

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #2D – Dhingri Ngawang
May 14, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #2D
2. Interviewee: Dhingri Ngawang
3. Age: 80
4. Date of Birth: 1932
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dhingri Gangkar
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1980
9. Date of Interview: May 14, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 33 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dhingri Ngawang's father was a soldier in the Tibetan army and died when Dhingri Ngawang was 8 year old. His father issued an oral will at the time of his death asking the army major to take care of his children. To honor this will, Dhingri Ngawang was recruited into the army at the age of 10 years old. He talks in detail about the army, his responsibilities, the types of guns used by the Tibetan soldiers and the rankings in the army.

Dhingri Ngawang's describes many aspects of Tibetan laws, including those to prevent the killing of wild animals, punishment for crimes, and the taxation system. He also tells about the crops that were grown by the farmers, the barter system between the farmers and the nomads, and the various breeds of domestic animals of Tibet.

Dhingri Ngawang talked at length about his 21 years in prison, including 11 months in solitary confinement. He talks about torture and forced labor, specifically how the prisoners were made to build an electricity plant in Lhasa. He reveals how he and some prisoners formed an underground organization and how they suffered when the Chinese discovered the group.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, Tibetan army, farm life, taxes, environment/wildlife, life under Chinese rule, forced labor, imprisonment, brutality/torture, thamzing, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #2D

Interviewee: Dhingri Ngawang

Age: 80, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 14, 2012

Question: Could you please start by telling us your name?

00:00:14

Interviewee #2D: [I] am called Dhingri Ngawang.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, with Chinese people and the rest of the world.

#2D: [Nods]

Q: Your memories and experiences are going to help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#2D: [Nods]

Q: Does the Tibet Oral History Project have permission from you to use this interview?

#2D: You have.

Q: Thank you very much. During the interview if you want to take a break or stop at any time, just let us know.

#2D: Okay.

Q: If there's any question you'd rather not answer, that's fine. You can just say, "I'd rather not answer that."

#2D: Okay.

Q: We need to ask you if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else in the world, would it be a problem for you?

00:01:57

#2D: Yes?

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

#2D: It will not be. It should be shown. I need it to be broadcast.

Q: We are very honored to record your story today and we really appreciate you participating.

#2D: Thank you. That is very good.

Q: Can you start by telling us a little bit about your life growing up in Tibet?

00:02:37

#2D: I would be able to recall were I to relate the story after I turned 8 years old. Therefore, when I was 8 years old...my parents had us four siblings: three sons and a daughter who was the eldest. I was the eldest among the three sons. There were two younger sons. When I was 8, my father developed a cyst [touches left abdomen] and passed away from it.

Just before [he] expired, a person named Dhingpon ‘Major’ Kalsang was called and told, “I am going to die. When I am gone, please take care of my children.” He left this oral will. That was the oral will, but there was nothing much to do except that he [father] believed I would be drafted into the army when I grew up. Later when I was 10, he [Dhingpon Kalsang] spoke about the oral will to a gathering of the *dapon* ‘colonels’ and other officers of the army.

Q: Who took [you] to the army?

#2D: Yes?

Q: Who took [you] to the army?

#2D: The name of my regiment was called Dhingri Maga. The Dhingri Maga is the *chadhang* according to the alphabet [*cha* is the 5th letter of the Tibetan alphabet]. It was called Chadhang Dhingri Maga. Father had been serving as a soldier earlier and the children used to be taken along. Father passed away suddenly in Chamdo in Kham. He left this oral will at the time of his sudden death. After father’s demise, during a meeting of all the army officials, the person [Dhingpon Kalsang] put up a petition requesting, “The father left an oral will. Please admit the oldest son, Ngawang in place of the father.” At that time unless one was tall and 18 years old, he was not drafted into the army. However, in recognition of my father’s valuable contribution and the oral will, and the kindness and compassion of the army, I was recruited into the army at the age of 10.

00:05:18

Being recruited at the age of 10, [I] was not able to carry a gun. However, as a little child, I was taught to play the mouth organ. [I] learned to play the mouth organ and drum. I became the best mouth organ player among the children. Therefore, I could join the army band. I was recruited at age 10 and then at around the age of 16 was sent to Dhingri [in Utsang].

Though my father owned a home [in Dhingri], when we lived in Kham we could not manage it. When I returned, I earned a livelihood by working in the fields. Really there was a very good custom in Tibet then, which was that one could go anywhere one wished, one could trade wherever one wished and if one had enough to eat, one could sleep and nobody would say anything. There was nobody to push you like the Chinese. Therefore, the ways and custom of Tibet were incredibly good. [The people] of Tibet were mainly farmers and nomads, doing farming and dairying. The farmers grew different kinds of grains and the *dzo*, yaks and oxen did the plowing.

How do you get a *dzo*? If you cross a *dri* ‘female yak’ with an ox, you get a *dridzo*. By crossing a cow with a yak, you got a *badzo*; ox with a *dzomo* gave a *tholay*; a *tholay* with an ox gave a *gar*; a *gar* with an ox gave a *gir*; a *gir* and an ox gave a *jojoba* that is mentioned in our proverbs. That is the origin of the *jojoba* and *silidri* in our proverbs.

Q: What is it that the farmers generally used?

#2D: Yes?

Q: Is it yaks and *dzo*?

00:07:44

#2D: Yaks and *dzo*. After plowing the fields, wheat, barley, peas, mustard, *serzung*, turnips and radishes were cultivated. The farmers produced much more than their requirement and bartered [the surplus produce] with the nomads, in turn receiving meat, butter, wool, fur, and also salt from the nomads. They [farmers] gave grains in exchange. That was how the farmers and nomads bartered. After consumption in the region, the surplus grain was thus exchanged. Among *nambu* ‘woolen fabric,’ the superior one is called *sherma* and then the *puruk*. The next in quality is *khapshar* and then *chinzo*. That is the range of wool. Normally during summer, one wore *nambu* in Tibet.

Q: What did you wear?

#2D: *Nambu* that is woven from wool. There were not many foreign fabrics. Only a few wealthy families could use the fabrics that were imported from foreign countries that they wore as inners within the shirts. The farmers and nomads were able to feed themselves by working [in their fields]. There were never any deaths from starvation in the history of Tibet. If we take the Chinese for instance...I went to prison in 1959 and between '60, the Chinese brought about starvation.

Mao Zedong said, “Every family should be productive. If each person saves a grain, with 600 million people it will fill a truck.” That would be every family’s production, it was said. One was to do more work, make more income and spend less. Once this movement came into being, numerous people died of starvation. This had never happened in Tibet. When Tibet was ruled by its own government, not one person died thus of starvation.

Because of the presence of the Buddha dharma in Tibet, little children were taught kindness and compassion. If one saw an insect, one was told not to kill it. The parents said

that. The parents taught and the children listened. Presently, wherever the Tibetans are, there's almost none who does not possess kindness and compassion. That is because of the Buddha dharma and the good advice one has received. That is the reason our nature is good.

00:11:06

The Chinese say that the Tibetans are...[not discernible]. If they call us...[not discernible], the Chinese have killed tens of thousands of people in Tibet. During the year '59 in Norbulingka, they killed...A person called Lhakpa Tsering who was from the Kusung Magmi 'Dalai Lama's Security Division' was with me in prison. During our conversation...

Q: What was the name of the Kusung Magmi?

#2D: Lhakpa Tsering. [He] was called Lhakpa Tsering. In our conversation I enquired from him, "How many people were killed during the Chinese' forceful oppression [attack] on us in Lhasa?" He replied, "If [I] were to make a guess around 15,000 have been killed at one spot."

Q: Fifteen thousand?

#2D: Yes, 15,000. "Perhaps 15,000 were killed at that particular spot because we were given the task of burning the bodies, and during the cremation there were bodies of people, horses, dogs and birds. It took 7 days to burn them all together." [He] said that [he] estimated 15,000 killed. The Chinese claim that the liberation was peaceful. However, if such a huge number of people were killed, it cannot be called a peaceful liberation.

When we were inside the prison, there was a Chinese military officer holding the rank of two stars called Sintithon Len [?]. He stated, "We have killed at least 70,000 people in Tibet. Around 100,000 have fled abroad and we have imprisoned the rest."

Q: Did he say that they'd killed 100,000?

#2D: Yes?

Q: Seventy thousand...

00:13:26

#2D: "One hundred thousand have fled abroad," he said. They [the Chinese] speak a lot about the liberation being peaceful. If such a huge number of people were killed, would you call it peaceful liberation? It cannot be called that. They speak such great lies claiming the liberation was peaceful. This is incredibly despicable behavior. As for the system, Tibet had an excellent system earlier and a law that consisted of 13 clauses.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Could you wait a little as I need to translate it in English to her [interviewer]?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay. We covered a lot of ground there. So first of all if you could just say to *pa-la* ‘respectful term for father’ we have plenty of time and his story is really interesting. So we want to go into it in more detail. So let’s start by going back to when his father passed away and he joined the army. If he can just start from that time and then he can just keep telling us the story because I think he doesn’t need a lot of prompting. And then every now and then you make him a sign like, “Can I just have some time to translate it?” Let’s see if that works rather than me keeping asking questions. He might just keep going.

#2D: Okay. During my period as a soldier, the guns the Tibetan troops used were the *enji-khadhum* ‘English-made short-barrel [rifles].’

Q: Is *khadhum* the long-barrel one?

#2D: *Khadhum* is similar to the ones used by the Indian soldiers that have an ear-like nozzle. We used to call it *khadhum* and *kharing*. The larger guns were called machine guns, *roos* guns, *birigun* and *bakbak*. Those were the larger guns. There was a smaller one called *tingun*.

Q: *Tingun*?

#2D: *Tingun* can be folded at the bottom. As for the drill in our army, it was similar to the drill of the English. “Left, right, left, right” were called out as we marched with right and left foot. It was derived from the English. As for our flag, we still have it. It was the very flag that we have now. Besides that we had currency. We had all the properties of a nation. As for currency, the first [denomination] was called *zhokhang*. Oh, the first one was *khakang*, then it was *karma*, then *chegye*, then *zhokhang*, then *zhosum gormo*, then *zhonga gormo*, then *chuti*...

Q: *Chuti*?

00:20:53

#2D: *Chuti* that was equal to 10 *tanka*, then there was one called *sangsum gormo* and then there was *tanka karpo*. Among the paper notes were the five *ngulsang*, then there were the ones called seven *ngulsang* and *zhonga*. Then there was a 10 *ngulsang*, then one of 25 denominations and then the 100-*ngulsang* note called *gyalo*. Whatever the buying and selling in Tibet, they were done with *ngulsang* and *tanka*. There was the *dhotse* that was equivalent to 50 *ngulsang*. While buying or selling large numbers of domestic animals, the rate was fixed on *dhotse*, either two *dhotse* or three *dhotse* or four *dhotse*. That was how the buying and selling took place.

Q: Was that for buying animals?

#2D: Yes, either for buying animals or any kinds of goods. Except for these no other currencies were in use. Take for instance the illustrations on the currencies. The Chinese claim that [Tibet] is a part of China. That is not so because except for our Tibetan script and art, there was not one Chinese character on it [Tibetan currency]. That is an evidence of [Tibet’s] independence.

Take law for instance: there was a charter with 13 clauses. That was the constitution of Tibet. It was called *Timyik Shiway Chusum*. Sentences were passed in cases of thefts, murders and looting. Similarly, in the case of lighter crimes the punishment meted out was either 100 or 50 lashes and then [the culprit] was released but never incarcerated.

Q: What is the punishment for stealing?

00:24:31

#2D: It was lashing and there was a leg chain called *kangcha*.

Q: That's for stealing, right?

#2D: The punishment for stealing, murder and looting entailed shackling the legs and handcuffing. There were two types of shackles: *gyangcha* that shackles the legs apart and *tukcha* which [makes] a *siling*, *siling*, *siling* [sound].

Q: What?

#2D: *Tukcha*. Then there was a neck brace called *kyego* on which the crime of the thief was written. These were the punishments for major offenders who were then imprisoned.

Take soldiers and monks for instance. If one stole a *zhokhang* that I told you about, the punishment for a monk would be being expelled from the monastery and a soldier was expelled from the army. A *zhokhang* was the limit. That was how the law was.

Q: There's a theft and it was considered a really serious crime alongside murder. Theft of what are we talking about? Obviously we're not talking about theft of something very small.

00:27:06

#2D: Take outdoors for instance where the animals are. It could be stealing yaks, stealing horses, breaking into houses to steal things, stealing goats and sheep. The punishments were for such crimes.

Q: They would be bound in these steel chains for how long?

#2D: The periods were 2-3 months for some but never beyond four months. Some were awarded the *tsego tsegya*, which is bracing the head for life [touches neck]. That was for extremely heinous crimes like murder and such. Some [of these criminals] received the *tsego tsegya*, but it was not permanent since after a while he [the prisoner] could remove it, lie down or do whatever he wanted. It was okay as the punishment was just in name. The punishments at that time were never strict like the Chinese.

Q: And then?

#2D: So the law was like that. Take a farmer in the countryside for instance. You had to pay taxes to the government depending upon the size of your land holding. The tax to the

government was in the form of grains, which was not in huge quantity like the Chinese' when you were hardly left with anything to eat. After paying the tax, the rest [of the grain] was for the farmer. Such was the custom.

There was a labor tax called *thagu* and *wulak* during harvesting of crops, and similarly when moving from place to place—there were no vehicles then—*thagu* meant that a horse must be provided as well as yaks for transporting things. That was the labor tax.

00:30:31

That was how taxes were implemented in the country. Of course, there was happiness for the people in the country. Really, nobody would ever have been happy like the people of Tibet if it were not due to the blessings of the Buddha dharma. That is the gist of it. There was bliss. Not just humans, even animals enjoyed happiness.

The animals were happy because there was a monastery called Zarongbu where on the Tsipirikha [a mountain] 500-600 blue sheep roamed about. Numerous blue sheep came to lick at the salt from the urine at the toilet of the monastery but nobody killed them. All the animals roamed about. Besides, take Lhasa Bamari [a mountain] for instance. Many families did not kill their chickens but left them free on the Bamari. There were more than a thousand chickens there. Benevolent people and Tibetan circumambulators took their food and enjoyed a happy time there.

Furthermore, there is a lake called Yamdok Yuntso that one passed on the way to and from Lhasa. Yellow and white cranes and various water birds abounded and filled the area with eggs. The Tibetan Government posted sentries there until the eggs hatched, not allowing even one egg to be taken away until they hatched. That was the amount of happiness the animals enjoyed.

Similarly, there was happiness in our region of Khochay. These are the places I know of but it is the same in many places [I] do not know where animals enjoyed amazing contentment. Environmental protection was incredibly strict in the earlier times because “not a drop of blood of a bird should be shed.” It was mentioned in the Tibetan Government law that not a drop of blood of a bird should be shed; not one wild animal could be slaughtered. Besides not one sheep could be killed. So strict was the law.

00:34:09

Such was the contentment. The Chinese talk about the system of *kakoe gyuezin* ‘successive order-giving’ feudalists. When they talk about *kakoe gyuezin* feudalists, they mean that the order givers are the inheritors, but when we ponder it, that was never the case. [I] must make my point why it is not so. The supreme religious and political leader of our country is His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Fourteen reincarnations have been born. Were they all born in one family? None were. It has been documented that there were 14 different birthplaces.

So all that the Chinese have stated are lies. There is a reason why the Chinese claim so. What is the reason? They wanted to invade an independent Tibet and in order to cover their tracks, they claimed that it was a *kakoe gyuezin* feudal state. That is the reason why they claim that we were a *kakoe gyuezin* feudal state. And moreover, whether they were

renowned lamas or government officials, there have never been successive inheritors in the history of Tibet. Take the case of the aristocrats. If [the Chinese] state that the aristocrats were *kakoe gyuezin*, then every official in the Chinese state can be called *kakoe gyuezin*. They have been appointed; the aristocrats have been appointed by the Tibetan Government and not that they took [power] upon themselves.

Q: I'd like to back up a second. He said that they weren't allowed to kill a single sheep. If that was the case, how were they able to get meat to eat?

#2D: Yes? Meat? In the 9th and 10th lunar months, during the autumn when fresh grass gets exhausted, there is the *thonshay* 'autumn slaughter' during which slaughter is carried out. Meat to last for the year is stocked during *thonshay*. Initiating compassion [animals] were not slaughtered randomly because they must eat fresh grass during summer. It was like that.

Q: When you were 10 and you joined the Tibetan army, this would be 1942. So how big was the Tibetan army in 1942?

00:38:18

#2D: There were 500 soldiers in my regiment with one *dapon* who was the supreme head and two *rupon* 'captains.'

Q: What was name of the highest...?

#2D: *Dapon*. And there were two *rupon*, four *gyapon* 'leader of 100,' 25 *shelngo* 'majors.'

Q: What's *shelngo*?

#2D: *Shelngo* is also known as *dhingpon*, a leader of 25 men.

Q: Were all of these leaders?

#2D: Yes, they were the leaders. The troops numbered 500. The total number of soldiers in Tibet was accounted as 3,000. In the early days the Tibetan army's strength was 3,000. How did one come to this figure? There were 1,000 [troops] in the Khadhang Drapchi Maga. There were 1,000 in the Gadhang Shiptse Maga. In the Ngadhang Gyantse Maga, there were 500. There were 500 in the Chadhang Dhingri Maga. Those were known as the 3,000 Tibetan soldiers.

Q: Was that in 1942?

00:40:07

#2D: Yes. In addition to these soldiers, there were 1,000 troops called Kusung Magmi to guard His Holiness the Dalai Lama. From the 1,000 troops, 500 came from Tsang and 500 from U.

Q: The Kusung Magmi consisted of 500 from Tsang and...

#2D: ...500 from U making it 1,000.

Q: What kind of activities was the Tibetan army engaged in when you first joined in 1942?

#2D: The activities were learning military drills—how to march and how to carry a gun. [We] were also taught to dismantle and reassemble guns. And target shooting.

Q: Yes?

#2D: Taught to aim at a target. In those days there were no signals or telephones. So the sound of a conch was the indicator. “The enemy is to the right. The enemy is to the left. Climb up the mountaintop. Send reinforcements. Bring more ammunition.” All these were communicated through the sound of the conch at that time. There were no telephones then.

Q: And then?

00:43:31

#2D: Then in the year 1949 after liberating their [Chinese] people and during the inauguration ceremony, it was proclaimed that liberation would be implemented in Tibet and Taiwan.

Q: Yes?

#2D: It was proclaimed that Tibet and Taiwan would be liberated. The Chinese were yet to arrive in Tibet then. That was what they had proclaimed. At the time of the announcement, the Gadhong soldiers were stationed at Kamdhokdu. The Shothalhosum, Thadhang Maga and Simchungnga [military units] were waiting near the rocks around Dhenkok to check the Chinese should they come through that route.

The number of soldiers then...where we stayed...let us talk about the number of soldiers first. There were only around 4,000 soldiers in the whole of Tibet. We of the Dhingri Maga marched towards the northern route near Nagchuka to Dham Chilung to guard the area. There was another place near Nagchuka called Zama Atta. So two groups of 250 troops each camped in these places.

00:45:23

Then the Chinese attacked in the year 1950. Those who were stationed at Kamdhodukha clashed several times. Finally they could not withstand the Chinese. The Tibetans were only 4,000 in number while they send tens of thousands [of troops]. During that battle we lost Rupon Rukhang. He fought very bravely. Rupon Rukhang was killed and so was Shamo Rokrang. Altogether around 500 soldiers were lost there.

Q: Were they killed?

#2D: Yes, they were killed. From the 1,000 troops around 500 were killed. Then there was an attack where the Thadhang, Shotalhosum and Simchung Maga [units] were and more

than 2,000 men were killed. Unable to withstand the huge number [of Chinese troops], they retreated and came to the place called Chusung.

Q: Chusung?

#2D: It was called Chusung and located close to Chamdo. All the [Tibetan] soldiers retreated and spent a night there. While they camped, the Chinese attacked at night killing ordinary people, soldiers, soldiers' children, women; innumerable people were killed there. The Tibetans lost [the battle] and in the 10th lunar month of '50 Chamdo fell into Chinese hands.

Q: And you were in the army at this time?

00:49:05

#2D: Yes, I was in the army and stationed at Nagchuka then.

Q: Were you not at this place?

#2D: No, we were not where the attack took place. We were at a higher altitude. Believing they [the Chinese army] would come through the northern route, we were blocking the northern route.

Then the 17-Point Agreement was signed under duress. Following the signing of the 17-Point treaty, we who were in two groups of 250 men each at Dham Chimlung and Zama Atta were called to Nagchuka. Chamdo was lost to the Chinese and the 17-Point Agreement signed. The Chinese had somehow arrived. "There is no need for us to go to war. Agreements have been reached through talks. It is only through talks and not war." were the orders we received.

Once the order was given, we were called to Nagchuka, where the District Official of the northern region was based. We were called there and stayed as his security guards. At that time there was a road leading from Chamdo through which 1,000 Chinese arrived. Another 1,000 arrived through the northern route. They converged on Nagchuka on the same day having, of course, made plans over telephones. [They] converged on the same day. The Chinese then wore tattered clothes and really, had we fought them we would have succeeded. We believed that but the government orders were not to fight. Their [Chinese troops] lips were cracked and dry when they arrived.

00:51:30

Our *dapon*, *rupon*, *gyapon* and *dhingpon* were invited to where they [the Chinese army] had camped in tents in a large open ground in Nagchuka. They were given a feast there. For us ordinary soldiers, they [the Chinese] put on a *tangshi* 'show' like we have the dance performance shows here. They enacted a show with the characters speaking in Kham dialect.

Q: Did the Chinese put on the show for the Tibetans?

#2D: Yes, a show for the Tibetans.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: For their own soldiers?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: For the Tibetan common soldiers.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Wait a second. The Chinese army?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Chinese army performed opera.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Performed Chinese opera for the Tibetan soldiers?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Some drama. I don't know whether it is opera or not.

[Videographer to interpreter]: Did they surrender?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: There was already a ceasefire.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: There was a ceasefire, you mean?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They were not allowed to attack after the 17-Point Agreement.

Q: So what kind of opera did they perform?

#2D: They enacted a show for us in Kham dialect. The reason being that they were dispatching their troops on every mountaintop. Machine guns and cannons were set up at large open grounds. A speech followed the show, "We have come to develop Tibet. Tibet lags behind, so we have come to bring progress. Once the development is up to the mark, we shall go back." That was the essence of the speech.

Q: I just wanted to ask how old were you when you first started to use a gun because you said when you were 10, you were too young to use one. So how old were you when you first started to use a gun?

#2D: [I] could carry a gun at the age of 16 or 17. [I] was tall then.

Q: You said that in Tibet people would be told not even to harm insects. So then was it difficult to use guns against humans?

00:55:45

#2D: We did not get the opportunity to fire our guns upon people then. Since the orders were not to fire, [we] could not. Where Chinese are concerned, I would not think of compassion though otherwise I am a compassionate person, even sweeping away insects [on my path] and feeding the birds. In the case of Chinese, I would not have let one get away had I confronted him. That was my belief but [I] did not get the chance.

Q: Okay, I had a question but it is completely gone from my brain. So let *pa-la* carry on with the story.

#2D: After the Chinese arrived, they stated that once Tibet's development was to satisfaction, they would return. Once they had stated that and were in Tibet, what did they execute? They destroyed all the monasteries. There were more than 6,000 monasteries in Tibet. Around 6,000 were destroyed; there were none left. I saw with my eyes the statues of the deities being destroyed. I saw many of them toppled and lying on the ground. As for the scriptures, they were flung about on the roads, such that one had to walk on them.

The 17-Point Agreement mentions that the status of the Dalai Lama will not be changed; that likewise, there'll be no changes to the region's way of life and that similarly, there'll be religious freedom. All these were mentioned in it and in particular, it was mentioned that the minority community would be given special rights. However, none of these were implemented.

00:58:59

Then they formed the Planning Committee, a separate commission. Its objective was to visit various villages to find out in each village who are the wealthy people, who served in the Tibetan Government, who is the village leader. After eliciting answers, the class categorization began. One category was the *ngadak* 'leaders,' which consisted of the aristocrats. The next category was the *ngatsab* 'deputy to *ngadak*' and then the *sadhak* 'land owner,' those that held a large area of land. The traders were classified as big traders. Each class was separated into three groups, like 'rich farmers' for the better-placed families and 'middle farmer' for someone a little poorer and then the *ulpong* 'poor.' Each category was separated into three groups.

From among the various categories, the *ngadak*, *ngatsab* and rich farmers were targeted for physical assaults. Everyday they were forced to labor 8-12 hours and once they returned in the evening, with hardly any time to eat at home, they were ordered to attend a meeting [and questioned], "Who did not work today?" and then the person was subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.' [He] was subjected to *thamzing* and told, "You are not working well. You are evading work." There would be no sleep for almost half the night. [The higher class] were segregated like that in the society.

Similarly, even the animals belonging to such a family were termed, "This is a *ngadak*'s horse. It is a *ngadak*'s animal." They were beaten and ridden. Thus they caused a lot of suffering for the people. When a rich farmer or an *ngadak* or an *ngatsab* walked on the road and if an official happened to pass by, [the upper class people] had to kneel on the ground and join their palms and were not to glance above this point [gestures off camera]. Such was their horrible system.

Q: Did they not subject the *sadhak* to *thamzing*?

#2D: Yes?

Q: Did they not subject the *sadhak* to *thamzing*?

01:01:46

#2D: Who?

Q: The *sadhak*.

#2D: The *sadhak*? Yes, they were. They were all subjected. They were the prominent people selected to undergo *thamzing*.

Q: Can I just ask one question? Sorry. Was there like a protocol in the Tibetan army about how the Tibetan army would treat Tibetan informers, Tibetan spies I guess? Was there some kind of protocol about how to treat them if they found out that they were spies?

#2D: There were no chances for spies to get in [the Tibetan army] because a Tibetan soldier had a family name in the village that was registered. Take me for instance; my family name is Khangsar, so in the army I am known as Khangsar Ngawang. Therefore, there was not any chance for a spy to get in because the name of the village was used. So spies could not get in.

Q: In the event a spy was caught, what would be the treatment?

#2D: Yes?

Q: If a Chinese spy was uncovered and caught...? Would he be killed?

#2D: [I] do not think [he would] be killed. One would be interrogated. From what I had heard, such spies had infiltrated the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] since the men that joined it arrived from different regions and there was no scrutiny. When the spies were uncovered, they killed them. Just like it happened to us, among Chinese people those that were categorized [as upper class] and the former soldiers had been brought out from prison to [Tibet] to labor by the Chinese. Ignorant about it, when they [the laboring Chinese] surrendered [to the Tibetans], our people killed them.

Later when we were working together in prison, [the Chinese upper class turned laborers] said, "You people are not good. When we thought of surrendering, your people killed [the conceding Chinese]." Hearing it we then realized, "Alas, that was not right." Since they [the *Chushi Gangdrug* men] were not aware of the Chinese strategy, they were killed. Numerous men were killed during the period of the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: You can carry on with your story.

01:06:27

#2D: Take for instance the prison where I was. One Chinese officer stood with every 10 prisoners. One was always supposed to flatter and utter not one demeaning word. Praises like, "Ha, ha. There is none better than the Chinese. There is no other policy better than this." One must keep chanting this throughout the day. However, I believe that there is no policy worse than theirs in the world. They govern with such incredible disgrace.

That was how the people of Tibet were classified. Take prisoners for example. If there was a Chinese prisoner—actually he is equally a criminal. They [the Chinese] told us, “You are an enemy of the state.” while for [the Chinese prisoner] “He has acted against the people. His crime is lighter.” [He] was assigned on easier tasks. Likewise, he was given more rights. Such was the discrimination among the prisoners. There is a vast difference among the Chinese and Tibetan officials. I did not have authority, but as I observed them, unless the Chinese [official] said so, the Tibetans [official] had nothing to do. The Tibetan [officials] had to obey whatever the Chinese [officials] said. That was how it was.

Q: Could you please tell us about your capture? You were in prison. Can you tell us about how you were captured by the Chinese? Please tell us from your own experience and as much detail as you can.

#2D: To relate my experience of going to prison—I was living in my house when captured. It did not happen on the battlefield. I was living at home and was 27 years old then. [I had] played many games with the Chinese, playing soccer. Calling me to play soccer, [the Chinese] caught [me] at the doorstep. As I was being captured, I looked up and saw that the mountains were teeming with soldiers. That was how I was captured, treacherously.

Q: Was that quite common, Tibetans playing sports with the Chinese?

01:10:48

#2D: Yes, [we] played because earlier there was no animosity. They [the Chinese] claimed to have come to help. They harvested crops for the people, transported...[not discernible], plowed, transported fertilizers; they did everything, even helped sweep. Actually they were planning to steal people; they had devious plans.

They used to send their troops then; some came with little packets of tea, some with handfuls of rice, some brought candies and sugar and gifted them. They entered different homes and observed them. As I reflect now, that was their actual intention. When they came to my home, I was young in age and shrewd then. I was the very first person to be captured in Dhingri; nobody else had been arrested so far.

Q: This was 1959, correct?

#2D: I was 27 years old and the year was '59.

Q: So by that time it was pretty clear what the Chinese were up to and you had still, you had been on friendly enough terms to have a soccer match with them.

#2D: [People] did realize it but we were living in a village called Dhingri in Thoe. Actually [people] were desperate in the distant regions. The first rebellion took place in Gyue in 1949 when [the Chinese first] appeared. They [the Chinese] had killed 16 people by burning them.

Q: How many people?

#2D: Sixteen. The rest of 62 people leapt into a river in terror. Such was the panic. My next book is going to come out later and I will offer you copies. Once the translation is done, I will offer copies. Everything is very clear in it. I have made drawings of the ways in which people were executed and severed. I commissioned an artist from the Tibetan Children's Village [Dharamsala, India] by paying 230 *rupees* per drawing. They will be in there.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful that you are writing a book; that's really wonderful.

01:14:46

#2D: Except for drawings, I did not have the means to take photographs then nor was I in a position of authority [to do so]. So [I] brought these [images] inside me and put them in drawings here. I know how things were done there; the way of tying [a person] and similarly, the carrying away of a body after execution, the digging of pits; I was aware of everything. There are around 166 drawings of people's executions [in the book].

Q: So you were captured when you went to...you were called for this soccer match. Can you please tell us what happened then?

#2D: Soldiers rushed at me and two men each grabbed my hands and took [me] to prison. [My] hands were tied behind me to a chair. Following my [capture]...I was friendly with a few brothers from Amdo. One of the boys was called Alak and the younger one Loga. There were four of them. They had been ordered to surrender their guns, which they had refused. Pulling out a pistol from under the bed, they shot dead three Chinese. Except for one [brother] who survived, the other three brothers, their wives, even including a good dog they owned, were slaughtered. [I] heard about their killing then.

There was a place called Rasam where the *gyapon* of the Dhingri Maga named Tamdin Tsering, a very brave person was deceitfully told to come to the door and when he emerged, was shot dead. The manner was ambush and they [the Chinese] killed however many they pleased. It did not look like a country [with laws].

Q: And then?

#2D: At the time I was interned—there was this boy who presently lives in Nepal and whose father named Shelngo Tsapa used to be our *dhingpon* and who has already passed away—the father and son duo used to live at Shepay and were brought and interned with me. There was also Shelngo Tsering Pasang from the same village who was imprisoned; Tsedhang Gerong also was imprisoned with me. So there were five or six of us. [We] were kept there for two days. The following morning [we] were taken to Sheka where 100 Dhingri soldiers were guarding the armory. They [the Chinese] captured all of them [the Dhingri troops]. That night we were taken in vehicles with our hands still bound.

Q: Were there around a hundred people?

#2D: There were 100 men to guard the weapons at the place called Sheka. They had all been already captured. So along with them, we were dispatched to Shigatse.

Q: Where to?

#2D: To Shigatse and interned at Ladang Kukang.

Q: And then?

01:20:05

#2D: So over a 100 Dhingri soldiers and seven of us were imprisoned at Ladang Kukang. [I] suppose there were 200-300 Gadhong soldiers stationed at Shigatse. All of them were captured and incarcerated in another prison. Just before the start of the 5th lunar month, we were packed in vehicles and dispatched to Ngachen Thang. Apart from the younger and those that seemed feeble, the rest were bound to the vehicle [shows hands tied behind back].

There was this place called Ngachen Thang where a new electricity plant was being constructed. We were also made to build the electricity plant in Lhasa. To form an estimate, [I] would say there were around 10,000 people. When I first heard that Lhasa was lost...

Q: Were there 10,000 people in prison?

#2D: Yes?

Q: Were there 10,000 people in prison?

#2D: It was more than 10,000 since there were many prisons. There were more than 100 prisons in the whole of Tibet. When we reached Ngachen, they [the Chinese] had formed the Preparatory Committee of Tibet Autonomous Region in Lhasa in the year '59 but failed to implement even one clause that was mentioned in it, due to which out of desperation, the people protested peacefully on March 10, 1959. The number of people arrested during this period was so huge that it seemed as if there was an infestation of worms.

When I was taken to Ngachen, I wondered, "How can so many people surrender when they are [countless] like ants and each one is armed with a weapon? How can it happen like this?" I wondered so then. Later when we had conversations, they said that they could not withstand the shelling which was like rainfall on Dip Tsecholing, Peling and one more place called Simbue. The shells fell like rain such that it rendered the smaller guns useless.

[The people] were forced to take shelter wherever possible. The 15,000 people were killed at Norbulingka then. Trees fell crushing 8-9 people to death. Shells hit the trees, uprooting them. They told us that such things had taken place. I had told him, "When there are so many people, who will believe that everyone surrendered?" I was amazed because each

person carried a weapon then. I swear I thought the people had not stood in unity [against the Chinese].

01:24:55

#2D: Then we stayed there and worked. At that time...

Q: What was the work?

#2D: Yes?

Q: What was the work?

#2D: The work was like this: You have the small carts here [in India] that are pulled by horses. Such a cart was assigned to every five men to transport soil and stones for the construction of a dam. The Ngachen Electricity Plant was like this. A mountain stood here [gestures off camera] and along its edge a barrier was being constructed. The barrier touched right up to the Kyichu River that flows towards Lhasa. Another barrier was built from the other side of the river.

The big mountain's mid-section was cut and a building constructed below, which was the electricity plant. When the mountain was being cut, 300 or 400 to 1,000 dynamite sticks were blasted daily. The prisoners were the ones that performed the task of planting the dynamite. Men transported all the soil and stones. However much dynamite was used on a particular day, that much soil and stones had to be transported away by the next day. The debris was carted away to build the barrier.

Q: Did men do the transporting?

#2D: Yes, it was the men and nobody else. The ground was flattened with the treading of men.

Q: And then?

01:26:58

#2D: When the men returned at night, some made a fire or went to fetch water. Without any reason two men on such an errand were shot dead; [the Chinese] said that going [to fetch water] was forbidden. They were killed like that then. Of course, from then on men dared not go out nor were they allowed out. Barbed wire ran along the sides with soldiers standing guard. That was how [we] labored.

People worked day and night. Men were divided into two groups with each group working half a day and half a night. There was a pass that was a piece of paper given to each person who attended work. Each person was to collect 200 of these. They [the Chinese] set up loudspeakers like we have here...

Q: What was the result for collecting 200 passes?

#2D: That was to encourage [the men] to work and to announce how good they were. They set up loudspeakers and—there are different kinds of men—some who were healthy walked really fast and collected over 200 passes. After a calculation was done, it was said later that one walked the equivalent of the distance from Lhasa to Yangpachen.

Q: Lhasa to...?

#2D: Lhasa to Yangpachen in the north is a distance of two days' journey. It was said that [the men] covered that distance. The announcement on the loudspeaker stated taking the person's name, "He is very good. Look how fast he walks." They made such statements over the loudspeaker.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I'm sorry what's the walking part?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Young people often walked like really far away for the work.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, to actually go and do this work.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Work, yeah. For this work, they would walk as almost as walking for two days from Lhasa.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, it was as equal to. I see, I see. Okay, okay.

Q: And then?

01:30:28

#2D: I was strong then, really strong. I hauled big boulders and used to be awarded four passes. I always hauled the big ones and was given four passes each time. So if I hauled 50 boulders, I would get 200 passes. I used to give away 20-30 passes to aged people who could not walk [fast]. After a while lifters of big boulders were automatically handed four passes each even though the stones were not big. It happened like that.

After constructing barriers on both sides [of the river], there was only the part left where the water flowed. Every time [we] heaped soil and stones, they got washed away. During this time, one of our men fell in the water. I had learned to swim as a child in Chamdo and was a good swimmer. So I swam to this man and rescued him. They [the Chinese] praised me highly, "He is good. He is very good." Later [I] rescued two other men and they said the same thing. Finally, when the construction of the dam was at the final stage—there used to be Chinese in boats that angled – there were two men.

Q: Chinese?

#2D: Yes, they were Chinese officials. They had come to fish and people shouted at them not to row the canoe close to the water currents lest they be washed away. However, they were authoritative and did not heed. As it came between [the barriers], the canoe overturned. One of them was still sitting in the boat while the other had fallen into the water. Had he swam towards the canoe, he could have made it since he knew swimming.

But he was at a distance and the water forced him away. The [Chinese] officials told me, “You have rescued people. It’ll be good if you save him. Go and bring him out.” However, I thought, “He is a Chinese and it matters not should he die.” I thought so in my mind and replied, “I do not feel well today. Please excuse me.”

01:33:25

Later [it was mentioned] during a meeting, “Dhingri Ngawang is a very bad man. [He] discriminates between Chinese and Tibetans. Had it been a Tibetan, he needs no prodding and leaps into the water immediately. However, when it was a Chinese, even after being told, he refused to go. He discriminates between races and is very bad.” I was made to stand in the meeting and derided. So that was how the Chinese acted.

Q: Oh, just one question about the passes, sorry. What do you get for the 200 passes? What was the benefit?

#2D: That was to encourage people to work. One or two men would be awarded with something called the *pesang*, a red flag you could wear here [touches left chest]. There was nothing else. A person wearing a red flag would receive comments, “He has received a *pesang*. That is good.”

Q: I see. Okay and then?

#2D: And then Chinese and Indians clashed at the Tu-Hin border, the Tibetan border. We were at Ngachen then.

Q: Where?

#2D: It is called the border of Tu-Hin. Hindu means India and Tungo is China.

Q: Wasn’t that in 1962?

01:36:21

#2D: Yes, it was ’62. Earlier I had lived in India [?] when I was 24 or 25 years old. At that time my colleague was Kyipchang, who was in prison and had been appointed as an official. I was not aware but he commented, “Water is gurgling below the Ngachen Dam.” [I] wondered what he was saying. “What are you saying?” I asked. We weren’t allowed to converse and he had mentioned that when we met on the road. We met again a day or two later and I asked him, “What did you mean by water gurgling in the Ngachen Dam?” “[I] could not say more then because there were people around. India and China are at war. That’s what I can tell you.” “How is that?” I asked and he replied, “These days truck loads of artilleries are being transported, 100-200 every day. People between the ages of 40 and 18 are called *yulmag* ‘militia’ and are being used. These people are responsible for hauling ammunition and supplies to the military front. On their return they bring corpses and the injured. [I] think there is a great battle going on. That’s the activity among the people. Individuals have no authority over their personal vehicles or horse carriages, which are driven to the military camp. That is how the war is being fought.”

He [further] said, “Our soldiers who have been there say that at the border all the mountains and nearby areas have been dug out for the Chinese to stay. Electricity connections as well as water connection have been installed inside the bunkers. Similarly, there is a hospital, storage for arms and communication devices.”

01:39:52

So that summarizes the story of my prison life. It is useless to talk about the starvation deaths because there have been innumerable starvation deaths. To make a guess...[I] would not know the figure because I was not in an authoritative position to be able to take a count. To form an estimate...Right in the center was a meeting place. Blankets and bodies of the dead were thrown in the middle of it. The bodies along with the blankets were heaped there and it resembled a sort of hillock. Those were the men that died there.

Q: Why do you think it was that you were able to survive?

#2D: Who? Me?

Q: Yes.

#2D: I was imprisoned twice. How did it happen twice? Initially when I was apprehended and taken away in '59, they [the Chinese] did not have any crime to charge me with. The reason being was that I had not fired any shots at the Chinese, not even aimed a gun at them. [They] could not charge me of killing; there was nothing [yet they] caught and took me along. I was jailed for five years. During the five years, they did not have even a speck of a crime on a sheet of paper to charge me with. [I] was just put in.

Actually according to their law, they could hold someone for six months, carry out inquiries during the six months and if no charges were found, release [the person]. However, I was not released. Should they find [that someone] had committed a simple crime, they had the authority to sentence [him] to 2-3 years in prison. But I was not given that and jailed for five years just like that. There were many men like me in prison that had not committed any crimes to speak of. They apprehended everybody with the intention to force work on them.

Then I arrived in Powo, having been transferred all the way from Shigatse to Powo. Earlier I was in Ngachen and then dispatched to Shigatse—that was the period before the end of war between China and India—and we were told, “You are being sent to Ton and perhaps can go home from there.” They [the Chinese] were almost certain that they would lose. However, India was weak and it lost [the war]. Presuming that they [the Chinese] would lose, they told us that. Later [I] was sent to Powo where I formed an organization. I formed a *digzu* in the 6th lunar month of the year '66 during the Cultural Revolution.

Q: What's forming a *digzu*?

01:43:59

#2D: *Digzu* meaning that there was a discussion among like-minded men in the prison. Our first [plan] was to escape. We were seven men that formed a strong union, such that

whoever was held from any prison would give up his life rather than jeopardize the others. One would give up one's life. With me was a subordinate called Dhokhung Sonam Norbu. We planned it by watching movies. The Chinese showed movies—we call them pictures here—in which [we] saw secret activities being carried out. By watching them, initially seven men formed the group. There were seven different prisons where each of us, the seven men connected. The seven men chose two [subordinate] men each. The two men, in their turn could select any number of people they wished. I did not know the identity of the two men; the one at the top was not aware of their identity. So I formed the *digzu*. The organization came about in the 6th lunar month of '66.

The Cultural Revolution came to an end in the year '70. They [the Chinese] announced that the Cultural Revolution was over and organized a closing ceremony. During this period, one person from our organization was exposed and 12 men from our side were executed, killed by firing.

Q: By the Chinese?

#2D: Yes, by the Chinese.

Q: Twelve men...

#2D: Yes, 12 men were executed.

01:45:51

Later, the organization was almost revealed in Gushang. The leader and the rest [of the group] leaped into a river; nine men leaped into a river and died.

Q: Were they Chinese?

#2D: No, they were our people.

Q: Tibetans?

#2D: Once the group gets exposed, lives were bound to go. Many men would eventually die. So in order to save the others, nine men sacrificed their lives. In the year '73, I stood exposed. There was my subordinate who in '70 during the end [of the Cultural Revolution] told me, “[I] think our [organization] is not going to work right. This organization may be exposed. If so, lives will be lost. So let us plan on escaping.” I replied, “It does not matter. Lives must be sacrificed. It is the same whether one dies during escape or here [in the prison]. Let us wait some more time for a chance. One can certainly wait for an opportunity.” He abided by my words.

The Chinese distributed alcohol during the Go Marpoe Dhuechen of the year '73, a festival similar to Losar ‘Tibetan New Year.’ During a drinking session, the man and his subordinate got into an argument. In his drunken state, he went and reported to the official about the [underground] organization. Once this was revealed, Sonam Norbu was

apprehended and when grilled about the person behind it, my identity got revealed. Finally I was caught and placed in solitary confinement for 11 months and 18 days.

Q: Yes?

#2D: For 11 months and 18 days. I was in solitary confinement 12 days short of a year.

Q: For 18 days?

#2D: 11 months and 18 days.

Q: In a room?

#2D: Yes, in a room with my legs and hands shackled.

01:50:09

I was interrogated in the room, “What and where is your organization? If you confess everything, you will be released immediately. You will be released this very day. If you do not disclose, you will lose your life.” The interrogation carried on that way. I answered, “There are two subordinates with me in the organization but I have no knowledge about others. I know nothing about others except for these two.” I admitted to this.

Five or six months after my detention, I was led back to the main prison, made to stand facing the gathering of people, who were told to criticize and help me. Everybody stood up. Some honestly said, “You must speak truthfully about whatever the situation is.” Others accused, “You were going to escape and then come back to destroy the prison. That is your intention.” I did not have the right to speak that day. From the beginning I was stopped from speaking.

After the meeting came to an end, I asked, “Can I speak now?” to which the reply was “You can if it is not *thuktsa*.” *Thuktsa* means if the contents were not bad I could speak. So I said, “Those who criticized and helped me today have been extremely good. It has helped me like a person being pulled back when he is on the verge of leaping over a cliff. However, someone spoke about my escaping and coming back to destroy the prison.” As soon as I uttered it I was stopped, saying, “Whether it is the truth or suspicion, you cannot speak about it.” And that was it. I was put [back] in the prison.

I was stopped from speaking there and then was taken back to the prison. After three or four days I was told [by the Chinese interrogators]—there was a person called Pothoe Sonam Tsewang who was very strong willed, really very strong and we were very good friends—“You are on very friendly terms. He [Pothoe Sonam Tsewang] is also a part of the [secret] organization. If you admit to it, you will be released.”

There were seven brothers who had earlier fought around Powo. He [Pothoe Sonam Tsewang] was the youngest. The oldest was called Tsetop. The seven brothers fought under his leadership and had vowed among themselves that they would die fighting until the end. He was the only one that had survived. He was shot here [points below right eye and close

to nose] and [the bullet] emerged here [points behind head]. He survived. He and I were on very friendly terms. [The Chinese] told me that if I accused him I would be released. I thought to myself, “Okay, if I state that he is in the [secret] organization, he will be killed. I may or may not be killed and may be released in five or 10 years. They cannot keep me more than that because I have not shot any of their people. So politically my crime is not that serious. During the encounters he [Pothoe Sonam Tsewang] engaged in, there have been a lot of people killed, so he will be killed on account of that.” I adamantly replied that he was not among us, that we had never spoken about this. [I said] so determinedly.

01:55:22

I was suspended in the air. Their [the Chinese] binding was horrible. With the two ends of the rope like this [illustrates by using rosary], they made a knot in the middle of the rope in such a way that it rested in the middle [of the person’s] back. One end [of the rope] was wound on the arm [indicates left hand] until it reached here [the wrist]. The other end was wound likewise [on the right arm] and then the ends of the rope were passed through the knot at the back and pulled. When pulled, the shoulders distended here [indicates slightly above breasts]. Thus trussed up, I was interrogated. “I do not have anything to say. We were never together.” “He says that he was,” [the Chinese claimed]. “He may but I do not. I have nothing to say about that,” I asserted.

I was suspended and my arm was bent because of the suspension [shows right arm]. [I] cannot move it much [tries to move arm backwards]. I was suspended in the air and then lost consciousness. When you are suspended, after a while you lose consciousness. Then they brought you down and threw water. [The Chinese] uncoiled the rope a little and rubbed the area, uncoiled and rubbed. I was suspended in that fashion. I stressed that I did not have anything to say. I thought determinedly and had no regrets if I died.

One day they brought a book with so many pages [indicates thickness of around 200 pages]. “Speak up if you wish, otherwise here is the proof. This is the only one. He [Pothoe Sonam Tsewang] has accepted everything in these pages. There is no other way except two *moktse* ‘Chinese currency unit.’” A bullet costs two *moktse* and it was to indicate [I] would be executed. “I have nothing to say.”

01:57:18

When they were interrogating and beating the book down, I would laugh. I had given up [hope], so there was no fear in me. I had given up and laughed. “What is making you laugh?” “Of course, [I] would laugh. You persistently tell me I have done something I have never done. Of course, I would laugh. I am the person who [is supposed to have] done it. I did not do it and yet you accuse me of having done it. I would laugh.” I had stated that from the start. At last we were acquitted. Since then they never questioned me.

I was in there for 11 months and 18 days. There was a Tibetan woman. One day she came to open my door. “Ngawang,” she said. “Yes?” I replied. “Today is your judgment. Do not be afraid. You will not be killed. You are sentenced to five years and your subordinate Sonam Norbu to three years. You need not be scared. However, do not mention that I told you.” “Of course [I] will not,” I replied. She then went away. That day I was taken to a big meeting where both of us were made to face [the people]. All our charges were read out:

our forming the organization in the year '66; Dhingri Ngawang being the culprit and Dhokhung Sonam Norbu, his running dog. These were announced along with the main culprit Dhingri Ngawang being sentenced to five years and Dhokung Sonam Norbu, the running dog to three years. It was further announced that we would have no political rights for three years.

Q: You were penalized for five years?

#2D: I was sentenced to five years and he [Dhokhung Sonam Norbu] to three years. The “no political rights” meant that if released from prison [we] would have no political rights for three years, that is, no right to expression and required to perform like animals whatever tasks assigned by them. That is what “no political rights” meant.

Q: How long were you actually in prison for or in forced labor camp?

02:03:05

#2D: Twenty-one years.

Q: I'd like to ask you about the solitary confinement for 11 months, how did you endure it? I mean mentally. How did you survive it mentally?

#2D: I did not have any worries then. One has to die. Death is imminent once you are born. The only difference is the way you die, whether by sickness or under a gun. Death is imminent. Believing there's nothing but to take refuge in God, I recited prayers. I had two quilts. I tore one to muffle the *silig, silig* sound produced by the shackles. When night fell, [I] prostrated and prayed. [I] spent my time that way. You could not eat much when you are locked in. So I made tiny *pa* 'dough made from roasted barley flour and tea' to feed the many birds that came through the opening from where [I] was given my food. I fed the birds a lot. They came and landed near my knees.

After a time the day of my judgment drew near and I thought to myself that I must test the birds. Early the next morning [I] made three circular pieces of *pa*. I prayed and considered one of the circular *pa* as representing the death sentence. The next [I] considered as representing a sentence of a certain period and another as release. I prayed and left the three *pa* in a row. I thought I must test the birds the next day. [I] prayed and left the *pa* like that for the night.

The next day the birds flew in through the little window where I used to be given my food. Unlike other days the birds were very lively. They did not fly towards the *pa* and [I] wondered why. They did not come close immediately. One bird almost pecked at the [dough] representing a death sentence and then flew away. It came back and took away the *pa* representing a sentence of a certain period and then all the birds flew away. I thought to myself, “Okay, it is going to be a sentence of a certain period. [I am] not going to be released or executed.”

02:05:46

Many mice also used to come into the room. I thought I must test the mice too and made three pieces of *pa* and prayed over them. The next morning, the *pa* representing a sentence of a certain period was missing while the other two were there. Now I was sure it was a “period sentence” and that was the verdict.

During the day of judgment, I was ordered to bend [my head] at the meeting but I refused. I thought, “What can they do when [I] have given up on my life? [They] cannot do anything [more].” [I] just stood there but my colleague [Dhokhung Sonam Norbu] bowed and did everything he was instructed to do. Normally, there were many people in the prison and as I looked at them, everyone bent their heads and none dare look up, poor things. Everybody bend [their heads]. I thought to myself, “Poor things. They are so disheartened.” Then I started my sentence.

There were many categories in the prison. There were many *tsuk* where the armed forces lived. There was one called the lama’s *tsuk*, where only lamas lived. Then one called the *tulku* ‘reincarnate’ *tsuk* and one called *magchi tsuk* where the military leaders lived. I was put in the *magchi tsuk*. At that time I was told, “If you change for the good from henceforth, you will find a future. If you still remain a conformist, never mind a future, you will be executed.”

02:07:27

Among them [prison officials] was someone called...he was a Tibetan. His thoughts were very good. [I] heard that he spoke this way in their meeting, “The minds of men like him [Dhingri Ngawang] cannot be easily persuaded. If once drawn over, they can become very helpful.” Among prison workers he was a *dhadue*, a sort of a leader. He appointed me as supervisor.

During my period as supervisor, the production from the farm was very good. Earlier after reaping wheat crops, they used to burn everything and then plow. When I was appointed as an official, I had deep pits dug at the edges of the fields. Hauling straw from the fields, a layer of it was laid at the bottom of the pit and then a layer of white chemical fertilizer. Again another layer [of the straw] and chemical fertilizer and so on until it resembled a hill. This started to decay in 15-20 days and the hill-like thing gradually shrunk in size. In the morning there would be a haze of smoke from the decaying process. When this substance was applied in the fields, the crops grew incredibly well. I was named 30 *gokho* then, meaning “harvesting 1 into 30 times of grain.” “Ngawang has really undergone a great change. He is doing great,” this was always stated during the meetings. They used to award me that red cloth [touches left chest].

Prisoners faced scarcity of food then. I gave thought to this. During the collective work, there was [name withheld] who was the head of the collective. I requested him to give me the waste grain, which I intentionally created by not winnowing properly. [I] made 3-4 bags of these. “Please give me these to make gruel for them [the prisoners].” He would give me that for making gruel. All the prisoners then had plenty to eat and drink! They got to eat *tsampa*. They used to remark then that I was very good.

02:10:05

Later my colleague [Dhokhung Sonam Norbu] was released after three years. I had two more years but [I] thought perhaps they would release [me] on account of the good work but [they] did not. I was not released until the completion of five years. Around a month after I reached there [the prison], they [the Chinese] announced, “Dhingri Ngawang has undergone a big change. He has brought about great production from the fields, which has been of great benefit to the country. Therefore, from this day onwards, his political ‘hat’ will be removed and like every common citizen of the country, he is given civil rights.” At this time, what did I state...? Again [they] asked me...

Q: What does it mean by “removing the hat”?

#2D: The hat was the political “hat.” There were many [such things] in the prison. They spoke in depth about the political “hat,” [I] swear. The political “hat” was known as *konpa hat*, meaning “wearing the hat.”

Q: Was it some sort of a right?

#2D: No. There was no right even to speak. To put it in a nutshell, wearing a political “hat” meant having no right of expression. That is the gist. There were the ones called “*pisha hat*,” “*laksung hat*” and such that they announced. The essence of the “hat” meant no political rights. That was it.

Q: And then you were released after the “hat”...

#2D: My “hat” was removed indicating that [I] enjoyed political rights. Then one day [they] asked me, “What do you think now? What did you think when your ‘hat’ was removed? What do you think?” To this I answered, “I changed myself over the last 20 years and the result of this change has at last dawned. The political ‘hat’ has been removed and you have granted me rights like every citizen. You and I are conversing, which means I am not dead. As I reflect over the formation of my village, the location of mountains, the flow of the rivers, the neighbors, my relatives and my wife—when I think of them, as I am not dead, I feel anxiety that [I] cannot reach them. I need to be sent to Khoshar.”

Q: Can you describe the hat?

02:17:22

#2D: The “hat” is not an actual hat to be worn. It was awarded politically [symbolically].

Q: I see. So how would other people know that he wasn’t supposed to interact?

#2D: That was announced within the prison and the people present there knew but others were not aware of it. That was a political strategy. Their [the Chinese] policy was that deep.

Q: But he was actually allowed out of prison, right?

#2D: That [working in the fields] was outside [the prison] but there were no other people around. One was just not permitted to speak. In case you happened to meet someone, you could not speak a word, you just passed by.

Q: What would happen if someone spoke?

#2D: You would be questioned, “What did you speak? What was it that you spoke about politics?” The rules were that strict.

Q: Do you have any regrets?

02:18:51

#2D: I would like to say it here just as it is in my book and the next one I’m writing. As a living person, I did not get the chance to take revenge when I was younger. Therefore, at the time of my death if I am able to leave these books, firstly, [I] want them to be publicized to the world so that everybody will understand [the Chinese’s] miserable policies and their terrible ways. Secondly, there are many of our youth in Tibet and it must enter their minds. The next book I’m writing has all the right answers.

Therefore, for one, [I] want them to be published in the world and secondly, should these books be translated into Chinese and reach China, I feel that will be beneficial, because there are numerous just people in China. Though there are many of them yet they do not have authority. So if some of these documents reach there, I feel certain they will help. That is the reason why I’m getting them translated into Chinese and English.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Can you please tell him that one of the aims of the project is to translate everything into Chinese also?

#2D: That is very good. If it could be broadcast to the world...The Chinese do not realize that they are bad because they [the Chinese government] keep repeating the good things and news regarding the world do not reach China. When I was living there, one was not permitted to listen to news. Should one do so, “Why did you listen to the news? The reactionaries must be uprooted,” saying so one would be subjected to terrible *thamzing*. Not only the whole of Tibet, even in China except perhaps those at the high level, none living under the rule of Communist China learns of any news of the world. So, if these could reach the Chinese, it would be incredibly beneficial. That’s my hope.

02:21:47

This is in my next book—from 1920, since the beginning of the civil war there [in China], millions of their people have been killed. I have mentioned these killings in my [book]. They have suffered many failures in the Wami Way, Tindhu Way, Leesen Way during which 95% of China’s total resources have been wasted. That’s been mentioned in their books.

When such a huge number of lives were lost, surely they feel the pain because those [that died] were people of China. They are surely not without relatives or parents. There is great pain in their hearts even now. However, the policy binds them like this [makes a claw-like gesture with right hand]. They [the Chinese] call [their army] the Liberation Army but it is

not Liberation Army but Binding Army. It is the one that binds all the people. That is why the people cannot make even a slight movement. However, they [the Chinese government] will gradually collapse. It is certain that they will collapse, a hundred percent.

Q: *Pa-la*, I'd like to ask you, what do you think about the self-immolations happening in Tibet these days?

#2D: In any physical struggle, nowhere in the world can it be done without sacrificing lives. Even if it is a peaceful physical struggle, one must sacrifice lives and in the event of violent physical struggle, the need for sacrifice is even greater. However, in our case, because of the magnificence of our dharma and His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advice, though one is sacrificing one's life, yet no other person is being harmed. The world must understand this. If the world does not understand, eventually there will be violence. If it does not lend support, it'll become worse and not better. That is the essence.

Take me for instance, if I was a young man and if there still was not any result, I can sacrifice my life. Really if I was to take birth [again] as a young man and there was no outcome even then, I could sacrifice [my] life. Really I could do it and do it in an enormous way. I do think on those terms but [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] is seeking a way through peaceful means and of course, we must support it; all people must support it. That is the gist.

If the world wants to extend help, this is the right time. The highest number of people in the world to sacrifice their lives through immolation has occurred in Tibet. It has not happened elsewhere, except perhaps a few and it is highlighted due to its uniqueness. Now we have lost 38 people so far and that's a lot. And it is still bound to happen because everybody is desperate. Unless one is desperate, one will not sacrifice one's life. The reason for their desperation is their [the Chinese] governance, which is the worst in the world. It is called *phashisi ringluk* in Chinese and here it is called something like Stalin [System]. This is also a doctrine but the Chinese is worse. That is it.

Q: Thank you very much. I need to ask you one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet, China or anywhere else in the world, would it be a problem for you?

#2D: Yes?

Q: Would it be any problem if this interview was shown in Tibet or china?

02:26:27

#2D: No, there is no problem. There is no problem and it would be beneficial.

Q: It's fine to use your real name? It's fine to use your real name, yes?

#2D: Yes, you can. [You] must use it. It must certainly be used. I need it to be known. I have experienced suffering in the prison. I was very famous in prison. There is not anyone among the majority of the prisoners that do not know me. Everybody knows me. I surrendered everything and did not...[not discernible] to them.

I wrote [the first] book here in 1982. Actually I was supposed to go [back] to Tibet but I lost the papers. “Oh, losing this document does not portend well. It has surely arrived in Tibet. There must be someone working behind this who had stolen it. [I] must now not go to Tibet.” Since then I withdrew my plans and never returned to Tibet. Otherwise, I have great connections there. I had good connections in the prison and in the community too. However, that was the reason I did not go back to Tibet.

One of my colleagues has also arrived here. There is one called Rinzin who lives near the Tsuglakhang [main temple in Dharamsala]; we were in the same prison. He has written a book and so have I. We were on very good terms, such that while in prison he gave me photographs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for safekeeping and a protective amulet called Jigshay Mahe that he had acquired in Lhasa. I never revealed it but kept everything hidden in the mountain. Nobody could locate them in the mountain. I did not keep them at home. I hid them in the mountain wrapped in plastic to protect from rain.

02:29:52

Later when we formed the [secret] organization, I presented a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Sonam Norbu since he wanted it. He was a staunch believer but lacked courage. In the night he kept [the photograph] in a wooden box and without closing the lid tight, lit a butter lamp inside. When the prisoners lay down, one of them remarked, “There is a fire burning in Sonam Norbu’s box.” Someone came and informed me about it the next day. Then I told Sonam Norbu, “It is good that you have faith. However, if you overdo it that way, you will cause yours as well as others’ downfall. Both of us will be ruined.” The actual source of the photograph was Rinzin whose wife lived in Lhasa then. That was how it happened.

When I was incarcerated, the photograph was confiscated and he [Sonam Norbu] confessed that he had received it from me. My answer was, “When you [the Chinese] started the Cultural Revolution, there was great restriction on red-colored monks’ robes, photographs [of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] and blessed pills. Having immense faith in my mind, I kept them safely. Rinzin threw them and I picked them up.” When you read our books, Rinzin has mentioned that he gave them to me for safekeeping while I, to save him said, “He threw them and I picked them up.” He was not in prison then.

Q: Could you just finally, please just say what it was like to tell your story today?

#2D: Yes?

Q: How do you feel after telling us your experience?

#2D: I told you what I had in my mind. You, on your part, will publicize it everywhere. I feel content. I feel satisfaction in my mind. This is what I wish for. The Chinese, even though they are not perfect, claim to be and broadcast it everywhere. Now when we reveal the truth, whether [their story] is perfect or not, the world will compare both sides to find out. We do not have the authority or wealth. Similarly, we do not have the means to

publicize it while they broadcast all over the world. So, even though we lack it, you [interviewer] are helping us by doing it and I'm extremely grateful.

Q: Thank you so much. Your story was fascinating. Thank you very much for sharing it with us.

#2D: [Nods and joins palms]

Q: We have a small gift for you.

END OF INTERVIEW