

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #25N – Rabten
April 8, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #25N
2. Interviewee: Rabten
3. Age: 82
4. Date of Birth: 1933
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Meshay
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1980s?
9. Date of Interview: April 8, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 33 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Henry Tenenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Rabten was born in a small village called Meshay consisting of 12-13 families. He describes his village as an incredibly beautiful place where all the people had plenty to eat. Rabten's family earned their living by both farming and nomadic activities. He also explains that for generations his family served the King of Derge.

Rabten recalls the appearance of the Chinese who began democratic reforms that categorized people into different classes. Rabten's family was classified among the landowners, who at that time were being assaulted, imprisoned or killed. His parents were too old to be arrested but they died eventually from starvation. Rabten joined the King of Derge in his revolt and escape. They encountered resistance fighters trained in the United States and air-dropped into the region.

Despite the large group of fighters and weapons provided by the U.S., the guerillas could only resist the Chinese for three days before the majority were killed or captured and the rest fled into the forest. After several months Rabten also had to surrender to the Chinese. He gives an account of his imprisonment, the conditions in prison and forced labor. He was subjected to *thaptsoe* 'physical struggle [*thamzing* 'Chinese struggle session']' and was under complete surveillance with no rights even after being released from prison. Rabten was able to escape to Nepal with the help of a smuggler.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, first appearance of Chinese, resistance fighters, imprisonment, *thamzing*, forced labor, escape experiences.

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Interview #25N

Interviewee: Rabten

Age: 82, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 8, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:10

Interviewee #25N: I am called Rabten.

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?

#25N: Yes.

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.

#25N: Okay.

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

#25N: There will be no problem since I am here. Had I been living in Tibet [I] would have to fear that the Chinese might cause suffering and make inquiries. There is no one to fear when you are here.

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

#25N: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' please tell me where you were born?

00:02:46

#25N: The birthplace is called Meshay; the Chinese call it Meshay Chue 'Prefecture.' The actual village where we lived is called Ligong. It is Ligong in Meshay Prefecture.

Q: What year were you born or how old are you now, *pa-la*?

#25N: [I] am 82 now.

Q: When you were born, how many people were in your family?

#25N: There were many family members. There were Father and Mother, and I had many younger sisters. There were two siblings, three including me.

Q: Three brothers?

#25N: Yes, three brothers.

Q: In your village or town, about how many families lived there? Was it a large or small place?

#25N: It was a small village. Ours was a small village and there were 12-13 families.

Q: Your parents, what kind of work did they do for a livelihood?

00:04:54

#25N: It was farming and also nomadic activities, as there were animals too. That is how they earned a living.

Q: When you think of your village and growing up there, what kind of picture do you see in your mind? Can you paint us a picture of what we would see if we looked at your childhood?

#25N: Like every nomadic site it was a very beautiful place. Though our activity was farming, our village was located on a range. It was an incredibly beautiful place.

Q: What kind of memories do you have of your boyhood when you were growing up there?

#25N: [I] cannot remember much.

Q: What was it like when [you] were a little boy?

#25N: As a little boy the parents were at home and there were many sisters that took good care [of me]. [I] was very happy, incredibly happy. [I] was not given any responsibilities.

00:07:18

We were very happy until the Chinese appeared. [We] were very happy until the Chinese changed everything. There was plenty to eat and no problems whatsoever. Though it was a village, wherever [we] went [we] were happy.

Q: When is your first memory of seeing the Chinese in your area?

#25N: [I] wonder how old I was then. It was in the year '59 that the Chinese appeared but did not bring about changes until '56-'58. Then [they] launched democratic reforms.

Q: You mean '66-'68 or the '50s?

#25N: It was in the '50s. The Chinese began democratic reforms in the year '56. The [poor] people rose up and caused us suffering and did such things.

Q: What did you see, *pa-la*, with your own eyes? Did you see the Chinese coming into your village, into your area?

00:09:20

#25N: Of course, [I] saw the Chinese coming. Initially, the Chinese were very good. The Chinese were good but gradually they grew worse. Then they launched the so-called democratic reforms and the people rose up. [The Chinese] issued instructions to the people and we were called enemies. We were...there were the *sadak* 'land owners' and *shingchung* 'poor farmers.' The rich were called *sadak*. The rich were called *sadak* and the poor *shingchung*. That was how the democratic reforms were conducted.

Q: What did the Chinese look like when you first saw them? What did they look like to you?

#25N: Initially, the Chinese were very good.

Q: What did they look like?

#25N: [They] acted in such a way as to appear good. Initially, they acted well.

Q: What changed in your life when the Chinese came?

00:11:21

#25N: The change is apparent. I am here in this situation. Otherwise, in Tibet we were a rich family with plenty to eat and do. The Chinese labeled us as *sadak*. [We] had everything.

Q: Did anything happen to your parents? Can you tell me what that was?

#25N: All of them...[my] parents died from starvation. It was said that they died from starvation. I had fled. I fled fearing imprisonment from the Chinese. One of my sisters was at home and she said that the parents died from starvation. There was nothing to eat.

Q: Before this death of your parents were they persecuted in any way in the village while you were there?

#25N: There had been no persecution at that time. I fled when I was about to be captured. [I] escaped and lived for many years in the place called Polo Kutse on the other side of the Yangtze River. I came as a servant to the King of Derge.

Q: Was that a disguise or were you really the servant of the king?

00:14:42

#25N: [I] was a servant.

Q: A real servant or...?

#25N: A real servant.

Q: You fled as a servant?

#25N: Yes.

Q: *Pa-la*, why do you think that you were going to be captured? What was the reason the Chinese were coming after you?

#25N: Where? In the hometown?

Q: Yes, you fled from the hometown believing the Chinese were going to capture [you]. What was the reason for the Chinese to do that?

#25N: That was because I was in the *sadak* class who were all being captured, killed, assaulted and imprisoned. This was being done to everyone.

Q: Had your own parents been captured or imprisoned before they were coming after you?

00:16:03

#25N: They were old and though [they] were not captured or imprisoned, there was not anything to eat and [they] died from starvation.

Q: *Pa-la*, how did you happen to become the servant of the King of Derge?

#25N: From the beginning we had been servants to the King of Derge. There were 80 *dahor* in Derge, 80 families. Servants were appointed from among them and the rest were ordinary citizens. We had the 80 *dahor*. We had been serving the King since the time of our forefathers.

Q: What are the 80 *dahor*?

#25N: These were also called *honda* ‘deputy ministers.’ There were 80 families.

Q: I see. So you escaped as the servant...was the King also escaping and you were part of that party of escapers?

00:18:12

#25N: I was not together [with the King] but came later. At that time I was serving the mother of the King of Derge and was at Dhartsedo among the Chinese. The King’s mother was called Derge Jamyang Palmo. Jamyang Palmo was a Chinese official of some sort. She was living in Dhartsedo and I was serving her there then.

Q: What was Jamyang Palmo’s [position] with the Chinese?

#25N: Since Jamyang Palmo was the Queen of Derge, the Chinese appointed her as an official. [She] was paid a salary and could live there. It was like that.

Q: What kind of service did you render to her?

#25N: She had to attend the Chinese office.

Q: What kind of service did you render to the queen?

#25N: I had to cook and do such things; cooking for the Queen and carry out whatever tasks had to be done.

Q: Did that continue very long? Did you have to escape at some point?

00:20:25

#25N: [I] was there for long. We were long in Dhartsedo, around a year. Then [her] son, the King of Derge was preparing to flee to Polo. They had rebelled in the hometown and were preparing to flee. After around a year there, Derge Jamyang Palmo sent me saying I had to help her son. I joined the revolt then. I was not among those revolting against the Chinese earlier to that.

Q: [You] joined the rebellion from then on?

#25N: Then I joined the rebellion on the flight to Polo.

Q: Who was the resistance? Was there a leader? Who were the resistance forces that you joined?

#25N: The main person was one called Woma Rinam, Womatsang, Woma Rinam. Then there was Gyangkhar Gonam of Gyangkhartsang. They were the ones. They were the ones that guided our escape to Polo.

Q: Polo is in Kham?

00:22:47

#25N: It is on the western side of the Yangtze River. After Polo was attacked, we arrived in Dayab, in Dayab. We reached the place called Sidikha in Dayab. We had an encounter with the Chinese there and Woma Rinam was injured. Both [his] hands were broken and [he] could not walk. We thought that from Dayab we would reach Wonju and from there India. That was the plan.

Q: From Dayab to where?

#25N: From Dayab to Ba and then to the place called Gyue. It was said that India was not far away. That is how we planned to move. However, from Dayab we could not proceed further and fled towards the place called Lhozong. From Lhozong [we] reached the place called Penpa.

One night...before reaching Penpa a plane flew in the night. People wondered, “What can it be? Can it be the Chinese?” We felt uneasy. It seems they had airdropped in Penpa. It seems the Americans airdropped men. The next day...there were some of our men in Penpa who came to fetch us and they gave the story about the men [that were airdropped] and that there were many we knew. They had such a story to tell.

Q: It was remarked the next day that there were many men they knew. Where were these men?

00:25:25

#25N: It was said that there were many people we knew among those that the Americans airdropped in Penpa.

Q: Who said that?

#25N: Our colleagues that had revolted and fled to Penpa came to pick us up when we reached Wosin. That is what they said.

Q: What happened next?

00:27:04

#25N: Then it was suggested, “Let’s organize a force in Penpa or Lhozong. There are many of our people in Lhozong, Penpa and Shopado. Let’s organize a force there.”

Q: “Let’s go there and organize a force as there are many people.”

#25N: Weapons would be issued. Earlier we did not have any weapons, having come with nothing. I did not have a gun when [I] left the hometown. It was like that. Then when we reached there weapons were distributed and a force organized.

Q: Before we continue I want to ask—the airplane that dropped your colleagues, some Tibetans, what country was that airplane from?

00:28:57

#25N: They were sent by America. The Americans had sent the men. The men had been trained and armed with weapons and deployed.

Q: *Pa-la*, do you know where they were trained by the Americans?

#25N: I do not know where they were trained by the Americans.

Q: Did you know any of the men who were dropped when you reached them?

#25N: Yes, there were.

Q: Who?

#25N: Most of them were killed.

Q: They were killed, but did you know any of those that were dropped in Penpa?

#25N: Yes. There was one called Rari Yeshi...Rari Yeshi and...I cannot remember.

Q: Was the man from your hometown?

#25N: He was from Derge. There was Utsa Bhuchay, Bhuchay from the family of Utsatsang.

Q: From Derge?

#25N: Yes, Derge. There were four or five from Derge but I cannot recall the names.

Q: You saw them being dropped. Is that correct?

00:31:56

#25N: No, I was in a different place. They were dropped in Penpa. [I] did not see that.

Q: You saw a plane and then you wondered what that was about?

#25N: Yes, an airplane makes a sound while flying that I heard and wondered what it was and whether it was the Chinese.

Q: Right and then how did you find out who the men were who were dropped from the plane?

#25N: [The men] had been dropped when the plane flew in the night. The following day some men from Derge who were in Penpa came to fetch us. They said that this and this man was there and described the happening. Then we became relaxed. That was how [we] heard it.

Q: What happened to you next?

00:33:53

#25N: Then we at Lhozong...there were three different districts Lhozong, Shopado and Penpa. A force was organized and weapons...[men] came pouring in from the lower regions and it became a large organization. Then the Chinese attacked and destroyed it into dust.

Q: Where?

#25N: At Penpa, Lhozong and Shopado. The Chinese attacked.

Q: There were three districts: Lhozong, Shopado...

#25N: Lhozong, Shopado and Penpa Districts.

Q: Three?

#25N: Yes, three different districts.

Q: Were fighting units established there?

#25N: Yes. We helped each other and established a force. It was quite a large one and the Americans supplied arms and ammunitions. We became a large force but then the Chinese attacked. The Chinese attacked from every direction. Within three days it was turned into rubble.

Q: Were the Chinese attacked?

#25N: No, the Chinese attacked [us]. We organized a force in Penpa to challenge the Chinese but were attacked.

00:36:17

#25N: Then everything was destroyed. We were forced to flee into the forest. Except for escaping into the forest there was nowhere to go and nowhere to stay. For a long time I stayed in the forest.

Q: *Pa-la*, about how many Tibetan fighters were there trying to ward off the Chinese?

#25N: Initially, when the force was organized there were a lot of people. There were the people of three districts and those of us who had fled [from our hometowns]. It was a large number. The Americans provided weapons and it seemed to be a good one, but the Chinese attacked. Within three days it was turned into dust. Those that were killed were killed, those that were captured were captured and those of us who could escape, escaped. There was nowhere else to run but into the forest. There was no other place to flee or stay in.

00:38:24

Then the people of the three districts who lived there surrendered to the Chinese. Their leaders and the influential people might have been killed or captured. Those of us that did not belong there had nowhere to go or stay. The majority were killed or captured and the rest of us fled into the forest, into the forest.

Q: And then what happened?

#25N: Then [we] were inside the forest with only meat for food from the animals that were stolen. We stayed for a long time inside the forest.

Q: Where were the animals from?

#25N: The animals were those that belonged to the region and were in the mountains. [We] stole them and...

Q: Stole?

#25N: Stole and ate them. There was nothing else to eat. [We] ate meat whenever [we] could get them. [We] moved within the forest but could not venture out.

Q: When you say a long time, like are we talking a month or two months? How long?

00:40:59

#25N: It was around five months. At one point we could not obtain anything to eat and it became summer and started raining and [we] had nowhere to stay. It became extremely miserable. I had a colleague and we went to spy on the Chinese movement. We watched. From the end of a valley a great number started approaching. There were horses, animals and people, [the animals] laden with stuff. Behind them were Chinese soldiers. The soldiers were driving them. They might have escaped and camped together somewhere and the Chinese were driving them.

Q: And then what happened?

#25N: As we looked on they stopped on a large open ground and prepared tea. The Chinese troops cooked at the head of the ground and the rest made individual fire and began making tea.

Q: There were the Chinese troops and who else?

00:43:22

#25N: The others were Tibetan escapees that were being driven after they [the Chinese] had captured them. We looked on and told each other, "Let's go and try to get a horse." He [colleague] replied in the affirmative. "Let's go wherever possible. If [we] get a horse [we] can go anywhere."

Q: If [you] get a horse?

#25N: All the horses were let loose on the ground down below. One part of the ground bordered the forest and we went there in search of a good horse to catch. Then each of us jumped on a horse and crossed a river and into a valley. We sprinted away. Strangely, we did not hear the Chinese shoot.

Q: Didn't shoot?

#25N: Did not shoot.

Q: Did [the Chinese] not see?

#25N: Perhaps [they] did not or whatever. We fled into the valley that was forested. After a while [we] tied the horses and came back to take a look. [The Chinese] drove away. The Chinese drove them [the captured people and animals] away.

Q: The two of you rode away but got down from the horses to take a look?

00:45:08

#25N: Yes, we tied the horses and came back to take a look to see what was happening and whether we were being pursued. [We] watched and saw them leaving without even looking back. Then when it became dark we went back to where our group was. They told [us] that [we] would not make it if we tried to escape. “What shall we do? What shall we do? We took the horses with the aim of running away. We want to flee.” That night we fled on the horses.

Q: The two of you fled?

#25N: Yes, fled. It was in the forest. Daylight broke as we reached a place and hid in a forest. The next night too [we] went into hiding. It was raining early that night. There was a fog and it seemed like nobody could spot [us]. We boiled water and ate some dry meat and rested. The Chinese launched an attack on us.

00:48:50

#25N: When the Chinese started attacking, we ran away and up a mountain pass with the Chinese in pursuit. [We] reached the top of the pass and then a rocky area. We took hold of the rocky area and exchanged fire whole of that day. The whole day [we] were there on the rocky area. The Chinese were lower down and send up men in twos and threes. In that manner Chinese troops were deployed upon the two of us.

We continued to fire upon those that advanced. Then it became late. It was around the time of dusk that I ran out of bullets—ran out of bullets for the gun. When there were no more bullets, I struck the gun on a rock and threw it away where the Chinese would not see it. There was a Chinese holding a binocular atop a boulder. He [the colleague] fired and [the Chinese soldier] was felled. When he fell, there happened to be three Chinese that ran away. The leader who was sending them up was the one carrying [the binocular]. That was it. Then it turned dark.

Q: Were [you] not caught when the Chinese initially appeared?

#25N: No, [we] were not caught then.

Q: And what did you do next?

00:52:17

#25N: Then we were out of bullets. He threw away his gun and I had done so too. That night we tried to find the way to Shopado and reached there. At Shopado we surrendered to the Chinese. We had nowhere to go, no guns, nothing. Having nothing, [we] surrendered to the Chinese.

Q: Why did you surrender?

#25N: Now we had nothing, no guns and no food. So [we] surrendered to the Chinese.

Then we were driven from Shopado to Lhozong and imprisoned at Lhozong, imprisoned for a year in Lhozong. Then whichever hometown we hailed from...[The Chinese] came driving many that were [fleeing from their respective villages] and living in the regions of Penpa and Lhozong. We were then taken to Chamdo.

00:54:47

We were then put in prison at Chamdo for a long time. I belonged to the other side of the Yangtze River, to Siting. So was taken to Dhartsedo. He [colleague] was left in Gyamda as [he] belonged to the other side, the Tibetan Autonomous Region. He was left there while I was taken to Dhartsedo. [I] was in the prison in Dhartsedo for around a year. And then from Dhartsedo I was taken to the district of Derge. I was put in prison at Derge District for around three years.

[I] was jailed in Derge for around three years and then was released home.

Q: When you were in prison, *pa-la*, did they ever give you an amount of time as sentence that you would be in prison for? What was your crime that you were punished, being punished for?

00:57:07

#25N: They do not tell the amount of time. At one point during...[not discernible] they said, “You have been sentenced to this number of years.” Until then [the Chinese] did not say anything.

Q: When was it said?

#25N: I was transferred from Dhartsedo to Derge District and in prison for many years there. Then [the Chinese] said [I] could go back to the hometown from Derge District. At that time I was under supervision, given the “hat” of being under supervision for three years, and then was sent to the hometown. What the supervision means is that you do not have any rights as a person. One who has no rights whatsoever is given the supervision hat. Whatever acts of violence they wished to do, we with the “hats” [had to endure] the assaults. [I] was awarded that for three years.

Q: Before we hear more about that time in your life, can you tell us about prison life? What were some of the conditions? Were they similar in all the prisons or were they different and what were those conditions like for you?

00:59:22

#25N: [The conditions] were sort of similar. [The conditions] were sort of similar.

Q: What were the conditions like?

#25N: In the prison...one was in prison. There were restrictions in movement and one abided by whatever they said. One had no right even to speak a word...[not discernible]

Q: How was the food and the conditions, you know, the warmth or the cold because these prisons were all in Tibet?

#25N: The food provided was such that one did not die of starvation. Food was provided three times [a day]. That was it. It did not matter whether it was hot or cold; one was in prison.

Q: Was the weather cold? What was it like?

#25N: If the weather was cold, one felt cold and if it was hot, one felt hot. It did not matter what happened as one was in prison. One was in prison and it did not matter what happened to those in prison. We did not have the right to utter even one word. It was like one was dead. Whatever was given or whatever was done [to you], that was it. Whatever work was assigned, one carried it out.

Q: What kind of...Can you tell us some of the work that you had to do, *pa-la*?

01:01:58

#25N: They assigned whatever work it may be. [The Chinese] drove [us] to work and back after work.

Q: What was the work?

#25N: The work concerned with soil and rocks like constructing roads or houses. They made [us] do all types of work.

One must work four hours a day.

Q: You said it was almost like dying. Did many people die, *pa-la*?

#25N: Countless people died. There is no use identifying. It did not matter what happened or who died. If they died, they died. That was it.

Q: Did you regret that you had surrendered to the Chinese or were you still happy to be alive even with minimal food and shelter?

01:03:47

#25N: I thought it was right because by surrendering I remained alive. [I] was able to survive.

Q: Were there many people who took their own lives through suicide in the prison?

#25N: [I] did not witness any suicide in the prison. [I] did not see any.

Q: *Pa-la*, what kind of...Give us an idea...What kind of food that you had each day in a kind of typical way?

#25N: Rice was provided. It was rice and boiled water with a few vegetables, boiled water. That was it, and some salt. One had no choice but to eat that.

Q: Rice, boiled water and...?

#25N: Mixed in the boiled water were some vegetables.

Q: Vegetables?

#25N: Yes, vegetables.

Q: And salt tea? Was tea provided?

#25N: There was salt in it [the boiled water with vegetables]. That was it. One had to eat that.

One carried a bowl and the cook gave out a portion. You ate whatever was doled out. Other than that there was no looking here and there [for more].

Q: Did you ever feel that you were starving yourself because of the limitation of food?

01:06:24

#25N: [I] became very weak because of the food, became weak.

Q: *Pa-la*, why do you think the Chinese were even keeping you alive in such a minimal way? Why were they going to all that trouble?

#25N: That must be their custom, keeping all the people in prison and to give out whatever the sentence.

Q: Did anybody ever find out how many Chinese soldiers you killed or did they ever ask about that?

#25N: [The Chinese] did not ask anything like that and I too did not speak about it to the Chinese. [I] never spoke anything about the encounters.

Q: While in prison?

#25N: Yes, to the Chinese.

Q: Probably a good idea.

#25N: [I] spoke about not having the means to fight and never anything about owning weapons.

Q: In the prison, were you in a cell with many people? And who were these people? Were they other soldiers? Were they monks or lay people? Who...How many people were in a cell and who were they?

01:08:46

#25N: In Dhartsedo most [of the prisoners] were Chinese. There were not many Tibetans but Chinese.

Q: That was in Dhartsedo.

#25N: Yes.

Q: In Derge?

#25N: In Derge there were many people from Derge that included the influential people of our region who had revolted against the Chinese. There were also those that were thieves and such. In the prison were people like me who had revolted during the revolution of democracy. Then there were others who had robbed or murdered or been in fights. There were many different kinds. There were many people.

01:10:14

After coming to [the prison in] Derge, the food was a little better. Maybe because of the water [my] body became healthier. Though there was no [food] being brought from outside, the food in the prison was a little bit better. It was mainly *tsampa* that was being provided in Derge [prison]. Tibetans are accustomed to *tsampa* and it is stronger than rice, better than rice.

[I] recovered very well and could walk about. In Derge [the prisoners] were required to work in the fields, used to be driven to work in the fields. Initially, [I] could not do much but after a while [I] was able to work along with the others. [I] became so in Derge.

Q: What gave you courage to survive these many years of prison? Was there any thought or wish in your heart? What gave you courage to go on?

01:12:24

#25N: [I] became so well as to feel that I could survive until release from prison.

Q: And it sounds like that time came, didn't it? Tell us about how...what it felt like to get out of prison?

#25N: In that way [I] was in the prison in Derge for three years. After three years the court of Derge District decided that [I] could go to the hometown but under supervision. [I] was given the hat and was to remain without any rights for three years. Though being among the people one did not have any rights. [I] was released but was to remain under supervision for three years.

Q: So how did you...what were the implications or if you had no rights, then how did that affect how you lived?

#25N: One had to remain without any rights for three years. They took it away for three years. The supervision "hat" was to last for three years.

Q: What did one have to do then?

01:14:20

#25N: Then one was not allowed to speak to any of the people. There was no right whatsoever. Then there was the *thaptsoe* ‘physical struggle [*thamzing* ‘Chinese struggle session’]’ for class [enemies] that happened from time to time. Whenever a *thaptsoe* took place, one must undergo the *thaptsoe*, was assaulted and had to kneel.

Q: Was this carried out during those three years?

#25N: Yes, during the three years.

Q: You were given the “hat” and released...

#25N: Yes, [I] was given the “hat” and released. Then they awarded the sentence in front of the people by conducting *thaptsoe*. After the *thaptsoe* the people talked [made accusations] and then there was beating while [the victim was] kneeling. It was always like that. Among the people were those that were called activists. They got up to beat. The *thaptsoe* sessions took place once a week. So naturally there were *thaptsoe* sessions every month. One was always made to kneel while the *thaptsoe* was conducted. One had no rights as a person while they could do whatever they wished. It was like that.

01:15:55

Then one was obliged to go to deliver letters and messages. One had to travel through the whole night, as traveling during daytime was not allowed. Even if the letter needed to be delivered only in 3-4 days, [the Chinese] made [me] go through the night. One must deliver the letter where it should reach. In those days there was no [other means of communication] except letters.

So in those three years though [I] was out and not in prison yet [I] suffered quite a lot. After three years the supervision “hat” was lifted. Once the supervision “hat” was lifted [I] was told that [I] could enjoy equal rights like other people. Though there were not any rights as such but [I] was not subjected to *thaptsoe*.

Q: When you say the “hat,” I understand that as restrictions but there was nothing...was there anything visible that you had to wear that marked you as a person with the hat?

01:18:11

#25N: There was not anything like that [visible]. Some were at home and there was not anything different in attire. It was only that one did not have any rights while among the people.

Q: I see. So how would someone know you were a person with no rights? How would they know that?

#25N: [The people] would know as we were from the same village. One was not allowed to go outside [the village]. There were not any people from outside except our people. One was not allowed to go anywhere. There was no freedom of movement once the “hat” was given.

Q: Where did you live under those conditions?

#25N: I lived with my sister in our old village. [She] was living in a single room in our neighbor’s house that was a poor person. I lived there. Our house had been confiscated.

Q: You lived with your sister who was living in the neighbor’s house? The Chinese had taken over your house?

#25N: Yes.

Q: *Pa-la*, what happens next? You’re no longer under the “hat” and you’re living with a relative. Do you have any other visitors or things happen to you?

01:20:58

#25N: Then [I] was sent as a herder to a nomadic community called Gyanyen Dokpa by our Commune. There were nomads in a place called Ngamonga where I was sent as a herder.

Q: To graze sheep?

#25N: To graze animals. [I] was sent there and then grazed animals there. The people of that region were very good, not causing harm but being helpful. The leader among the nomads was a man called Phurpa who was a very good man. As I worked as a herder, he sent me to meet the Queen of Derge at Dhartsedo. I was sent to Dhartsedo without the knowledge of the Chinese. At Dhartsedo [I] went to the Queen and then continued to be a herder after returning. [The Chinese] did not realize and nothing was done [to me].

Q: Did you first go to see the Queen of Derge and then work as a nomad?

#25N: [I] worked as a herder. Visitors from here...Then Tibet was opened and connections established. My sibling was living here and he arrived. He came on a visit and took his wife who was there, took [her] to Nepal as he was living in Nepal. He visited once again and took along the older son.

Q: His older son?

01:23:36

#25N: Yes, the older son.

Q: Took along or brought along?

#25N: Took [him] along who had been living in the hometown. On the next visit [he] took me. I made preparations to leave after he said that. I went to Dhartsedo to the Queen of

Derge. There was a road from the south of Kham and another through the north of Kham. There were two motor roads. I believed nobody would come to know if I took the road through south of Kham. So [I] went to the Queen of Derge. But I could not find anyone to take me along. There was a man from Chungpo who was going on the other route. His wife was from Dhartsedo. This woman and the Derge Queen knew each other well. The Derge Queen asked her to help take me along. So she helped bring [me] until Chamdo.

Q: Didn't the sibling take you?

#25N: The sibling wanted to take me along and had the money but that could not be done because I did not have a [travel] permit. I had to run away.

Q: I just wanted to back up a little bit. How many years were you in prison all together and how old were you when you were released? What year was it?

01:26:38

#25N: I do not know how old [I] was.

Q: How long were [you] in prison?

#25N: Perhaps [I] was in prison for 8-9 years, maybe around nine years.

Q: All together?

#25N: Yes, nine years all together in prison.

Q: Is there anything that...we need to follow up on Chamdo? Do you stay in Chamdo for a while or come to India from Chamdo? You went to Chamdo, *pa-la* and then what happened?

#25N: At Chamdo she bought a bus ticket and sent [me] to Lhasa. When [I] reached Lhasa [my] sibling was waiting there. [We] met in Lhasa and spent a few days there. I did not have anything [papers] and like me were 8-9 people.

01:28:18

There is a man from [name omitted] called [name omitted] who lives in [name omitted]. He took across [people] at a cost, smuggling across those that did not have permits. We were eight, nine or 10 people. He took us along. We reached here by taking roundabout routes avoiding the regular roads and traveling during day on safe routes and at night on risky ones.

[We] had to take a detour near Dam. As [we] neared Dam, [we] were told that the place called Dam was located at the intersection down below. Then he took us over a mountain pass and reached Lachu. There it snowed and [we] had a very difficult time. While it would take three days through Dam it took us around 15 days due to heavy snowfall. Then I was able to reach here.

Q: Where did [you] arrive?

#25N: Arrived in Nepal.

Q: And that was walking?

01:31:14

#25N: Yes, walking.

Q: Fifteen days to Nepal.

#25N: Over there [in Tibet, I] traveled by vehicles wherever it was safe. Later we came walking.

Q: It sounds like you finally reached a place where you could be free and I think that's a good place to end our story for today. So I want to thank you for sharing it with us.

#25N: Okay. Thank you.

Q: Was there anything else that you wanted to add?

#25N: There is nothing more to add.

Q: Well, I want to again thank you and hope that you will have many happy days in comfort and peace.

01:32:49

#25N: Okay. Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

#25N: Such is the struggle [I] underwent, yet [I] never thought about suicide.

Q: Yes?

#25N: [I] never thought about committing suicide. There had been so many struggles in the prisons and so many struggles when living [under supervision] among the people. Yet [I] never thought about suicide, perhaps because happy days were to come.

It was like that.

Q: We are happy that you have such happy days.

#25N: Okay.

Q: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW