

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #25B – Tsering Norbu
December 28, 2013

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #25B
2. Interviewee: Tsering Norbu
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1940
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Chelong
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1961
9. Date of Interview: December 28, 2013
10. Place of Interview: Private home, Old Camp 4, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 39 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tsering Norbu belonged to a wealthy family in Tsang, Tibet. The family tilled land and his father was also a merchant. His mother died when he was 7 years old and at the same time his father lost all his merchandise to robbers during a trade mission. The unfortunate circumstances led his father to give up family life and begin studying Buddhism.

Tsering Norbu was placed in Tashi Lhunpo Monastery at the age of 8. He witnessed the grand arrival of the Panchen Lama coming from China. Tsering Norbu ran away from the monastery at age 12 and returned to his village where he joined a hermitage called Dhuesar Gonpa.

Tsering Norbu's life changed when the Chinese appeared. He and all the monks were forced to leave their monasteries and submit to Chinese political education. The Chinese instructed people to denounce the old society and trained them in conducting *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.' He witnessed the *thamzing* of the leadership class, land reforms and redistribution of wealth.

Tsering Norbu's father was going to be arrested for helping others escape, so his family chose to escape themselves. In India Tsering Norbu spent 16 years in the Indian Army and also participated in a rebellious attack on the Chinese embassy.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, monastic life, Panchen Lama, life under Chinese rule, oppression under Chinese, *thamzing*, starvation, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #25B

Interviewee: Tsering Norbu

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: December 28, 2013

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:19

Interviewee #25B: The name is Tsering Norbu.

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?

#25B: Yes. Thank you.

Q: Thank you. 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.

#25B: [Speaks before translation is complete] Thank you. It is good to retain the stories when generations change. We will die.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break, we can stop. If you do not wish to answer a question, you can say so.

#25B: Okay.

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

00:02:25

#25B: There will be no problems. [I] am speaking what actually occurred and [I] do not think it will have any political repercussions.

Q: We're honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#25B: Thank you.

Q: *Ngagpa-la* 'respectful term for shaman,' could we begin by hearing where you were born in Tibet and how old you are now?

#25B: [I] was born in Chelong in Tsang, Tibet.

Q: How old are you?

#25B: I am 73 years old.

Q: What kind of livelihood did your family have?

#25B: The livelihood was farming. The parents...mine was a rich family. It was a ruling-class family. It is called Shaglo, called Shaglo and I am a descendant. [We] earned a living by farming and trading. At the time my mother passed away, I was 7 years old and my younger sibling 4 years old. Father was not home when mother expired; [he] was in Phari to trade. Robbers waylaid [father] on the journey and took away all the merchandise. He returned leading a donkey with nothing on it. Mother had passed away at home and someone was sent to inform [father] about mother's demise. I can recall [father] leading a donkey with nothing on it but a *chupa* 'traditional coat.'

Q: Who? You? The donkey...?

00:04:55

#25B: Well, you know donkey. One used to drive donkeys on trade missions. When [father] reached home, my mother had passed away and we were left alone. Then gave up the home, everything and practiced dharma.

Q: Who?

#25B: Embraced the dharma.

Q: Who?

#25B: My father. [He] embraced the dharma and took us along when I was aged 7 and my sibling was aged 4. [Father] gave up home, everything and relinquished paying tax or performing labor tax.

Q: Where did you go?

#25B: To Thoe where there is Zaringpo.

Q: Zaringpo?

#25B: Zaringpo. There was a lama in Thoe.

Q: Is Zaringpo the name of the village?

#25B: Zaringpo is the name of the village, Zaringpo.

Q: What did you do in Zaringpo?

00:07:17

#25B: Father practiced at Zaringpo and left me at Tashi Lhunpo [Monastery]. [I] was taken to Tashi Lhunpo at the age of 8. The younger sibling was left with an old lady. We no longer had a house to return to because the house had been given up. We became orphans. [We] had no parents from a young age.

Q: When you said your father engaged in practice, did he join a monastery or go off on retreat? What did he do?

#25B: [Father] practiced the Nyingma sect but did not join a monastery. Instead [he] moved around and begged for a living. Whenever [he] received some alms [he] engaged in practice. [He] renounced everything and took to practice. We, the two children, became orphans, as father practiced and we did not have mother or any relatives. [We] were in an alien region. I was left at Tashi Lhunpo and the younger one with an aged lady. We did not grow up under [our] parents' love.

Q: Do you have any idea why did your mother die when you were 7 years old? What caused her death?

00:09:45

#25B: [Mother] was pregnant with a daughter. Perhaps [she] could not give birth to the daughter or something. And then [she] passed away.

Q: Do you think that your father became very grief stricken and deeply sad and that's why he couldn't continue functioning?

#25B: Yes, and taxes were heavy in the village. Taxes were heavy and due to grief, [he] took to practicing the dharma. [He] renounced this life and engaged in practice. [Father] also renounced the children. When father took to practice we became parentless. [We] became orphans at a young age. I stayed at Tashi Lhunpo for five years, from age 8 to 12. I ran away from Tashi Lhunpo after five years. [Smiles]

Q: Can you tell us about your life in Tashi Lhunpo from age 8 to 12? What was it like for you to go there?

#25B: [I] memorized scriptures while there. [I] was a *geshe* 'Buddhist monk with philosophy degree' at Tashi Lhunpo and even learned the debates. [I] was a *geshe* at Tashi Lhunpo.

Q: Before the age of 12?

00:12:16

#25B: Before the age of 12, around 8 or 9. *Geshe* and ordinary monks were separated and [I] must have been good in the scriptures. So, [I] learned the debates.

Q: [A *geshe*] at age 12?

#25B: [I] did not complete the *geshe* [degree] but was studying the debates. This was taught only to those that excelled in the scriptures. There were two groups, the ordinary and the *geshe*. The ordinary [group] did not study the debates.

Q: And you were in the *geshe* group?

#25B: Yes.

Q: What made you leave at 12 if you were doing so well in your studies?

00:13:58

#25B: The teacher was strict and used to beat a lot. I was a child and longed for [my] village. So [I] ran to the village though there were no parents or relatives in the village. Even the relatives that were there, [we] did not belong to the same family and [they] would not treat us well, right?

Q: While you were at...?

#25B: [Interrupts] The Chinese appeared. The Chinese appeared before I left.

Q: Before you left Tashi Lhunpo, were there any interesting events...?

#25B: [Interrupts] [I] left after His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left.

Q: Before you left Tashi Lhunpo, were there any grand events?

#25B: I have witnessed the arrival of the Panchen Rinpoche. [I] was in the welcoming queue. There were crowds of welcoming people and the Panchen Rinpoche's sedan chair accompanied by Chinese that were [his] bodyguards. Hoards of Chinese shimmering in blue arrived.

Q: How old were you when he arrived? Do you remember?

00:16:19

#25B: [I] was 12 then.

Q: If there were bodyguards, were people afraid? Why did you think the...?

#25B: [Interrupts] What happened at an early age remains very clear. One cannot forget it.

Q: Why did you think there were so many soldiers surrounding the Panchen Lama?

#25B: The previous reincarnation of the Panchen Rinpoche submitted to China. Prior to that, the two regions of Utsang were not on good terms.

Q: What did [you] say about China?

#25B: The previous reincarnation of the Panchen Rinpoche, Panchen Tenphel Nyima fled to China and passed away at Jekudo. Tenphel Nyima fled to China on account of the conflict between [his] *ladang* ‘grand lama’s residence’ and the government. Whether the government did not treat Tashi Lhunpo [Monastery] well or not, there was some discord. The Chinese are beneficial in that it united the Tibetans. [I] feel in my heart that the Chinese are beneficial because there were internal discords then. Never mind the three provinces, the two parts of Utsang did not get along.

Q: What was your memory of seeing the Panchen Lama? Can you describe how it made you feel? What did you see with your eyes?

00:19:11

#25B: Then I think it was in the year ’56 that the Panchen Rinpoche went on a pilgrimage to India.

Q: You saw [the Panchen Lama] arriving in Tashi Lhunpo, Tibet then. How did [he] arrive, what was [he] wearing, what was the Panchen Rinpoche like?

#25B: At that time men carried [the Panchen Rinpoche] in a sedan chair. [He] looked out from the window of the sedan chair. Around 50-60 people carried the sedan chair. The Panchen Rinpoche peeped out from the window. There were hordes of people, folk dancers, those in the welcoming queue and numerous *thapra*.

Q: *Thapra*?

#25B: *Thapra* means people riding on horses of which there were many. Then there were Chinese infantry and cavalry. [I] think it was the Chinese bodyguards that came shimmering.

00:20:55

[They] carried Chinese flags and huge portraits of Mao Zedong. [They] arrived bearing such.

Q: Did people feel excited or were they nervous about the Chinese being there?

#25B: There was panic among the people. However, the old Tibetan society was not fair. People would get beaten and many such things were done. There were some that were happy about the Chinese’ arrival and some who panicked thinking, “What is going to happen?” There were those that felt panic. Some who used to be beaten by their leaders were happy the Chinese had come hoping for freedom.

Q: Do you remember what you were feeling?

#25B: [I] wondered what was going to happen. I was a child then and did not have much thought. “What is going to happen?” [I] wondered but nothing else. The older people said, “This is not good now that the Chinese have arrived.”

Q: When you saw the Panchen Lama at 12, how soon after that did you leave Tashi Lhunpo?

#25B: [I] might have stayed around six months after that and then ran away.

Q: Did you tell anyone you were leaving or did you go by yourself?

00:24:22

#25B: [I] did not say anything and there was nobody [with me]. The teacher was strict. I took a little bit of *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and wore the *chamze*, the yellow *chamze* for fear of the cold.

Q: *Chamze*?

#25B: *Chamze* is the yellow [cloak] that is worn during prayer assemblies. [I] left Tashi Lhunpo wearing it.

Q: When your father took you to the monastery and made you stay there, how did you feel about being told to stay in the monastery when you were only 8 years old?

#25B: One would [naturally] miss the parents being a small [child] and feel unhappy. [I] could not meet father as he had undertaken a 3-year retreat. My teacher was father’s *bapa* at Tashi Lhunpo, a *bapa* sibling. [I] was left with him.

Q: What’s *bapa*? Is it father’s sibling?

#25B: [He] was neither father’s older or younger sibling but the *bapa* ‘middle.’ [I] was left with him. He was a very good artist, was an artist.

Q: He left , but you also said he left you in the monastery. So when did that happen that you stayed with the uncle?

[Interpreter interprets question as: Your father’s sibling, the paternal uncle, was he a monk in the monastery?]

00:26:39

#25B: [He] was a monk at the monastery and an excellent artist.

Q: Which monastery? Tashi Lhunpo?

#25B: Tashi Lhunpo. Now [he] has passed away.

Q: So when you left the monastery, you didn’t even tell him and you went back to your village?

#25B: [I] did not and ran away.

Q: Can you tell us what happens in your life after you leave the monastery? What happens right after when you go back to your village?

#25B: Actually my village is at a distance of four days' journey. However, it took me around 12 days to get to the village having to ask for directions along the way. It took around 12 days.

Q: What happened once [you] got there?

00:27:58

#25B: There was no home to go to. Father was living with some family. [He] said [I] would have to go back to Tashi Lhunpo and that [he] would take [me] there.

Q: Who said it?

#25B: Father said.

Q: Was father living in the village?

#25B: Father was living in the village. [He] used to go begging around the village.

Q: And then? [Father] said [you]'d be taken back to Tashi Lhunpo.

#25B: [He] said [I] would be taken back but [I] replied, "I will not go to Tashi Lhunpo. I will run away from Tashi Lhunpo and go to Lhasa." So [I] was not taken back. There was a monastery in the village called Khechoe Gonpa, a Gelug monastery. [I] was admitted as a monk here.

Q: Did you want to go to that Gelug Monastery?

#25B: Well, we were poor then. Therefore, a rich family's son was admitted there. The number of monks was limited, so instead of me he was given admission. Then I joined the Dhuesar Gonpa, a small hermitage in the valley. It is called Dhuesar.

Q: Were you not admitted in the Khechoe Monastery?

00:30:20

#25B: No. [To interpreter] Let us drop that subject.

There is a pilgrim site deep within this region. The pilgrim site is the one called Dhochok Dilbu.

Q: Yes?

#25B: The pilgrim site is very holy. There were only eight monks at the monastery called Dhuesar Gonpa. The pilgrim mountain has the shape of a wheel.

Q: What wheel?

#25B: Dhochok Dilbu Nay Nga.

Q: What does that mean?

#25B: Dilbu Nay Nga. The mountain has a figure of an embracing male and female deity. There are stories of many great *sadhana*s having lived there in the past. I lived there until around age 18 or 19.

Q: Can you tell us about your life when you lived there? What did you do during the day? How did you find food? Did you have any instructions? What happened?

#25B: The patron of the Dhuesar Gonpa was a nomad that lived below. In this nomad family was a paternal aunt of mine, a paternal aunt. [I] lived with the paternal aunt. [I] was a part of the Dhuesar Gonpa, but worked in the home of the paternal aunt. There were yaks and goats that [I] grazed. [I] lived in that manner.

Q: How would you say your life was? Was it peaceful or sad or happy during those days?

00:33:47

#25B: [I] was never happy in that home. The paternal aunt mistreated me a lot. Then [I] lived at the monastery and was happy. [I] did the preliminary practice and the 500,000 commitments. [I] lived in solitude in caves and meditated. The pilgrim site is very holy.

Q: It sounds like you were trying to find comfort in spiritual practice because you could find so little from human relationships.

#25B: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Did you find comfort in spiritual practices and can you say what kind of comfort you found?

#25B: [I] felt happy. While [I] practiced, the nomads brought a lot of cheese, butter and such. [I] have not been happier than those days.

Q: Did you understand much about spiritual practices because you were only in the monastery until you were 12? So what kind of spiritual practices would you do with that limited training?

#25B: [I] did the 500,000 practices that included the 100,000 *kyabdo* ‘refuge prayers,’ 100,000 *yigya* ‘hundred syllable mantras’ and such. [I] did the 500,000 practices in the cave.

In the past the monastery located on top of the mountain used to be extensive. Below it was a nunnery that lay in ruins. There were caves among the ruins. [I] had no fear then and was happy being alone and not meeting anyone. Teacher put [me] into retreat. My teacher was good. He left me in the cave and placed a boundary stone, beyond which [I] could not venture.

Q: There was no way to leave because your teacher had put you there?

00:37:56

#25B: The teacher put [me] into retreat and placed a boundary stone and marked it with *thodho*.

Q: What does *thodho* mean?

#25B: *Thodho* means measuring the boundary stone. One cannot go beyond it. There was an outer and an inner boundary stone; the outer boundary being placed a little distance away. One must stay in meditation within that area.

Q: Will the door be closed?

#25B: The door is not closed for one must move outside in search of firewood and such. There was plenty of wood like juniper that I used.

Q: Did you want to stay there or did you feel you were being forced to?

00:39:31

#25B: It was [my] wish. It was [my] wish. However, before [I] could complete the retreat, the Chinese appeared in the region.

Q: [The retreat] wasn't complete?

#25B: [The retreat] was not completed.

Q: Tell us what happens then, please?

#25B: Then all the monks of every monastery were sent to receive the Chinese.

Q: Where?

#25B: There were different monasteries and [the monks] were sent to receive the Chinese, to receive the Chinese.

Q: And then?

#25B: It was announced that the Chinese were coming and [they] had to be received.

Q: And then?

#25B: Then [I] did not get to stay in the monastery. The Chinese stated that [the monks] had to come and receive [political] education.

Q: Where?

#25B: At an estate called Chelong estate. All people from upper and lower Chelong normally gathered at this estate. The Chinese called [us] there.

Q: Can you please tell us what happened there?

00:41:25

#25B: Then the Chinese stated, “The old society is bad. There was oppression, which is bad. Now that we have come, there will be happy sunshine days. The monasteries will be developed. Monasteries will be constructed. Monks, please come forward.”

The monks were placed in front and not allowed to sit among the people. [We] were each given a picture of Mao Zedong and three *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins.’ The Chinese gave us money, *dhayen*, and [I] felt, “This is really good.” [Laughs]

Then the Chinese distributed a book to each that had to be studied about how good Mao Zedong was and what he did as a child. [It described that] as a child Mao Zedong was a Buddhist and his parents rotated the prayer wheels and how [Mao Zedong] told them that it was a waste of time and how he even told such to his family and how much he had struggled.

When the Panchen Rinpoche and His Holiness the Dalai Lama went to China, a Losar ‘Tibetan New Year’ offering had been prepared for Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong was sitting in the middle with the Dalai Lama sitting here [indicates left] and the Panchen Rinpoche sitting here [indicates right]; there was a picture of it that was given [to us]. [The Chinese] claimed that Mao Zedong was the reincarnation of Jamphelyang ‘Manjushri.’

00:44:48

Then a few months later, the many authorities in our [village] were distributed *dhayen*. Some received 100 *dhayen*, some 200 and some 300 depending upon their performance in the education. The Chinese had taught from the book and taken a test. Those that performed well in the test received more *dhayen*.

[Naturally the people] liked it when awarded *dhayen*. It was said, “Silver *dhayen* are falling like raindrops, the Chinese are parent-like benefactors. Silver *dhayen* are falling like raindrops.”

Then the people were called to gather and voice opinions about the old society. There were some stupid ones among the people. They had suffered beatings and having to render heavy taxes and labor obligations. Hence, some people that had been subjected to beatings and lashings on such matters got up saying, “[Those in authority] were bad. [They] beat me. [I] was beaten for not being able to pay tax.” Beggars and the worst of people were instructed and then all those that had earlier received 100 *dhayen* or 200 *dhayen* were subjected to *thamzing*. [Laughs]

Q: And then?

00:48:05

#25B: It later turned out that all those who had received *dhayen* became victims of *thamzing*.

Q: And then?

#25B: Then they were arrested and imprisoned, for the people voiced many opinions about the beatings and what they had done. The people had been instructed, taught day and night and their opinions taken. “The Communist Chinese have come and [you] have escaped from the [oppression of the] three great *ngadak* ‘leadership classes.’ The sun of happiness is shining now. You need have no fear in subjecting them to *thamzing*.”

This made the bad people happy, as they had a grudge on account of the beatings. There were some accusations like, “He caused me suffering. He punished me for not being able to pay taxes.” Finally, even in the case of teacher and student, [the student] said, “The teacher beat [me].” [The Chinese] wrote these down and then gave instructions on how to conduct *thamzing*. People learned how to conduct *thamzing*, learned to conduct *thamzing*.

People stood up one by one and were ordered to give their opinion, “What did you do in your life? Who caused [you] suffering? Give opinions.” There would have been some that would have caused sufferings. After [the people shared their] thoughts, they were taught how to conduct *thamzing*, given instructions and made ready to conduct [*thamzing*].

00:50:58

Then the people were categorized into three groups, wealthy farmers, poor farmers and middle-class farmers. And then began the mistreatment of monks. [The Chinese] gave the name “yellow robbers and red lamas” [to the monks].

Q: Yellow robbers?

#25B: Yellow robbers and red lamas. “You have lived by oppressing the people. You do not do any work but live by depending upon the people,” [the Chinese] said such things. And then [I] felt panic in my mind and thought, “The Chinese are not good.”

Q: And then?

#25B: The [bad people] learned to conduct *thamzing* and the three great *ngadak*...among the poor farmers, middle-class farmers, the wealthy farmers were in the *ngadak* group. I do not remember clearly. [The Chinese] created three great *ngadak*. [The Chinese] said, “You have not progressed because [you] have been under the oppression of the three great *ngadak*.”

00:53:52

#25B: And then land reform was undertaken. We were considered among the poor during the land reformation, among the poor. [The Chinese] appointed leaders from among the people. Then there were the activists that were assistants to the leader. I was an activist then. As I knew a little bit of writing I was taken to the fields to affix wooden boards. When the fields were being divided it was assessed how much harvest, like 13 measures of grain was expected in a given area of land and the type of seed [to be sown]. This was recorded on a wooden board fixed in the field.

Q: Where was it recorded?

#25B: It was recorded on the wood, in regard to the fertility of the land, whether the land was fertile or not, the quantity of seed required and the extent of harvest. The entire area was distributed among the people. [The Chinese] launched land reforms.

Then people were given instructions day and night, given instructions to conduct *thamzing*. “What opinions do you have?” And people talked about oppression and how bad the old society was. [People] learned to conduct *thamzing*. And then those that were awarded 100 *dhayen* or 200 *dhayen* in the past became the victims of *thamzing*.

Q: And then?

00:56:41

#25B: Then [the victims] were brought out to be subjected to *thamzing*, “You did this. You beat me.” [The victims] had yak tails attached to [their] bottom and were garlanded with shoes. [They] were made to stoop.

The proverb ‘The axe is the enemy of wood but the handle of the axe is made of wood’ came true. The Chinese gave instructions to our people and used [them] to destroy [us], to conduct *thamzing*. Saying ‘You did this and this to me’ [the poor people] beat and dragged [the rich] by the hair. When [the victims] with hands bound were being brought to be subjected to *thamzing* by the people, the people were made to sing.

Q: Can you please sing the song?

00:58:28

#25B: All the people had been taught this song [to be sung] when [the victims] were being brought out to be subjected to *thamzing*. It is a Chinese song.

Shako tuyi ha
Shako tuyi ha
Shako tuyi kenza remi dhenmi kho
Phandong phe phida dhong
Chashi tui wo la lemo lenkho le
Shachi la shako tuyi
Shako tuyi ha
Shako tuyi ha

There is a Tibetan translation.

Q: Can we hear it?

#25B: [Sings in Tibetan]

Chitso Ringluk su

Chitso Ringluk su
Chitso Ringluk salam shu

Mimang gosa phar
Lokchoepa tsame thong
Tsengyal Ringluk
Shuku kum ne tola sho

[Hail Socialism
Hail Socialism
Reverence to Socialism]

[That uplifts the people
And destroys counter revolutionaries
Imperialism takes flight
With tail between the legs]

Then as [the victim] was being brought out, people raised their fists [raises right hand in air] and shouted, “The sun of happiness shines for us. We, the poor, are members of one family. If cordial, people can become very powerful.” All the people were made to raise their hands like that.

Q: Can you repeat it, please? *Chitso Ringluk...?*

00:59:47

Chitso Ringluk su
Chitso Ringluk su
Chitso Ringluk salam shu

Mimang gosa phar
Lokchoepa tsame thong
Tsengyal Ringluk
Shuku kum ne tola sho

[Laughs]

The Chinese bribed those that conducted *thamzing* with money and treated them very well. [They] had been trained and then they, the thoughtless people conducted [*thamzing*]. [The Chinese] selected beggars to collude with them and the thoughtless ones did it. The majority were not happy about the Chinese’ arrival, “The sun of happiness no longer shines!”

Q: Please continue.

#25B: Initially [the Chinese] asked the monks to come forward and presented us with three *dhayen* each and then labeled [us] “yellow robbers and red lamas.” And then said, “Monks do not work but oppress the people to subsist.” Then [I] felt, “What will [the

Chinese] do next?” And then all of us monks were called for education. [The Chinese] created situations for students to conduct *thamzing* on those teachers that had beaten [their students in the past]. I had no one, no teacher, hence none to subject to *thamzing*. Earlier [the Chinese] had asked the monks to come forward and presented each with three *dhayen* and talked about constructing monasteries, but now [I] realized that was not to be.

01:02:49

There were the wealthy farmers. The wealthy farmers owned large houses. After the land reforms, all the lands were divided. The monks were given lands. For those that did not own houses, doors were created in many parts of the houses of wealthy people. The family [owner of the house] was driven out to a lower floor. After creating doors in different parts, 10 or 11 poor families lived in one wealthy family's house.

The family called Chelong Shaglo is a relation of mine, where father came from. Eight [poor] families lived in this family home. The real Shaglo family was driven downstairs. I went there to lend assistance, to help them. [I] stayed a month or two to help them.

Father had escorted some who were escaping to India over the mountain pass. This became known [and the Chinese] said, “[You] have connection with the rebels. [You] have connection with the *ngadak*.” I was nearly subjected to *thamzing* and father was certain to be subjected to *thamzing*. Therefore, [we] left in the night out of panic, [we] fled.

01:05:49

That was the most difficult period of my life. [We] climbed mountains in the night and there was immense dread of being caught before overcoming the pass.

Q: Was father also there?

#25B: Yes. We continued across mountains because going down in the valley meant being caught. [We] fled right across mountaintops and it was difficult. Prior to [our] departure there was starvation. Many people died from starvation. There were many deaths from swelling in the faces brought on by eating plants from the fields. We had nothing to eat, nothing to carry. So [father and I] ground some tea, added brown sugar cubes and chewed it. When [we] came across fields along the way, [we] snapped the grain ears and ate them.

Q: What year was this?

#25B: Lhasa, Tibet was lost in 1959. This was after Lhasa was lost. [Lhasa] was lost in the year '59, so this must be towards the end of the year '60.

Q: What was the village from which you were leaving?

01:08:34

#25B: India lay close should one travel directly across the pass. It is in the direction of Sikkim. The name of the mountain pass is Sebobula, called Sebobula. It is a high pass that has to be covered [to reach Sikkim, India]. Once across it, you were in Indian Territory.

Q: Did you not come through Sebolula?

#25B: [We] came through Sebobula. [We] almost starved during the journey for want of food. One day there was a shepherd. So [we] bought a goat by giving clothes that were made from Chinese fabric. The goat was very beneficial. [We] killed the goat and ate it on the pass.

[I] have left out something. Before leaving I went once again to Tashi Lhunpo. The lama of our monastery was a *ngachen* [?] at Tashi Lhunpo then.

Q: What's *ngachen*?

#25B: *Ngachen huthukthu* 'holy one [Mongolian language]' is a big title, *ngachen huthukthu*.

Q: Who is the *ngachen huthukthu*?

01:10:42

#25B: The one called Gangla Rinpoche. He was the lama of our monastery. [I] went to see him. We were a few monks receiving oral transmission on refuge practice. [He] said, "Now Lhasa is lost. Losing Lhasa is like *nyingmay ro* [removal of person's heart]." It is akin to a human whose heart has been removed [and is rendered a corpse]. "We are *ningmay ro*. Once Lhasa is lost there is nothing. The Chinese are free to do anything to us. The dharma will flourish in India as His Holiness the Dalai Lama has gone to India. If you can, go to India. The dharma will flourish there. The dharma will no longer flourish in Tibet. I am old and not in a position to go."

[Gangla Rinpoche] spoke on such internal matters. He asked [us] not to come when his attendant was present. So [we] went to see the lama at 10 o'clock in the night. That is when he spoke about the internal matters. "In the past my table was covered with scriptures. Now it is covered in Chinese books. One has to express an opinion every week. It has become impossible here. We old ones have to perform forced labor in the fields. If you can, go to India." [The lama] talked about internal matters. Then I told father about [Gangla Rinpoche's thoughts], "Losing Lhasa has rendered [us] like *nyingmay ro*. A person's heart has been removed and is rendered a corpse."

Q: Yes?

01:14:10

#25B: I told father that the lama said, "Lhasa is lost. [We] are like *nyingmay ro*. In the past my table used to be covered with scriptures but now it is covered with Chinese books. In the past a lama placed the ritual vase where he wished while in this time the ritual vase placed the lama where it wished." He had told [us] to come without the knowledge of the attendant. We went to receive teachings in the night after the attendant had left.

[I] met my father's middle sibling and told him what the lama had said. He was an artist and used to make drawings of Mao Zedong. The Chinese liked it and [he] earned a lot of

dhayen. He said, “If you are planning to escape, come to receive *dhayen* [from me]. If possible I might also come with you. If not, [I] will give [you] *dhayen*.” I narrated this to father.

Father said...There was a man named Jola in our family who was well educated and worked among the Chinese. The Chinese liked him. “The Chinese have conquered one fourth of the world. Ultimately, there is nowhere to run,” he said this. [He] said that we would not succeed in escaping because they [the Chinese] have conquered the world.

Q: And then?

01:17:15

#25B: I told father about it [the lama’s advice to flee to India] and father spoke about what Jola had said about not succeeding should we escape. Around a month later, [the Chinese] came to capture father. Father was called in the night and told, “You have connection with the rebels. [You] have connection with the *ngadak*. If you accept your mistakes, there will be leniency.” Among those that introduced reforms with the Chinese was a person from Chepa who had earlier gone to China and studied the language. [He] was among the Chinese that introduced reforms.

Q: Who?

#25B: Our...[not discernible]. He said discreetly, “It is the right time for you to go. Once caught, [you] will never escape.” I told father, “[We] have no money, no food to take [with us]. I will go to Tashi Lhunpo and get some money.” But father said, “There is no time as the arrest can happen tomorrow or the day after. Let us go now.” [I] replied, “[We] did not go earlier when [I] suggested. Now how will [we] succeed?” “It does not matter. [We] will travel in the night.” I had a stepmother in the family who father had met later. “Do not tell stepmother,” [I told father].

After the distribution of sheep, I used to shepherd the sheep of the people. “Let’s go,” [father said]. “How can we? We have no food and no money to take [with us]. How can we go?” “Earlier you were courageous in suggesting [we] go. It will be okay. Let’s go.” “Okay, let’s go but do not even tell stepmother. The secret will leak if stepmother is told. Let the two of us go.”

01:19:34

[My] younger sibling had been sent to a Chinese school in Shigatse. The younger sibling was not living at home; [so we] could not bring [him] along, my younger sibling. [I] told you earlier about the one who was 4 years old [when mother passed away]. He is the one. The two of us planned to leave at once. I wore an amulet with protective cords and carried a knife with the thought of fighting back if captured. [I] was 19 or 20 years old then. That is how [I] prepared. Then carrying a little amount of *tsampa* and a blanket, [we] left.

The stepmother had a daughter who was a Chinese appointed leader. I told [father] not to tell the daughter for we will be captured. At the time of departure father said, “We will come back soon. If [we] do not evade for a little while, there are plans to capture us. Once

captured, there will be no escape. Now is the right time to escape but we will come and get [you] secretly.”

Q: To whom [did father say this]?

#25B: To stepmother. Then stepmother started shouting and [we] could not go. And then [stepmother] said [she] was coming and the daughter too said she was coming.

Q: Then did all escape together?

#25B: All escaped together.

Q: All escaped together including stepmother and [her] daughter?

01:23:17

#25B: All fled.

Q: And then?

#25B: Trekking on the mountains only at night, a journey of four days took 10-11 days. [We] succeeded in crossing the Sebulu. Then [we] fell asleep due to exhaustion. There were some [people] in tents that had fled earlier. [I] went to beg from them. While begging there, [I] found a relative and the relative took care [of us].

Then [we] arrived in Sikkim where [I] worked as a road crew. Since I was good in the scriptures, [I] read prayers [for people].

Q: What was it like to be reunited with your father in this escape after he had, in a sense, abandoned you when you were a child? What was that like to be with him?

#25B: When father came out of retreat after three years, [he] had a beard of this length [indicates half a foot]. When [he] came to Tashi Lhunpo I was sitting on an upper floor and saw a bearded man through the window. I did not recognize father. “Where are you from?” [I] asked. [Laughs]

01:26:05

Then father shed tears, shed tears on seeing me.

Q: How did you feel about seeing him again?

#25B: I must have felt sad too. [I] must have thought, “Now [I] have met father.”

Q: What we would like to do because there’s so much more of your story to hear, but we don’t have the ability to do that right now. Maybe we could ask a little bit about how you became a shaman. If you could give us a kind of a brief explanation of how you became a shaman?

#25B: And [I] joined the Indian Army from the road construction site. [I] was in the Indian Army for 16 years. While [I] was there for 16 years, father and others were sent to a settlement. Father returned to Tibet to bring my younger sibling. During the army days [I] fought in Bangladesh, jumped from airplanes and did many other things. [My] duty in the army was working with wireless.

Q: And then?

01:29:05

#25B: And then [I] took leave from the army and came home. I married while in the army and had four children, three daughters and a son. That happened during [my] holidays from the army. [I] do not know if it is correct to say, but [my] sibling and I shared [the same wife]; [I shared my wife] with the younger sibling.

Within the siblings, we had not grown up under parents' love and had not met for a long time. So there was not much of a brotherly relationship. So when I retired from the army, we did not get along and I had to go [my] separate way and came to Hunsur. In Hunsur I tilled land, did business in sweaters and was successful.

Q: Is there any point where you become a shaman?

#25B: In the year '92 the Tibetan Youth Congress of Hunsur started a movement. [I] volunteered for this movement. As a volunteer for the movement, [I] threw patrol bombs at the Chinese Embassy. At that time the Chinese were executing prisoners in Tibet. We were nine people that took part in this movement and threw patrol bombs at the Chinese embassy. The police caught [us] and [we] were imprisoned at Tihar Jail for a month.

01:32:50

#25B: [Our] opponent was the Chinese Government and they took us to court. The case dragged on for around 19 years. [I] had to appear 62 times in the court. During the first year [we] were called twice a year and then it became less frequent. It was said that [we] would be put in for eight years. The case pertained to Section 300-something [of the Indian Penal Code].

Q: And then?

#25B: The Tibetan Youth Congress covered our expenses as they had started the movement. It was in the year of the ...

Q: I think that your story has given us a great understanding of different periods of Tibetan history and we want to thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

#25B: Can [I] say something in conclusion?

Q: Oh, okay. Yes.

#25B: In the past in Tibet we had three provinces Kham, Amdo and Utsang. There were three big provinces. Different groups in Kham and Amdo resisted the Chinese many times. There have been many great martyrs among the people of Amdo. The Chinese have destroyed much. In Utsang during the period of ‘Three Oppositions and Two Concessions,’ the previous incarnation of the Panchen Lama left for China from Tashi Lhunpo and lived in Chamdo. Ngabo Ngawang Jigme stood up and...no, an aristocrat of Tashi Lhunpo said, “The previous incarnation of the Panchen Lama and we have lived under Chinese authority and do not want reforms.” Then Ngabo Ngawang Jigme stood up and said, “There is only one Tibet and not two.” The Chinese caused suffering to everyone [equally] and that unified everyone. In my opinion the Chinese are very beneficial.

01:37:19

There is a person called Minister Tenzin Penpa, who is from Amdo, Tibet and in his book—I like reading—it is mentioned in this book that there were over 900 encounters with the Chinese in Amdo. He had 19 family members among whom many died under the Chinese. He is the only survivor.

Q: Thank you. That was very important for us to have a record of that experience and history. I want to ask one more time if this were shown in Tibet, would this be a problem for you?

#25B: There will be no problems at all. Its best if [you] can show it. Initially [the Chinese] arrived gentle-like and later turned harsher and harsher and transformed the country of Tibet into real hell. [I] am scared even on seeing a Chinese. However, it is the Chinese that unified the three provinces of Tibet.

Q: So that was a good ending.

END OF INTERVIEW