

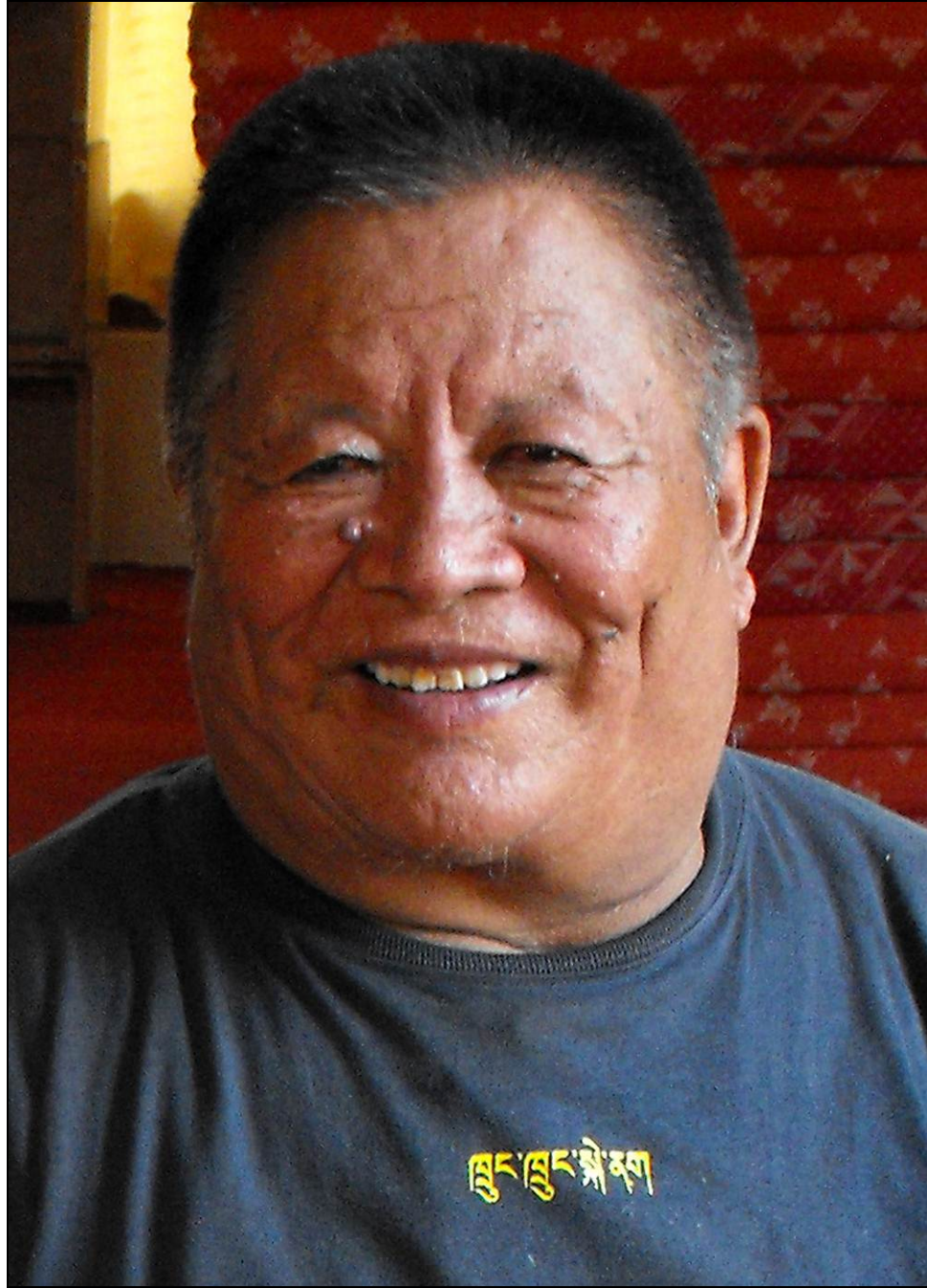
Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #37M – Norsang
April 12, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #37M
2. Interviewee: Norsang
3. Age: 70
4. Date of Birth: 1940
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Gerze
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 12, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 26 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Norsang was born in a nomadic family where a child was sent to graze yaks and sheep when he turned 7 or 8. His family lived in a *ba* 'tent made of yak hair' and possessed around 1,000 sheep and 100-200 yaks. He talks about wild animals like the wild asses, antelopes, gazelles and brown bears found in the region. He recalls an incident where a Tibetan brown bear along with its two cubs attacked an uncle, but the uncle was able to kill the bear in defense.

Norsang describes the social customs during those days, such as death rituals, people's superstitious beliefs regarding certain birds, and sick people treated by *ngagpa* 'shamans' and *lhawa* 'mediums' in the absence of doctors and hospitals. He speaks in length about the mediums—their dress, rituals invoking protective deities which entered their bodies, and various methods used by the *lhawa* to treat the sick and the results.

Norsang's village since was located in an isolated place so they were not initially effected by the Chinese invasion. Later the villagers were ordered to surrender their weapons to the Chinese, which the elders in his family did not want to. They chose instead to escape to India through the Ladakh region.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, environment/wildlife, nomadic life, customs/traditions, trade, shamans/healers, life under Chinese rule, escape experiences.

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Interview #37M

Interviewee: Norsang

Age: 70, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 12, 2010

Question: Can you start by telling us your name?

00:00:17

Interviewee #37: Norsang.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans to share with the younger generation, with the Chinese people and people in the outside world. Your memories are going to help us document the true experience and culture of the Tibetan people.

#37M: Thank you.

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

00:01:16

#37M: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#37M: [Smiles]

Q: If you want to take a break at anytime during the interview, just let us know.

00:01:36

#37M: Okay.

Q: If there is a question you'd rather not answer, its fine. You don't have to answer it.

#37M: Okay.

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

00:01:57

#37M: No, there will be no problems. [I will] speak the truth.

Q: Okay. We very much appreciate your coming and talking to us today.

#37M: Thank you. I am very happy and grateful that you are doing this project.

Q: We are having a very good time. We are learning a lot.

00:02:30

#37M: Okay.

Q: So you know, there's been quite a lot written about the history of Tibet and what happened. We all are very familiar with the historical events. What people don't know so much is what ordinary people experienced in their daily lives and this is what we are hoping to learn from you.

#37M: In my village the parents got married and the children were born. Once the children turned 7 or 8, they were sent to graze the yaks and sheep. We did not own farm lands but reared animals. [The children] were sent as shepherds and to look after the yaks and horses.

Q: Did your family own animals?

00:03:44

#37M: Yes, we did.

Q: How many?

#37M: There were 1,000 sheep and 100-200 yaks.

Q: Did you always live in a tent or did you sometimes live in a house?

00:04:12

#37M: [We] lived in *ba* 'tent made from yak hair.'

Q: Did you have houses?

#37M: There were no houses. The sheep went out to graze and the family lived in the *ba*. When [we] went to graze the sheep, tents were set up.

Q: When was the cotton tent used? Was that a different time of year?

00:04:57

#37M: We lived in it for a month or two during the *lukra*. And then it was used during the *dipa* [?] trips and not otherwise.

Q: How often would you move from place to place?

#37M: We did not go for *lukra* during the summer. The sheep were grazed in two groups in summer. During winter when there was snowfall, we went for *lukra*.

Q: What does *lukra* mean?

00:05:44

#37M: The *ba* is like your house and you went away for *lukra* wherever the grass was good. [We] went for a month or two for *lukra* and stayed there. When the sheep had to be given water, they were taken far away and after they'd been fed water, [we] returned.

Q: How many people slept in the tent together?

#37M: Two or three people went [with the animals]; not more than that. I mean for the *lukra*. When we went for the *lukra*, there were two or three people. If there were two groups of sheep, there would be two shepherds. Then there was one person to do the household chores. Apart from them, nobody else went.

Q: Let's talk about some of the animals that you saw as a child. Can you remember some early encounters with different kinds of wild animals - not the sheep and the yaks - with the wild animals?

00:07:38

#37M: When we left our village, the regions were uninhabited and we could always see Tibetan wild asses, Tibetan antelopes and Tibetan gazelles. These animals lived in the mountains and there were none to harm them. One could always see them.

Q: The Tibetan brown bear, was that quite rare to see?

#37M: The Tibetan brown bear lived in the *dza*.

Q: What is *dza*?

00:08:26

#37M: There were steep mountains with pastures. They lived among the *dza* there.

Q: Did you ever see one?

#37M: Yes, I have.

Q: Tell us what happened when you saw one?

00:08:49

#37M: When we watched them from afar, they did not harm us. If one went close to them, they would bite.

Q: So sometimes they would hurt people? You heard that?

#37M: I have heard and I have seen [it happen]. My maternal uncle and a paternal uncle were attacked by a Tibetan brown bear which they shot at it with a Tibetan-made gun and killed it.

Another time when I was just a child, my mother's paternal uncle was attacked by a Tibetan brown bear and her two cubs. All the fingers on his hand were injured [gestures to right hand]. He killed the Tibetan brown bear by stabbing it.

Q: When you saw the fight yourself between...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It was his uncle?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, an uncle.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...and there was another man?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Another man.

Q: Your uncle and another man fighting, how were they fighting? What were they using?

00:10:40

#37M: The Tibetan brown bear leaps at the head. The Tibetan brown bear has hands and teeth and everything. Its cubs bit at his calves. The mother Tibetan brown bear jumped at the head and bit his hand. He possessed a fine knife about this size [shows a length of 2 feet]. He stabbed it and hit the chest. The Tibetan brown bear was killed.

Q: And you saw this?

#37M: Yes, I saw it.

Q: What were you doing at the time?

00:11:29

#37M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] The face was this long [shows length from tip of fingers to elbow].

Q: Yes?

#37M: The face of the Tibetan brown bear was this long [continues to point from finger to elbow of right hand]. It was this length of an adult person from its head to bottom [of face].

Q: What were you doing at that time?

00:11:45

#37M: I was a child then. I was grazing the sheep. When my grandfather and mother's uncle killed the Tibetan brown bear, I was a small child and engaged in grazing the sheep.

Q: Did you hide behind something? While this fight was going on, were you hiding?

#37M: I did not see the fight. I saw the killing. The older people told me about it.

Q: So that's quite a story. Not many people have a story like that.

#37M: That's right.

Q: How old were you when that happened?

00:12:57

#37M: I might have been 8 or 9 then.

Q: When something like that happened and then your family would go back to the tent and you all sit round after dinner, they'll be telling everybody the story. It must have been very exciting to hear stories like this?

#37M: Some people remarked to my uncle, "You have become renowned. Three Tibetan brown bears could not kill you. Instead you killed one. You have become famous." There were others who said, "How scary!" There were different comments.

Q: Once the bear was killed, did you use its body parts for anything?

00:14:11

#37M: [We] did not use its meat. [We] did not use the meat of the Tibetan brown bear. The skin was taken to *tsokthok*.

Q: What is *tsokthok*?

#37M: That is where people gathered.

Q: Why?

00:14:24

#37M: It is a way of showing off. It is to portray that he had killed a Tibetan brown bear similar to what the tribesmen do with...[not discernible]. [Laughs]

Q: Do you remember any other stories that you have heard growing up from your family, stories of adventure or danger that you heard from your family?

#37M: There were some who did it [hunted]. There some who did and others who did not. Not everyone hunted wild animals.

Q: Did you hear any stories from your father or your grandfather about this?

00:15:34

#37M: I have heard but not seen any.

Q: Can you remember any?

#37M: No, I do not.

Q: You went to trade across the border, so you must have been quite close. You must have been quite far ...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In Ngari.

Q: In Ngari, right? Trading at Ladakh. Can you tell us a little bit about the trading?

00:16:10

#37M: I did not go, but my father and older relatives went to Ladakh, Khunu and Shakhho to get goods.

Q: You did not go?

#37M: I have not been.

Q: What kind of things were they trading?

00:16:33

#37M: They took butter, wool, salt and the hair of goats which is called *khunu*. They traded in such stuff. They took butter, cheese, wool and *khunu*. They brought back *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' rice and wheat.

Q: Of all of the things you owned, apart from the animals—I am talking about inside the tent—what was considered the most precious items? Like if there was a fire or a disaster, like the first thing that would be saved—you know the first thing that your parents would go in and save.

#37M: The rich families of those days owned guns. Horses and guns were considered very precious. They were considered precious, but when the times upturned, [people] were ordered to surrender all the weapons. After implementing the liberation, the Chinese divided whatever wealth some people possessed, while the poor did not have anything to divide.

Q: What other precious items did you own besides horses and guns?

00:18:30

#37M: There were families who owned gold and silver.

Q: If there was a fire or disaster in your home, what would you save first?

#37M: There is no chance of a fire in the *ba*.

Q: In case it happened?

00:18:46

#37M: [Laughs] There has never been a fire in my village. There was no kerosene oil or petrol.

Q: [Laughs] No, no, no. Forget about the fire. What was considered the most precious things in your...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Only horse and gun.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Horse and gun? That was it, the gun. Okay. So if they had to save one thing, he would go and get his gun.

#37M: There were swords this long [stretches both hands out] and some people had swords of this length [shows a length about two feet]. [There were swords] to put inside the *amba* 'pouch of traditional coat' and to wear it here [indicates the waist area]. There were swords this long for the waist and they were considered very precious.

Q: Now the weapons were to defend yourself from wild animals or other people? I guess to shoot animals, to hunt animals?

00:19:39

#37M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] The sword was to use when [people] got into a fight. It was not to kill animals.

Q: So who were you really protecting yourself from? I mean what was the biggest threat then that you had to protect yourself from, bandits?

#37M: Sword was used when there were fights. [We] feared the Tibetan brown bear in the summer. However, in winter its paws got frozen. It could not run and could not bite. During summertime, if one met a Tibetan brown bear, it attacked. It was to protect ourselves from that.

Q: Were there any bandits in your area?

00:21:25

#37M: Much later when the Chinese attacked Xinjiang, some [bandits] appeared. They [the Xinjiang people] took flight and attacked us for provisions as they fled. Many people were killed. So we too fought and killed them. It was the Chinese that attacked Xinjiang.

Q: People from Kham and Amdo?

#37M: They were not from the direction of Kham. They lived in Xinjiang.

Q: How old were you when you learned to shoot a gun?

00:22:55

#37M: I used to shoot a gun when I was 17 or 18 years old. However, those were not the semi-automatic American-made rifles that use 30 bullets. They were the ones that used five bullets. The automatic rifles could take eight bunches of bullets. We used the ones with five bullets.

Q: Could you shoot all the five bullets at a time?

#37M: No, one at a time. It was not the automatic one. We shot once and then reloaded. If you pulled the trigger of the American-made semi-automatic rifle, the 800 bullets fired continuously.

Q: Were you a good shot?

00:24:11

#37M: I was fairly good with a gun.

Q: When the Nationalists came through your area, they are fleeing from the east, did they give any particular problems to your family?

#37M: They did not come to my house. I have witnessed many people of Gerze being killed and have also heard about it.

Q: Let's go back to the animals for a second...

00:24:55

#37M: [Interrupts] They were oppressed by the Chinese and were fleeing from them. They did not have anything to eat and they plundered from us. So we fired on them and they became desperate. They had not come there with the intention to occupy or kill us. They were fleeing from the Chinese.

Q: So to go back to the animals for a second. Were there some animals that were considered very auspicious to see? Like if you saw this animal it was considered a very good sign or another animal that was considered a black sign.

#37M: There was a bird called *charekhapa*. It was believed to have been taught by the Chinese. It was a black bird with a white face. When this bird arrived in Tibet, every attempt was made to kill it. It was considered bad. It was said to be a harbinger of bad things. It was killed and its mouth sliced apart. If it was not killed, something terrible like a war or something would occur. I believe it was taught so by the Chinese. It was the same case when our crows went there [to China].

Q: How big was the bird?

00:26:39

#37M: Its size was that of the crows in Tibet.

Q: How big was the Tibetan crow?

#37M: It was a little larger than the hen. Its face was bare with not a single feather on it and you could see the bones.

Q: It came from China?

00:27:43

#37M: It came from China and it was said to have been taught by the Chinese.

Q: What was the thing about the bones?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In front of the nose, there were only bones. You cannot find any flesh or feather or something.

#37M: I have seen it. You could see the bones clearly. I have also killed it.

Q: When you saw it and killed it, did something bad happen after that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No. When the bird comes, we have to kill it. We should not leave it alive. So it is a good opportunity if you kill it. If you cannot kill it...

00:28:25

#37M: [Interrupts] It arrived from a distant place and could not fly much. It stayed on the ground and it was considered an inauspicious sign. It could not fly immediately; perhaps it came from a very far distance. It could not fly into the sky.

Q: After you saw this bird and killed it, did anything bad happen?

#37M: No, nothing happened. The elders advised that the *charekhapa* be killed and its mouth sliced apart.

Q: Was there an animal that was considered in particular a good sign?

00:29:30

#37M: The good signs were the birds called *khuyuk*. I have heard about it but not seen it. It was considered an auspicious sign. *Ta* was also considered auspicious.

Q: Is that also a bird?

#37M: *Ta* is a bird. It eats small birds in the sky. The *ta* also ate rabbits. The *ta* are said to be birds of the gods and considered good.

Q: What did they look like, the lucky birds?

00:30:25

#37M: In our early history, they were considered birds of the gods. During the period of Ling, there occurred the story about Gonpo Phalha and the birds belonged to him. It is a story. [Laughs]

Q: Did you ever see one?

#37M: Yes, I have seen it.

Q: Yes, you have seen? What does it look like?

00:31:09

#37M: It is a small bird. It is quite small like the parrots, like the two birds that are there in the monastery. Its size was like that but it was brownish in color.

Q: Did something good happen after you saw this?

#37M: There was no good sign as such, but that is what people normally used to say.

Q: Did you ever witness anybody dying in your community?

00:32:09

#37M: Yes, I have seen death.

Q: What would happen after somebody died? Did they leave the body for three days without disturbing it?

#37M: The bodies were offered to the birds by the monks and *choepa*.

Q: Did that happen on the first day itself?

00:32:33

#37M: [The body] was kept for about two days and then given to the birds. The *choepa* cut up the body and offered it to the birds. That was how it was done. Innumerable birds arrived.

Q: Was it somebody in your family that you saw?

#37M: I did not see that but this sort of thing happened in my village.

Q: Was it difficult in the summer to keep the body for a couple of days?

00:33:27

#37M: No, it was not. It was never hot in our region. And in winter everything froze.

Q: Would they take the body and put it in another place or would it stay in the tent with the family?

#37M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] Some people took the body to another place and after it had been eaten by the birds, they built a big cairn out of stones which had *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' engraved on them.

Q: Where would they put the stone?

00:34:34

#37M: The stones were either kept at the sky burial site or on the land belonging to the family of the deceased.

Q: Did you ever witness a sky burial yourself?

#37M: I have not witnessed one. The older people used to tell us about it. I was small at that time and did not see it. I used to go to graze the sheep and did not see the ritual. [Laughs]

Q: For the two or three days when the body was not disturbed before it was given to the vultures, where would the body be?

00:35:48

#37M: It was kept at the place [home] where he died and the body was covered with a white sheet. Then the lama performed the *phowa* 'purification practice in which the consciousness is transferred to a pure land' and read the prayers of the *bardo* 'the state of existence between life and death.' Butter lamps were lit and rituals were performed for the dead while [the body] was kept for a day or two. After the lama had performed [the rituals] and the body had been kept for a day or two as the case may be, it was taken away to be fed to the vultures.

Q: Were there always monks available? I mean, was it easy to get a monk to come?

#37M: At times it was difficult and at times it was easy to get [monks]. When there were assembly offerings in our region of Gerze, there were many monks. Gerze paid tax to Sera Monastery where there were many monks. There were many monks of Gerze in the Kagyu Monastery. The people of Gerze joined the Kagyu Monastery to become monks. However, there were no monasteries close to our village. They were located very far away. For the prayer assembly...[not discernible]

Q: If you couldn't find a monk and somebody had died and you needed certain prayers to be done, was there someone in your village who was very knowledgeable about these kinds of rites and ceremonies?

00:38:32

#37M: Yes, there were *ngagpa* 'shamans' and such. There were accomplished *ngagpa* and others around. If none were available, I just told you that the *phowa* was transferred and then the body was consumed by the birds. After that *mani* was engraved on stones and a cairn built out of it.

Q: The *ngagpas*, the tantric practitioners—did you ever see them doing anything particularly special, like they are supposed to have special powers? Did you ever see any *ngagpas* doing any special kind of thing?

#37M: I have no memory of such.

Q: Did you witness any such thing?

00:40:06

#37M: I did witness it. When a whole family had passed away, whether it was their cattle or belongings, or if the father of a family passed away, the gun, horse, everything were offered to the lama or to the monasteries in memory of the dead.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: All the belongings? None of the belongings would be given to the children? All to the monks?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: All that the father, what he had. Example, especially what individually had.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, I understand but I'm saying it wouldn't be passed on to the family? It would all be given to the monks?

Q: If all the father's belonging were offered to the monastery, were none passed on to his sons?

#37M: The progeny would receive their share. Whatever the animals or belongings [the family owned] they were divided among its members like, this is the father's share, this is the mother's share and this is the offspring's share. And then the entire share of the [dead] father was given as offerings.

Q: What was the most common cause of death in the people who you lived with?

00:42:17

#37M: They would [die] from various illnesses. There were not many sufferers from tuberculosis in my village. There were no AIDS or any such things. However, people died from backache, fever, stomachache and liver complaints. There were different kinds of diseases. There were never any illnesses like jaundice, tuberculosis or AIDS.

Q: If somebody got sick, was there a doctor?

#37M: At times doctors were available. There were no doctors round the clock. There were the *lhawa* 'medium' and *choepa* who performed certain rituals. If the sick person was afflicted by certain causes, they [mediums] could cure them.

Q: Have you ever seen that happening?

00:44:12

#37M: Of course, I have seen it [laughs]; many times.

Q: Can you tell us how sick was the person and what would the *lhawa* do and what happened? Can you give an example?

#37M: First the *lhawa* set up the table and covered it with a cloth. He put a butter lamp and a tea offering. Then he placed the *ling* [picture of a deity?] there. After that he recited

prayers to whichever deity that he had to invoke. Then the deity entered him. Once the deity had taken possession of him, he was told what the person [seeking the medium's intervention] was suffering from and a cure sought for it or asked if the problem was brought on by other causes and a solution for it. If it was caused by other forces, he was rid of it and if it was a physical illness that was sucked out of him. Then he [the ailing person] became well.

Q: When the *lhawa* performed his cure, can you see an immediate result?

00:46:44

#37M: [We] see it. I have seen it many times. [Laughs]

Q: When the *lhawa* would enter the person's body, did their behavior change at all? Did they act differently once the *lhawa* was inside them?

#37M: Yes, yes. Once the deity possessed him, his body started shaking [shakes body] violently. He jumped and leaped into the air. He claimed that he was that particular protective deity that was invoked. Then he [deity possessed medium] was praised, tributes paid to his virtue and sought refuge in. The sick person sat in front of him and then he [the *lhawa*] sucked [the disease] or chased the harmful effect out.

Q: When the person was talking while the *lhawa* was possessing them, was their voice different? Did their voice sound different to their normal voice?

00:48:31

#37M: The voice was slightly different. In the case of the Neychung [oracle], only a special person could understand him. However, in our village they [*lhawa*] were laymen and they spoke like we do.

Q: How long would this procedure last? How long would the person be possessed?

#37M: Some lasted for half an hour. Some lasted 20 minutes or 30 minutes.

Q: And afterwards, did the person remember the experience? Did the person remember like having had the spirit inside them?

00:49:45

#37M: He cannot remember. He would have said [during the trance], "You have [someone causing] this harm to you and you must do this to overcome it." Or if it was necessary he would say, "You have to consult one or two more deities. Since harm has come to you because of the land deity's displeasure, you must invoke the deity of the land. Invoke the deity which you have displeased. You have to do these depending upon the harm." The *lhawa* would explain all the harm and once the spirit had left him, we had to explain the whole thing back to him.

Q: Was he very tired afterwards?

#37M: Some of them looked very tired. When the possession first took place, it looked very difficult. It's very hot in India and though it was not so back in the village, it was difficult. The spirit was taking possession of his chest or wherever and I think that was very tiring. The face seemed pale and when the spirit first took possession, he looked very tired. Once the sucking and everything was over and the deity left him, he returned to his normal self.

Q: Once the spirit left him, was he normal?

00:51:36

#37M: He was normal. Once the spirit had left, he was back to his normal self.

Q: When you said...

#37M: [Interrupts] After the deity was invoked and all the sick people had been attended to, he [the *lhawa*] requested it [the deity] to leave. So the deity left and he came back to his normal self.

Q: When you said that his face changed, did he look like a really different person when this was going on? Did he look really different?

00:53:01

#37M: The eyes became big and his face became very different.

Q: Was it quite frightening to see this—sounds a bit frightening.

#37M: If one was a new person, one would feel frightened. [Laughs] Someone who was young and who had never seen one earlier, [he] would be scared. I had seen many *lhawa* and was not frightened.

Q: How was the *lhawa* dressed? How did he dress?

00:53:48

#37M: They wore a *thonga* 'a monk's shirt' and a *dhongray* 'face veil.' The *lhawa* dressed like the monks and covered the face with a piece of cloth. And he invoked the deity by performing *serkim* [ritual to invoke the protective deity by making offerings of black tea, milk or beer] and beating the *daru* 'small two-headed drum for religious rituals.' Then when the deity took possession, he wore the *ringa* 'ritual headdress.'

While he was performing the *serkim* and invoking the deity, he started shaking. It was very strange because once the *ringa* was worn, whether he moved his head to the right or left, it never fell off. However, once the spirit had been invoked and then requested to leave, the *ringa* did not fall to the right or left but fell to the back of the head.

Q: Was it quite heavy?

#37M: [Interrupts] [The *ringa*] had five images on it, one in the front, two on either sides and at the back.

Q: What was it made of?

00:56:55

#37M: It was made out of wood and there were images on it like you see on the *thanka* 'traditional scroll paintings.'

Q: The remedy that the protector would give the sick person whatever he thought would help to cure them was it medicine or was it like spiritual practices?

#37M: It was a sort of treatment. Some of them provided *ngagchu*, water which had been blessed by reciting mantras over it, or blessed butter, which one could apply over the sore or any part of the body that was swollen. They also provided incense for burning. He recited prayers and passed the *daru* over the *ringa* and blew into the water, which was to be drunk [by the sick person]. Then there was the sucking method, which of course entailed sucking away [the illness]. For those swollen parts of the body, he gave blessed butter and water.

The *lhawa* are really very unique. The reason was that there was a germ called *khatonsho*. It is mentioned in the teachings of the Guru Rinpoche that the germ is a treat for the *lhawa*. If a person [contracted this germ] he developed boils and if not treated, he could die within a week. If the sucking method was applied and once the germ was sucked out, the person became well the very next day.

Q: What boil?

00:59:28

#37M: You know people get boils [touches arm]. It is called *tsaptso*. So when a person developed *tsaptso*, the *lhawa* sucked at it and chanted the mantras. If he was a genuine *lhawa*, the person became completely well. There was not even a blemish left the next day!

Q: And the *lhawa* didn't get sick?

#37M: No, he did not get sick. I suppose the deity consumed the germ. He was just a human medium; it was the deity that consumed it.

Q: Was it always the same protector or was it different protectors that used to inhabit the *lhawas*?

01:00:45

#37M: Yes, [different protectors]. Not all the deities were the same.

Q: I'll just clarify you. You were just saying that each *lhawa* would have a special relationship with a particular protector. So in your village, how many *lhawas* were there approximately?

#37M: There were many *lhawa*. Before the times changed, it [the village] was full of deities. [Laughs]

Q: Would a family have a certain relationship with a certain *lhawa*, like this is our *lhawa* and he is the guy we would call?

01:01:50

#37M: One can approach any *lhawa* and he will do the task. There was no such thing as he is my *lhawa* or he is his *lhawa*. All the people of Gerze believed in the same protective deity. There was no one who invoked the protector Gyalpo. Everyone in Gerze invoked the same protective deity. A *lhawa* was invited when someone fell ill and there was no talk about protective deities.

Q: The protector of your village, what was the name of your protector?

#37M: The majority of Gerze prayed to the Tsen.

Q: Any other?

01:03:03

#37M: There were none who invoked the Gyalpo.

Q: What were the protective deities other than Tsen?

#37M: There was Palden Lhamo. Most people prayed to Palden Lhamo. Besides Palden Lhamo, there was the protective deity Gangri Lhaptsen. [People] worshipped Gangri Lhaptsen, Palden Lhamo and Gonpo. [People] also invoked other minor gods.

Q: Wasn't Tsen like a monster?

01:04:05

#37M: The protective deity Tsen is red in color.

Q: Is it a kind of demon?

#37M: Yes, it is fierce.

Q: Can you describe the Tsen a little bit more?

01:04:38

#37M: No, I do not know much.

Q: Did you ever get so sick that a *lhawa* was called for you?

#37M: Yes, I have had connections. [To interpreter] You know *Lhawa* Wangyal in Camp Number 6 [Mundgod]? He was called.

Q: When you were in Tibet or...

01:05:10

#37M: While in Tibet there were many *lhawa* but as children...[not discernible]. When my father and others became ill, *lhawa* were invited and I have witnessed such happenings many times.

Q: So he came for your father. What was wrong with your father?

01:05:45

#37M: It was food poisoning and my father had pain in his intestines. The *lhawa* treated him and he became well.

Q: Really. Do you remember what the *lhawa* told your father to do?

#37M: The *lhawa* performed the sucking method.

Q: What did he say?

01:06:09

#37M: He will say which being has been displeased and caused the harm and the particular treatment for that and then one gets cured.

Q: And people always got better?

#37M: Yes, they were cured.

Q: Were there cases when someone was not cured?

01:07:12

#37M: If a person did not get cured after one sitting with the *lhawa*, he was approached a second time. Even a third time might be necessary in certain cases. However, if he did not become well after the first, he was sure to be cured after the second time.

Q: When your father had food poisoning, just one time?

#37M: The *lhawa* was invited twice.

Q: How sick was your father?

01:07:44

#37M: He was on the verge of death. He was cured after the *lhawa* was consulted.

Q: I would imagine then that making proper offerings to the protectors was considered very important in your community?

#37M: Yes, it was. It is written in our scriptures how offerings must be made to all the deities and protective deities. So it is natural that they must be invoked. In our village if the earth deity was displeased, appropriate offerings were made to appease it.

Q: Does it work as well in exile as it did in Tibet? You were saying that every time people got better. The people who are doing this practice, is it as effective now as it was back in Tibet?

01:09:20

#37M: *Lhawa* Wangyal is so helpful.

Q: He is in Mundgod?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In Mundgod, yeah.

#37M: [Speaks in Hindi] He lives in [Camp] Number 6.

Q: Can I have his number?

01:09:40

#37M: We can get in touch with him.

Q: How was the *lhawa* paid?

#37M: [Speaking to interpreter] Is she [the interviewer] sick? Once the deity has left, it was up to you how much you want to offer him. There was no fixed price.

Q: We've never heard anything like this before and you said you had nothing to say. You just never know. So interesting. I think we need to get to the Chinese. So your village, Gerze, what happened in your village when the Chinese came?

01:10:46

#37M: I think the Chinese had appeared in our region long ago. However, we lived in an isolated village and they did not arrive there. Tibet lost her territory and the leader of Gerze had to go to Lhasa.

Q: Why?

#37M: He was an official holding the fifth rank in the Tibetan government. He came back to Tibet [Gerze] in summer and spent the winter in Lhasa. Our region was very cold and over there [in Lhasa] he owned a house. He lived there as he was an official of the fifth rank.

Once when he came back, the Chinese demanded that all arms be surrendered. The Chinese ordered everyone in Gerze to surrender their weapons. Except for a few families, majority of the people surrendered their arms. Some of the families did not give up their weapons saying, "I will never give up my arms to the Chinese even at the cost of my life. I will never surrender my weapons to the Chinese as long as I am not dead." So these people left the place. My maternal uncle, Grandfather Guru Tsering decided not to give up their weapons and left for the Changthang [northern desert region].

When the leader of Gerze went [to the Chinese] to deliver the weapons that had been given up, the Chinese poisoned him to death.

Q: When was that?

01:12:18

#37M: It was in '59, just prior to the fall of Lhasa.

Q: And then?

#37M: And then it was said that the leader of Gerze was poisoned to death. He could not return. He'd gone to surrender the weapons. And then the Chinese attacked and destroyed the areas of Kham and Chamdo. Khampa [people from Kham] escapees arrived and we fled alongside.

When we reached Ganglhari, an area of Gerze, nine Chinese vehicles and over 200-300, perhaps thousands of infantry arrived there. There were many Khampa with us. The Chinese fired and killed women holding children in their arms while others managed to flee. However, we were caught by the Chinese. Everyone from the families was captured together.

The Chinese told us that since we were people of Gerze, we were not rebels. They deceived us saying, "We will give you [propaganda] lessons. You must not follow the way of the *ngadak* 'people holding leadership posts.' Thus they stopped us for 5-6 months during the summer. Later in the wintertime, [people] learned that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had escaped to India and people started fleeing to India. People from Tibet as well as Gerze began escaping and so gradually we did, too.

Q: The three men who decided not to surrender their weapons, what happened to them?

01:17:26

#37M: They managed to escape to India. They did not surrender their weapons and fled to India. However, my maternal uncle was captured by the Chinese.

Q: Which uncle?

#37M: The grandfather who was my mother's paternal uncle.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Genpo Rikyab?

#37M: Genpo Rikyab was able to reach India. He surrendered his weapons to the Indians. My grandfather, the one who was my mother's paternal uncle was captured by the Chinese in the Changthang.

Q: What happened to him? Did he die?

01:18:07

#37M: We came away while he was captured by the Chinese. What do we know, what happened to him?

Q: Your grandfather, did he try to persuade your father to also not surrender his weapons?

#37M: Some of our weapons were seized by the Khampa and the rest were captured by the Chinese.

Q: So it is always the Khampas causing trouble? [Laughs]

01:18:54

#37M: They cannot be blamed because they were being pursued by the Chinese. When they were pursued by the Chinese, they needed weapons. As we were fleeing alongside the Khampa, we were captured by the Chinese and lost [the weapons to the Khampa].

Q: Do you want to tell us anything about your escape journey? What happened?

#37M: During our escape journey, we fled during the night. When we reached the border between the Indians and Chinese, we kept a watch out for Chinese vehicles in the night. We hid during the day. At the time of crossing the road, we tied up the mouths of the dogs [laughs] and thus crossed it.

Q: Which border did you cross?

01:20:44

#37M: Ngoeche on the Ladakh border.

Q: Where is Ngoeche?

#37M: Ngoeche is on the border between Ladakh and China.

Q: You entered through Ladakh?

01:20:52

#37M: The Indian border is at Ngoeche. And then you reached India. Over the other side was the territory of the Jangpa, Changla and Tingze Rangwa.

Q: It was very few people who came that way. Was it because there weren't many people that lived in that region? You hear very few people who came that route out of Tibet. You always hear people going through Assam or obviously Nepal. But very few people...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: All the Ngari people used to come from Ladakh. That's for sure.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Maybe a lot of them settled there.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because it is very nearby and used to go by traders on this way.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: To trade to Ladakh they come through this way. So they know that this route leads to the Indian border.

Q: Did your family make it out safely?

01:21:48

#37M: Yes, they did. A daughter of...[not discernible] was unable to escape. She is with her mother.

Q: Which mother?

#37M: My mother's sister had a daughter. Initially both the women [mother and aunt] lived together but then went their separate ways. The daughter was living with her mother.

Q: So did your father have two wives?

01:22:10

#37M: Yes, that is right.

Q: Was the mother also left behind?

#37M: Yes, she [aunt] had re-married.

Q: You have two mothers.

01:22:32

#37M: Yes, there were two mothers. [One] was an aunt.

Q: Do you have two wives?

#37M: I do not have two wives. [Laughs]

Q: Just one.

#37M: One.

Q: One is enough, yes? Okay it is been really interesting to talk to you. Thank you so much. It's been fascinating.

01:22:53

#37M: Thank you.

Q: I just want to ask you a couple of questions. What was it like for you to talk about all of this today?

#37M: I have great hope that you will be able to broadcast this to the world. I am very happy that you have taken such interest [in the Tibetan cause] as advised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and I would like to thank you very much.

Q: Definitely. Have you shared your experiences before much about your time in Tibet?

01:23:49

#37M: No, I have not shared. I have not spoken about it.

Q: Have you told your experience to the children?

#37M: All of us are refugees. We are all here because of the same reason. Actually we should describe it to the young people. However, it is not so. There is no one doing the questioning and no one relating [the stories]. We should tell our children, "During your parents' time, we have struggled so much. We struggled after coming to India and struggled during the journey from our homeland. There were people who had to eat their shoes during the escape." But there is no one to listen. Due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama all the children are occupied in the school. They do not want to hear the stories of the "old brains."

Q: I think when they get older, no one's going to listen to them and then they are going to know how it feels.

01:25:23

#37M: Yes, that is right.

Q: I have to ask you one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it create any kind of problem for you?

#37M: No, no.

Q: Can we use your real name?

01:25:40

#37M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] I am fine if there is any problem for me individually. I welcome it.

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

#37M: Yes.

Q: It was a real honor talking to you. Thank you.

#37M: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW