

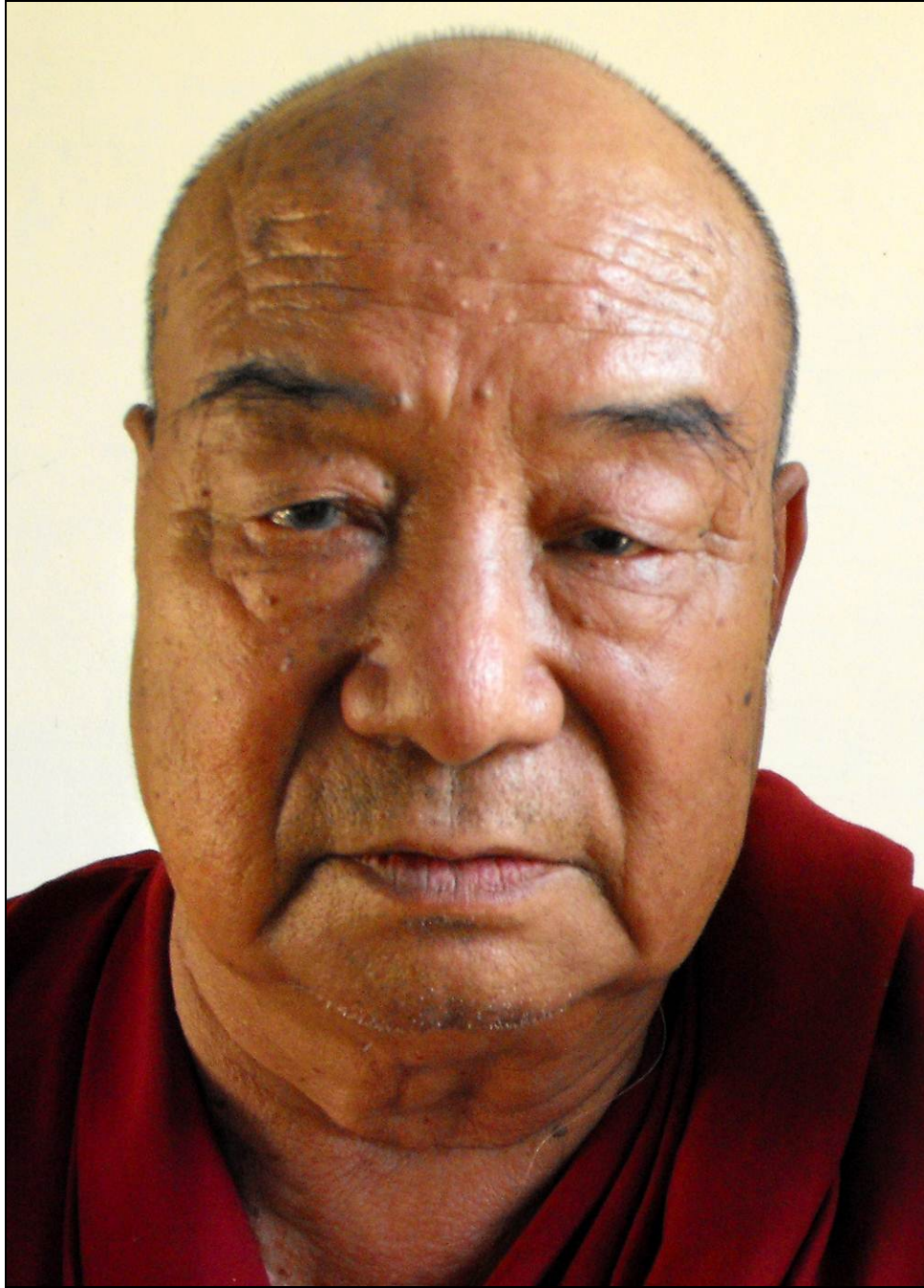
Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #29M – Tenzin Woesser
April 11, 2010**

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #29M
2. Interviewee: Tenzin Wooser
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Yanglay
7. Province: Dhoday (Amdo)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 11, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Drepung Gomang Old Monks Home, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 21 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tenzin Wooser's parents engaged in farming. They had eight children and he was the sixth child. He became a monk at the age of 7 at Sangdok Monastery, near his village. Two of his older brothers were also monks at the same monastery.

Tenzin Wooser recalls the Chinese appearance in his village as, "The Chinese first came to our village to wage a war. The villagers ran away temporarily into the forests to escape them. The Chinese fired shells at his monastery and killed one monk." Tenzin Wooser describes the propaganda films that the Chinese screened in the village when they first arrived and the monthly meetings that villagers were forced to attend from which monks were exempt. Some villagers were killed at these meetings and similar things happened in nearby villages.

Tenzin Wooser left his monastery at the age of 20 and soon after it was completely destroyed by the Chinese. He describes the long journey of 5-6 months from his village to Lhasa where he joined the Drepung Monastery and lived there until the Chinese attacked in 1959. Tenzin Wooser escaped to Bhutan and then was sent to Buxa in Uttar Pradesh, India where he lived for eight years before being resettled in the Drepung Monastery in south India. He returned to his village in 1983 to meet relatives and talks about the changes that had taken place in Tibet.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, life under Chinese rule, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #29M

Interviewee: Tenzin Woesser

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 11, 2010

Question: Can you please start, *kusho-la* ‘respectful term for monk,’ by telling us your name?

00.00.20

Interviewee #29M: Tenzin Woesser.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans to share with the younger generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and with people in the outside world to document the true history, beliefs and culture of the Tibetan people.

#29M: Okay.

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

#29M: Yes, you can. [Smiles]

Q: Thank you very much.

00:01:19

#29M: [Nods]

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break at anytime, please let us know.

#29M: Okay.

Q: And if there’s a question you don’t want to answer, just say “I don’t want to answer that.”

00:01:41

#29M: Okay.

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

#29M: No, there will not be.

Q: And is it okay to use your real name?

00:02:02

#29M: Yes, you can.

Q: We are very, very happy and very much appreciate you for coming to talk to us today.

#29M: Yes.

Q: First of all, can you describe a little bit about your village growing up in Amdo, your village of Yanglay?

00:02:33

#29M: Yanglay came about...initially men had been sent from Tibet in order to occupy this border area. The region was called Khagya. Khagya meant "one who rode a horse." So a hundred of them arrived and lived along the border. Initially they arrived from Tibet to the border.

***Lay* in Yanglay meant that long ago there were many forests [in the region] and a clearing where there was no forest called *lay*. There were two regions called Layrang and Yanglay. These days the forests no longer exist.**

Q: When you were growing up, there was a forest, yes?

#29M: There were no forests. There were sparse forests, but not close to the village where we lived.

Q: What was the livelihood of your parents?

00:04:38

#29M: They worked in the fields.

Q: And how many people in the family growing up?

#29M: When I was little, there were my parents, five sons and three daughters.

Q: Where do you come in that: higher, middle, younger?

00:05:19

#29M: The three daughters were older. Then there were two monks older to me...

Q: And then it was you?

#29M: And then it was me and two younger ones who are lay men.

Q: So the two younger brothers never became monks?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They were lay people.

Q: But for always, like they never became monks in the future?

00:06:07

#29M: No, they were not monks. They are still living. They are farmers.

Q: They are still in Tibet?

#29M: Yes, they are in Tibet.

Q: Three monks in one family. Isn't that quite a lot of monks for one family?

00:06:37

#29M: Yes, there were many monks. They were older to me and the oldest one still survives. The one in the middle was imprisoned by the Chinese and died from starvation.

Q: Was that considered a lot of monks from one family? I mean I heard that usually maybe in one family there was one son who became a monk, but of five of you, three of you became monks. Was that unusual?

#29M: No, it was not. It was not unusual.

Q: Really? So at what age did you become a monk?

00:07:57

#29M: At the age of 7.

Q: And which monastery did you go to?

#29M: I joined the Sangdok Monastery.

Q: At the monastery, were you treated kindly by the other monks?

00:08:36

#29M: I lived in the quarters of relatives who were also monks. The quarters are still there. All the houses were destroyed in '58. The houses have been re-built now.

Q: By houses you mean...

#29M: I mean the monks' quarters. In '58 they were completely demolished. There was a vacant space then. The area where the monastery stood was vacant.

Q: So they were re-built.

00:09:13

#29M: Yes. The Chinese demolished all the houses in the year '58 and grew vegetables and farmed the land. That's what they did. These days the houses have been re-built.

Q: Were you a very well behaved boy or were you a bit naughty?

#29M: [Laughs] One could not be very naughty lest the teacher beat you.

Q: Yes?

00:10:23

#29M: The teacher would beat you. There was the teacher.

Q: Really? What would he beat you with?

#29M: He would beat you with whatever he could lay his hands on. [Laughs]

Q: So what kind of things...

00:10:55

#29M: [Interrupts] While teaching the scriptures, there was a long wooden board and he used that to beat. Otherwise there were sticks with which he would beat.

Q: [The wooden boards used] to cover the scriptures?

#29M: Yes, there were two wooden boards to cover the scriptures.

Q: What kind of things would you get beaten for? What kind of infractions would deserve this response?

00:11:35

#29M: [They] would beat.

[Question is repeated.]

#29M: If not satisfied, [they] beat. In the old days, they beat a great deal. It was not like what it is now. In the earlier days they beat a great deal.

[Question is repeated.]

#29M: One had to memorize the scriptures and give a test. If one did not pass that or did not work satisfactorily one got beaten.

Q: Do you think it is better these days?

00:12:21

#29M: These days there's not much beating.

Q: Definitely. What did you particularly enjoy about being a monk back then as a child? Was there any particular studies that you particularly enjoyed, lessons you enjoyed?

#29M: I was a small child at that time and I do not know.

Q: What kind of food did you eat at the monastery?

00:13:04

#29M: There were bread made out of wheat flour and *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley.’

Q: No meat?

#29M: There was meat. We ate meat.

Q: How many monks at this monastery?

00:13:40

#29M: There were about a hundred monks.

Q: Okay and so what was your...

#29M: [Interrupts] Now there are no longer a hundred. There are only a little over 50. Earlier when I was there, there were about a hundred.

Q: Right now we will stay with this period and then we can move on to what happened later. What was your first experience with the Chinese?

00:14:19

#29M: The Chinese first came to our village to wage a war. They attacked and occupied the territory.

Q: When was that?

#29M: I wonder when that occurred. I might have been 12, 13 or 14 years old then. When the Chinese first arrived from China, they appeared like bandits and attacked. They fired shells at the monastery and killed one monk.

Q: How far away was Sangdok Monastery to Yanglay village?

00:15:52

#29M: It was quite close. It was not very far away. However, one had to walk across valleys and inclines. The area was not good [level]. One could not walk over the rocks easily. One had to climb up and down on the rocks. When one looked out, one could see it and it seemed close but when one started walking, one had to go up and down and at certain points, if one slipped over the rocks, one would fall down the gorge. One could fall.

Q: Was it very, very steep gorges or something?

#29M: Oh yes, they were. They were very steep.

Q: Did people used to die...

00:16:54

#29M: Oh, there were many such cases.

Q: So when you said that your village of Yanglay was attacked and occupied, do you mean that the Chinese people moved into the houses? What do you mean by occupy exactly?

#29M: No, they did not [move into the Tibetan houses]. They lived separately in the army camp. They had a separate army camp. They did not live in the village.

Q: What happened to the people in the village?

#29M: For a few days, the people of the village ran away. They ran away into the forests and everywhere, but later they gradually returned. Later, nothing happened.

Q: Returned after the Chinese had left?

00:18:29

#29M: [The Chinese] had not left. At least one army camp still remained. One army camp remained and later when Nagrang was attacked, these [soldiers] went there. Except for one camp, the rest had left. They had left after occupying the region.

Q: What happened when the people returned to the village?

#29M: [The Chinese] did not do much to the people of the village then. Much later, many were killed.

Q: So how long did they stay in the forest, the villagers?

00:19:32

#29M: They might have not stayed too long. No, they did not stay much.

Q: Perhaps they spent a few days?

#29M: Yes, a few days. They fled into the forest when the attack took place.

Q: And your family was among them?

00:19:53

#29M: Yes, my family [ran away]. The forest was close by. However, we at the monastery did not flee. A shell or two were fired on the monastery. We did not flee.

Q: You were shelled?

#29M: Yes, the shelling killed a monk. The shell fell into the room where he was. At that time their [the Chinese] army was approaching. In those days there was a custom of tugging a *khata* ‘ceremonial scarf’ when the army arrived and in order to do that, a lama’s *chanzo* ‘business manager’ who was young in years—about 26 years—entered the room and the shell fell on him. The shell burst and he was hurt here [points to right side of forehead] and was killed instantly.

Q: [The shell] fell from above into the room?

00:21:03

#29M: Yes, it did. There were no buildings like this. The houses were made of mud.

Q: Did the shelling just come out of the blue, like completely unexpectedly, or did you see the Chinese preparing for this attack?

#29M: Initially the Chinese had arrived there, and hoping to stop more Chinese from coming, [the Tibetans] resisted them. Clashes took place for a few days. Then at one point the whole area was surrounded.

Q: By the Chinese?

00:21:56

#29M: Yes.

Q: How were you trying to resist them?

#29M: With simple guns. We did not have anything except guns. There were no bombs or other artilleries. There were simple guns like the policemen carry here. In those days there used to be different types of guns. Each gun could not use many bullets, just five bullets.

Q: You had guns normally in the monastery or you'd acquired guns specifically to fight the Chinese?

00:23:02

#29M: The monastery did not possess guns. Those that resisted were not the monks of the monastery. They were the lay people of the village.

Q: How long did the shelling go on for?

#29M: They did that one early morning, at about 7 or 8 o'clock. We were not many people and they could easily subdue us. Several tens of thousands of them could easily subdue us.

Q: How much damage was done to the monastery?

00:24:12

#29M: Except for the monk that was killed and [damage] to the building, there were no other damages to the monastery.

Q: What were you doing at that time? Were you hiding somewhere?

#29M: I was hiding in my quarters at that time. [Laughs] When that monk was killed, [the Chinese] were on the other side of the valley. The soldiers were approaching and he [the monk who was killed] said that he would hold them off. The Chinese made signs for us to go back inside. When someone ventured out, they said [waves hand] “Go inside.” They did not enter the monastery and there were no one who fired at them. The monks did not possess any guns.

Q: So what happened?

00:25:30

#29M: A few days after occupying the territory, they screened a film. There was an open ground in the center of the village where *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks’ used to be performed. They screened a movie there while the soldiers surrounded the area and placed machine guns. That’s what they did.

They continued to screen films for four to five days. They were about the army of China and artilleries. At that time Stalin was living. He was a bearded man, the one called Stalin. He was in the Chinese army and doing this [raises hand].

Q: In the film?

#29M: Yes. There was this man called Stalin who is a Russian. He was like a teacher for the Chinese.

Q: If you could, describe all the films you saw and what was in them.

00:27:24

#29M: They did not show anything else except that.

Q: Just about wars?

#29M: Yes, about wars and about conquering Taiwan in a battle, which was a lie. It was about conquering Taiwan in a battle and it showed a little bit of Japan. The Japanese and the Chinese fought a war.

Q: Had you ever seen a film before?

00:28:18

#29M: No, I had not. [I] had never seen one. [Laughs] There were no [films] in the region.

Q: So what did you think of these films when you saw them?

#29M: There was nothing much I thought.

Q: Were you more interested in the process of how it worked technically than the content?

00:29:11

#29M: There was not even electricity then in our village. We wondered at the batteries they used. [Laughs]

Q: So how did life change in your monastery after that?

#29M: After that the monastery was completely demolished with not a trace left.

Q: When was that?

00:29:53

#29M: That was in the very year of '58. I escaped to Lhasa. I fled to Lhasa at the age of 20.

Q: You fled to Lhasa?

#29M: I fled from my village.

Q: Was that before or after the demolition of the monastery?

00:30:17

#29M: Before the demolition. When I was there, the monastery existed.

Q: Before that happened, from the period of like 13 or 14 to 20 during those years, were you discouraged from practicing Buddhism? Did the Chinese discourage you from practicing Buddhism? Discourage monks?

#29M: At that time [the Chinese] did not say that religion could not be practiced. The monasteries were left standing then. However, the people had to gather for meetings every 15 days or a month. All the villagers had to assemble wherein a few Tibetans were killed. They were shot in the head—two, three or four people were killed.

Q: You saw this?

00:32:19

#29M: We did not attend the meetings. At that time it was not necessary for the monks to attend the meetings.

Q: So the people who were killed, were they being killed as an example to show other people what might happen to them?

#29M: Nearby there was a village called Kapu. In this village was a leader.

Q: Kagu?

00:33:01

#29M: There was a leader in a village called Kapu. Some of his family members were killed while he was imprisoned. He died in prison.

Q: Did you know any of the people personally who were killed during these meetings?

#29M: No, there was no one I knew.

Q: Before you escaped to Lhasa, how was the well-being of your family?

00:33:57

#29M: They were fine.

Q: Why did you escape to Lhasa?

#29M: In my village it was a custom to go on a pilgrimage to Lhasa and it was considered a great joy to join [one of] the three great monasteries.

Q: So it wasn't an escape. You were going to attend education.

00:34:42

#29M: I came along with other people who were going to Lhasa. I assisted them in driving their animals. There was no motor road then.

Q: What happened when you got to Lhasa?

#29M: Upon arriving in Lhasa, I joined the Drepung Monastery.

Q: That must have been a very great honor. I mean you were in a monastery with only 100 monks. How many of the monks from your monastery attended Drepung at that time?

00:35:59

#29M: There were not many monks from our monastery, perhaps four or five.

Q: You mean in Drepung?

#29M: Yes. One must walk for many months and it was very difficult. There were no motor roads then. One had to walk. [Laughs]

Q: How long did it take?

00:36:34

#29M: It took about 5-6 months.

Q: When you got to Lhasa, what was the atmosphere like in Lhasa? What was going on in Lhasa?

#29M: Lhasa was full of soldiers.

Q: Whose soldiers?

00:36:59

#29M: Chinese soldiers. There were many Chinese soldiers. There were not many civilian Chinese. They were all soldiers.

Q: Were they around the city or in the city?

#29M: The soldiers?

Q: The soldiers.

00:37:32

#29M: [They were] inside [the city]. They were at various areas inside.

Q: Where were they mostly concentrated?

#29M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] At that time there were not many [civilian] Chinese. Except for the soldiers, there were hardly any [civilian] Chinese to be seen.

[Question is repeated.]

00:37:54

#29M: They had different army camps. These army camps were located close to the locals. Take Drepung Monastery for example. There was an army camp close to Drepung Monastery. They [the soldiers] were living in it. They would not live just anywhere. They stayed at the important places.

Q: What happened then?

#29M: They stayed at Lhasa and then attacked it. They attacked Lhasa and it took them only one day.

Q: We're jumping straight to 1959 now. You arrived in 1957. So you were 2 years in Drepung before everything hit the fan in 1959?

00:39:18

#29M: Yes, that is right. [I] stayed at the monastery.

Q: During your time in Drepung before 1959, did you have complete freedom to do your religious studies? There was no impact by the Chinese presence?

#29M: One could read [the scriptures].

Q: Were there no restriction?

0039:45:

#29M: There were no restrictions.

Q: Did you always have enough to eat?

#29M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] They were very gentle at that time. The soldiers shook our hands. We did not understand the language, but they shook hands with us. They said, “*Loshang, loshang*” and shook hands.

They had cultivated vegetable. Nearby Lhasa was a lot of garbage thrown in the gutter. They transported all the garbage in horse carts and used them for their vegetable field. There was no attack of any sort.

Q: Was there always enough to eat in the monastery? Was food not a problem?

00:40:59

#29M: One had to [fend] for one’s food. There was nothing much except *tsampa*.

Q: One had to fend for oneself?

#29M: One fended for oneself as except for *mangja* ‘assembly during which tea is served’ and [someone’s] *geshe thangko* ‘offering made for graduation with a degree in philosophy,’ there was nothing else from the monastery.

Q: No food coming from the monastery. So how did you get your food? How did you provide for your own food?

00:41:50

#29M: The *tsampa* was rationed out by the *datsang* ‘division in a monastery’ and the main monastery. There was a large [measurement] called *bo*. The monks were thus provided. First a coupon was allotted and one received his share on producing it.

Q: Did you remember being hungry?

#29M: [I] did not experience that.

Q: What did you personally witness in March 1959?

00:43:09

#29M: I did not have any responsibilities.

[Question is repeated.]

#29M: Lhasa was full of soldiers. Other than that we did not know what was happening there.

Q: So in March 1959 you just stayed inside your monastery. Is that right?

00:44:11

#29M: Norbulingka was the summer residence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Many people converged there and His Holiness the Dalai Lama was inside the Norbulingka. On that day in '59, the [Chinese] soldiers in Lhasa started shelling it at around 2 a.m. and continued to shell Norbulingka the whole day. The [army] did not come but they fired shells at it.

Q: Were you given a *tsonsung* 'protective amulet' by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, any kind of protection?

#29M: No, I did not have. It was not so easy to see His Holiness. One could not see him while in Tibet. One is able to do so in India, but that was not possible then.

There was one [protective amulet] called *jigshay raphel* that one could acquire from Gaden [Monastery]. And Sera [Monastery] had another type of protective amulet. Unless one acquired and wore one of those, there were no other [amulets].

Q: No, I did not mean personally, but we'd heard that he distributed thousands of *tsonsung*s to monks and to people in the Tibetan army. So I was just wondering if you received anything like that that had been blessed by His Holiness.

00:46:42

#29M: [His Holiness] did not distribute such [amulets] in Tibet. [He] distributed them in Dehradun [Tibetan soldiers in the Indian army] but they were not distributed in Tibet. Earlier His Holiness distributed protective amulets with the image of Jigshay Mahe.

Q: And the Jigshay Mahe, do you still have it?

#29M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] I did not get one.

Q: Oh, you didn't get one. Okay. Can you tell us a little bit more about your experience in Lhasa while Lhasa was being occupied? But make it really personal to you. We can read the history of Tibet in books. It's been well documented, but your experience is completely unique. So what you saw is what we really want to know.

00:48:42

#29M: I was in the monastery on the day of the attack. The *datsang* produced around seven guns and instructed us to go to the hill called Shari near Drepung and hold fort. There were 50 bullets each. So for every two of us there was a gun and 50 bullets and carrying these we went to the hilltop and stayed there the whole day.

Q: On the Tseri?

#29M: On the Shari which is a hill.

Q: Was that located behind Drepung?

00:49:22

#29M: No, it was located on the left side of Drepung.

Q: And have you ever used a gun?

#29M: Yes, I have used guns. We used guns in the village. However, it was the type that used only five bullets.

Q: Were you given any kind of training?

00:50:33

#29M: It was not necessary to provide training. It was not necessary to give training to use the gun that took five bullets.

Q: Were you given any training to use the gun that was provided by the monastery?

#29M: It was not necessary to provide training for that. Everyone knew how to use it.

Q: After you were given the guns, you went to the Shari and then?

00:51:06

#29M: We stayed there for one day. The next day we returned to the monastery. Then leaving the guns there, we fled.

Q: You left the guns at the monastery?

#29M: Yes, we left the guns at the monastery because one could not take them away like that. They belonged to the monastery.

Q: There was one gun for seven monks or he just left his gun there?

00:52:03

#29M: There were only seven monks. There were not many people.

Q: Okay, there were seven monks. How many guns were there?

#29M: There were only about seven guns. There were two people for each gun.

Q: So you left your gun at the monastery?

00:52:23

#29M: All of us left the guns at the monastery.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Why did he say he left the gun at the monastery?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because the guns belonged to the monastery. It was the property of the monastery and they couldn't take the property of the monastery away.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, no. I guess that is not my question. Why did they go back to the monastery? Why did they leave their post?

#29M: We were instructed to hold fort. Then it became unnecessary as there was no one who arrived there. [Laughs]

Q: And gave your guns back to the monastery. And then what happened?

00:53:36

#29M: Then we fled. We fled towards India.

Q: Is there anything else you want to tell us about anything that happened in Tibet before you crossed the border into India? What you experienced?

#29M: There is nothing much to talk about [my] experience. I lived at the monastery studying the scriptures. I learned the treatises of debates and memorized the texts. There were no opportunities to know anything else.

Q: What happened at Dhuwazong?

00:54:46

#29M: There was a clash at Dhuwazong. The monks were at Dhuwazong and the Chinese were pursuing us. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] guerrillas were stationed at Dhuwazong. There were many people with weapons there who were the men of *Chushi Gangdrug* and monks. Except for that type of guns, no other weapons were available.

Q: Then?

#29M: Then the Chinese arrived and attacked. They had artilleries and started firing. They set the monastery on fire. Many monks from my *khangtsen* [a smaller community in a monastery in which monks of one geographical area live] were killed.

Q: At Dhuwazong? Were they all at Dhuwazong?

00:55:43

#29M: Yes, there was a monastery. It was located on a hill like the Potala Palace. We were in there and the Chinese arrived and surrounded us. They were huge in number and we could not fight them. Their aircraft flew at that time but it was not a war airplane. It was an airplane that carried loads and circled over Lhasa.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Where is this? Is he talking about Amdo?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, Dhuwazong is right across Utsang.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, it's in Utsang.

Q: They burned the monastery. They burned to death? The monks burned to death?

00:57:10

#29M: Some might have been burned. However, I was not there. When the weapons were distributed, I did not join the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: You did not have a gun?

#29M: No, [I] did not.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But his understanding was that people inside burned to death or how did they die?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: A few of them burned to death.

Q: So when you got to India you were sent to Buxa, a refugee camp in West Bengal and can you tell us about the conditions there, what that was like?

00:58:10

#29M: When we escaped from Lhoka, we reached a snowy mountain called Melagajong on the border of Bhutan and Tibet. It took half a day to cover the snowy peak. After crossing over this snowy peak, you were at the Bhutanese border. Bhutanese sentries were posted there.

Q: Then?

#29M: For about 20 days we were stopped there by the Bhutanese army. We were stopped at a bridge there. By then His Holiness the Dalai Lama had reached India. [We] learned of it from the radio. About 1,000 to 2,000 people had collected there in that area who were stopped by the Bhutanese from proceeding further. We were there for about 20 days.

Q: And then?

00:59:43

#29M: After 20 days by which time His Holiness had reached India, it was announced over the radio to allow the people to cross the border. There was a Bhutanese minister called Pha Tongpa who came to the border. He said, "There is no use for the monks and nuns to go to India. If you go to India, you will not receive food by clapping [reciting prayers]. Go back [to Tibet]." The Bhutanese minister called Pha Tongpa said that. Then all of us shouted, "Let us through, let us through." [Laughs]

Q: Then what happened?

#29M: We requested to be let through and from the next day, 300-400 people...Except for a few monks, most people carried guns and all the guns were surrendered to the Bhutanese soldiers at the border. Then three or four Bhutanese soldiers escorted [the people]. One could not go where one pleased.

Q: Across Bhutan towards India. And then?

01:03:08

#29M: One had to walk several days through Bhutanese territory. We were living at the border of Bhutan and then we reached the place called Bumthang. We were there for four or five days. Each day 300-400 people were let through. When we reached the Indian border, many bullock carts arrived.

Q: Bullock carts?

#29M: Yes, and we put our things in the bullock carts. Then many trucks arrived and we moved our things onto the trucks. [We reached] a place called Hathi. There was a huge prison in this place where we were accommodated and provided with food rations. We had been bitten by insects and were treated by the Indians.

Q: When you reached Indian territory, was that Bumthang?

01:04:38

#29M: No, Bumthang is in Bhutan.

Q: Was Bumthang the first place you reached in Bhutan?

#29M: It was a big town. The name of the place in India is Hathi.

Q: And then?

01:05:23

#29M: There were trains at Hathi. At that time we were like animals. [We were] put inside the trains and the doors locked, so we could not go out. They passed bread through the windows. The Bhutanese police knew to speak Tibetan. We ate the bread and after a night's journey, reached the place called Buxa, [laughs] by the train.

Q: What happened in Buxa?

#29M: We were not in central Buxa [West Bengal]. We were at the railway station and from there had to walk for quite a while. It was about half a day's walk.

Q: Then you were in Buxa.

01:07:00

#29M: Yes, in Buxa. That was the border between India and Bhutan. It was in Indian territory, but at the border.

Q: And then?

#29M: Buxa was a [former] prison. There were about 3,000-4,000 people. Tibetans from everywhere was sent there. And then all the people fell sick of fever and died. Many people died. [We] lived there for many years, in the place called Buxa.

Q: How many years?

01:08:05

#29M: We were the last ones to arrive and lived there for 8-10 years. [We] lived there for eight or nine years. We were the first to leave and the monks were the last to arrive.

Q: You lived for about nine years in Buxa and then?

#29M: [I] was there for 8-9 years. Then [we] were told to go to the settlements and came to the settlement.

Q: Here?

#29M: Yes.

Q: In 1983 you went back to Tibet. Why did you go back to Tibet?

01:09:27

#29M: I went to see my relatives. One must meet the relatives.

Q: What happened when you went back?

#29M: At the time I went back, it was much freer. In my village, they [Chinese officials] did not even look at the pass that was issued by the Chinese Embassy. Besides that there was another document which permitted one to stay at the house. One had to show that while living at the house. They did not even look at the one issued by the Embassy.

Q: Was it easy to get a visa?

01:10:51

#29M: You could not get it immediately. It took several months after making an application. One received it after several months and [I think] it is the same these days.

Q: How did you find your village?

#29M: One had to provide the name of the village and details [of the region] like Tsongo Shingchen, Rikong Tue and Chentse Shen. Our village Yanglay is called Tinay. One had to give all the names. Then there was a form to fill.

Q: What changes did you see when you returned in 1983?

01:11:55

#29M: Things were so-so at that time. The monasteries had been rebuilt. There was not a trace of those that were demolished long ago. The buildings had been reconstructed.

Q: Were they in the process of rebuilding?

#29M: They were already built. They were built in the very place that they used to stand like my quarter was built at the old spot. All were rebuilt. Wherever your house stood earlier, it was rebuilt on that very spot. There was not a trace to be seen of the earlier demolished [structures].

Q: What other changes did you see?

01:12:54

#29M: All those people I knew earlier were not there and it seemed like one had arrived at a different place.

Q: Really. It was so different.

#29M: That's right. Now it has been over 50 years. One could not recognize the older people who had aged. The young ones have grown up and one cannot recognize them.

Q: What was the reunion with your family like?

01:13:55

#29M: My older sister was alive, but the two other sisters had passed away. My younger brother who is a monk is still surviving. The monk [brother] younger to him was imprisoned by the Chinese and died in prison.

Q: Did they have a lot to share with you about their experience of what had happened?

#29M: My older brother who is a monk was there as well as two younger brothers. There are two [brothers] that are younger to me. They'd become very old and could hardly be recognized.

[Question is repeated.]

01:15:10

#29M: There was not much. My older brother who is a monk was to be captured by the Chinese and he'd fled to the hills, but was finally caught. He was jailed in the district prison. He said that he did not face many problems with food since he was given the task of assisting the cooks. He did not die, but the one just older to me passed away in prison.

Q: Which is the brother that assisted the cooks?

#29M: There was the one older to me that died in prison. He [cooking assistant] was older to him.

Q: Had any other of your family members wanted to leave, tried to leave?

01:17:00

#29M: No, they did not.

Q: What did they ask you? What did they want to know from you?

#29M: They did not ask. They were settled there with wives and children. There were no such [questions].

Q: They were not interested in life in exile or what was going on with His Holiness or anything like this?

01:17:50

#29M: The region is isolated and they have never been anywhere, so they did not have the wish to leave.

Q: *Kusho-la*, when you think about Tibet these days, what do you think about?

#29M: [Laughs] Now there is nothing but Chinese in Tibet. It's full of Chinese. In the villages close to my village, initially five to six Chinese families were stationed among the Tibetans. They were no longer living there; they had left. However, now roads have been constructed and fully populated.

Q: By Chinese?

#29M: Yes. The Chinese are everywhere. You could not get food if you did not know to speak Chinese during the journey or in Lhasa. If you wanted to eat something, you had to say it in Chinese.

01:19:43

[Interviewer to interpreter]: During his time there, he's talking about?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: When he went back.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, when he went back

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You needed to know the language to buy food.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: To buy food.

#29M: In Lhasa, except for a few Tibetans around the Jokhang 'Central Cathedral' you could hardly see any among the crowd of Chinese. One could only see a few Tibetans

circumambulating the Jokhang. Other than that there were hardly any [Tibetans to be seen].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: In Lhasa in 1983.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Is there anything else you want to ask, Yangchen-la? Are you satisfied?

Q: Okay. Thank you very much for talking to us. It was really interesting. And just tell us, what was it like to talk to about these experiences and sharing your memories?

01:20:48

#29M: [Laughs]...[Not discernible]

Q: Okay. I need to ask you one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it make a problem for you?

#29M: There will be no problem.

Q: Can we use your real name for the project?

01:21:18

#29M: Yes, that is okay.

Q: Thank you very much for sharing your story.

#29M: [Smiles] Okay.

Q: We have a small gift from the project.

[Interviewee stands up to receive the gift]

#29M: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW