed. It was then that we were suffering. Those Chinese leaders of that period are no longer there. [The present officials] were not there then. So there is no reason why I should face problems. Except for living in this place...my hair has become white and I may live a year or two. I do not think I will survive beyond that due to [my] physical condition. So, there will be no benefit or problem for me.

Q: Very good. So thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

#20N: [Joins palms]

Q: *Pa-la*, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW