

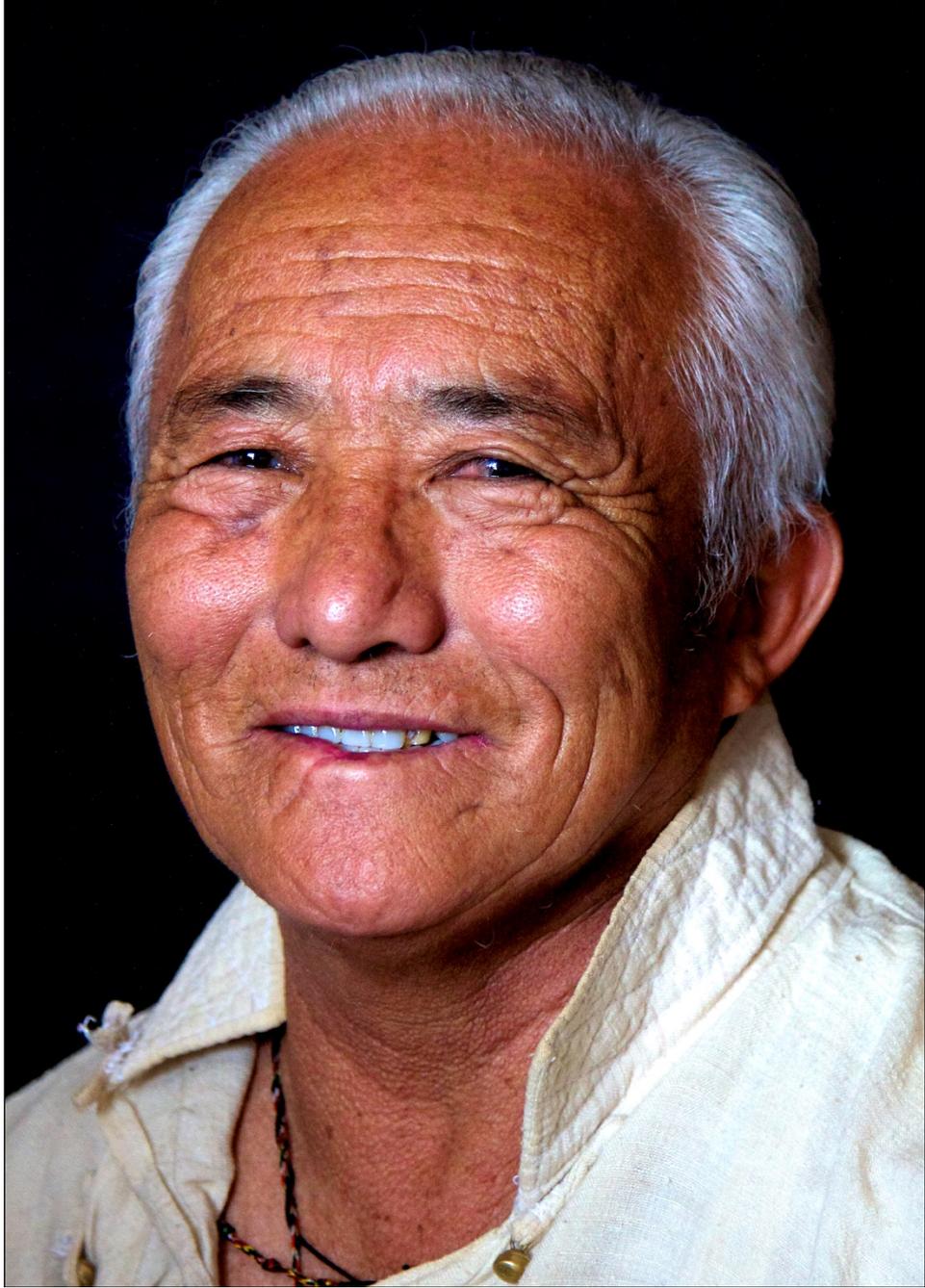
# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #39D – Tashi Samphel  
May 20, 2012

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #39D
2. Interviewee: Tashi Samphel
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Ngari
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: May 20, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 55 min
12. Interviewer: Martin Newman
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Tashi Samphel was born in Ngari, which is very close to Xinjiang, China. There were eight members in his family of *samadok* 'farmers and herders.' He spent his early days playing games, swimming and helping to graze sheep and yaks. Besides working as a farmer, his father was also a salt trader and a tailor. His father bartered the salt for grains in Ladakh, India. Tashi Samphel describes the process of collecting salt from a large water body and transporting it on sheep. He talks about the various types of taxes like salt tax, labor tax and farmers' tax which the common people paid to the government, monasteries and landowners. Once each year all the sheep owned by the monasteries were brought together by the herders for shearing and the wool was collected and purchased by Indians.

Tashi Samphel talks about the first appearance of the Chinese, who everyone in his isolated village believed were good people and very helpful. However, gradually the Chinese began to create friction within the Tibetan community and then arrested the prominent people. All the villagers were called to meetings and *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' were initiated where the poor accused the leaders of oppressing them. Tashi Samphel tells that many of the people of Ngari decided to escape together and travelled to Ladakh with their goats and sheep. He gives a touching description of seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama for the first time in Dharamsala, whom he had believed was a deity and not a person in flesh and blood.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Childhood memories, herding, nomadic life, trade, environment/wildlife, taxes, first appearance of Chinese, *thamzing*, life as a refugee in India.

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## **Interview #39D**

**Interviewee: Tashi Samphel**

**Age: 73, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Martin Newman**

**Interview Date: May 20, 2012**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:11

**Interviewee #39D: Tashi Samphel.**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama has asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, 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?

**#39D: Yes.**

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

**#39D: Okay, and thank you.**

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, also let me know.

**#39D: Okay. Thank you.**

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

**#39D: There will be no problems for me.**

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

00:02:39

**#39D: Okay, and thank you.**

Q: *Aku-la* ‘respectful term for paternal uncle’...

**#39D: [Laughs]**

Q: Can you tell me where you were born?

**#39D: I was born in the place called Ngari.**

Q: And where is Ngari?

**#39D: Ngari is in the north, in the direction of Xinjiang. There is the [place] called Xinjiang under China. [It] is close to Xinjiang.**

Q: It must be very cold too.

**#39D: It is extremely cold. In general Tibet is very cold due to its high altitude.**

Q: How many people were in your family?

**#39D: I have seven members in the family, five children and the parents.**

Q: How many family members were there when you were a small child in Tibet?

00:04:01

**#39D: I see. At that time my mother had 16 siblings.**

Q: Did [your] mother have 16 children?

**#39D: No, my grandmother had 16 children and they were the family members in my grandmother's home.**

Q: You have 16 siblings or your mother had 16 siblings?

**#39D: My mother had 16 siblings.**

Q: How many siblings do you have?

**#39D: I had seven siblings.**

Q: So how many people actually lived in your home?

**#39D: Do [you] mean in my parents' home?**

Q: Yes.

**#39D: In [my] parents' home?**

Q: Yes, when you were small and living in Tibet.

**#39D: When I was small, [I] was at grandmother's home.**

Q: When you were a child in Ngari, how many people were in your home?

00:06:02

**#39D: You mean my family members?**

Q: Yes. There were [your] father, mother and you, and how many family members?

**#39D: There were around 10 family members. Ten. There were 10.**

Q: Ten in the family. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**#39D: There were five brothers and one sister. There was only one sister.**

Q: Were there six children?

**#39D: Yes.**

Q: Not seven children?

**#39D: There were seven. There were five sons.**

Q: And one daughter. So that's six.

**#39D: Yes, [I] made a mistake.**

Q: It seems it's six children.

**#39D: Yes, [I] think so. Yeah, it is six.**

Q: Five brothers, one sister and then mother, father and...

00:07:14

**#39D: There were father and mother's siblings. That was it.**

Q: Were there grandfather and grandmother in the family?

**#39D: Grandfather and grandmother lived separately. They had a separate home.**

Q: What did your father do for work?

**#39D: Father used to travel on trade in Tibet. [He] engaged in trade, taking salt from Tibet to places like Ladakh and Khunnu and bartered the salt for grains. [He] traveled on such work. Besides that, father tailored clothes for all the family members. Father stitched girls' clothes and clothes for the boys. We also owned land which father tilled. The rest of us worked as nomads. We were *samadok* 'farmers and herders.'**

Q: Can you remember what it was like to sit in your home with your father stitching clothes and the particular...maybe the smoke from the fire or maybe a particular kind of scent in the air? Can you recall all that?

**#39D: There was no particular smell as such but when one went to the mountains to herd sheep, different kinds of grass and flowers grew on the mountains and there were various kinds of sweet scents. The ground smelled sweet, the air was clean and the ground was clean. One could not find a speck of dirt. It was incredibly clean. During summer when one went to graze sheep, there was the sweet scent of grass.**

Q: Can you still smell that now?

00:10:50

**#39D: [Laughs] There is a certain scent here these days that reminds [me]. A white flower, which is used in the preparation of medicine, blooms at this time. It is a plant with thorns and smells very sweet. When [I] smell this fragrance it reminds me of the scent of Tibet.**

Q: What kind of feeling does that call up inside you?

**#39D: I feel, “When will [I] get to go back to my country?”**

Q: Yes, that’s a good question. When you were a child in Ngari, what were the favorite things you liked to do when you were a young child?

**#39D: What one liked to do most as a child was to play. [Laughs] One had the wish to play.**

Q: Yes.

**#39D: One did not stay home and went everywhere to play. There were many other children and [we] ran together all over the place. [We] were so engrossed in playing that [we] would not get lunch.**

Q: What were you liking to play so much that you forgot about eating?

00:13:02

**#39D: We made a fireplace like in a home. Someone acted as the father, some as children and someone as mother. A fireplace was constructed and [we] pretended to make tea and pour into cups. [We] pretended to drink tea and eat *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and *pa* ‘dough made from *tsampa* and tea.’ [We] played such games. Some pretended to herd sheep and some yaks while some stayed home like parents. [Laughs] Such games were played.**

Q: Did you ever get into trouble with your playing?

**#39D: [I] did not face any trouble. I used to swim a lot in lakes formed by rains. [I] have spent a lot of time swimming in water in Tibet. [I] had cracks formed here [bends down, gestures off camera] from overstaying in the water and used to cry from the burning pain.**

Q: Did the water cause cracks?

**#39D: Yes, because the water was bad. It was stagnated water. [I] loved water and swam in it and later developed cracks on the skin. There would be bleeding and [I] used to cry from the burning pain when oil was applied to it. [I] used to cry out. [Laughs]**

Q: What would your parents say to you then?

00:15:18

**#39D: [My] parents would not say anything but, “You must not swim in the water. It is bad water, so do not swim in it.” [I] was very small at that time. When I turned older, there was no time to swim because [I] would be sent to graze yaks and sheep. During summer the kids and lambs were separated and the children were given the task of grazing them. The adults left at night for *domadhon* and brought [the animals] back at noon. And then they were milked.**

Q: What’s meant by *domadhon*?

**#39D: *Domadhon* means that since the animals must be milked during summertime, they were taken to the hills very early in the morning and brought back at noon. The children grazed the kids and lambs. The mothers that were [grazed] separately were milked at noontime. After milking was done, we would be told, “Let [the calves] go.” We let [them] lose and the kids and lambs ran to their respective mothers. Humans milked most of it, but there was still some left and the little animals ran to their mothers to suckle. Poor things, they sped away.**

Q: Was Ngari a big place or a small place?

**#39D: It was a vast area. In general the country of Tibet is vast with little population. There were vast tracks of barren regions. In general the region was vast but due to fewer people, there were huge barren regions.**

Q: Did you live in a tent or in a constructed house or did you move around from place to place? What was your living situation?

00:18:23

**#39D: The one responsible for farming the land like the father lived on the farm where there was a house. However, those like us that worked as nomads must move where there was good grass. There were no houses but [we] carried tents, tents made from yak hair called *ba*. [We] carried tents and went in search of good grass and could not remain in one place. There were different places for the summer and winter.**

Q: Did you ride horses then?

**#39D: There were horses and [we] did ride them but there were not many horses. Some families owned many while others did not. It was not the same for everyone.**

Q: Did you have Tibetan dogs to guard your flock?

**#39D: Dogs were vital. It was a must for the nomads to own dogs because there were wolves. Wolves approached at night when people would not be aware. Without dogs, the wolves would devour the animals at night. Each nomad must own two or three dogs. Every family owned two or three dogs. There were huge dogs that were as large as sheep, some with flabby mouths and grand looking. It was imperative to own dogs in Tibet because without them, wolves would devour all the animals. [The sheep and goats] were enclosed outside in the pen at night and without dogs, the wolves that approached at night would make off with them. It was like that.**

Q: Were they fierce as well?

00:21:00

**#39D: Yes, [they] had droopy mouths. [They] must be secured in the daytime though set free at night because of the wolves. [They] must be chained during the day for [they] lunged at people. Then [they] were tethered. The dogs sprang in the air; just looking at them terrified one with their hanging mouths. In case one got loose, it lunged at people without hesitation. It just pounced. [They] were secured with chains.**

Q: Would they ever attack anyone in the home or just outside?

**#39D: [They] only attacked people from outside and not the family members. Once accustomed, [they] did not attack an outsider who may spend a long time in the home. After becoming familiar, they did not attack.**

Q: At nighttime after work and after food, what did the family do? Did everybody just go to sleep or was there any time together to tell stories or entertain each other?

**#39D: It happened like this. During daytime we were all scattered and all the family members gathered in the evening. After all the family members had gathered, food was eaten. During summer there was no meat. There was no meat at all during summer because animals were not killed then. [We] drank dairy products like curd and buttermilk and ate *pa*. *Thukpa* ‘noodle soup’ was eaten during wintertime, like gruel made from *tsampa* and cheese. Because of the cold weather in winter, *thukpa* was the main food.**

**After food was over and all the family members were assembled, either father or mother began the Dolma ‘Praises to the 21 Taras,’ which was chanted three times, and also *benza guru* ‘mantra: *om ah hung vajra guru Padma siddhi hung.*’ After prayer recitation was over, the children went to sleep around the sheep while father and mother slept in the tent.**

Q: What’s around the sheep?

00:23:47

**#39D: [The children] went to sleep around the enclosure.**

Q: The children?

**#39D: Yes, all the children. Each one took [his/her] blankets and went to sleep near the sheep. [They] slept at the edge of the sheep [pen].**

Q: Did your parents ever tell you stories or funny stories or something to make you laugh?

**#39D: Yes, [they] did. The story of Ling Gesar [king of the legendary empire called Ling, who was associated with a series of mythical stories and epic poems] was told very often in Tibet. Then there were the sweet tales about the Monpa boy and three sisters called Serlo Dolma, Ngulo Dolma and Dhunglo Dolma, but most people told stories of Ling Gesar. I used to listen a lot to the stories of Ling Gesar. When I went to herd sheep, [I] used to sing the Ling Gesar story. [I] loved that very much.**

Q: Was it in the form of a song?

**#39D: Yes, the story of Ling Gesar is sung as a song. It was sung in a tune.**

Q: Do you still remember any of the Ling Gesar story?

00:26:14

**#39D: [I] can still remember a little. At times I tell them to my children and they like it.**

Q: Can you sing a little?

**#39D: [Laughs] The story of Ling Gesar?**

Q: Yes.

**#39D: [I] forget now.**

Q: [You] can sing just a short one.

**#39D: Gonpo Palay says...in this story, Ling Gesar goes to vanquish the demon Alkyung.**

Q: Yes?

**#39D: [Ling Gesar] goes to vanquish the demon Alkyung.**

Q: Who?

**#39D: The demon Alkyung.**

Q: Demon?

**#39D: There was a demon called Alkyung who [Ling Gesar] went to conquer. It was in the direction of Manali [Himachal Pradesh, India]. Those areas were supposed to be the land of the demon Alkyung. Manali and its nearby regions are said to be the land of the demon Alkyung where people wear black waist cords that are nine meters long. When he went to**

conquer it [the demon], the wife of the demon Alkyung served him [Ling Gesar] *chang* ‘home-brewed beer’ laced with poison that made [him] forget [his] country. [He] forgot [his] country. There were many of his *padhue* like Gonpo Palay, Gongpa Tagyay and many others.

Q: What were they?

00:27:55

**#39D:** They were the ministers, the *padhue*. The *padhue* were like soldiers. They were living in Ling while he [Ling Gesar] went to Hor to vanquish the demon Alkyung. Then Gonpo Palay says, “Everyone who travels returns but our traveler has still not returned. It has been nine years, nine months and nine days.”

Q: Who said that?

**#39D:** Gonpo Palay said it.

Q: Gonpo Palay?

**#39D:** Gonpo Palay.

Q: Who was Gonpo Palay?

**#39D:** He was one of the *padue*, one of the ministers of Ling Gesar, like a soldier or a minister.

Q: Would [you] be singing this story?

**#39D:** This used to be sung but I cannot sing it well.

Q: It’s okay, please sing it.

**#39D:** [Laughs]

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Shall I translate this and then will [you] sing?

[Interviewee to interpreter]: [You] can translate it. [I] cannot sing well.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: [You] sing first and then I’ll translate this.

00:29:20

**#39D:** Okay. [Sings]

*Lu aladhi thala reya*  
*Thala dhi ngak kyi kulu reya*  
*Sa dhidha sa-ngo mashe naya*  
*Sa dhi ling gar tamo reya*

*Mi ngada nga-ngo mashe naya  
Nga ling gar gopo bale yinya*

[Approximate translation:  
*Oh, the song Aladhi Thala!  
The ancient oral tune of Thala  
If you do not recognize this land  
It is the land of the great Ling Gar  
And if you do not recognize the person  
It is I, the old keeper of Ling Gar!]*

Q: Very good. Very good. So that leads me to...Thank you for singing that.

**#39D: [Joins palms] Is [the interview] over?**

Q: So that leads me to asking about again in your childhood what was your relationship to the local monastery? Did you participate in activities there or what kinds of things did you do?

**#39D: There were monasteries. Our district was known as Ruthok Zong and the district headquarters and monasteries were located together there. During the *guthor* ‘offerings on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month’ on the 29<sup>th</sup> day, all the people went to view it. Everybody went to see the *guthor* when *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks’ was performed. It took place in the 12<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month, on the 29<sup>th</sup> day. Except for one or two people in a family who grazed sheep, the rest went to watch the *guthor* and *cham*. When the *cham* performers arrived, [people] lay below them. [People] lay on the path and the performers stepped over in their costumes and masks.**

Q: On the path?

**#39D: [They] lay on the path because that is supposed to take care of all the obstacles of one year. [People in] Tibet are staunch believers in the dharma.**

Q: That takes place once a year?

00:33:33

**#39D: Yes, it is once a year.**

Q: Was there only one *cham* dance or was there a different *cham* dance for a different reason?

**#39D: There were no different *cham* performed in our region. Only one type of *cham* was performed during the *guthor*, which everyone went to watch. It was not performed anywhere else.**

Q: Did you ever consider becoming a monk yourself?

**#39D: [I] did not feel that way.**

Q: When did you hear about the Chinese or anything that there were Chinese in the area?

**#39D: I think [I] was 14-15 years old then. The older people said that the Chinese had arrived. Why had the Chinese come? “They are very good people who have come to help Tibet. [They] have come to provide help. The Chinese have come to help all the poor people. [They] are very good people,” the older people said. “The Chinese are giving *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins’ and wheat flour free of cost. [They] are incredibly good people,” [the older people] said.**

**Much later when [I] saw [the Chinese] arrive, [they] were soldiers and ordered all the people for a meeting and said, “We have come to help you. Express whatever problems you face. We have come to help you.” Our *ba* were set up and the soldiers went and patched the little tears in the tents. [They] were misleading [us] by trying to be very good. When [we] went to herd sheep, some soldiers accompanied and helped graze sheep. [They] came armed with guns.**

00:36:26

**[People] commented that [they] were very good. Meetings were called everyday and [they] commented about how bad the past leaders were, how much sufferings [they] had caused, how [the Chinese] would bring equality among us and how bad the leaders were. Then [they] said that the United States was bad and that it was imperialist and that India was very good. [Laughs] [The Chinese] said that and waged a war in '62! What an irony!**

Q: I want to get more details in a few moments about life when the Chinese came, but before we do that I want to come back to...you said your father was a salt trader and I wanted to know, can you tell me more about what that was about, what a salt trader did, where did he go, were there different kinds of salts, anything you can tell us would be helpful.

**#39D: Okay. In our region salt was gathered from three saltpans called Tsakha, Mindum Tsakha and Dathong Tsakha. What does the salt look like? Salt look like sugar candies that we have here. There was another kind of salt that was reddish. These were for our consumption. It was used in the preparation of tea. The salt was of very fine quality. Salt is found in water and must be claimed from it. At the bottom was the *tsadhen*. *Tsadhen* is a hard substance under water. Salt is formed in the water.**

**When salt is collected like this [makes sweeping movement with right hand], it makes a sound like that of sugar candies. [The salt] must be removed. There were huge *tsangmar*, huge vessels in which [salt] was taken out [from the water]. It [salt] must be piled like this [joins both hands to indicate a conical heap]. The salt was removed and kept like that in heaps. Each one marked [his] pile. There were many people as it was not us alone that gathered salt. All the people of the region came to gather salt and traded it.**

00:40:52

**After the salt was gathered and left to dry, it would dissolve should it rain, so a thin layer of mud was plastered [over the salt heap]. It must be left for quite a long time. The salt must dry. Initially it was gathered from the water and dried. After quite a long time elapsed, the salt must be packed. [The sacks] were loaded on sheep while yaks carried some. Salt must**

be packed in sacks, which took many days. Then they were heaped in separate piles of those to be carried by sheep, yaks or horses. Then [they] were transported to India.

Our region traded mainly in the Ladakh areas. Grains were available in Ladakh while our region's production was low. Salt was traded in measurements called *dey*. During a good business deal, one received two [measurements] of grain for one of salt. During a not so good deal, it was equal, one part of salt for one part of grains. That is how trade was conducted in Ladakh. [The traders] came back with loads of grains by bartering salt.

Q: You went with your father on his journeys to get the salt?

**#39D: Yes, [I] have been to Ladakh. [We] drove the *khepa* 'load-bearing' sheep and they must be taken to the grasslands. Father engaged in bartering salt for grains and then had to spend around a week packing grains in the salt bags. During this time the *khepa* were taken to the hills to be grazed and that was my job.**

Q: How old were you when you did this?

00:45:23

**#39D: [I] was 15 or 16 years old then.**

Q: Were those salt piles ever stolen? Were there times when somebody did not respect the code of keeping each thing separate?

**#39D: Such things did happen sometimes. However, each one marked his salt pile and at times the owner did not turn up and somebody else came and took his pile. Such things did occur.**

Q: Would those people ever be found out or punished?

**#39D: There were not much of punishments because we did not like to quarrel. People did not like to quarrel and even normally people did not have any wrangles. The people of Ngari did not like it.**

Q: That's very interesting. They did not like to dispute much. What would happen when there was a real problem between people?

**#39D: If a problem arose, there was the headman in every region, just like there is the Settlement Officer in the settlements [in India], and here we have a local head. We had [leaders] like them in our region in Tibet. They were approached and then the case was resolved by reaching a compromise. A case was not left unresolved.**

Q: I wanted to understand the mud that was protecting the salt from the rain. Was this dried hard mud or what kind of mud protected the salt?

00:48:37

**#39D: There was plenty of mud available around the area. Mud was in plentiful in the area.**

Q: Close to the lake?

**#39D: Yes, close to the lake. It was found naturally. [We] took the mud from there and covered [the salt piles].**

**There was a [type of] soil called *du* in our region. *Du* was like the white wash [points to wall]. It was available in different colors. This was found around the huge lake. The lake was called Rawang. *Du* was found all around it. If the *du* was [pressed] like this, it resembled *tsampa*, very smooth and without any grit. There was no grit at all. This was used to plaster the stupas. It was found in black, blue, red, yellow; there were various colors.**

Q: Where was this mud found?

**#39D: Around the edge of the lake in our region. Hence, the Risung Gonpo stupa could be painted yellow or blue in mud. All these [colored mud] were found naturally. [They] were absolutely natural. One need not buy or anything. [They] were natural.**

Q: Were they colored stones or...

00:50:36

**#39D: [They] were not stones but were like our *tsampa*. *Du* was in solid form and you broke it and it fell in lumps. This was powdered and then mixed in water and that was it. Here we have the distemper; it was similar to that. Original color.**

Q: These stones, did they have any particular value for their color, I mean besides taking them to the monastery? Were they traded as well?

**#39D: Nobody took [them]. Nobody from our region took [them] to trade. What one required one could use it from there, but there was never any practice of selling. It was a huge lake and in its center were broken *du* formations. During summertime, the area teemed with cranes and ducks. The area was surrounded by water birds. Ducks were seen like goats and sheep. Ducklings hatched among the *du* stones in the center of the lake. Nobody ever ventured where the ducklings hatched. [We] considered eggs, fish and pork as unclean. There was never the practice of eating such in our region. One had never set eyes on chicken or fish or pork.**

Q: And eggs?

**#39D: Eggs were never consumed. There were countless numbers of duck eggs. After the eggs hatched, ducks would lead 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 or 12 ducklings in the lake. The ducklings would [swim] in a line between the parents.**

Q: And that [not eating eggs, chicken, fish and pork] was out of respect for these creatures?

00:53:59

**#39D: We never harmed the wild animals. [We] did not harm [them]. You know what is harm? We never thought about killing other animals. We possessed domestic animals that we reared and herded in good grasslands. They were milked during summer and [we] made butter and consumed curd. Goats and sheep were never killed during summertime. It was never the practice to slaughter during summer. When winter set in and the weather turned cold, meat was needed. Therefore, animals were slaughtered when it was cold in the whole of Tibet. The owners did not do the slaughtering but hired other people to do it. Meat was used in the preparation of *thukpa* during winter, but there was never slaughtering of animals in summertime.**

Q: You would never do that yourself?

**#39D: Owners did not slaughter, but others were hired to do it.**

**The whole region abounded with wild animals. There were blue sheep, Tibetan antelopes, Tibetan gazelles, wild sheep, Tibetan wild Asses and wild yaks. Every kind [of wild animal] was present. Nobody ever harmed or killed them. They lived peacefully in the mountains.**

Q: Blue sheep? I've never heard of blue sheep.

**#39D: Blue sheep, wild sheep, Tibetan antelope, Tibetan gazelle, and there were wild sheep that had huge horns. They are found in some countries as seen on television, perhaps Africa. All these wild animals are present everywhere in Tibet.**

Q: It sounds like you had a special relationship with these animals.

00:57:50

**#39D: Yes, [they] were like the ornaments of one's region. [We] considered [them] as adornments. And yes, there were Tibetan wild asses. They resembled horses. The whole region was covered with Tibetan wild asses. They mixed with the horses and yaks of our village. [They] were in plenty.**

**After the Chinese appeared, they began to be consumed. The slaughtering started and now [we] do not know if wild animals even exist. Perhaps they are extinct.**

Q: Do you ever dream of them?

**#39D: [I] dream sometimes. [Laughs]**

Q: I wanted to ask about the salt. You said there was white salt and reddish salt. I've heard there is also a black salt. Did you trade in that or hear of that?

**#39D: There was no black salt but a bluish one. It was bluish but there was no black [salt]. There was no black one.**

Q: When you gathered your salt and then you were saying before you delivered it and traded it in Ladakh and other places. Did you have to pay a tax on the salt?

01:00:09

**#39D:** There was a salt tax on the salt by the Tibetan Government. Everyone must pay the salt tax. There was a tax on the salt. [It] was not without a tax. There was a salt tax. One must pay the salt tax. The name was *tsasho*—the one that collected salt tax was called *tsasho*. The department's name was *tsasho*. One must pay tax to it, but I do not know the quantity because father took care of it. One must pay a tax. One could not gather [salt] as one wished. Taxes must be paid.

Q: Did you ever hear him complain about the tax?

**#39D:** [I] have never heard such. In general taxes were strict in Tibet. There were taxes for the citizens. It used to be said that taxes were heavy, but it was never mentioned that the salt tax was heavy.

Q: I want to understand better, correct me if I'm wrong, but you had some relationship with Sera Jey Monastery. Could you tell me what that was?

**#39D:** It was like this. The one we called *ladang* was the Sera Jey [Monastery] and those people that worked for it were called *korwa*. The families were [entrusted by the monastery] with not just 100-200 sheep but in thousands. An abbot from the monastery arrived in the 6<sup>th</sup> month [of the Tibetan lunar calendar] when shearing was due. [The abbot] came to our region called Rawang. All the *korwa* gathered there along with the sheep. Then the shearing began. There were the *meser* 'subjects' of Sera Jey like us who were responsible for shearing and not the *korwa*. It was the *meser* that did the shearing.

The *korwa* were the servants that grazed the sheep. There were two types [of people]. We were the *meser* of Sera Jey and arrived there to do the shearing. There was no salary; [our service] was for free. Food was provided at noon. It was *thukpa* 'noodle soup,' a sort of *tsampa* [gruel]. That was it and nothing else. All of us remained there until the end of shearing. I have been there in place of father. Though unable to shear, [I] grazed the sheep a little, tethered them for the shearing and then untied them after the process.

01:04:03

After the shearing was complete, the *korwa* went back. [They] returned to wherever they lived. The monastery had contracts with the Garsha 'people of Himachal region' from India to purchase the wool. They came driving 200-300 horses and mules. The horses and mules decorated with white yak tails that had been colored arrived in a row amidst a whirring sound.

Once in Rawang, [the Garsha merchants] set up tents. [They] stayed in tents at the shearing site. They stayed for around a month since thousands of sheep must be sheared. After the shearing, the Garsha took possession [of the wool] as they had paid in cash or whatever to Sera Jey. They spun the wool into balls and packed them in squares to be loaded on the mules. Following that they left with their horses and mules. The Garsha returned to India. They purchased from Tibet and sold in India where [the wool was] made into *nambu* 'machine-made woolen cloth' and all. That is how it was done.

Q: Did you enjoy shearing sheep?

**#39D:** [I] did shear but at times the animal got cut. The knife slipped and it was frightening when [the sheep] was wounded. One becomes terrified. There were goats in our region and the goat hair called *pashmina* was removed by using a wooden instrument, which looked like this [keeps fingers of right hand in line like a comb], like a hand and [the hair] was combed. The hair came out in chunks since it was already shed. It was exactly similar to dogs that shed hair. [The goat hair] could be combed like we comb [indicates combing hair] and [the hair] fell out.

This was made into balls and sold to buyers that came to Tibet in summer from Garsha, Khunnu, Spiti and Ladakh. Every family sold their ware to buyers with whom they had friendly relations; they were like friends. [The *pashmina*] must be sold to them and trading with someone else would anger them. It was like a contract; that was the practice in Tibet with all the nomads. It pertained to everyone.

01:09:57

[The traders] took those and brought with them whatever articles had been ordered from India like silver, gold, food items and different kinds of fabrics. When we gave them [wool] it was not necessary to pay in cash. There was no need to open wallets like we do. [We] gave them goat hair, yak hair and wool and in return took whatever we wanted in kind. It was not necessary to open wallets for cash in those days. Such were the fortunate days.

Q: Did you think this was a fair arrangement with the monastery?

**#39D:** I was a child then and I do not know much about what father thought. I was a child and thought that it must be [our] duty to serve [the monastery]. It never crossed [my] mind that [we] were being subjected to a lot of servitude. It never did to me. [I] thought it was [our] duty since Sera Jey Monastery was held in high esteem. So [I] thought [we] must serve. I never felt that [we] were being forced or oppressed. However, I do not know what father thought.

Q: Did you have any other obligations to Sera Jey?

**#39D:** There were no other obligations but in general there was the Tibetan Government. There were obligations to the Tibetan Government. Some were obliged to send men, some who owned horses were obliged to send horses and some who owned yaks were obliged to send yaks. It was called *wulak* 'labor tax.' *Wulak* means servant; there was nothing, no wages. Men must attend, those that owned horses must send horses and those that owned yaks must send yaks. There were such taxes from the Tibetan Government then. That was a must for most people. The *wulak* was there. It covered everyone.

And then we who were farmers had a farmer's tax. My father used to complain that the farmer's tax was high. I do not know how much was the tax but in general, one must pay a lot of tax for the land. Tax must be paid for the land. [I] do not know how much was the tax but father used to complain. [I] think it was a bit high.

Q: Did you hear any other people complaining about having to provide for the government?

01:14:32

**#39D: The Tibetan Government taxes were well known. All people of the region considered the Tibetan Government's *wulak* a hassle. Then there were rich monks in the monastery that had their personal *khorpa* 'attendants.' There were many with personal *khorpa*. The rich ones had their personal *khorpa*. They must stock goat's butter and pay a *shemar* 'butter tax.' There was an annual standard amount of *shemar* based on the number of goats. I do not know the amount, but it was imperative for [the *khorpa*] to stock butter and deliver it to the owner of the goats.**

**There were some risky [deals] where a birth was taken into account but not death. There were some good ones where deaths and births were both accounted. In actual births and deaths take place. However, there are some obligations that considered only births and not deaths. It did not happen to me but these were prevalent.**

Q: Were these by aristocrats...

**#39D: Not aristocrats but private people.**

Q: Who were these private people?

**#39D: [They were] private wealthy people. Wealthy people. That is what happened to the servants of wealthy people. There were some that were harsher than the government.**

Q: I'm hearing you say there were some wealthy families who took advantage of the people who worked for them and there were some wealthy families that were kind to the people who worked for them?

01:18:13

**#39D: Yes, there were such [people]. It depended upon the attitude of your master, upon the extent of [his] compassion.**

Q: So if your boss was the monastery you could expect a lot of compassion, I would think.

**#39D: He [a wealthy monk] could have a monastery. Besides belonging to a monastery, being a monk, he could build an individual monastery like monks do here these days. It was the same thing like it is done here. Individual monks build monasteries. It was like that, a private monastery. There were individuals like that.**

**The horns were marked. Horns used to be marked using a hot metal. If [an animal] died, the horns and skin must be shown [to the master]. Such practice took place in Tibet. It was very strange.**

Q: I think it's time to move on back to when the Chinese started to come.

**#39D: Okay.**

Q: I'd like to come back to where you started to talk about what life was like when the Chinese first came to your area and you were saying that they were very helpful at first. Could you say more about what happened?

01:20:50

**#39D: Everyone thought that they [the Chinese] were so good. Gradually the number of meetings increased and the malicious talks against the prominent people increased. "The rich must be brought down. The influential must be brought down and everyone made equal," they [the Chinese] increased such talks. After a while the District Administrator and the headmen were chained at the feet and hands and brought out. Then the people were told, "These are the ones that made you suffer. These are the ones that caused you suffering. They are the ones who oppressed you. [They] have been brought before you. What have you to do?"**

**There were people who had suffered in the past and had a certain amount of suffering [resentment] within and therefore, believed it to be true. There were people that were generally poor and in need who became agitated. [They] were made to beat or spit [on the chained leaders]. When the assaults went on for a long time, [the Chinese] would tell them to stop. [The Chinese] brought [the leaders] in chains to be assaulted amidst the people, but when the beating went on for long [they] said, "Do not beat. Do not beat." The assaults were stopped; perhaps thinking [they] would be killed. Actually they [the Chinese] wanted to make them suffer for a long time. [The Chinese] thinking that [they] would get killed said, "Do not beat. Do not beat."**

**We witnessed this as children and felt grief stricken. Earlier [we] had heard things like times would overturn and then it would be the end of time. [I] thought, "This must be it." There were many good mediums in our region. When the mediums were consulted, they said, "It is time for you to eat and wear. It is time to eat the food [you] have. You will not be able to remain. You will not have the right to live in your country." The mediums gave many such predictions. Later [I] realized these were true.**

01:23:25

**And then [I] heard that Lhasa was lost. [I] heard that Lhasa was lost. All the people said, "Now it is over. What must have happened to His Holiness the Dalai Lama?" "His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left in the clouds," it was said. At that time people's thoughts were such that [they] did not think His Holiness was someone real to be seen. [He] was believed to be something like a deity with miraculous power and not someone to be actually seen. That was how we thought in Tibet. That is the truth. [People] did not think His Holiness could be seen. [I] never believed so. [He] was believed to be a deity, like someone in a photograph but never that [he] could be seen in human form. "He has left for India in the clouds," that was said.**

**Then everybody became sad and said, "It is useless for us to remain. It is no use staying. We must leave." Everyone decided to leave. Most of the people of Ngari left together. Nothing much was left behind for the Chinese except the lands. The wealthier families**

owned storehouses of grains that were left behind, but all the yaks, goats and sheep were driven to the Ladakh border. [We] journeyed in the night and hid in the hills during the day. We trekked the whole night and when the sun rose, hid in the hills. That is how we came. It took 10-15 days to reach the Ladakh border. We reached the Ladakh border in the year '60 and surrendered to the Indian army. And then [we] felt greatly relieved because there had been panic during the journey fearing capture by the Chinese.

Q: Okay, so that's the outline and now the details.

**#39D: Okay.**

Q: I want to understand better a few things. First of all, you were 20 years old? How old were you about that time?

01:28:51

**#39D: I arrived in '60. I am 73 years old now. From '60 to age 73, how old was [I]? Can you calculate?**

Q: 21. Were you married?

**#39D: No, not at that time. There is still a lot of story left.**

Q: Okay. Good. When you said the leaders were brought before...the Chinese brought the leaders in chains in front of everybody, were these leaders monks? Were these leaders landowners? Were these leaders tax collectors? Were they political officials? Who were these leaders?

**#39D: They were like the abbot of Sera Jey that I told you about earlier, the administrator of the district, the headmen of the village, like we have the Settlement Officers here, and wealthy people.**

Q: The people...the Tibetan...the poor people who'd suffered, they were very angry at all of these people. Why were they angry at the monastery?

01:31:30

**#39D: The Chinese...Since all the leaders had caused some sort of suffering [the poor] had the same feeling against [them]. They felt angry thinking, "All these people have oppressed us" and assaulted [them] a great deal. Because though it used to be said that the Tibetan Government oppressed, but in actual [the people] were directly under them [the leaders]. The Tibetan Government was thought of as being far away. These people were close by. And usually when the *khorma* labored, there were no wages and perhaps there was some amount of anger or pain felt by the older people. Being children then, we did not have much knowledge but [I] found it very sad.**

Q: The Chinese said it was going too far and it has to stop. Was this happening many times or one time, the *thamzing* 'struggle session'? This was a *thamzing*, yes?

**#39D: Yes, it was a *thamzing*.**

Q: Did the *thamzing* happen once or many times?

**#39D: The first *thamzing* took place when I was there. And then we fled soon after. [I] do not know how many *thamzing* happened subsequently. [I] heard that the abbot who was subjected to *thamzing* by us and subsequently to other *thamzing* was released in Lhasa but did not live long and passed away soon after. I know the name of the abbot; [he] was called Ngawang Tenzin and the District Administrator was Yeshe Thupten. I can recall their names and later when subjects and monks of Sera Jey came into exile here from Lhasa, they said, “[The abbot] was released after being subjected to *thamzing* but did not live long. [He] passed away soon after.”**

Q: How soon after that did you say, “I have to get out of here”?

01:34:53

**#39D: After witnessing the *thamzing* the more thoughtful people like the leaders remarked that it was better to flee. There were leaders in our village who said that [we] should escape soon or will face capture. So immediately the plan was made to flee since it was not good and [we] had witnessed the downfall of the influential. “It is not going to be good unless we escape. [We] must flee immediately.” We fled a year after the first *thamzing*.**

Q: A year later?

**#39D: Yes, all of us fled a year later. The head of our village also managed to escape. [He] could arrive in Ladakh in exile.**

Q: Wasn't he captured and subjected to *thamzing*?

**#39D: There was not time to subject him to *thamzing*. There was not time.**

Q: But [he] was arrested?

**#39D: [He] was not arrested. [He] could not be caught. [He] could not be caught.**

Q: So it was one year after the first *thamzing* before you'd left.

01:36:13

**#39D: Right, and then [we] escaped. It was soon after, perhaps sometime in spring, in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> [Tibetan lunar] month. It seemed like [we] arrived in Ladakh in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month.**

**Then we had surrendered in Ladakh. All of us had surrendered to the Indian army. However, [we] had driven a huge number of animals, goats, sheep and yaks. So the nomads stayed near the Indus River at the Indian border. [We] stayed around a year there, after having arrived in the year '60. [We] spent '60, the year we arrived, and '61 there. Then India attacked China in '62 and we fled to the other side of the Indus River. [We] were forced to flee. Initially [we] stayed there because not many Chinese soldiers arrived. In the**

year '62 they attacked India, which they had called a friend. [The Chinese] used to say that they were very friendly with India and attacked it in '62. We were shocked. [Laughs] It was shocking for India, too.

Q: What's the name of the bridge?

**#39D: What?**

Q: [You] said that you crossed a bridge.

**#39D: The bridge is called Dhungdi Zampa.**

Q: Dhungdi Zampa?

01:37:38

**#39D: Yes. It is called Dhungdi Zampa. [We] crossed the Indus River. The Indus River's source is at Mount Kailash and it flows into Ladakh.**

Q: You mean the Indus River?

**#39D: Yes. The Indus River flows into Ladakh. There are four rivers that had [their] source at Mount Kailash.**

Q: Just to go back for one moment. Was it a common belief at the time that His Holiness was not a human being?

**#39D: [People] like us had no knowledge then. It seemed like even the older people did not because when it was asked, "Where did His Holiness go?" the reply was "[He] went in the clouds." It meant that [he] merged with the clouds and left and not just anything else. It was said that [His Holiness] went in the clouds. [Laughs]**

Q: When did you realize that he was really a human being?

01:40:12

**#39D: After the war [Indo-China War], we came inwards into India where there were large tracts of land [near] Ladakh, which were territories of Himachal [Pradesh]. We were living at the nomadic sites of Ladakh after having fled again. We were many people that had arrived in the region and His Holiness the Dalai Lama sent someone to take all the children to school. His Holiness sent a monk official from Sera [Monastery] called Kungo 'Your Presence' Thupten Dawa for the purpose. He arrived when we were living at the nomadic camp. All the children were gathered. All the children were engaged in herding sheep. [They] would be sent as shepherds and moved with the goats and sheep and knew nothing. He arrived to gather the children and everyone said [raises right hand], "I want to go. I want to go to school."**

**[We] had bands in our [long] hair that were cut. The children were given a long coat each and the fur coats removed. [We] were given leather [?] and pants to wear. We were 50-60**

children that had assembled and then we were taken from the border to the capital of Ladakh in army vehicles called *shaktiman*. [We] were led by Kungo Thupten Dawa. He was an official from Sera [Monastery] and sent by His Holiness. Then we arrived in Leh. It took [us] many days in Leh as there were no flights. It took many days because there were no flights. It was about a month.

Many children fell ill and some passed away because of a bad cold. There was no treatment for bad colds then. There was constant coughing and development of boils. Numerous children passed away suffering from the bad cold. Later a plane arrived that was sent by a foreign aid organization. Perhaps it was a United States plane. It must be a United States [plane] because it was from India. It was a foreign one. Two planes arrived in which the children were flown. [We] arrived in Chandigarh [Punjab] and were off-loaded. Then [we] went to Pathankot and from Pathankot to Dharamsala [Himachal Pradesh]. [We] arrived in the night.

01:42:56

At that time TCV [Tibetan Children's Village] was tiny and we stayed outdoors. There were no rooms and the children were kept in the verandah. [We] stayed like that for a few days and then were told, "You will receive the opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama." [I] remember that I thought, "What would His Holiness look like? Can [he] actually be seen?" Until then we never thought that His Holiness could be seen. Such was the result of living in isolation in Tibet that the people had become like sheep. The leaders had conditioned their subjects like sheep, like animals. That is what happens when people are not given education.

Then one day [we] were given an audience. His Holiness was standing there at the old palace. [I] think that was it but we had no knowledge. [Joins palms] All of us children went in a line and His Holiness asked, "Where are you from? How old are you?" [We] answered. At last [I] had seen His Holiness. [I] realized that [His Holiness] could be seen like a *tulku* 'reincarnate lama.' Earlier to that [I] never thought His Holiness could be seen, but that [he] was something like god, like a protective deity that cannot be seen. [We] thought like that. Poor things, it was like that in Tibet. Finally [I] saw [His Holiness]. And [I] was happy.

Q: I'd like to ask you what your feelings are today towards the Chinese?

01:47:33

**#39D:** [My] feelings towards the Chinese...what should [I] say...in general it is just a few people at the top who are the hardliners and I feel it is very sad. [They] criticize His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who the world respects as a leader. [I] see their stand as very weak because their interests are shallow. They do not care for the people of China or about living cordially with the Tibetan people and are always harsh. Therefore, I feel that their thoughts are very limited and weak.

As for the people of China, [they] are like us. They have no power and are exactly like the Tibetan people with no authority and no freedom of expression. [I] feel should the [Chinese] leaders concur with what His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, they can stand

**proudly wherever they go in the world with their heads held high. If [they] consent to what His Holiness has said, the people of China will have happiness, they the leaders will enjoy happiness and the Tibetans will be happy; all races that live there will be happy. That is what I think. [I] do not have any other feelings except that the leaders of China have very shallow and weak thoughts.**

Q: If Tibet were...if Tibet by some present miracle were to become independent, would you go back?

**#39D: Of course. [Laughs] If the opportunity arose, [I] would go back to my country with joy.**

Q: You would go back to Ngari?

**#39D: Really, in the past one did not have understanding except about Ngari. Now it is not just Ngari but the time has come to travel to the three provinces of Tibet. Not only the three provinces of Tibet but the ways are open for travel inside China. Since one need not go on foot, one can go anywhere. One can go on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in just a few hours. The facilities are incredibly good. Therefore, if one could go back, it is the time to travel everywhere and not just remain in Ngari.**

Q: What do you attribute your faith and good spirit?

01:52:43

**#39D: That is from our Buddha dharma. The peace in our hearts is from the Buddha dharma. Secondly, a happy heart, with no intention of harming others, all these stem from listening to the teachings and advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Though the other side has wronged [us], yet because it is mentioned in the dharma [we] do not recognize them as enemies, instead consider them as friends. We believe in the dharma and practice accordingly, so we are happy. We are aware that being miserable will not bring benefit nor would harming other people. So if the heart can maintain immeasurable equanimity, one can remain happy and others too. This has come about due to the Buddha dharma.**

Q: Thank you.

**#39D: [Joins palms]**

Q: So we're going to end here and I just have a few final questions. I'd like to ask you once again if this interview was shown in Tibet, China or anywhere else, would this cause a problem for you?

**#39D: There will be no problems whatsoever.**

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

01:55:10

**#39D: [You] can. Of course, [my] name can be used. [I] have no doubts whatsoever.**

Q: Thank you for sharing your story.

**#39D: Okay, and thank you.**

END OF INTERVIEW