

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #3N – Ata
April 8, 2015

The Tibet Oral History Project serves as a repository for the memories, testimonies and opinions 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 © 2016 Tibet Oral History Project.



TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #3N
2. Interviewee: Ata
3. Age: 78
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Meshay, Derge
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 8, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 19 min
12. Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Henry Tenenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Ata was born into a middle class family living in Derge, Kham Province. He describes his parents as *samadok*—engaged in both farming and rearing animals such as yaks, *dri* ‘female yaks’ and *dzomo* ‘female animal bred from a yak and a cow.’ They grew wheat, barley and peas, and the barter system was prevalent with the exchange of grains for meat and butter.

Ata talks about the Reformation during which the Chinese confiscated people’s property and redistributed it as well as established the *kongri* ‘commune system.’ Families were categorized as wealthy, middle class and poor and the Chinese imposed the “liberation” of Tibet against the wishes of the people. He witnessed the Chinese subjecting people to *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions,’ beating and imprisoning them. Ata tells how the people revolted against them and many escaped to Lhasa.

Ata left for Lhasa in 1958 and joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force. He describes the guerrilla tactics they engaged in and the types of weapons they used. The guerrillas were outnumbered by the Chinese so they tried to escape. Ata was arrested and endured hard labor in prison until he escaped. He again joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* which had regrouped in Mustang, Nepal. He remained for 13 years, crossing back into Tibet many times to ambush the Chinese.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, first appearance of Chinese, imprisonment, forced labor, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences, guerrillas in Mustang.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #3N

Interviewee: Ata

Age: 78, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway

Interview Date: April 8, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:09

Interviewee #3N: [I] am called Ata.

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, 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?

#3N: Yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During the interview if you need to take a break or stop at anytime, please let us know.

#3N: Okay.

Q: If you do not want to answer a question or talk about something, please also let us know.

#3N: Okay.

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

#3N: There will be no problems for me.

Q: We're very honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in the project.

#3N: Okay.

Q: Now for some of the questions that you already answered, how old are you?

00:02:25

#3N: 78.

Q: You don't look it.

#3N: [Smiles] [I] am 78.

Q: Where did you come from in Tibet?

#3N: [I] came through Mon Tawang after crossing over the Mangola pass.

Q: Where did [you] come from in Tibet, the hometown?

#3N: Through Lhoka in Tibet. [I] came from Lhasa to Lhoka and then followed His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Mon Tawang.

Q: Where were you born?

#3N: It is Derge. It is called Meshay in Derge Dzongsar. The monastery is called Dzongsar Gonpa and the region is called Meshay. It is the name of the town.

Q: It's Meshar?

#3N: Meshay.

Q: Which province was this?

#3N: It comes under Dhotoe [Kham] Province.

Q: What were the names of your mother and father?

#3N: Father was called Tsewang Rabten and mother's name was Aji.

Q: What did your father do for his living?

00:04:26

#3N: The livelihood was farming. [We] were *samadok* 'farmers and herders' that did nomadic work as well as farmed lands.

Q: Which animals did you raise?

#3N: Animals with the nomads were *dri* 'female yaks,' yak and such.

Q: *Dri*, yak...

#3N: *Yak, dzo, dzomo.*

Q: I'm sorry I don't know what those animals are.

#3N: *Dzo* and *dzomo* are bred after crossing an ox and a *dri*. It is similar to a mule that you get from crossing a horse and a donkey.

After crossing an ox and a *dri*, the male calf is a *dzo* and the female a *dzomo*.

Q: And yak?

#3N: A male is called yak and a female *dri*.

Q: And these animals, how many did you have about?

00:06:19

#3N: The total number of *dri*, yaks and all would be over a 100, around a 100.

Q: *Dzo, dzomo*?

#3N: *Dzo, dzomo, yak and dri*.

Q: What kind of farming did you do?

#3N: One could harvest only once a year. That would be wheat, barley, peas and such.

Q: Did you sell any of your animals or crops?

#3N: [We] did not sell. These were for your consumption and not for sale. The nomads brought meat and butter where there were no animals and took grains in exchange. That was the practice and there were not any sales outside.

Q: Did you have to do that?

#3N: We did less nomadic work and more of farming. Hence, when [we] were short of meat and butter, [we] got those from other nomads by bartering the grains, which was the practice in the region.

Q: Was your family considered wealthy or poor or in the middle?

00:08:45

#3N: It was middle class. Though the Chinese categorized it among the wealthy, generally the family was middle class. [We] were not in a position to give out loans but managed to survive.

Q: In which did the Chinese categorize it?

#3N: When the Chinese launched the Democratization of Liberation Process, it created classifications like landowners and wealthy farmers and [my family] was among the wealthy farmers. We survived but were neither rich nor poor but middle class.

Q: How could you tell that a family was a wealthy family?

#3N: A wealthy family is one that can sustain itself without having to depend on other people and is able to feed itself from the produce of its land. Such a one is neither very wealthy nor very poor but middle class.

Q: What can be termed as wealthy?

00:10:04

#3N: Wealthy is one who gives loans to other people and is economically very sound. One that has surplus and can give loans to other people is called wealthy.

Q: And the poor? How did you know someone was poor?

#3N: The poor were those that earned a living by working for other people. Those that worked for other people were called poor. They did not own much lands and animals.

Q: Did your family own its land?

#3N: The land was yours and you were its owner and if you got a harvest, that was good and if you did not, it was your loss. Your livelihood depended upon farming and rearing animals and you got to keep those.

Later the Chinese took over all the lands. The Chinese took possession of the animals and lands and you just earned a wage. You could not possess your own wealth.

Q: So can you tell us about that and how it affected your family?

00:12:09

#3N: After the launch of the Democratization of Liberation Process, the *kongri* was established, the commune was established. The government took possession of all that [the people] owned and paid daily wages in the form of stars that was barely sufficient to feed one. The government took away the rest.

The wealthy faced more problems as the poor became leaders and the wealthy became servants. Such changes came about during the Reformation.

Q: What happened to the poor?

#3N: The poor became leaders and the wealthy put in jail and became poor, servants.

Q: How did that affect your village life?

#3N: At that time, initially, there was the Reformation and later the rebellion. That was how it took place. There was revolt, and though the people did not desire reforms, it was launched forcefully, which led to [my] escape. And in that way [I] came to Lhasa.

Q: So can you tell us about when you first saw the Chinese?

00:14:24

#3N: In the very beginning the Chinese arrived in Kham in '50. At that time it used to be remarked that the Chinese were good. Then in '56 the Reformation was launched and all the people started packing.

Q: When was the Reformation launched?

#3N: The Reformation was launched in '55. The Chinese came into Kham in '50.

Q: When you say they were good when they came in 1950, in what ways were they good?

#3N: They gave wages and money to the people and deceived them.

Q: So how did the change occur? How did you know that there was a change when they launched the Revolution of Democracy?

#3N: After surrendering to them, they [Chinese] took possession and in '59 during the Revolution of Democracy they took away from the wealthy and distributed to the poor. That was the Reformation when all the wealthy became servants and the poor became leaders.

Q: So when you saw this happening, when your family saw this happening or your village saw this happening, did they come together to talk about it?

00:16:43

#3N: Leave aside coming together, at that time [people] were being put in prison, beaten and subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.'

Q: There were no discussions?

#3N: Except for taking whatever orders they [Chinese] gave, one was not allowed to do otherwise.

Q: The people saw this...

#3N: The people saw this.

Q: When [they] saw this did they not hold a meeting among themselves?

#3N: When such were being done, everyone could not endure and revolted against the Chinese.

Some were imprisoned and some beaten. There were cases of death from beating and death in prison. Some could not die and revolted, and gradually reached Lhasa. The majority from the Kham side went towards Lhasa, the central part.

Q: Can you tell us about that journey that you took from your village to Lhasa?

00:18:17

#3N: [I] was in Lhasa in '59. One took the journey in a Chinese vehicle.

Q: First from your village...

#3N: [I] came in a vehicle from the village to Lhasa and did not face any problems then. [We] resisted and then surrendered, and then saying that [I] wished to go to Lhasa on pilgrimage, came to Lhasa.

Q: Resisted and surrendered?

#3N: Surrendered and came to Lhasa.

Q: You said that you were resisting. Were you with a group of soldiers or guerrilla fighters?

#3N: There were groups of 40-50 or 20-30 and when [we] reached Lhoka the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] had been formed and then there were many people [fighters].

Q: You said that you traveled by vehicle and you were surrounded and you said that you're going on a pilgrimage to Lhasa. How did they...this was the Chinese who surrounded you and how did they respond?

[Interpreter interprets as: While in the village you said that you were going on pilgrimage and came in a Chinese vehicle?]

#3N: Yes.

Q: Is that right? Did [you] come in a Chinese vehicle saying that you wanted to go to Lhasa on pilgrimage?

00:20:21

#3N: Saying that [I] was going to Lhasa on pilgrimage, [I] traveled in a vehicle. In Lhasa, I went to join the guerrilla resistance of the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: In what year did you join the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#3N: It was in the year '58 that [I] joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I was 19 or 20 years old then. [I] cannot remember whether [I] was 19 or 20.

Q: What prompted you to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#3N: [I] came to Lhasa and heard that the *Chushi Gangdrug* had been formed after the construction of the Golden Throne. Earlier the *Chushi Gangdrug* was not united as each faction resisted separately. All those from Amdo and Kham living in Lhasa went to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* and then it was initiated. You joined it voluntarily for there was not anyone that forced you to. You joined it voluntarily.

Q: Can you tell us about your experiences and your memories of being in the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

00:22:21

#3N: [I] joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* in the year '58 and [we] lost the country in '59. [I] was in it for one year.

Q: What happened during that period?

#3N: [I] was young then and did not have many thoughts. [I] was carefree and followed the older people wherever they went as [I] was young then. [I] did whatever the instructions and followed wherever the leaders led, doing whatever was ordered.

Q: What kinds of things did they order you to do?

#3N: The older people and relatives, each had their own horses and guns. You joined voluntarily and the government did not pay a salary or supply weapons. You survived by yourself.

Q: What kind of duties was given?

#3N: The duties involved being deployed as sentries, as spies, to fight or to block. Such were the duties. One went up when told to do so and one went down when told to do so.

Q: So did the leaders of the *Chushi Gangdrug* provide you with some training on how to be a spy or how to be a sentry?

00:24:33

#3N: Initially, there was not any training as such. There was not any special training in military tactics except for what you already knew. There was not any training as such.

Q: Did you typically go out on your own or did you go with groups of other *Chushi Gangdrug* people?

#3N: [We] went in groups. The orders were not for one person to go but groups of 5 or 10 or 20 men that were instructed, "The Chinese will be coming to this place. Go and ambush or block [them]." Such were the orders.

Q: And you knew how to do an ambush?

#3N: You lie in wait and sometimes you win but most times you lose. Sometimes you win.

Q: Tell me about a time when you won.

#3N: Winning would be when at times you got to attack a vehicle. Sometimes you can kill a Chinese and destroy a vehicle. Sometimes you win but most times you lose and die. One could be killed and the group of 50 men scattered in fives, sixes or twos, threes. When you lose, you get scattered. There would be such situations while sometimes you got to set fire to

***gyakhang* ‘Chinese houses’ and attack vehicles. Sometimes you won but most times you lost.**

Q: What’s *gyakhang*? What’s setting fire to *gyakhang*?

00:26:52

#3N: Setting fire if there were any *gyakhang* and attacking vehicles as they moved about.

Q: What’s a *gyakhang*?

#3N: Yes?

Q: What’s setting fire to *gyakhang*?

#3N: Setting fire to houses, setting fire to Chinese houses.

Q: You had rifles and horses and bullets. What did the Chinese have? What were you fighting against in terms of equipment, military equipment?

#3N: When the Chinese initially arrived, they were like us [in terms of weapons]. Except for weapons given by Russia called *burā* they did not have...When the Chinese first arrived they were using the Nationalist period weapons and did not have sophisticated and different types of weapons like they do now. They were similar to us though they had more ammunition because in our case, a person might have 50-60 bullets but that had to be purchased since no one supplied it.

Q: Was there anything else you wanted to say about the weaponry?

00:29:06

#3N: The weapons we had were the English-made short barrel [rifles] brought from India that were there since long ago. There were no new guns. Later when the *Chushi Gangdrug* was in Lhoka weapons were airdropped. I do not know who dropped [them] but they were dropped in Lhoka. These were distributed among those that did not have while those that already possessed weapons were given extra bullets. Those that owned weapons already owned them and those that did not were distributed. Weapons were dropped twice in Lhoka.

Q: From these airdrops?

#3N: Those that had [weapons] were given bullets and those that did not were given guns called *Tashi Kharing*. They were similar to the English-made short barrel [rifles] and used similar bullets.

Q: How often did you go out on a mission?

#3N: It was from time to time. It was mainly blocking Chinese routes and not exactly face-to-face encounters. [We] waited by the road like bandits. It was similar to guerrilla style battles.

Q: So at this time were you living in Lhasa or somewhere else?

00:31:46

#3N: [We] were in Lhoka. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was established in Lhoka.

Q: How many *Chushi Gangdrug* were there at Lhoka?

#3N: Maybe there were 8-9,000 altogether. Half of them left for Shang Gaden Chokhor to fetch weapons but could not return to Lhoka and went towards the north to Chara Penpa. Andrug Jindha [Gonpo Tashi, founder of the *Chushi Gangdrug*] went there to Chara Penpa. The main army base was at Lhoka.

Q: And where is Lhoka?

#3N: The region of Lhoka was cleared except for 200-300 Chinese holed up in a military camp in a place called Tsethang. Lhoka was cleared of any Chinese presence. The Chinese were pushed off and the place totally cleared.

Q: So you had to provide your horse, rifle and your bullets although sometimes you would get airlifted bullets. Were you working, you know to make money so that you could buy food? How did you live?

00:34:02

#3N: While in Lhoka the *Chushi Gangdrug* used grains from storage belonging to the Tibetan Government. The Tibetan Government had stored grains in a granary, stored during the time of the old system under the District Administrators, which the *Chushi Gangdrug* borrowed to feed all the men and horses. That was supposed to be a loan.

[The *Chushi Gangdrug*] signed an agreement stating that [the grains] would be returned when good times prevailed. So the grains were utilized then.

Q: Did the government...the Tibetan Government support the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#3N: Generally, it was difficult to do so then. The Tibetan Government had already fallen under the Chinese Government. The *Chushi Gangdrug* stood away from the Tibetan Government though I would not know the inside story. In general, from the outside it looked as if there was no connection.

For any trouble the Tibetan Government's cabinet was squeezed and so the cabinet had to be smart to pretend not to have any connection. I do not know what it actually was.

Q: When you were in the *Chushi Gangdrug*, did you ever get injured?

00:36:37

#3N: [I] did not suffer any injuries.

Q: Going back to the Chinese—I forgot to ask—going back to the Chinese squeezing the Tibetan Government, what would they do when they did that?

#3N: [I] cannot explain for certain in what way [the Chinese] squeezed but they remarked, “Destroy the rebels. You have sent them. Destroy the rebels.” The *Chushi Gangdrug* [warriors] were the rebels and were called rebels with long sleeves. “You instigated [them] and have connection. Destroy them. You sent the soldiers. We will extend help.” [The Chinese] were thus putting pressure.

Long ago Alo Chonze and others began the Youth Association. At that time the Prime Minister Lukhangwa and Alo Chonze had to resign from their respective posts. [The Chinese] were thus putting pressure.

Q: What did Alo Chonze form?

#3N: Alo Chonze formed the Youth Association—what to say—these days [such associations] demand democracy, so it was something like that.

00:38:05

[Prime Minister Lukhangwa] resigned and was forced to live in Kalimpong [India].

Q: I understand that you left Tibet in 1959. Right?

#3N: Yes.

Q: Were you still with the *Chushi Gangdrug* then?

#3N: Yes, [I] was in the *Chushi Gangdrug*. The country was lost and His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left. So all the soldiers followed; not just soldiers, but [we] escaped together with civilians. Sixty to 70,000 people managed like that to flee together. There were monks and lamas of the monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden. After His Holiness the Dalai Lama left, all great lamas and leaders fled. At Missamari [Assam] there were 7-8,000...the number is around 70-80,000.

Q: Could you tell us about when you left Tibet? Your journey, what caused you to leave at that moment?

#3N: The reason for leaving Tibet was that [we] were outnumbered by the all-powerful Chinese. After the Dalai Lama left the Chinese started to pursue from both sky and land. [We] were forced to escape to India unable to challenge the huge number.

Q: Were you ever captured by the Chinese?

00:40:28

#3N: [I] was captured once in 1959 while on the way to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Could you tell us about that, please?

#3N: We were on the way to Lhoka and just before reaching the *Chushi Gangdrug*, the Chinese captured us as [we] camped by the road. We were 11-12 men from three families that were captured.

Q: What happened to you after you were captured?

#3N: [We] were imprisoned. All the prominent men were taken to the main Chinese military base and young ones like us were sent to work on construction sites from the prison, to work.

Q: Could you describe to us the prison, please?

#3N: [I] escaped from the prison.

Q: What was the prison like?

#3N: Unlike these days the prison then was not very restrictive. [I] was in prison before the fall of Lhasa. [I] was in prison for eight months before joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Except for being forced to work, [the Chinese] did not give many problems.

Q: Were you paid for this work?

#3N: Yes?

Q: Were you paid for this work?

00:42:48

#3N: [The Chinese] did not pay wages. Except for food that was barely enough, there was not any payment.

Some [of the prisoners] had been captured while traveling and some had been captured while on the mountains driving horses and mules, while some had been captured fighting with the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Shang Gaden Chokhor. There were over a hundred prisoners.

Q: Was it a regular prison or was it another building?

#3N: [We] were jailed in a military camp and not a regular prison.

Q: Tibetan military camp?

#3N: It was a Chinese military camp where [we] were jailed.

Q: Can you describe that to us because I don't know what a Chinese military camp looked like?

#3N: [I] was jailed in a Chinese military camp in Dechen, which is perhaps 15-20 kilometers from Lhasa. There was a large Chinese military camp between Lhasa and Gaden [Monastery] where [I] was jailed and then sent to work on the new Chinese electricity plant being constructed at Ngachen.

Q: So what were you doing? What kind of work were you actually doing when you were building the electricity plant?

00:45:06

#3N: The work entailed cutting earth and rocks, cutting earth and rocks and construction. The earth and rocks from the mountain was leveled and a damn built to stop the flow of the river and a lake created. An electricity plant was being constructed where one had to labor. [I] was there for only 21 days before [I] escaped. There were many Chinese prisoners. The Chinese prisoners had to work both day and night while Tibetan prisoners labored only during the day and not at night. That was the time when Lhasa had not yet fallen.

Q: So what was a day...when did a day begin for you and how did it go?

#3N: One had to get up around 5 o'clock in the morning and report around dawn and work until evening, around dusk. There were tents pitched in which one lived.

Q: And then?

#3N: What?

Q: Did you get enough food?

#3N: There was enough food that mostly consisted of radish and pork and then *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.'

Q: Pork?

#3C: A little bit of pork was given.

Q: Were your guards...?

00:47:21

#3N: [Interrupts] There was breakfast, lunch and another meal at around this time. That was it.

Q: Were the guards Chinese or Tibetans?

#3N: [They] were Chinese.

Tents had been pitched, a tent for every 10 people. This was surrounded by barbed wire fencing and beyond that sat the Chinese [guards].

Q: Each tent was surrounded by barbed wire?

#3N: Tents had been pitched and around that was a barbed wire fence. The Chinese sat around the fence.

Q: Were there around a hundred tents?

#3N: Tents were pitched here and there and surrounding that was the barbed wire fencing.

Q: Did the guards speak Tibetan?

#3N: [They] did not know Tibetan.

Q: So how did they communicate?

#3N: [Speaks before translation] Maybe one or two knew but the majority did not.

Q: How did they communicate to you?

#3N: They brought translators, translators that knew Tibetan.

Q: How did the prisoners feel about the Tibetan translators?

00:49:20

#3N: [I] wonder what [they] felt. They were Chinese schoolteachers or officials that could speak Chinese.

Q: You were prisoners and there was a Tibetan who was translating for the Chinese. What did you feel about this then?

#3N: I did not feel anything but I cannot speak for the others.

Q: You mentioned that there were some Chinese prisoners who worked day and night. Why were they in the prison? What had they done to put them in prison?

#3N: [Speaks before question is translated] The Chinese prisoners and we were separate. There were 100-200 prisoners.

Q: Why were there Chinese prisoners in Tibet?

#3N: What the reason could be...most of them had fled to Lhasa when the Reformation was launched in China. When the Liberation was launched in China, the high-class people could not remain in China and fled to Lhasa. So they were the ones that were penalized.

Q: Did [you] say there were 100-200?

#3N: There must be 100-200, kept in separate groups.

Q: You mentioned that you escaped after 21 days from the prison. Please tell us how you escaped, how that happened?

00:51:15

#3N: The prisoners stayed in at night and that day was windy and the barbed wire... I was with a colleague who is no more. [He] was called Jamda and used to be in the army at Dehradun. We both fled.

Q: How? What's that with the barbed wire?

#3N: The barbed wire was fixed to poles in the sand that had fallen in the wind. [We] escaped through that and ran to the mountaintop.

Q: Who was the colleague?

#3N: [He] was called Jamda but he is no more. That day many prisoners escaped but we were the first to do so. Later several others managed to flee. At that time it was not very strict. It was a little bit relaxed.

Q: So did you have food with you when you fled?

#3N: [We] carried no food.

Q: So you went up into the mountains...

#3N: [Interrupts] Having fled in the night, at daylight... [We] did not have Tibetan clothes and were wearing Chinese clothes. Once our clothes wore off we were dressed in Chinese attire. We reached the place called Dayaypa.

Q: Da...?

00:52:46

#3N: Dayaypa is a pilgrim site in Tibet. It is near Lhasa, just a mountain pass away from where we were working. There were people there and after explaining to the people, they provided tea, *tsampa* and things to eat.

Q: Who were the people? The people of the village, the people of Dayaypa?

#3N: The people of Dayaypa. Dayapa is a holy mountain.

Q: When the Tibetans saw you in the Chinese clothes, did they not think you were Chinese and attack you?

#3N: Inside the shirts... [We] removed the Chinese clothes and when [we] asked the people to give us clothes, they did so out of compassion. [We] cut away the Chinese long coats and converted them into *chupa* 'traditional Tibetan coats.' Then [we] went away in Tibetan attire.

Q: Didn't the Tibetans think that you were Chinese?

00:54:16

#3N: [They] did not think so as [we] explained that we had escaped from the prison, which was quite close. If one fled at night, you were in their area at daybreak. Then after crossing over a mountain pass you reached Phenpo. At Phenpo there were many newcomers that had escaped from [their] hometowns.

Q: Which part of Tibet? Is this [Phenpo] in Tibet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Which part of Tibet?

#3N: It is towards the south. No, it is northward.

Q: So when you got there, what did you do?

#3N: After crossing the river in Phenpo, [I] went to Lhoka where [I] joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force].

Q: So can we go back to when you left Tibet? So when you left Tibet, where did you go?

#3N: [I] crossed the Mangola pass and reached Mon Tawang.

Q: Mon Tawang?

#3N: Reached Mon Tawang.

Q: And where is that?

00:56:23

#3N: Mon Tawang is in the northeast of India. It is in Arunachal Pradesh.

Q: And what did you do when you got to India?

#3N: [I] was a refugee for 4-5 months in India and then went to Gangtok [Sikkim] to work as a coolie.

Q: How long did you work as a coolie?

#3N: [I] worked as a coolie for around 10 months.

Q: How was that?

#3N: One earned only 12 annas as a coolie but it was enough to feed one as money was of great value then. One worked for only eight hours and earning 12 annas was sufficient. When [we] arrived in Missamari people were segregated and the younger ones sent to school, the older ones to work as coolies and the lamas and monks of the monasteries to Buxar [West Bengal]. [People] were divided and scattered. We were sent to work as coolies.

Q: You stayed there for 10 months and then what did you do?

00:58:43

#3N: After that it was announced that the *Chushi Gangdrug* would be organized at Mustang and [I] left for Mustang.

Q: Mustang?

#3N: [I] went to Mustang at the Nepal border.

Q: How did you get to Mustang from Gangtok?

#3N: It was said that [we] were going on a pilgrimage to see Mustang. Men were sent in batches of 50, 60, 20, 30 by [officials of the] *Chushi Gangdrug* from Darjeeling to Mustang.

Q: How did [you] go?

#3N: [We] traveled by train from India to the border and then on foot carrying packs.

Q: How long did the journey take?

01:00:02

#3N: It is hard to say. Actually it is close, only about five days' journey from Nepal [Nepal-India border] to Mustang but we took around a month. It took around two months for the Nepalese stopped [us] at Pokhara for about a month stating that [we] were not allowed to go.

Q: Why were you stopped at Pokhara? What happened?

#3N: "You cannot go. You are single men in large numbers. Such men cannot go." [We] were stopped. "We are going on pilgrimage and have no other intention. We wish to go on a pilgrimage," [we] replied.

Q: This was the Tibetan police; I mean this was the Nepalese police who stopped you?

#3N: The Nepalese.

Q: How long were you kept in Pokhara?

#3N: [We] were around 20 days in Pokhara.

Q: Where were you kept in Pokhara?

#3N: [The Nepalese police] kept [us] right in the middle of the bazaar at a place called Baga. Initially there were 30-40 men and then the later batches arrived. There were around a 100 men detained.

Q: What did you do while you were there in Pokhara?

01:01:59

#3N: Being detained there was nothing to do but stay in Pokhara. [We] made fire out in the open, prepared tea and stayed there.

Q: You couldn't do any work?

#3N: [We] did not do any work.

Q: So how did you end up going to Mustang if they said you couldn't go even on pilgrimage?

#3N: Later when the number of men grew [we] forcefully went past and they let [us] through. When there were few men they stopped [us] but when there was a large number that pushed through, they did not make a serious effort to stop [us]. Perhaps they had to make it appear like [we] were being stopped.

Q: So you just pushed through?

01:03:02

#3N: Just pushed through and [the Nepalese army] did not do anything bad.

Q: How long is it from Pokhara to Mustang?

#3N: Days?

Q: Yes.

#3N: It is around five days to go directly from Pokhara but we took around seven days.

Q: From Pokhara to Mustang?

#3N: Yes.

Q: Eight days?

#3N: It took around seven days as [we] were carrying packs and could not walk more than half a day. These days one can reach in 2-3 days.

Q: So then you joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Mustang?

#3N: Yes. Then the *Chushi Gangdrug* was formed a second time, once again.

Q: Was it very similar to your previous *Chushi Gangdrug* experience?

#3N: It was similar. All the leaders were sent from Darjeeling. There were the likes of Bapa Gen Yeshi and others who were from India. They had traveled from Lhoka to India and from India to the *Chushi Gangdrug*, as that was the aim and objective.

Q: So in Mustang, how long were you there?

01:04:53

#3N: [I] was in Mustang for around 13 years.

Q: Tell us about what you did there?

#3N: In Mustang during autumn [we] went towards the Chinese side, launched attacks and returned, repeatedly. That was how [we] did.

Q: Did you have successes?

#3N: Yes?

Q: Were there times of success?

#3N: [I] do not know about winning but [we] did not face any losses.

Q: So when you went on these attacks on the Chinese, what was your role?

#3N: My responsibility was that of a common soldier who went when ordered to go and stayed when ordered to stay. [I] was not one in authority but a common soldier.

Q: So that was in the autumn that you'd go and attack the Chinese and come back and go back. What did you do other seasons of the year?

#3N: Yes?

Q: That was during the autumn, what did [you] do during the other times like summer, spring and winter?

01:06:47

#3N: Those periods [we] mostly stayed in Nepalese Territory. At the time of attack groups of 10, 15 or 20 men went into and stayed 15-20 days within Tibetan Territory. After a lapse of time [we] returned. Much of the time [we] lived in tents on the mountains.

Q: In tents?

#3N: Yes.

Q: In Nepalese territory?

#3N: Yes.

Q: And so when you went into China, did you take your tents with you and how did you live?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...went into Tibet.

Q: I mean Tibet. Sorry.

#3N: One could not take tents but you carried your food according to the planned number of days. [We] watched where the Chinese moved and what they did. There were a few leaders that took photographs, drew maps and wrote notes. Then [we] returned and took turns going there.

Q: Where did [you] stay?

#3N: One stayed on the mountains.

Q: You didn't have tents?

#3N: There were no tents.

Q: What did you live in?

01:08:17

#3N: [We] stayed on the ground during the day and at night ventured out in groups of two or three men. [We] were like guerrillas, like bandits.

Q: How far inside the Tibet border did you go?

#3N: One can venture quite far within. The Matsang Tsangpo River of Lhasa turned into ice during the winter and one can move far within Tibetan Territory. However, one cannot during summer when there is no ice. One cannot go beyond the river.

Q: Until the Tsangpo of Lhasa?

#3N: It is the Matsang Tsangpo of Lhasa, which flows from the Thoe region. It flows from the direction of Ngari towards Lhasa, towards Lhoka.

Q: How far can one venture into Tibet?

#3N: Perhaps one can go 40-50 kilometers. [We] rescued many that had fled their hometowns in Tibet.

Q: About how many raids like this did you do in a given year?

01:10:23

#3N: It was 4-5 times in a year. It was only during autumn season as one cannot go in summertime. [We] must go in autumn. In autumn [we] waited for and ambushed convoys. There were many communes that were raided. Winning a fight was just a matter of 20 minutes and losing was also just that. Then one must leave. By winning one could not claim the place and live there. It was just a matter of causing harm and not about ousting.

Q: So the rest of the year, what did you do when you weren't on guerrilla raids?

#3N: [We] trained. [We] received training in guerrilla warfare when it was not time [for raids]. [We] trained in guerrilla tactics like how to go about in the day and at night, how to fire a gun and such.

Q: You mentioned earlier that when you joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Tibet that you didn't receive any training. So was this something new for you to get training while you were in Mustang?

#3N: It was new. In the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Tibet one just joined it, while at the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Mustang there was training. Many teachers came who had been trained abroad.

Q: Where had they been trained?

01:13:03

#3N: [I] wonder where. It used to be said America but I do not know for sure, but there were 25-30 teachers. There were teachers in serial orders like first, second, third. There were many teachers. I do not know where [they] were trained.

Q: Were they all Tibetan teachers or some of them foreign?

#3N: [They] were members of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. [They] were Tibetans. All were Tibetans. [They] had arrived in India and then had gone abroad to train. Some of them came through the air and some through land.

Q: You mentioned that when you went on these raids that you didn't take tents. I'm assuming it was very cold. So how did you stay warm at night?

#3N: Even if it was cold you remained wearing what you possessed. There was not anything else to do. One was like an animal wearing the only thing you had, however many days that had been allotted. One could not do as one wished. Orders from higher ups came as to where to go and for how many days before returning. One did accordingly.

Q: Did anybody die from exposure?

01:15:12

#3N: It did not happen. It maybe cold at the border between Nepal and Tibet, but it was not that cold when one reached north of Tibet.

Q: And so when did you leave the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#3N: Then there were some internal problems in the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I resigned after 13 years. When was it when His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave the first Kalachakra Empowerment in Bodh Gaya? Was it '72 or '73? I left in that year. It was '73 or '74. [I] resigned and left. [I] did not stay after the internal problems and left.

Q: Why exactly did you resign?

#3N: You faced problems being there for a long time. [I] felt it would be much better to earn a living independently and it also happened to be a time when resignations were being permitted. Half of the soldiers had been sent to Dehradun [India] and some of the older ones were seeking to resign.

The younger ones were sent to Dehradun and the older ones that did not wish to remain were seeking to resign. Permission was being granted at that time.

Q: When you left, you were about...about how old were you when you left?

01:17:27

#3N: [I] must have been 35.

Q: Were there any women in *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#3N: There were not.

Q: Did the Tibetan soldiers have any interaction with the local villagers or anything?

#3N: There were others that were responsible for maintaining such contacts.

Q: Did you have any contact with the local people?

#3N: I did not have any contacts. I was staying [too far] in the north to have any contacts. There were officials and such that maintained contacts.

Q: Is there anything else...Thank you very much for telling us about all of this.

#3N: [Smiles]

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your life in Tibet?

#3N: [I] have nothing else.

Q: Okay. Well, thank you very, very much. This was very interesting.

I need to ask you two more questions again. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for you?

01:19:17

#3N: I have no problem because this is where I live and die. I will face no problems.

Q: Thank you.

#3N: One who travels back and forth to Tibet may face problems, but I have no time or means to go to Tibet.

Q: Can we use your real name?

#3N: Yes.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much for sharing your story.

#3N: [Joins palms]

END OF INTERVIEW