

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #38M – Gursang Damdul
April 11, 2010**

The Tibet Oral History Project serves as a repository for the memories, opinions and ideas of elderly Tibetan refugees. The oral history process records the words spoken by interviewees in response to questions from an interviewer. The interviewees' statements should not be considered verified or complete accounts of events and the Tibet Oral History Project expressly disclaims any liability for the inaccuracy of any information provided by the interviewees. The interviewees' statements do not necessarily represent the views of the Tibet Oral History Project or any of its officers, contractors or volunteers.

This translation and transcript is provided for individual research purposes only. For all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: Tibet Oral History Project, P.O. Box 6464, Moraga, CA 94570-6464, United States.

Copyright © 2012 Tibet Oral History Project.



TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #38M
2. Interviewee: Gursang Damdul
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Gerge
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1961
9. Date of Interview: April 11, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 3 hr 08 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Gursang Damdul was the only son among four children. His family owned a large number of sheep, goats, yaks and horses which were looked after by the family and their servants. Gursang Damdul recounts his experiences of salt trade to Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh, India. Either sheep or yaks were used to transport goods for trade depending on the trail conditions. Salt was traded mainly for grains, but sweets, soap and fabric were also brought back to Tibet.

A popular sport in Gursang Damdul's region was horse racing, target shooting and performing acrobatic acts while riding on a horse. He gives a vivid description of the competitions that took place once a year. The annual affair was also a time to pay tax, chant prayers and for settling any disputes. He also gives a glimpse of various social customs by describing his arranged marriage and wedding ceremony. He talks about the villagers' reactions to pre-marital sex, pregnancy outside of wedlock and infidelity as well as the punishments for such acts.

Gursang Damdul narrates the appearance of Chinese in his village in 1959. They were asked to give up their weapons and the entire village fled, but were captured. He relates the arrests and the *thamzing* 'struggle session' unleashed on the villagers. The poor were misled by the Chinese to execute the *thamzing* on the wealthy people. Eventually his family escaped to Ladakh.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, nomadic life, customs/traditions, festivals, trade, taxes, resistance fighters, life under Chinese rule, *thamzing*, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #38M

Interviewee: Gursang Damdul

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 11, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00.00.18

Interviewee #38M: My name? Gursang Damdul.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#38M: Thank you. Yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us.

00:01:26

#38M: Thank you.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know.

#38M: Okay, fine.

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#38M: Okay. Thank you.

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

00:02:14

#38M: If one speaks the truth, there will be no problem.

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

#38M: Thank you and I am grateful to you.

Q: *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ can you tell us where you were born?

00:02:46

#38M: I was born in Gerge Jangdhok.

Q: How old are you today?

#38M: 73 years.

Q: Can you describe the village where you were born? If we were looking at it, what would we see?

00:03:23

#38M: Yes, I can relate. There were five divisions in the region of Gerge. I am from the one called Gerge Jangdhok. We were nomads rearing animals like goats, sheep, yaks and horses and never did any cultivation. Ours was an extremely happy place. If one wanted to go to trade, salt was available in our region of Changthang. One did not have to pay for the salt, but collect it and sell it to the Indian traders in Ladakh, Shawarung, Nyithirung and Kyonamrung. All those are in Indian territory. We sold our salt to them and received grains, wheat, textiles and sweet stuff from them. So that was the source of all our grains.

We had a great trade relation with India. Indian traders came to our region driving their horses, mules and donkeys. All things Indian reached our region. Butter, cheese, wool, *lena* 'goat hair,' yak fur and salt and besides gold was found in our region, which were all sold to the Indian traders. The Indian traders came right to the door of the nomads during the three summer months. In autumn we went to trade twice or thrice. That was how we earned our livelihood.

Q: When you were a little boy did you go on these trips with your father or when did you start traveling on trade?

#38M: Yes, I have traveled on trade.

Q: When you were traveling, what kind of place did you live in?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Can he describe the tent or whatever he lived in?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: While he was traveling?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes.

00:06:38

#38M: We started out early in the morning at 7 or 8 o'clock. In the evening we made camp at 5 or 6 o'clock. The wealthy people drove horses, mules and yaks. They loaded the horses, mules and yaks. The middle class nomads loaded sheep with bags of salt. From the age of 17 until 23, I traveled back and forth on trade. Shawarung and Kyonamrung are located in the Himachal mountain range. The regions have such steep rocks and valleys that only the sheep could trudge. Yaks and horses could not manage there.

Sheep, which were laden with salt, climbed down and once they reached the valley, a sheep-load of salt was exchanged for a sheep-load of grains. Salt was very expensive. The value of salt and grains were equal. At areas like Ruthok where there were farmers, one could load yaks with grains. One drove horses and mules to Ladakh to places like Leh, Chamray and Sathi. That was how it was.

Q: Which were the regions where you drove sheep?

#38M: It was to Shawarung, Koterung and Nyithirung, which are located in the Himalaya mountain range in Nepal. There were steep cliffs and a lot of snow. Except for sheep no other animal could pass through that region.

Q: Before you were 17, can you tell us where did you live and how many people were in your family?

00:09:09

#38M: There were three daughters in the family and I was the only son. There were six members in the family including our parents, three daughters and I. There were also three or four servants who grazed the sheep and yaks.

Q: When you weren't traveling, did you live in a nomad tent or in a house?

[Interpreter translates question as: When you traveled to trade, did you live in a tent or a house during the journey?]

#38M: [I] stayed in a tent.

Q: Can you describe what the tent looks like?

00:10:08

#38M: The tent was square with ropes at the four corners and sides. There were eight ropes and two slender bamboo poles that were raised with the help of iron pegs in the evening. In the morning it was taken down and loaded on to the animals. That's how we traveled.

Q: What was the tent made of and what was inside the tent?

#38M: The tent was made of fabric. The jean material was purchased from India and the ropes were stitched at the edge of the tent. The ropes were made from yak hair. There were small pegs of this size [shows size of four inches] with a bit of iron attached to it.

Q: Your family's tent was made of cloth or yak hair?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: While traveling on the trade we used the cotton one.

Q: What was the family house like?

00:12:00

#38M: We were nomads and those very wealthy ones who did not need to move [places], owned houses. However, those nomads that moved in search of grass for their animals lived in *ba* 'tent' which was woven from yak hair. One such [tent] would last for 8-9 years. The tent was very large and they set them up as they moved. The fabric tent was not used.

Q: But your family always lived in a tent and did that family tent ever get moved at different seasons or did it always stay there?

#38M: It was changed.

Q: Did you change at seasons like summer, winter...?

00:13:33

#38M: The tent was not changed during summer or winter. When the tent became old, a new one was made.

Q: Not that but did you move...

#38M: Yes, we moved. We remained only four or five months at a place as the animals needed grass. We moved in search of grass for the animals. Very wealthy families that had a lot of possessions lived at one place.

Q: *Pa-la*, when your father was away trading, did you stay with your mother and sisters and what did you do?

00:14:27

#38M: You mean long ago when I did not go on trade?

Q: Yes.

#38M: Before I left [for trade] being the only son of my parents, I did not have much to do. I rode a horse and went to graze horses. I spent the first 17 years in a very happy manner with my parents and learned to read Tibetan. I led a happy life. The servants and my sisters grazed the animals. I spent my life that way until the age of 17 when I went to trade and continued to do so until my region was occupied. At the age of 18, I got married.

Q: How many generations were your family traders?

00:15:55

#38M: Oh, we were traders since my father's father's time and also before that; for about four or five generations.

Q: And living as nomads.

#38M: Yes, traders and nomads.

Q: Were all nomads traders or just certain groups of nomads?

00:16:28

#38M: All those that were economically better went to trade. Those who were not so well-off could not go and sent their animals with the others. There were different economic strata among the nomads. The richer ones went but not all the poor ones did.

Q: We didn't finish describing inside of the family tent home. What was the inside like? Can you describe that, *pa-la*?

#38M: The larger tents had ropes at the corners and they were as large as this house [points to interview room]. It was exactly square in shape like a house. Tied with ropes, it was large and happy [comfortable]. When it rained during summer, not a drop seeped inside.

Q: How did the family live inside?

00:17:52

#38M: The family belongings were stacked and there was a separate tent for the kitchen where fire was made.

Q: Can you tell us about the weather conditions when you were a little boy? How cold did it get and what did you do to stay warm?

#38M: The weather was incredibly cold. It was difficult due to the extreme cold. One wore thick boots and if one did not wear exceptionally thick clothes, one would not be able to bear the weather when it became cold. However, the best times were in summer, in the 4th, 5th and 6th Tibetan lunar months. It was enough to wear a *chupa* 'traditional coat' made of cloth as it was not cold. During wintertime it snowed and became extremely cold. It was like that.

Q: Was the snow very deep in the winter and could you still go out on your horseback or did you have to stay inside the tent?

00:19:44

#38M: During winter one could not travel to the Indian border along the Himalayan mountain range. It was impossible due to the extreme cold. We took care of the animals like yak, sheep and goats. Leaving the bigger *ba* for the parents, the younger lot and servants loaded a smaller *ba* on a yak and set off in search of grass on various mountains. One could not go [on trade] throughout the winter.

Q: How many animals and what kind did the family own?

#38M: We owned goats, sheep, and yaks. The sheep numbered 1,000 to 2,000. It was a huge flock of sheep. My family owned 200-300 or 250-300 yaks. Then there were 15, 20 or 30 horses. The animals that nomads in our region owned were horses, yak, sheep and goats. Those were the only animals.

Q: How many sheep did you have?

00:21:30

#38M: There were about 3,000 sheep.

Q: And goats?

#38M: There were around 1,000 goats.

Q: Who took care of all these animals?

00:21:55

#38M: There were people who did not have any possessions and who were paid by us to graze them in the mountains. The hired help did it.

Q: *Pa-la*, was this a typical size of animals that a family would own or were you considered very wealthy?

#38M: [We] were a middle-class family.

Q: If people were even wealthier, how many would they own?

00:22:55

#38M: Oh, the wealthier families owned *ka-ti-nag-thong* which means ‘thousand yaks and ten thousand sheep.’ At the time of the reformation by the Chinese, Thohey Pesang was said to own 10,000 goats and sheep and 700-800 yaks. The man’s name was Thohey Pesang.

Q: How did people acquire so many animals?

#38M: When tax was paid to the Tibetan government, a person received a certain tract of land depending on the amount of tax. Those who owned more animals received a larger share of land. So if they took good care of their animals, the sheep multiplied and their flock increased.

Q: *Pa-la*, how were the taxes collected by the government?

00:24:45

#38M: The animals were counted. Every six goats or sheep was considered as one *lep* and each yak was a *lep*. Depending on the number of *lep*, [one paid tax] but I do not know how much it was per *lep*. It was not very large. In the old days, there was the *tanka karmo* ‘white coin’ in which one paid based on the number of *lep* and it was collected by the Tibetan government.

Q: Were the taxes collected once every three years?

#38M: That’s right.

Q: Who came to collect the tax and how carefully did they count the animals to make sure? Who did the counting and who came to collect the tax?

00:26:04

#38M: The tax was collected by our district. For example, we came under Ngari District. A person from Ngari District, who was a Tibetan government official, arrived. The District Official and assistants of our village had to go to reach the tax to them.

Q: They did the counting?

#38M: Yes, the Heads and District Official of our village took them there.

Q: The Ngari District sent men to count and then it was paid?

00:26:29

#38M: Yes, that is right.

Q: How did people feel about paying these taxes to the government? Did they feel that they were appropriate or excessive or very low? What did they think?

#38M: The tax was for the government and we did not feel disheartened for paying them.

Q: What did they feel they got back from the government because they were paying taxes? What were the benefits of having a government?

00:27:48

#38M: There was no particular help forthcoming from the Tibetan Government. However, we were obliged to render a tax called butter tax, which we were told was for the purpose of prayer ceremonies and rituals at Sera, Drepung and Gaden Monasteries. There was no particular assistance that the Tibetan government gave us.

Q: Can you tell us more about your life—let's say when you were a teenager? You said your sisters were taking care of the animals and you were free to do whatever you wanted. What kind of activities did you enjoy doing before you started trading?

#38M: I realize that I was very happy at that time. I was free to do what I liked.

Q: What did you do especially?

00:29:06

#38M: Except for loitering about, I was not very naughty...

Q: What naughty things did you do?

#38M: I roamed everywhere and visited nearby villages. I took part in horse races and played games. I have indulged a lot in such activities.

Q: Tell us about that. Give us a picture, like of some experiences you had with horse racing?

00:29:50

#38M: For almost a month there was horse racing.

Q: One month?

#38M: The community of Gerge made their tax payment and conducted prayers and horse racing for a month. The winner of the horse race was awarded with 500-600 rupees and other prizes. I loved horses. Riding on the horse, I could pick up *khata* ‘ceremonial scarves’ and reach my hand to the ground [moves to the right and moves to the left]. I was very flexible in whatever I did. In that way I was accomplished and have made the horses suffer and done wayward actions.

Q: What month would that be?

00:31:02

#38M: It might be August as it was in the 7th Tibetan lunar month. It must be around August that there was horse racing, prayers and taxes collected.

Q: *Pa-la*, about how many nomads would come to that gathering?

#38M: In the early days it used to be said that there were 500 families. [I] would say that there were around 1,000 families. A person from each family—at the least there might be about 1,000 or 800-900 people that attended the gathering.

Q: Was there a specific reason why you would send one to two people. What were they doing besides horse racing?

00:32:35

#38M: That was like a rule and also one’s tax was collected there. It was to remit tax and also if there were disputes between people, it was to bring it before the law. We were nomads and there might be conflicts relating to pasturelands. So everything was brought there and that was a grand annual meeting. People must assemble there for the Tibetan government’s tax collection. There was a penalty if one person from each family did not attend it.

Q: Who would be the judge to help solve that problem?

#38M: The judge was the district official of Gerge. Then there were eight chiefs in Gerge.

Q: Chiefs?

00:34:02

#38M: The chiefs were substitutes for the district official. The highest judge was the district official. Then there were accountants who kept account and secretaries who wrote letters. There were many officials. Cases were solved by the district official.

Q: I want to go back to horse racing. Did you ever win the 400 or 600 *rupees* as a horse rider?

#38M: I have won it three times.

Q: Can you describe what you had to do on the horse to win that prize?

00:35:08

#38M: One must race for a distance about from here to Mundgod. I do not know how many kilometers that is [interpreter describes as 5 kilometers]. Whoever reached first received the prize and so did the second and third [riders]. The highest prize was won by the first and then the second and the third.

Q: Was it only racing and not picking up ceremonial scarves?

#38M: Once the race was over, after that...the race would have taken place in the early morning. After reaching there, people would drink tea and then there would be a lot of playing about on horses, like picking up ceremonial scarves and swinging. A gun would be twirled around [shows twirling motion over head] and aimed at a target [action of shooting with rifle]. If one hit the target, there was a prize. Such was the games played on horseback.

Q: What did you have to pick up?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Pick up the *khata*s from...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...the white scarves.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...the white scarves from the ground sitting on the horse.

Q: It sounds exciting and dangerous at the same time. Did anybody ever get hurt?

00:37:04

#38M: Yes, some did get hurt. There were few who got hurt.

Q: What kind of injuries did they have?

#38M: [Riders] fell and got slightly hurt [touches arms] but not seriously.

Q: Was there anybody who became like a number one person, the most famous person as a, I guess, a horse rider?

00:37:34

#38M: Yes, there was.

Q: Who was he?

#38M: There was the son of Yab Choying who is called Tashi Dhondup. He was very accomplished. Then there was one called Mela Tsewang who lives in Ladakh now. They were experts. Riding on the running horse, they could even pick up coins that were on the ground.

Q: You mean if a coin is placed on the ground?

00:38:18

#38M: The ground was dug up where a note was buried with a *khata* covering it. [He] grabbed a handful of soil along with the note and the *khata*.

Q: Were they still on top of the horse or were they on one side? How did they reach down?

#38M: The horse was running and there was a saddle on it. [He] leaned over one side from the saddle [leans to the right] and as the horse was running, he bent to one side and picked it up.

Q: Did people place any bets on who was going to win? Was there any gambling around horse racing?

00:39:25

#38M: Yes, there was.

Q: You said one or two people from each family came to this, were they always men or did women come or wives or young girls come or children?

#38M: If very high lamas arrived—once the Karmapa did—then all the children and women came. However, only a very few women attended the meeting and the horse race; all were men.

Q: Why did the women not attend?

00:40:22

#38M: It was not the custom for women to attend.

Q: But they did come?

#38M: Yes, they did come.

Q: Why did they come?

00:40:27

#38M: It was not that they were not allowed to come. If some of them did not have work at home, they came grandly to watch the horse race.

Q: So did a Karmapa come every year or just once in a while?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Once they got the opportunity.

Q: Did the Karmapa come every time?

#38M: No.

Q: Did he come only once?

#38M: He came only once.

Q: In your whole lifetime?

00:41:29

#38M: Yes.

Q: Were there any stories of the Karmapa having come there earlier?

#38M: Yes, there were stories of the Karmapa having come long ago. During my time, he came there when I was 13 years old. I heard that he'd come earlier.

Q: With a thousand people, what did the scene look like? What color were the tents and were there decorations? Can you describe what that gathering looked like?

00:42:16

#38M: [We] were very happy during that time. One was so happy. There were no wars, no conflicts, nothing whatsoever then. It was peaceful. We received teachings from the lamas and when the Karmapa arrived, people received him on horses and mules. Tents were put up.

Q: Did high lamas or blessings come every year to be a part of this festival?

#38M: Every year during this month, people practiced dharma.

Q: Were high lamas requested to come there?

00:43:17

#38M: Well, there was a high lama called Tulku Rinpoche in Gerge Monastery. Then there were Lama Yonten Gyamtso, Lama Tsewang and Lama Chime. There were many lamas. There were 200-300 monks in Gerge [Monastery]. They lived permanently at the Gerge Monastery. The meeting took place close to the Gerge Monastery and prayer sessions were conducted throughout the month.

Q: Did any of the monks come and participate in the horse riding or any of the activities?

#38M: No, they did not.

Q: You said earlier that you had two activities before you became a trader with your father. You did horse riding and you teased the girls. Can you tell me about how you teased the girls?

00:44:42

#38M: [Laughs] There were a few lovers.

Q: How did you tease them?

#38M: Well, tease in the sense that if they did not want it, one did not do anything. If both the sides wanted it, then we became lovers. We did such things.

Q: *Pa-la*, you had many girlfriends: girls that were friends. How old were these girls and how old were you?

00:45:39

#38M: I was about 18, 19, 20 years old and they were also 18, 19, 20.

Q: What made you something special with the girls?

#38M: At that time one was young and fun loving. However, I did not know my wife as she and I came from different villages and tax centers. She came from Jangpa. Considering the status of the family, our parents arranged [the marriage] and we married when I was 18 and she was 20. The love affairs earlier to that were the doings of a young one, where one enjoyed with a few women. I only knew that it was enjoyable and nothing more than that.

Q: Did you have a girl nearby where you lived that you wished you could have married?

00:47:48

#38M: No, I did not. I did not because it was the custom that basically the parents would do the task and [the children] would listen to them. However, there were some who were philanderers. There were a few girls whom I loved, but I never asked that I be allowed to live with them.

Q: In terms of the tradition of young people becoming teenagers, adolescents, were girls and boys allowed to have a walk alone together or go horseback riding together or go take care of the animals together or did they have to always be chaperoned or somebody with them, an older person? Could they be together alone or was this not permitted?

#38M: Yes, it was permitted.

Q: If a girl before she was married got pregnant and had a baby, what was the reaction of the community to her?

00:49:53

#38M: [Laughs] It was considered bad. There was a fine as it is written in the law book. [The father] must give the *kha-so-ten* ‘provision to feed the child.’

Q: Yes?

#38M: It was called *kha-so-ten*. The father of the child must live with her and if he does not and the child is born, he would be fined according to the law. Both the boy and the girl were fined.

Q: How about bad name for the girl?

00:50:23

#38M: After a girl became pregnant and the parents of the boy and the girl have no objection, they could live together if they wished and there was no penalty. If they did not live together and a [girl] became pregnant and the [boy] claimed not to be the father, he was fined.

Q: *Pa-la*, what kind of penalty did they have to pay?

#38M: The penalty called *kha-so-ten* was 10 sheep. Then he must provide butter and cheese.

Q: To whom?

00:52:18

#38M: To the mother of the child. When the child grew older and if he was a boy, the father had the right over him. If it was a girl, the mother was entitled to her. The penalty also consisted of 10-15 *ngusang* [currency unit] corresponding to about 100-200 *rupees* these days. This was mentioned in the law book and he had to pay it.

Q: If this girl with the child out of wedlock, when she wants to get married to somebody else, is this a problem or not?

#38M: Yes, [she] did face problems. Some might get a man, but normally it was difficult to find a husband once you had an illegitimate child.

Q: Would it be equally hard for a man who has a child by another woman to get married? Would there be the same problem or stigma for the man?

00:54:52

#38M: He was entitled to the son. There was no difficulty for him to find a wife.

Q: Would he not face difficulties in finding a wife?

#38M: There were not many difficulties. The problem was lesser.

Q: Was there any instruction in how to prevent conception, birth control? In the culture, was there any way to be able to have relations without having a baby?

00:55:44

#38M: There was nothing like that. There was nothing.

Q: Was there in the culture, was there more worth for a girl who has never been with another man before that this would be her first encounter with her husband? Is that more valuable than a girl who had sexual relations?

#38M: Yes.

Q: Would the family pay more? Well, we're going to get to that next to understand what happens, but why would the girl be more valuable to the family?

00:56:47

#38M: If a girl had good character and was diligent, her parents would make every effort to find her a good husband. If a girl was characterless and bad, it would not be easy to find her a good husband. Even if they went to look for one, her reputation would have been known and he [the prospective husband] would say, "Oh, she is not a good one. I will not live with her." In that way, there was a lot of difference.

Q: The only way that a family would know if a girl was still a virgin, had no sex would be that if she didn't have a child, but is it possible she could have had sexual relations and nobody knows and then, you know, she could still marry? I'm trying to say how would they know a girl was of good character?

#38M: People live in the same village and they are bound to hear about it. Everybody would know about it.

Q: They would know a girl's character in the village. Everybody can see. It's a small community.

00:58:58

#38M: Yes, it's very easy to know about it.

Q: You said that your family arranged your marriage, your bride. Tell us about that. How did that happen and when did you see her the first time?

#38M: It used to be said that my wife's family was a good one. Though we belonged to different villages, my father rode his horse a long distance to seek [a bride] and he finally told me, "Come and meet the girl." So we met each other. The [girl's] parents said that if we liked each other, they would give her away. In order to request for the girl's hand, one must give a *khata* and gold to them [the girl's parents]. It was the custom in Gerge to offer one *shok* of gold.

Q: What's *shok*?

00:59:58

#38M: One *shok* of gold is equivalent to a *tola* ‘10 grams’ of gold. That was wrapped in the *khata* and it was requested, “Please give us your daughter.” If they agree to give their daughter, tea and food must be offered to the family. Then a turquoise must be worn in her ear, followed by a somewhat grand marriage celebration.

Q: *Pa-la*, can you remember when you went into the house and you saw her? What did you see? What did you feel?

#38M: I felt that the girl was a good one.

Q: What did she look like? Tell us about her hair and her clothes?

01:03:27

#38M: She was neat. She had on the *agor* [touches both ear lobes], which means earrings. She was wearing the *tsalok* [lambskin?] and her clothes were neat. She’d heard that I was arriving and she was prepared. It was like that.

Q: So she looked very beautiful. And what was her hair like?

#38M: The nomads braided their hair like this [moves hands from forehead to back of head] and pulled one braid this side [moves hand to right shoulder] and the other here [moves hand to left shoulder]. The hair was combed like this [again move hands from forehead to back of head] and braided.

Q: When you saw her, *pa-la*, was she shy or was she happy? What was her behavior like?

01:04:37

#38M: She was a little shy.

Q: What were you like? What did you wear and what did you look like?

#38M: I was wearing a *tsalok* of brocade *chupa* ‘traditional coat’ and a gold ring. [The shirt] was of silk and I wore a pair of boots that were from Kalimpong [West Bengal, India]. I went there in finery with the horses grandly saddled.

Q: You looked like a prince.

#38M: [Laughs]

Q: And she looked like a princess.

01:06:06

#38M: [Laughs] [I] was young at that time and had on fine clothes and carried a rifle.

Q: Did you wear the rifle into the house?

#38M: I carried the rifle on my back and when I reached the house, I left the rifle outside. However, when one rode the horse to go anywhere, the rifle was carried.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the girl's family. What were they like and what did they do for a living that made your father want to pick them?

01:06:59

#38M: You mean when [we] came from there?

Q: Why was a girl from that family and not some other chosen?

#38M: The family came from a pure caste. They were rich and the girl was of good character and this was known to my father and mother. That was the reason she was chosen.

Q: Is this the woman you are still married today?

01:07:37

#38M: Yes [nods head].

Q: Do you have any photographs of your marriage?

#38M: No, I do not.

Q: Now you are engaged. Do you have to wear anything that shows that you are an engaged man?

01:08:12

#38M: The boy was adorned with turquoise and coral.

Q: The boy?

#38M: No, no. The girl [was adorned]. There was nothing for the boy.

Q: How long do you stay at the house and then when do you get married from the time you get engaged?

01:08:40

#38M: When I went on trade, she stayed home. When I was at home, we lived together and if I happened to go out, she stayed home. She stayed home and looked after the children. I only had one child when we escaped from the village. We only had the oldest son then.

Q: Was there a marriage ceremony?

#38M: [Nods]

Q: How was the ceremony conducted?

01:09:25

#38M: The ceremony was just like we do here. *Khata* were offered.

Q: Wasn't the bride coming from a long distance?

#38M: The bride came from a long distance. [She] was received with *chang* 'home-brewed beer' and *chemar* 'butter mixed with flour made from roasted barley' and *changphue* 'offering of *chang*.' There was a lama who made incense offering. That's how she was received.

Q: Was that at the house of the bride or the boy?

01:09:47

#38M: It was imperative to invite a lama to the boy's house. The lama chanted prayers to the protective deities for the welfare of the boy and the girl. All the relatives assembled that day. However, from the bride's side, there were just two or three people to escort her. That was how the marriage was celebrated.

Q: How long did the marriage ceremony last?

#38M: The well-to-do families conducted it for two to three days and some only for one day.

Q: And how long was your wedding celebration?

01:12:23

#38M: Mine lasted for two days.

Q: Did you wear a special costume again for the wedding?

#38M: Yes, there were. There were special clothes.

Q: Were these costumes passed down from generation to generation or were they new clothing?

[Interpreter translates question as: Was the marriage ceremony conducted according to how it was conducted from generation to generation?]

01:12:56

#38M: It was the same. Everything was the same.

Q: But was the actual clothing that they wore, the headdress ...

#38M: It was the same. The rich owned them [jewelry] and they wore them. Those that did not own, well, they were poor and did not own any. However, it [the marriage ceremony and costumes] was what it had been since historical times.

Q: At the party, is there a lot of drinking of *chang*? Do people get happy and drunk and celebrate?

01:13:47

#38M: Yes, people danced.

Q: At the horse festival, I forgot to ask, was there a lot of dancing and singing and drinking *chang* at the horse festival?

#38M: There was dancing, but *chang* was not drunk. There was no *chang* then because the lamas were chanting prayers. *Chang* was not drunk then.

Q: When you are newly married, where do you go with your wife? Where is your new home or where do you live?

01:14:44

#38M: Well, you become friendly from the start and it goes on. There were some bad people whose marriage did not last. As for me, after my marriage I did not eye other women nor did we separate. My wife is still living and I have six children, three sons and three daughters. All my children are in India and my wife is still living. That is it.

Q: The year that you got married, right after the wedding ceremony, did you have a special tent or a separate house or did you just move in to your parents' tent?

#38M: We had a separate tent.

Q: Did your father as the man of the family, did he give you any instructions about what to do on your wedding night with your bride or did you have to figure it out yourself?

01:16:36

#38M: Yes, he did.

Q: What did he say?

#38M: There were my father and my uncle. My uncle was the district official of Gerge and was captured by the Chinese [later]. They gave us presents in the form of money, four, five or six yaks, gold and other things and advised us, "Both of you must live together for life and not do anything wayward. You must work hard and earn a livelihood. You must see that you spent your whole lives together."

Q: So there was no specific sex education for him.

01:18:13

#38M: No. [Shakes head]

Q: Nothing regarding sex?

#38M: They did not give such advice, but once one has slept with the wife, they advised, “Now that you have become man and wife, the wife cannot be with another man and the boy cannot look for another woman. If one does not believe in the “causes and effects” as mentioned in the dharma, one will go to hell upon death. So one must believe in the “causes and effects,” if otherwise, one is going against the law of the living, too. If one does that, we will not let you off.”

Q: When a man was married, would he get into trouble if he went and had relations with another woman? Would he be punished or was that common practice?

01:19:24

#38M: Yes, there were [punishments]. The bad ones could be lashed.

Q: By whom?

#38M: By our leaders. If one had a relation with another woman without the knowledge of his wife and if she came to know of it and took the case to the judge and if he admitted to it and signed a declaration that he would not repeat it, that was fine. In case he lied about it saying that he'd never done it and later if it was found otherwise, he was lashed.

Q: A physical beating? Was that a public beating or private?

01:20:24

#38M: The public was called.

Q: Did you ever see anybody beaten?

#38M: Yes, I have.

Q: Many times?

01:20:33

#38M: I have seen two or three times.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But he said if the man said, “I did it. I’m sorry” there would be no beatings.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: “...further I won’t do it.” Then he was allowed to go.

Q: So why wouldn’t a man say that? Why would he say, “No, I’m going to do it again?” Is that why he would get...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: If he doesn’t accept the faults...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: If he didn’t accept...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...accept it then the chief will start beating him until he accepts.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Until he accepts that he did it.

Q: What would he be beaten with?

01:21:10

#38M: He was beaten with a whip. It was a piece of bamboo with a long leather thong attached to it. The end of the leather thong was white and [split] but close to each other [shows three fingers together]. The man's hands were tied at the back. His legs were tied with a rope and held by a man. Another man held his head. The clothes covering his buttocks were rolled back. There were two men to do the lashing who were called over by the leader. The two men stood on either side of him and when one whipped him, he called out, "One" and the other called out "Two" and then "Three" and so on depending on the number of times he was to be lashed, whether it was 100, 50 or 200 as ordered by the judge.

Q: One, two, three, until the man confessed that he did it and said he was sorry?

#38M: They accepted. The thieves and the murderers who falsely claimed that that they'd never killed but when they were lashed, it was so painful that he confessed, "I killed. I did it."

Q: Did the wife accept the man back as her husband?

01:23:28

#38M: Most [women] did not live with him, but there were some who did. It was up to the wishes of the wife, but normally after a lashing occurred, they separated.

Q: Does the man have to still support his family, the children he might have had with her?

#38M: Well, if he was a good parent, he would support them, but if he was a bad one, he was not obliged to do so. Nobody forced him to do so.

Q: So how does the woman survive with two or three or five children?

01:24:52

#38M: Yes, the woman would face difficulties. There were instances where a penalty was recovered from the husband and paid to her. But others would meet a husband and she would be fine. If she was a good wife and her husband was bad and had left her—if the wife was good, she would find a husband. She could get married again.

Q: Two more questions. Does a woman ever get accused of being unfaithful and what happens to her?

#38M: It was similar [punishment] for the woman. If she was a bad woman and the husband was not to be blamed; if she was at fault, she might be lashed or fined.

Q: When you married your wife, did your family have to give her any animals to her family or did she give them to you?

01:26:18

#38M: As I told you earlier, one must give the girl a *shok* of gold, tea and *khata*. Besides that she was adorned with the turquoise and a full set of clothes by the boy's family. Her entire clothes and ornaments must be taken from the boy's home to her before [the wedding]. As nomads, some gave the girl 500-600 goats and sheep, 20-30 yaks, clothes, gold and silver neck pieces and other ornaments.

Q: So the girl's family gives the animals to the boy's family, but the boy's family does not give any animals, only the wedding dress. Are these very expensive wedding dresses with all kinds of beautiful jewelry, they are very valuable?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Very valuable. This is the strength that shows that our family is not very bad [poor]. So we have to prove that our family is very good, so they tried to give as much as...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...as they can afford.

Q: *Pa-la*, I'd like to go back to some of the wedding arrangements and when you gave your wife jewelry, can you tell us was this a large amount of money that was spent on these jewelry items and where did your family get them from?

#38M: The jewelry, like the necklaces of turquoise and coral, were acquired from the Indian territory of Khunu region of the Himalayan mountain range. My parents purchased the turquoise and corals and readied everything as I was young at that time. There were small earrings for both the ears called *agor* [points to ears], which were made of gold and studded with turquoise. Then there were gold bangles for the woman. Though the nomads did not have a lot of jewelry, there were silver ornaments called *chopchop* [points to chest area] that they wore. I feel that my parents were good and thanks to them, [my wife] was adorned with a lot [of jewelry].

Q: So your father and mother had been collecting and gathering for the wedding as a trousseau to give to the bride. What did she feel about these gifts?

01:30:44

#38M: Yes, she was happy.

Q: Do you have any idea in terms of money how valuable they were, like in terms of sheep what would it be or horses or something?

#38M: Oh, they were very valuable. In comparison to the present times, they were very expensive.

Q: Were they expensive in those days?

01:31:16

#38M: The full value of all [the jewelry] in those days might have been around 10,000 rupees.

Q: How much did the yaks cost then?

#38M: The yaks were very cheap then.

Q: How much was a yak?

01:31:34

#38M: At the time of my marriage, we used to sell the sheep to the Garsha at 15 rupees each; a yak was 40-50 rupees. And the best horse fetched about 1,500 rupees and other horses cost 1,000 or 800 or 900 rupees. They did not cost more than that.

Q: She not only received these wedding presents, she got to wear them on special occasions?

#38M: Yes, she wore them.

Q: You said your family—did they provide a tent for you and your wife after the wedding?

01:32:48

#38M: Yes.

Q: What did it look like and did you take her into the tent or who went in first? How did you do that?

#38M: There was a mattress laid out for us and a table. I lay down first; no, it was she who lay down first. Then I was led there and told to lie down. That was the first [night's] preparation.

Q: Did the ladies leave?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: You said that the ladies were kept inside the tent and then he was forced to go in.

Q: Why were you forced to go in? Didn't you want to go in?

01:34:03

#38M: When someone got married, there was shyness at first and one was instructed to lie there and do that.

Q: Of course, young boys would be shy. But in that tent, there's nobody else but you and your bride?

#38M: Nobody else was there.

Q: In your tradition, are the boy and the girl given any instructions about marital relations that first night, what they should do or not do?

01:34:55

#38M: They instruct that [the boy and girl] must sleep together. Other women would have taken her inside earlier and made her lie down. I would be guided by a relative or an uncle and told, “You must sleep there” and made us sleep together.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: There are certain traditions where the girl is led inside the tent and the other girls advise her while the boy is given advice by other boys. For example the girl is told, “Don’t let the boy touch you on the first night. If he does that, later he will become the dominating one. So it is important that he does not touch you on the first night.” And on the boy’s side, the advice was to touch her. What other advice was given?]

#38M: That was about it.

Q: So the girl is told not to let him touch you or have sex with you the first night because you will always be under him, but is the boy told he should try to have sex and he will be in charge?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They said the boy should have and do it [by] force and do that night; should not miss it.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He should not miss it. So already...They are given different instruction.

Q: The girl is told not to let the man dominate her and the boy is told he must dominate her on the first night. Do you want to tell us what happened to you?

01:37:34

#38M: We liked each other and she listened to whatever I said.

Q: Were you lovers earlier?

#38M: No, we were not lovers earlier.

Q: That was the first night and she had been advised not to let the boy touch her. Did she listen to whatever you said that day? Did she not protest?

01:37:57

#38M: The girls did not tell her that she must not let herself be touched because she was getting married. They advised her that day, “You must be loving and have a good relation.” They did not tell her that she must not let herself be touched. The girls did not tell her that while the boys advised me, “You must be loving and have a [sexual] relation.” They did not say that we should not have [sexual] relations. There was no problem that day.

If one did something to a girl who had no wish, then she would protest. However, this was arranged by the parents and advice already given earlier in the day before night fell. There was no protest that day.

Q: Often young boys have more opportunities to have experiences with sex before they get married. You know, young girls don't have those kinds of opportunities. So did you have more experience with sex before you were married?

#38M: The poor girl was shy at that time. Well, we boys were not shy. There was nothing other than that we should be loving and amiable. That was it.

Q: After this time together in your private tent, did you ever change and move in with the family or did they always stay in the private tent?

01:40:36

#38M: The parents, husband, wife and children did not sleep in the same quarters. All the couples, whether they were the parents or son and wife or daughter and husband had separate sleeping quarters. However, sleeping in a particular place did not mean that they had to sleep there everyday.

Q: Was the sleeping arrangement in one tent?

#38M: Everybody did not sleep in one tent. Some slept outside and some in tents put up elsewhere. It was the children and the likes of them that slept in one tent. However, two or three couples did not sleep [together].

Q: You can pitch your tent anywhere.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Anywhere.

Q: So now you are a married man and what happens after that? What happens in terms of children? Do you give birth and what happens with your work? Can you continue your story, please?

01:42:12

#38M: I had three sisters and, including me, we were four siblings. All my sisters were given away in marriage to different men. I lived together with my parents and had a son by the time we fled to India. He is the oldest and lives here now. We earned our livelihood as nomads rearing animals and I went to get goods to trade. We lived in that manner until '62. The Chinese arrived and Tibet was conquered in '59. Then the Chinese arrived and people of our village fled to Mon Tawang [Arunachal Pradesh, India]. We made our escape in '62.

Q: That sounds like a very big change from being a kind of a carefree young man who could enjoy teasing the girls and horseback riding and now you're married and you have much responsibility. Was that a big change for you and how did that feel?

#38M: My difficulties and worries grew at that time. However, until the arrival of the Chinese my loving parents were living at home. My parents lived at home. When I left my wife and parents home and went to trade, I did not have that much of an anxiety. Then the Chinese arrived and we made our escape and [before] we reached Indian territory, all our animals died in the snow. It was incredibly difficult and a hard struggle for me and a lot of anxiety. I faced immense difficulties then.

Q: So if I understand you, you were married in 1955. Is that correct? You were about 18?

01:45:36

#38M: That's right. I was 18 years old.

Q: You said you took over everything. Did your father continue to take care of the animals with his helpers and you took over the trade or did you do it together jointly?

#38M: [The animals] were taken care of by the hired help.

Q: Who managed them?

01:46:15

#38M: My father managed them.

Q: And what were you doing?

#38M: I attended meetings and went on trade and fetched goods during summer and autumn. In the wintertime, I too cared for the animals and managed the helpers. I instructed them to take the sheep to graze to this area and the yaks to that area. I concentrated on nomadic responsibilities.

Q: What kind of meetings and gatherings?

01:47:11

#38M: I told you about how a month was passed [in prayers and meetings]. Besides that there were other times that one was asked to assemble for meetings.

Q: For what?

#38M: There were certain customs in the community. Just like we have meetings here, it was similar to that. There were several such meetings.

Q: *Pa-la*, did you go on any trade missions at that point? Can you tell us where you went and how many people were with you?

01:48:06

#38M: I went to Chamray and Sathi in Ladakh. Then there was a place called Kyonamrung and Tatsang that are located in the Himachal area. There were Kyonam, Nyithi, Shawarung, Koterung and Gyanyima where I went to trade.

Q: For example, Ladakh was in the direction of Ladakh and the others were in Himachal. What about Nepal?

#38M: Shawarung and Koterung were in the Himachal area and in the vicinity of Nepal border. There was Dharjula, Shawala and Bithang which were trading points.

Q: They were on the border?

01:48:50

#38M: They were on the border of India and Tibet. We unloaded the salt in Indian territory.

Q: How many people would be in your group and how long did it take you and what months did you go?

#38M: We left in the 5th Tibetan lunar month and returned home in the 7th month. It took a little over two months to Ladakh. It took about a month and 20 days to Shawarung. Seven or eight men accompanied the 1,500-1,600 sheep. All of us rode horses. One could drive only sheep on the south route. However, to fetch grains from the Ladakh border like Chushul, Pangung and Ruthok, one could drive 50-60 or 100-200 yaks.

Q: Which was the direction where you drove sheep?

01:50:16

#38M: That was to Shawarung in Himachal where there were very bad [steep] mountain passes and only sheep could cross it. [The trade journey] to this region took about two months or a month and 20-25 days.

Q: The Ladakh side you could take yaks because the roads were better?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The roads are broad.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And where was the road narrow?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Himachal.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The Himachal side.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The roads were very narrow and all the rivers and very high mountains and this and that.

Q: And had you ever gone on any of these before and what was it like if it was the first time?

01:51:42

#38M: [Grimaces] It was difficult and worrisome to traverse in the valleys. There was danger of falling off the cliffs. The journey with yaks was easier because the ground was more even.

Q: When was the first time you went on a trade mission?

#38M: I was 17.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: That was before his marriage.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Before marriage.

#38M: Yes.

Q: Please paint me a picture. Tell me about the first time you went? What was it like? What did you see? Was it scary, exciting, tell me?

01:52:56

#38M: When I went on trade long ago I used to be very happy to travel to different places. However, I missed my parents on the journey and I suffered a lot. The first time I went to trade was at Garsha. There is Kyelang in Kulu Manali. From Kulu Manali, you reached Kyelang and then Kardhang. From Kardhang it was Dhortsam. Yes, there was a trade fair in Dhortsam and I went to the region of Garsha. The region of Garsha was so far that it took three months.

Q: Three month to and three months back?

#38M: No, no, a month and half on each route. It took three months from the time you left home to when you reached back. I faced the most difficult time then. I was young in age and missed my parents and my village.

Q: So your father was not with you. Who was with you?

01:54:07

#38M: There were others who were older to me and who are now no more. There was Wori, who was the father of Karma Yugyal. Including him, we were eight people.

Q: I'm sorry, but what was the name of the place that you went on your first trip?

#38M: Garsha.

Q: Where was it located?

01:54:36

#38M: It was at Garsha Dhortsam.

Q: In which direction was it?

#38M: If one traveled from Kulu Manaili, there was Garsha Kyelang and Kardhang. It was at a higher region.

Q: Was that on the Himachal side or the Ladakh side?

01:54:52

#38M: It was in Himachal near Manali.

Q: What were the roads like?

#38M: The roads were bad but better than Shawarung. If one continued further, you reached Ratangla and then Parala. Beyond Parala were Lachulung, Serchu and then Rupshosamen and Tsokar.

Q: Did you have any scares or dangerous experiences like falling or worrying about ...

01:55:51

#38M: I did not have any such bad experience.

Q: On that mission, what were they carrying on the sheep? What were they carrying on the backs of the sheep?

#38M: It was salt.

Q: Only salt?

01:56:24

#38M: Salt and the wool of sheep. First the salt was given in exchange of grain, rice and wheat. There were salt, wool, butter and cheese. The wool was cut and sold for money, while the salt was exchanged for grain. Trade was very good at Garsha.

Q: From where did you get the salt?

#38M: Salt was available in my region. There was no one who told you not to take the salt. One had to pay wages to the man who gathered the salt. Other than that you were free to take any quantity of salt you could.

Q: So you would buy the salt from somebody...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, no, just take the salt. For the laborers charge, we have to give... Some laborers were there. This was a fee but the salt was totally free.

Q: So someone would give you the salt and you would pay for their labor?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, pay for the labor.

Q: Okay, and then you exchanged it with grain.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Exchange it with grain.

Q: This is three months to come and go. Give me an idea of what you would do on an average day: morning, afternoon, evening, nighttime.

01:58:44

#38M: We got up early in the morning at 5 o'clock. We started out with the animals without drinking tea. At about 11 or 12 o'clock, we stopped and made a fire. We drank tea and had something to eat. Then we pitched a tent at 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening. That's how we did.

Q: Did you go very high altitudes over mountain passes?

#38M: Oh, yes. There were very high mountains.

Q: And since this was *pa-la*'s first time, did he have any difficulty breathing or walking?

02:00:07

#38M: There was no difficulty in breathing because there were mountains in my region. However, my heart was heavy and physically, it was difficult.

Q: At night was there all sitting around drinking *chang* or singing or anything, any kind of entertainment?

#38M: No, there was not. There was no *chang* at all. We drank tea and ate food; rice and meat or whatever we had. There was no *chang*. Yes, *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' we mostly ate *tsampa*. We mainly used *tsampa*; *tsampa* and tea.

Q: You said you were missing your mother and father, what were you missing about your home life?

02:01:35

#38M: I used to live happily at home talking to my parents. All the family members were together and we were happy. Now I was traveling far away to an alien country which I did not know and where I could not set eyes on my parents. I missed my parents and realized how happy I was with horse racing and felt that this [trade mission] was so difficult. I felt that way.

Q: Were these people in the group, were they not from your village or area or were they from other places?

#38M: No, they were those that lived around us.

Q: So you knew all the people.

02:02:37

#38M: Yes, I did. I knew them very well. We lived in one village.

Q: When you arrive, is it a city or a village or a town where you make the trade?

#38M: There were not many houses. The villagers brought their grain and rice and arrived at the trading point. It was like the fair ground in India. It was a fair like that. When the fair was organized, many traders arrived at that point.

Q: Who arrived there?

02:03:10

#38M: There were 500-600 people who arrived to buy salt. They were from Garsha, Zangkar, Khunu, Kyelang, Kardhang, Dhilingpa; all of them arrived. The salt was sold out within a few days. They brought the grain and other things with them.

Q: Was it at a village?

#38M: The main trading point was an open ground. Dhortsam was a place of trading point.

Q: What did you see for the first time that was surprising to you?

02:04:12

#38M: Once you reached the trading point, you see things you've never seen and people you've never seen. It was good and [I] felt happy.

Q: What kinds of things were colorful?

#38M: [People] I had never seen were the Garsha, well, I had seen Garsha in my village, but there were [people of] Khunu and Zangkar that were dressed differently and spoke differently. Then I saw things that were different and which were not available in my village.

Q: What things?

02:04:47

#38M: There were fabric and things that I had never seen.

Q: Did the people in your group, did they buy presents to take back to the family that were unusual and souvenirs?

#38M: Yes, they purchased.

Q: Did you buy?

02:05:40

#38M: Yes, I did.

Q: What did you buy?

#38M: Different types of fabric like *gonam porthi* ‘type of machine-made woolen cloth,’ various kinds of silver items, soaps and face lotion. We bought such things and when we reached there, we distributed them as presents to relatives and family members.

Q: Was face lotion important for a particular reason?

02:06:45

#38M: We used to buy it at that time.

Q: Why?

#38M: There was this thing called Vaseline. Our region of Changthang was cold, so in order that the face did not crack and also that the face become fair, we bought that. As for soaps, there was something called *burok* we could extract in our region with which one could wash any clothes but when we saw the soaps in India, they were better and scented. So to wash face and hair, we bought those without fail.

Q: If you didn’t buy Indian lotions for your skin, what did the nomads put on their face to prevent cracks? Could you tell us?

02:08:11

#38M: Poor things. They used the butter of *dri* ‘female yak.’ If one applied the *dri* butter, they [points to lips] did not crack.

Q: The sun is very bright everywhere in the Himalayas and in India. Did you do anything to protect your eyes from the sun?

#38M: The prevention of sunlight was eyeglasses. Those who possessed spectacles used them. If one did not have eyeglasses, there was nothing you could do. You carried on even if your eyes burned.

Q: When you go back home, are you carrying...is your load lighter or heavier? Can you make better time going back or is it same?

02:09:49

#38M: The load was the same. The number of loads one took was equal to what one brought back. On the return journey, one brought Indian fabrics, food grains and sweets equal to the previous loads. If one had taken a hundred loads, one returned with a hundred loads. If one had taken a thousand loads, one returned with a thousand loads.

Q: Were there no difference in the weight and effort?

#38M: No, there was not much difference. [During the journey] the salt that was laden on the animals had to be taken off and the animals rested twice in three days. It was difficult for the animals if we did not do that since salt was heavy. That was bad. However, the return journey was a little easier and the animals need not be rested once in three days.

Q: *Pa-la*, was the grain the main item? What were you trading besides grain?

02:11:07

#38M: Wheat, rice and all kinds of sweet stuff like brown sugar cubes. Every kind of thing was brought from India.

Q: When you did the exchange, was there a lot of bartering and bargaining or did you have a set price for the grain and the rice and sweets?

#38M: When the fair began in that place, the prices were fixed. There was a leader in Dhortsam and another from Tibet and they announced the prices that were fixed for all the traders. Nobody could bargain. Take salt for example; one load of salt was bartered for a load of grain. There were times when one had to give two loads of salt for one load of grain. There could be some range in quality but once one reached there; there was no bargaining of any sort. The price was the same for all.

Q: To move on, that was your first trip and then you got married and can you tell us, does your life change after you are married? Do you continue to make trips about once a year for trade?

02:13:14

#38M: Annually we made two or three trade journeys.

Q: Even after your marriage?

#38M: Yes, one went [to trade] even after you have a wife. That was for our survival. The nomads only had animals, butter and cheese. One must go to fetch grain once in autumn and another time in summer. Some people went during spring but I did not. I went without fail in summer and autumn to trade.

Q: How does married life suit you? Do you like having a wife and how is that experience?

02:14:14

#38M: It became more difficult after marriage. Now I must look after my child, wife and parents. One cannot roam as one wished. The struggle became more after marriage.

Q: When does your life begin to change because of the Chinese coming into your area?

#38M: Oh, when the Chinese arrived it was bad [shakes head]. We heard in my region that the Chinese appeared in Kham and Lhasa around '46. We'd heard that they arrived around '44-'46 and that His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama had left for China. The elders commented that that was not good and the Chinese would occupy [invade].

A small number appeared in our region of Thoe Ngari around '54-'55. At that time the Chinese were gentle. They were deceiving us. They told us, "Good. Good." and distributed *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coin' and cigarettes. They told me, "It is good if you join the army. Come and join." They were gentle then, when they appeared. Then they became worse and worse as their policy is destructive. They said that they were there to help the poor people and that "Your leaders and lamas are authoritative and not good." When they first appeared, they were gentle.

02:16:05

By '57-'58 they began to be more controlling and then in the year '59 the attack occurred and the whole of Lhasa was conquered. We heard that after the fall of Lhasa, His Holiness the Dalai Lama left for India. "Now this is not good. We will not be happy living here. The Chinese will not do any good. We must make an attempt to go to a foreign country," the elders remarked. Then in actual fact, the Chinese arrived in our village in '59. They were not gentle like they were earlier. They demanded that we surrender our weapons and the people of Gerge did not readily give up their weapons. The reason Gerge suffered serious attack was because of not surrendering the weapons immediately.

Q: Why did the Chinese want the Gerge area to surrender weapons?

#38M: The whole of Tibet was conquered. If one did not have weapons, there was no way one could win a war. Actually the whole of Thoe Ngari had surrendered their weapons. Then Gerge was told to give up their arms. The [people] of Gerge said, "It is not good to surrender our weapons. We cannot fight them [the Chinese] and they will do no good. Let us all flee towards the south from where we can go to the Himachal area through Dhoporung." Many families started out and the Chinese came to know of it. Their soldiers surrounded the area and blocked the way.

After that all our leader and lamas were captured and just a few could manage to escape. The reason we were treated the worst was on account of not surrendering the weapons. Otherwise in the region of Thoe Ngari, except for a few cases, they did not mistreat to that extent. If someone agreed to everything that they [the Chinese] said, it was fine. We became the worst with innumerable people of Gerge being captured. Many were sentenced and died in prison.

Q: So the Gerge people, were they all gathered in some location when the Chinese surrounded them?

02:21:27

#38M: At that time some of the people were ahead of others and they were the ones who faced the worst. There was a difference with some leaving earlier than others. We were among the last and our plight was slightly better. Those in the lead were all captured and their weapons seized. At that time there was no man who did not carry a gun and a sword. They seized everything and [people] surrendered. All the men were captured. That's how it happened.

The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] guerrillas were in Mustang at the Nepal border. We were fleeing towards that area. If we'd gone there, the Chinese...

Q: Why were you going towards the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#38M: The *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas were resisting the Chinese. There was such an armed unit then. The force was there and the Americans dropped guns from airplanes. However, our people were stupid and did not know to read and write English. By then the Chinese came to know and burned all the weapons. The Americans rendered a lot of help.

Q: Why were the people of Gerge going to the *Chushi Gangdrug*? Did they want to join the resistance?

02:22:44

#38M: We'd heard that there were weapons with the *Chushi Gangdrug* and we were going there with the intention to fight.

Q: How did the Gerge people get the weapons from the U.S.?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Gerge did not get weapons from the U.S.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The *Chushi Gangdrug* got the weapons, but they didn't know how to use them.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They did not. The Chinese came to know and burned them.

Q: To go back to *pa-la's* story, he said that they planned to escape but the Chinese troops surrounded them. Who planned to escape? Was it everybody in his area?

#38M: The plan was formulated by the district official, the Chief and other leaders of Gerge. They told everyone to leave and that no one could stay back. So everyone departed.

Q: How many people were planning to run away?

02:24:40

#38M: There might have been a little over a thousand people.

Q: And were they scattered all over or were they in one place?

#38M: Most of the people were together. but there were some in the lead. Most were together.

Q: When did the attack come, in the morning, at night? What did they do when they attacked?

02:25:18

#38M: It was in the day. It was during the day and it was at night. It was at all times as we were surrounded by their soldiers and outnumbered. There was no way for us to face such a huge army. So everything was seized [by the Chinese].

Q: What were people feeling? They saw the Chinese around them. So what did the people begin to think and feel?

#38M: [Scowls] Oh, there was extreme panic and everyone felt that that was terrible. Everybody was in panic and filled with anxiety.

Q: Did any people try to escape right there on the spot?

02:26:21

#38M: Yes, some people escaped. There were some who fired their guns and killed some Chinese. A few riders on horses managed to flee, but most people could not escape.

Q: So you mean the whole group of 1,000 was captured?

#38M: The entire 1,000 were not captured.

Q: How many were captured?

02:26:58

#38M: Most of the men in the leading group were captured. They [the Chinese] interrogated [them] for two or three days as to who were the leaders and the main people and wrote them down in a book. Then they gradually let the people pass by in the next two or three days. However, they captured for good about 66-100 of the main people.

Q: The 60-80 people who were taken were leaders of your community. Where did the Chinese take them?

#38M: They were taken to the region of Ngari Gar as it was known then. These days it is known as Ngari Tongchue.

Q: What is that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It is the district area under this ...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Under the Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Under the Chinese. A Chinese camp was there.

Q: Please *pa-la*, continue.

02:28:40

#38M: They [those captured] were taken away. All the nomad families were scattered and they [the Chinese] said that everybody must assemble for a meeting.

Q: Yes?

#38M: The Chinese said that they would hold meetings of all the people, saying, “If you do not have anyone to herd your yaks and sheep, our soldiers will look after your sheep and yaks. Every one of you must attend the meeting without fail.” When all of us assembled they asked, “Who is the one who told you that you must leave for the south? Who is your highest authority? Who is the highest lama? Who are the lamas and the others in the monastery?” They kept on interrogating everyday about who was who [in the community].

“We, the Chinese have come to assist those of you who are lagging behind. We will extend help to those who are poor.” So the meetings went on for months through the summer. Then one day they brought those that had been captured to the village and told some of the poor people, “Oppose them.” There were certain disreputable people in our community who were advised by them [the Chinese] to oppose them saying, “You will be made a leader. You will be promoted to a high position. You will be given money by us. You must become a leader. You should take the post of a *turing*.” There were *turing* and *shading* which were the many names for officials in the Chinese language. “You will receive such positions. You seem ignorant now. You have been oppressed by the rich. You should oppose them.” That’s how the protests took place.

Q: What did they ask the low class or the poor people to do?

02:31:52

#38M: The Chinese said, “If you oppose them, we will give you presents. The properties of the wealthy will be confiscated and given to you.” They distributed a few but not all the [properties]. They gave away a little just to deceive them. The beggars anticipated receiving the wealth and opposed.

Q: Did they do it? Did the poor...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The poor people did it.

Q: And what happened to the wealthy people?

#38M: All the people gathered in a circle and the Chinese leader sat there [points to the right] and an interpreter sat there [points in front]. Then they [the poor people] yelled and opposed them [the wealthy]. Some beat them, pulled at the hair a little and shook them. Then after a day or two they were taken away to Ngari Gar and locked up.

#38M: [Interrupts translation] Yes, *thamzing*.

Q: The poor people were told to accuse the rich people of wrong doing?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, wrong-doing. They were asked to do.

Q: And then they were forced to hit the rich people?

02:34:01

#38M: Yes, they were. They were forced to do so.

Q: Were they ordered by the Chinese to do so?

#38M: They were ordered to do so. However, the Chinese did not order them in front of the public. Earlier they would have made a selection of officials saying, “You are a *turing*. You are a *suji*” and so on. Then they [the Chinese] would have been taken them [the poor people turned into officials] to a separate tent at night and instructed, “Tomorrow when that leader is brought to the public gathering, you must say this and do that. You must humiliate him. If you do that, you will be given presents and promoted to a high position. The Chinese government will give you a salary.” They never told them that in front of the public.

The next day when the public had assembled, those people who had been instructed the night before would do the accusation. That was how it was done.

Q: *Pa-la*, what did the Chinese teach the poor people when they were out of sight, away from the other people?

02:35:35

#38M: To the lamas they said, “Religion is not good. You must not practice dharma. It is a waste to make offerings of butter lamps. You light butter lamps in the monasteries.” [To the people they said,] “Lamas and leaders are held in high esteem and you salute them. You do not have to do that. The reason you do not possess any assets and properties is because they consumed them. Otherwise what is the reason for your being poor and their being wealthy? You must subject them to *thamzing*. If you subject them to *thamzing*, you will receive their wealth.”

They called people who had [earlier] received lashings and taught them to say, “I have been lashed. Why did you lash me? You did so illegally.” So in that way they were tutored the whole night and given training to hit, by using dummies. The next morning when all the public had gathered, the prisoner was brought and they were made to accuse him.

Q: *Pa-la*, did you see this with your own eyes?

#38M: Yes, I have seen.

Q: Who was subjected?

02:38:02

#38M: My paternal uncle called *Chikhyab* ‘District Official’ Yugyal was subjected. Then there was one reincarnate lama, who is a close relative of yours [to the interpreter]. There

were also Nangchen Tendel who was our army leader and then there was someone called Nam, a relative of mine. Oh, then there were *Chikyab Golo*, *Chikyab Chonzin*, *Chikyab Kalhasum*, who was the father of Sonam Gonpo. All of them were subjected [to *thamzing*].

Q: Did this happen in one day or over a period of time?

#38M: Each one was subjected to a day.

Q: How many people were subjected in a day?

02:38:50

#38M: Two or three people were subjected in a day.

Q: *Pa-la*, could you explain, like did they do it in the morning or in the afternoon and how long did it last and did everybody have to come or just the poor people?

#38M: Some people who were [selected] to do the *thamzing* said, “I cannot do the *thamzing*. I cannot do it. He is my boss. I am poor because that is my misfortune. I served him and he paid me for the service. They gave me food when I did not have anything to eat. How can I subject [him] to *thamzing*?”

“Go away from here. Go away from the meeting. You are supporting these people. You are not good,” said [the Chinese] and he was blacklisted. Some of them were removed from their leadership position. Then there were some [poor people] who lied and claimed that they were subjected to acts that they never were. They conducted *thamzing* and received presents and a promotion.

On some days, four to five people came forward [to conduct *thamzing*] while on other days there were eight or nine. On some days not even one or two people came forward. When *thamzing* conductors were called for, everyone sat quietly [bows head]. Not everyone came forward to conduct a *thamzing*.

Q: Did everyone in the village come to the meeting?

02:40:09

#38M: The whole of Gerge assembled for the meetings. People of each village like Thingsi or Shongpa must assemble and subject its men to *thamzing*. There were many people who refused to do and sat like this [bows head]. At times only three or four men arrived to conduct a *thamzing*. Sometimes two people came forward and at other times three or four.

Q: Even after being trained?

#38M: They were trained. When the training was imparted, there were 20-30 people, but not many came forward to conduct [thamzing].

Q: So some of the poor people said, “I cannot do it because they gave us food. They gave us work.”

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Work, shelter and everything.

Q: And shelter and everything. What did the Chinese do if the person wouldn't do it?

02:41:56

#38M: The Chinese did not tell him anything in public. Later he was taken away and told, "You will receive a *thamzing* yourself. You act like a bodyguard and supporter of the leaders and lamas. You are not good. You do not...for the Chinese government." He would be blacklisted and later penalized.

Q: So he could become a victim too of the struggle session if he didn't co-operate. *Pa-la*, did you actually see your uncle in the struggle session?

#38M: Yes, I saw. I could not look and sat like this [bows head]. They did not order me to do the *thamzing*. Only two or three people from our village came forward to conduct the *thamzing*.

Q: Was your uncle more wealthy than your family or about the same?

02:43:57

#38M: My uncle was wealthier.

Q: Did he actually see the high lama in a struggle session?

#38M: I witnessed one lama while the other was not subjected to *thamzing*. I witnessed one.

Q: What was his name, please?

02:44:41

#38M: The name of the lama was Tulku Dhonam.

Q: What exactly did they do in the struggle session?

#38M: The poor people said, "You did not allow us to hunt. You did not allow us to hunt near the monastery citing punishment under the law. You were very authoritative as a lama." There were four or five people who subjected him to *thamzing*.

Q: How did they beat him? With their hands or sticks or what did they do?

02:45:47

#38M: They did not use sticks. They pointed to him with their fingers and grabbed these [touches clothes]. They did such things.

Q: What did the lama do when this was happening?

#38M: The lama did not say anything. He did not utter a word.

Q: What did *pa-la* feel when he saw his lama being treated like this?

02:46:24

#38M: I felt incredibly sad that such things were being done to a lama we held in such high esteem and that times have upturned and the Chinese were really bad. I wondered when I would be able to escape to India.

Q: So there was the rich people who were in the struggle session and the poor people were doing it. Was there a large group in the middle section?

#38M: There were some bad people in the middle group. Actually every man thinks differently. There were some poor people who did not participate in the *thamzing*, while there were some not so poor people, who due to certain grudge, claimed that they [the wealthy] had done acts that they had not and accused them.

Q: And so *pa-la*, you said, “I see my lama who is my protector being beaten; I think I better leave soon because who is here to protect me?” So what did you do next with your family?

02:48:36

#38M: Except for the thought of escaping to India, there was no feeling of attachment for our wealth or our animals or our village because of what they were doing. We felt nothing but, “The Chinese will do us no good. When would we be able to flee to India or to some foreign country?”

Q: And what happened next?

#38M: During that year, meetings were held for three months: the 6th, 7th and 8th lunar months. The Chinese held meetings for the entire three months.

Q: Yes?

#38M: Meetings were held collecting all the people of Gerge. The leaders had been captured. It was in the year ‘59. When the attacks occurred in our region, the year was ‘60. When the meetings came to an end in three months, the nomads requested them, “The animals have nowhere to go. There’s no grass. What can we do? Should we beg? We have to take care of our animals.” Then they said we could go to our respective areas. We returned to our place. Then eight or nine families planned; we were 12 families of Gerge Changthoe who fled together to Ladakh.

Q: About how many people were in that group?

02:51:16

#38M: There were 5-6 people in some families and 8-9 in other families.

Q: How many were there approximately? 50, 60, 20?

#38M: There might have been a little less than 100.

Q: Was there a reason you chose Ladakh instead of India? They could have gone...

02:51:49

#38M: To Ladakh? We knew the way to Ladakh as we'd taken the trade route. We trekked through Jangpa, Rawang, Chakrang and reached the border area of Karshung. There was an Indian army division at Karshung and Dhungti. When the Chinese arrived in Tibet, countless number of Indian soldiers was dispatched to the border. Those responsible for issuing us with passes did so immediately since His Holiness the Dalai Lama had reached India.

Q: When you were escaping with a hundred people, what did you take with you into exile?

#38M: We drove several horses and yaks. We could not bring most of the goats and sheep and they had to be left back home. We drove a small number along with the horses and yaks.

Q: You couldn't bring your sheep?

02:53:29

#38M: We brought a small number, but half were left behind.

Q: *Pa-la*, what happened to your whole collection of animals? Your herds, what happened to them?

#38M: We arrived at the nomadic regions of Ladakh like Wobchok, Sathok, and Samay with our animals. We let them [graze] there. However, due to the huge number of refugees and the lack of space in Ladakh—the region was not like the comfortable nomadic area of our region—many thousands of animals died there when it snowed in winter. They could not be put to use.

Q: You brought your animals to the Ladakh border and left them in others' care?

02:54:22

#38M: No, they were not left in others' care. We lived there and took care of them, but all of them perished. We lived for three years at Jangkhu, which was not in proper Ladakh, but at the border. Jangkhu is a nomadic region and within those three years, we lost all our animals.

Q: Were you able to bring all your animals [from Tibet]?

#38M: We'd brought most of them, but there were 500-600 sheep that were left in the care of others.

At that time, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was in Dharamsala [Himachal Pradesh] and the United States, England, and other foreign countries provided a lot of food rations and

other aid in Ladakh. Together with help from India, we were brought to a camp and given food rations and tents. We lived three years in Ladakh.

Q: When you left Tibet, do you remember what year that was?

02:56:14

#38M: I was 23 years old.

Q: You were married then. You were married at 18, so about five years.

#38M: [Nods]

Q: Your wife came with you?

02:56:34

#38M: Yes.

Q: Did you have any children at that time?

#38M: One of the children was born in Tibet and the other was born in '61 when we arrived at the border of India.

Q: Son or daughter?

02:56:54

#38M: The oldest is a son and the second a daughter.

Q: Right on the border?

#38M: [She] was born after we reached Indian territory at the Ladakh border.

Q: Did your wife bring all of her beautiful jewelry from her wedding?

02:57:23

#38M: [We] were able to bring them, but all our animals died and we were left with no money. We had nothing and labored as coolies, so we sold most of our belongings and my wife's jewelry.

Q: You were forced to sell all your jewelry and you lost all of your animals. How many had you brought with you from home? How many animals?

#38M: [I] might have brought nearly 2,000 sheep and managed to bring 70-80 yaks. That was it. Within two years they were completely wiped out.

Q: Did all the 70 yaks too die?

02:58:28

#38M: Oh, the yaks died first. They fared worse than the goats and sheep. They were all killed by the snow. It snowed for 8-9 days and nights and there was no grass to eat in Ladakh.

Q: What was that like for you, a man who was such a care-giver of animals to see your animals starve and freeze to death?

#38M: [I] felt very miserable at that time and wondered what to do. We were living in the nomadic region with our animals and there was no one to help us. There were no drivable roads or anything. When our animals perished in three years, officials from Dharamsala arrived and so did aid from abroad and a camp was established in Ladakh. Tents and food rations were provided there.

People of foreign countries have been very beneficial. When we were living in our land, the United States dropped guns and provided weapons for the *Chushi Gangdrug*, but our people did not know to use them and the Chinese came to know about it and did those things [burned the weapons]. And after we reached here, there were bags of wheat and sugar with "U.S." written on them that arrived in Ladakh. We knew that those aids came from foreign countries. It was written in English. The Indian government provided a lot of assistance. After the camp was established, we lived in Ladakh for three years. After three years, we were told that we must leave for the place called Karnataka in India and so 700 people came here.

Q: You said that your next child was born right over the border, so in your journey from your home to the border that must have taken in about a month, your wife was about to give birth to a baby. How was that journey for her?

03:01:41

#38M: There were immense difficulties during the journey. There was the fear of encountering the Chinese and the animals that carried loads did not know the way. [We] faced a lot of struggle. At the time we faced enormous difficulties.

Q: Well, this story we could continue for a long time, but I think you need to take a rest. We're going to take a break and maybe you could before we finish, *pa-la*, what was it like for you to sit here today and tell us this story about your life? What was this experience like?

#38M: It is not a problem for me at all. Tibet was forcefully seized and occupied by the Chinese and these days people from abroad, whether you are Americans or English or whomever, you may have faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama and render a lot of help, which is most appreciative. If it would help the cause of Tibet, it is nothing for me to sit here for a few hours and talk, but I am thankful to you for your help and support. Even if I were to sit here the whole day, I would not feel any difficulty if it would be of help for the cause.

Our leaders, Tibetan people of our flesh and blood, and our country have all been invaded. Even though they forcefully seized, we were helpless because of the disparity in the

supremacy between the nations and the intelligence of its peoples. However, these days due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, all the children have the opportunity to study and go abroad. I feel extremely happy and good if the world could come to know about the issue of Tibet.

Q: Thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to add about why it's important to do these interviews to know about the history of Tibet? Is there anything else he wants to add?

0305:27

#38M: I cannot think of anything else to say.

Q: Please sing a song. Please sing a song in praise of His Holiness.

#38M: Yes?

Q: Please sing a song in praise of His Holiness or any other song of your region.

03:05:43

#38M: I have forgotten the songs.

Q: Just sing one song, a short one.

#38M: In the old days, there was a song: *Tashi Lungpay Phu la* [In the region of Tashi]

Q: Please sing it.

03:06:14

#38M: [Laughs] I do not sing well.

Q: That does not matter.

#38M: [Recites the following verse]

***Tashi lungpay phu la
Ser kyi khang chung gyap sung
Gyalwa Yeshe Norbu
Ngathang gyel sung
Ngathang bod kyi choe si dhar sung***

***[In the region of Tashi
A shower of golden snow has fallen
His Holiness the Dalai Lama
Saw [him] as before
The religious government of Tibet flourished as before]***

Q: Please sing it.

#38M: [Tries to recollect] There was a song I used to sing. [Tries the words] Kargyu Gongmay...I have forgotten everything.

Q: That's okay.

03:07:03

#38M: I have forgotten all the songs. I used to know to sing earlier, but I have not sung for many years.

Q: Is there anything else in your story that we forgot to ask that you think is important to be included, something little or something big?

#38M: No, I feel it has been extremely good. You have asked in a leisurely manner and written them down. I feel grateful and wish to thank you.

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

03:08:06

#38M: No, there would not be. I have spoken the truth and there will be no problems.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project or do you want to use an alias?

#38M: You can use the name. There is no variation [in what I have spoken].

END OF INTERVIEW