

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #42D – Samten
May 15, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #42D
2. Interviewee: Samten
3. Age: 78
4. Date of Birth: 1942
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lhasa
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: May 15, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 07 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Samten became a monk at the age of 10 at his parents' insistence. He joined the Sera Monastery near Lhasa and wanted to study the scriptures. He gives a description of a monk's daily routine and different responsibilities as well as the sources of food and income for the monastery. He was forced to give up his monk's vows at the age of 25 when he chose to pick up a gun and try to fight against the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese.

Samten recalls how the Chinese deceived the Tibetans with money and development. Samten was one among the group of 2,000 monks who went to the Potala Palace to fetch weapons to try to resist the Chinese army. He witnessed the shelling of the Chokori, a hill facing the Potala Palace, and Norbulingka [Dalai Lama's Summer Palace]. They could not see any Chinese soldiers to challenge to a fight. He speaks about the people of Lhasa surrounding Norbulingka to stop His Holiness the Dalai Lama from leaving to attend a Chinese show. He also relates the stoning to death of a clergyman in the Tibetan Government suspected to be a Chinese spy.

Samten and the other monks waited for a chance to attack the Chinese army camp, but soon learned that the Dalai Lama had escaped to India and were told to flee themselves. He felt that he was a failure for not being able to defend his country, but was happy to know that the Dalai Lama was safe in India. Samten worked for the Tibetan Government's Home Department in Dharamsala, India for 18 years.

Topics Discussed:

Monastic life, invasion by Chinese army, Norbulingka, resistance fighters, Dalai Lama's escape.

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Interview #42D

Interviewee: Samten

Age: 78, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 15, 2012

Question: Could you please tell us your name?

00:00:11

Interviewee #42D: Samten.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama 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.

#42D: Okay. [Nods]

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

#42D: [Nods]

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

#42D: Yes, [I] do.

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

#42D: [Nods]

Q: If here's anything you'd rather not talk about, just tell us that and that's fine.

#42D: Okay.

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

00:01:40

#42D: The problems in Tibet and China are great for us.

Q: If this film was shown in China...?

#42D: The film?

Q: Yes. If this film that we are recording is shown in Tibet, would it be a problem for you?

#42D: There will be no problem.

Q: Thank you very much for sharing your story with us today.

#42D: [Nods]

Q: I just wanted to let you that we're really interested... There's been many books written about Tibet and Tibetan history has been quite well documented. What we are interested in is your experience; what you saw with your own eyes. This is what we are interested in.

#42D: Okay. [Nods]

Q: Samten-*la*, can you start by telling us a little bit about your early childhood?

00:02:39

#42D: Long ago [I] was a monk as a little [child] in Tibet. [I] became a monk at the age of 10 and lived as a monk until the age of 45. And then times changed. I carried a gun in my hands with the intention to revolt against the Chinese. I had taken a vow that I offered back when I took up arms. One must return [the vow]. When you have taken the vow, you cannot use [firearms]. After returning the vow, I carried a gun and then left.

Q: Okay. Samten-*la*, we have a lot of time, so you can take your time. We're going to really want to hear a lot of the detail about your story, right? So we can start in the earlier years when you first became a monk and we have plenty of time for you to tell your story. So please there's no hurry yet.

#42D: Okay.

Q: So why did you become a monk at such an early age?

#42D: [My] parents made me a monk at the Sera [Monastery] where there was a huge monk population. [They] hoped that [I] would study the scriptures from a small age and become somebody. [I] did not get to study much as we lost our country.

Q: Was it difficult for you to leave your family so young and go live somewhere else?

#42D: How do [you] mean?

Q: Was it difficult to leave [your] family members as a [child] and live in the monastery?

00:04:57

#42D: It was not difficult as [I] hoped to study the Buddha dharma. [I] studied for some time, but could not do much due to lack of time.

Q: Can you describe to us what it was like in the very early years being a monk in the monastery? What it was like? What your daily routine was like?

#42D: There was a prayer assembly at around 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. After it got over, one went for [another] prayer assembly—if there was one—at the *datsang* ‘section in a large monastery’ and if not, one went to the *khangtsen* [smaller community within a monastery in which monks of one geographical area live]. The *datsang* provided our daily sustenance, as there was no aid from anywhere. The monks’ sustenance was provided like that.

Q: And then?

#42D: [I] wished to study the scriptures well but later as [I] grew older, [I] could not and then [we] lost our land.

Q: You said that you got up at 7-8 and went for prayer assembly. What did you do after the prayer assemblies?

00:06:23

#42D: After the prayer assembly, if you were student, you must go to the teacher to learn the scriptures.

Q: I see and after that?

#42D: There was not anything except carrying out chores for the monastery or at the teacher’s residence.

Q: And after that?

#42D: And after that one went to circumambulate [the monastery]. That is about it and there was not anything much to do.

Q: Around what time did [you] go to sleep everyday?

#42D: It was around 5:30 that [we] got up. Early in the morning [we] must recite the prayer that had been taught.

Q: What time did you go to sleep at night?

#42D: Yes?

Q: When did you sleep?

#42D: Tea time?

Q: No, after tea when it became dark, when did you go to sleep?

00:07:15

#42D: [We] stayed up reciting the prayers that had been taught by the teacher until around 8 or 9 o'clock. [We] sat within the compound.

Q: So the work for the monastery, was this like maintenance work? What kind of work was it?

#42D: The work was not difficult. Most of the monks engaged in studying the debates, but those of us who could not study were sent on errands for the *datsang*. There were tasks for the *datsang* that had to be carried out.

Q: What kind of tasks?

#42D: Tasks like fetching water, making fire and such. There were no major tasks.

Q: How did the monastery support itself financially?

00:08:59

#42D: Revenue came from the lands that the monastery owned and also from [monks] that were sent on trade missions to the north and to Kham. On account of our [monastery] being located in Lhasa, there were many offerings that were received. People of Lhasa were pious and made offerings of tea and such. [The monastery] survived on such revenue and nothing else. [We] were able to survive.

Q: What were the things that you didn't really enjoy that much about being a monk?

#42D: We were young at that time and besides leading a happy life, [I] did not think much of anything else. There were no difficulties whatsoever. There were no problems in survival since the monastery provided.

Q: Was there anything that was a special treat that you really looked forward to?

#42D: There were no special treats as such from the monastery but when the traders returned from their mission called the *buldhue* 'collection of offerings made to monasteries,' there were special offerings like money and such. The offerings were good and that was it and nothing more.

Q: What kind of business did you do? You said sometimes they went on business, so I'm wandering what kind of business.

00:11:10

#42D: There were the estates that belonged to individual *datsang*. Though I have not been there, monks that could not study the scriptures well were sent by the *datsang* to the estates to take care of it for the sustenance of the monks.

Q: To do farm work?

#42D: The monks did not need to do farm work. [They] had to oversee the work and such activities. Those monks that could not study the scriptures well were sent to earn a living for the monks of the *datsang* by going to supervise the work or to observe the grain [harvest].

Q: Were you good at scriptures?

#42D: [I] was somewhat good at the scriptures but if one does not have brainpower, it is not possible.

Q: How did life in the monastery start to change because of the Chinese presence in Tibet? What changes did you start to notice?

00:12:44

#42D: We were young then. What changes do [you] mean?

Q: What changes occurred in the *datsang*?

#42D: Just before the attack there were great developments in the *datsang*. There were developments with new buildings and all. Tibet was on the verge of being occupied then.

Q: Who brought development? Who was the one that brought development?

#42D: Whether it was furniture in the monastery or food or offerings, everything became better before the occupation of Tibet. People were happy then. Just as development was in progress the Chinese appeared and then there were problems.

Q: So this is...we are talking about Sera Monastery at this time or another monastery?

#42D: Sera [Monastery]. Sera Je [Datsang].

Q: Okay. I have some information about another monastery Gyangtse Pekor Monastery. Gyangtse Pekor Monastery?

#42D: Yes?

Q: Have you lived in Gyangtse Pekor Monastery?

00:14:15

#42D: Gyangtse Pekor?

Q: Yes.

#42D: That was located in a different region.

Q: Did you live in it?

#42D: I did not live there. That was in a far away region, towards the direction of Tsang.

Q: So before the Chinese attack, they were doing very well; things were doing very well. So, how did that change then? If you can give us detail like slowly, slowly how did things change in the monastery?

#42D: When the Chinese first appeared, I was not in any [official] position [to have information] and wondered what the reason could be. They started to use money, like in construction of roads and making offerings to the monks. They brought great improvement. When they did that, we felt what could [the reason] be? [I] felt dislike towards them then.

Q: And then?

00:15:19

#42D: They destroyed [Tibet] by the use of money. Even if a small road was to be constructed, [the Chinese] paid a great amount of *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins.’

Q: Did the Chinese seize [money]?

#42D: The Chinese arrived.

Q: Did the Chinese ask for money to construct roads?

#42D: [The Chinese paid *dhayen*] to the people of the country, the Tibetans. And the Tibetan people saw progress to quite an extent. In the end, they [the Chinese] got all the money [back]. That was how it happened and [I] felt that it was not good.

Q: And then?

#42D: The Chinese arrived and they paid a lot of money to people who were flatterers. When they received money, these people spoke various things and even sold the little land they owned to the Chinese and received a huge amount of *dhayen*. [The Chinese] did such things.

Before the arrival of the Chinese, we did not have to depend on anybody outside because there was enough production in Tibet. Tibet was self-sufficient and did not have to depend on anyone. They [the Chinese] came along and used their money, buying small tracts of land and paying a lot of money. This continued and then [they] constructed houses.

That was how Tibet was lost. Besides, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was small then. There was not much authority. Right from the beginning there was no reason at all to turn to the Chinese for anything; whether it was articles or money or fabrics or goods; everything was sufficient in Tibet.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: You can continue to narrate and I shall take notes.

00:18:01

#42D: To relate my experience, I was born in '64 [?] and the country was conquered when I was aged 25.

Q: Were you 25 years old when the country was lost?

#42D: Yes?

Q: Were you 25 years old when we lost our country?

#42D: When [I] was 25, [we] lost [our] country. There is a year's difference with His Holiness' age. The Chinese claim *chashay* 'Tibet as part of China.' But it was not really *chashay*. If it was *chashay*... There had been many battles in Tibet; there was a war with Outer Mongolia, an attack from Nepal, an attack from Xinjiang and the English also attacked. During these times [the Chinese] never claimed, "It is my *chashay*." If it was their *chashay*, they should look after it. However, they did not. Later they claimed, "[Tibet] is my *chashay*." At the time when the English attacked—[though] there was not a big war—but still they did not extend any help nor was there any talk of a *chashay*. Okay, that is about it.

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' we really are very much interested in what you personally saw because these things you're telling us they are important, but they've been well-documented already and so I think people do know about the true history of Tibet, but they don't know about your story and what you saw. So it'll be really helpful if you can tell it from your own eyes what you went through because that is unique.

#42: [Nods]

Q: So when you were in the monastery and the Chinese started occupying Lhasa, can you tell us how your life, personally, your life was affected by that as a monk?

00:21:40

#42D: There was a great change that occurred. I was a monk in the year '59. In the year '59 [I] went to the Potala Palace, got a gun, removed the monk's robes and joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] armed with a short-barrel English-made rifle. The *Chushi Gangdrug* could not see any Chinese in sight. [The Chinese] were hiding in every nook. We also did not have experience or anyone to deliver us supplies. Once you had consumed your food stock that was it. If you fired your gun and exhausted the stock of bullets, there was none to replenish it. That was how we gradually lost our land. His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped through Tawang [Arunachal Pradesh, India] and we did too.

That was the experience I had in my life. Then [I] arrived in India and lived in Missamari [Assam]. From Missamari we went to Ladakh to work as coolies. [I] worked as a coolie in Ladakh and...

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: Okay. That's a big chunk of time and change. So let's go back to the day that you decided to take up arms. So how did that happen? Did people come to the monasteries to recruit people to fight? How did that decision happen to take up arms when you were a monk?

#42D: [I] hoped to do something to the Chinese if [I] could actually encounter them at an open area even at the cost of my life for destroying our parents, culture and everything. We lived as monks and when we received guns...For one, we did not receive any training and secondly, even if we were trained we did not have any support. You ate what you had with you and that was it. The might of the Chinese and ours was different. There was a great difference because they had weapons on land as well in the sky. Once we exhausted the ammunition we possessed, that was it. There was nothing to do but throw away the weapon and run.

Q: How did the decision to fight the Chinese came about?

00:25:04

#42D: [I] fetched the gun with the hope to confront and fight the enemy if we could encounter them. However, that was impossible.

Q: Going back to the monastery just for a minute before you've given up your robes, was it you and a group of monks? How many monks together did you decide that you're going to stop being a monk and take up arms? How many of you were there from Sera?

#42D: It was in March of '59. Monks did not possess weapons and...

Q: Around how many monks were there?

#42D: Around 2,000 monks of Sera went to the Potala Palace where the weapons were stored on the top [floor].

Q: Were there around 2,000 people?

#42D: Yes, around 2,000 [monks] went and returned with weapons. Each one left by himself because you could not move in a group. So we came through Lhoka and Tawang.

It was not just [the monks of] Sera but included all the three monasteries [Sera, Drepung and Gaden].

Q: So how did this decision happen? Did you have a meeting? Was there a meeting where you decided to do that? Do you remember, *pa-la*, the day that this decision was made and how was the decision made to go and fight?

00:27:44

#42D: There was a meeting. Prior to that when the Chinese arrived, many prominent men made plans with *Chushi Gangdrug* being the key [organization]. However, the plan did not succeed very well. People like me were not part of the meeting but were on the go. There was no time for meetings or discussions.

Q: No, I meant in the monastery.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In the monastery it was very impromptu.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It was impromptu. They just decided?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They just decided to go.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Like we said earlier Tibet's history has been well documented, but we feel it is important [to record] the actual experiences and eyewitness stories of each individual. You might feel that what you experienced in your life isn't important but we, the younger generation, do not know when and how it happened in Tibet. It's difficult for us to understand. So if you could describe everything slowly, wouldn't it make it easier for us to understand?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So take it day by day.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: Go back to 1959, March 1959 and let's take it day by day, as much as you can. So let's start with the day that they got the guns. Like the monks, there's 2,000 monks from Sera, how did they know where to get the guns and can he describe that day when they got the guns and what happened.

00:29:24

#42D: We had no knowledge where the guns were stored. All the monks went to the Potala Palace where mortars were being fired. There were no Chinese in sight. Mortars were fired from everywhere, even from bunkers. We were adamant and hoped we would challenge them if we could get the guns. That was in our minds but in order to challenge them, we might have had just around 500-600 bullets. There were not anymore and carrying these [we] came through Lhoka.

Q: How did you know of the presence of the guns?

#42D: Initially, the government had issued a small number of guns to Sera [Monastery]. [Guns] were issued to Drepung [Monastery] and Gaden [Monastery]. [Weapons that] were issued were too few in number for us since the monk population was large. The guns were distributed to the older monks. So those of us younger ones that did not receive [guns] ran to where the stock was.

Q: How did you know that the guns were present where they were?

#42D: Initially there were soldiers to guard the armory. [We] had learned that it was somewhere there.

Q: Did you request the security guards for guns or did you take the guns yourselves?

00:31:25

#42D: They [the security guards] said, “If you want guns, enter that room as it contains guns. And the bullets are stocked in such a place.”

Q: Was this a place under the Potala?

#42D: It was on top of the Palace. There were many Chinese informers among us. So the bullets had been stored on the lower floor and the guns on the upper floor. Those that went to fetch weapons faced great difficulties. When one got bullets, there were no guns and when one got the guns, one could not find the bullets. During that period there were so many spies who were people that took money from the Chinese. Hence, [the guns and bullets] were stored in opposite [rooms]. We were at the Potala then. There was a place called Chokori on the other side of the Potala. The Chinese fired at it.

Q: Where were the Chinese?

#42D: They arrived at the Chokori, which we could [see] from the window.

Q: Chakpori?

#42D: Chokori is located close by. There was a [mountain] called Lhasa Chokori. The Potala and it stood facing each other. We watched from the window and saw the Chinese climbing up the Chokori twice. We could see from the window. Our guns could not reach there. At the [Chokori] were many Drapchi ‘Tibetan Government Army’ soldiers and the Kusung Magmi ‘Dalai Lama’s Security Army.’ Twice they removed the Chinese. We could see it. It was close by.

We were worried that the Chinese might have entered the place where His Holiness was living. Though we wished to go there, the Chinese were firing from hidden places and none were in sight. They were firing indiscriminately. Many monks had arrived at the Potala and [the Chinese] fired numerous shells at it. However, the Palace was not damaged. We had left in the morning around 8 o’clock, but could not get the guns until 6 or 7 in the evening.

Q: Six or 7 at night or morning?

00:33:54

#42D: [We] had left at 8 o’clock in the morning, but could not get the guns until 6 or 7 in the evening. [Our] stomachs were empty as there was nothing to eat—just water, in the Potala Palace. Then [I] came to Sera [Monastery]. What happened then? This is my experience, what I witnessed and what happened. Further away from Sera was a big army

camp of the Drapchi Army, [converted into?] a Chinese army camp. I was 25 years old then. Everyone was around my age. There were 2,000-3,000 monks as well as the Government's army. [We] were told that the army camp was to be destroyed, for which [I] volunteered. [We] were taught to use the gun by the soldiers. [We] stayed alert to move anytime and waited until around 1 o'clock at night.

Some men were sent as spies to assess the army camp [and they reported], "[We] should not go to there to the army camp. [The Chinese] have dug a ditch of 10-15 feet all around the camp and covered it with grass. Everyone will [fall in it and] perish." Many Drapchi soldiers had gone to observe the area. [The Chinese] were firing from there. The monks were stopped, "Do not go. There is a ditch all around." I did not see it myself but those that went there said that [we] should not go.

As we looked on, Norbulingka, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's [Summer] Palace was shelled a great deal uprooting the trees. We wondered what had happened to His Holiness. We thought His Holiness would be there, as we had no knowledge [about his escape]. There were no telephones and things like that. Later some people brought the message, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left for Lhoka. It is useless for you to remain. Flee wherever you can." Such a prophecy arrived whether it was from man or deity. Then [we] fled.

Q: Were you not able to get guns from morning until 6 or 7 o'clock at the Potala?

00:37:18

#42D: [We] had gotten the guns but could not get the bullets. The Chinese had spitefully stored guns at one place and the bullets at a distance from it. [We] were not able to cover the distance between them due to the firing from machine guns and cannons.

Q: Did you know how to use a gun?

#42D: Yes, [I] did.

Q: Where did you learn?

#42D: There was an English gun called the *Enji khadhum* 'short-barrel English-made [rifle].'

Q: Where did you learn?

#42D: Along the way two or three Tibetan Government soldiers taught us. Otherwise, [we] did not know how to fire.

Q: What did they teach you? What kind of training did you get?

#42D: One did not need much training for this type of gun. It was just moving the trigger. It was not like other technologies. [It] was called *Enji khadhum*. There was no need to learn a great deal.

Q: Did you have any firing practice, target practice?

#42D: Yes?

Q: Did the soldiers let you fire?

#42D: They taught us how to fire.

Q: No. Did they show you how to fire?

00:40:15

#42D: [They taught us] how to lie on the ground and how to move about, as the soldiers had had training from the English. [They] taught us those things but there was not much time.

Q: So actually you didn't discharge the weapon at all?

#42D: Yes?

Q: [You] didn't discharge the gun?

#42D: There was no one to be seen to discharge [the gun]. We thought we would encounter the Chinese on open ground, and there would be combat. I had a gun and around 250 bullets. [I] would be happy to have been able to fire but in order to do that, there were no Chinese in sight. All of them were in foxholes while we were on the open ground. There was nothing but to face harm for yourself. They [the Chinese] had made preparations from the start and dug bunkers and were firing from there. It was like that.

Q: Had you already taken the ceremony to give back your vows of a monk at this point?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, he already said that.

Q: Can you describe that ceremony? Was it a group ceremony or was it more of an individual thing?

#42D: All the monks present had taken guns into their hands and guns are firearms. Once that gets into the hands, we must give back our vows. "From today I have to perform violent activities. [I] cannot go on the spiritual path." One can offer it back.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: Did you give do it in front of a stupa or a *rinpoche*?

00:42:27

#42D: [I] could not dare speak to the *rinpoche* 'reincarnate lama.' It was okay to just offer back your vows like that.

Q: Where did you offer it?

#42D: I did it to a stupa, which was fine.

Q: Tell us what happened after he heard that the Norbulingka was being shelled? What happened then?

#42D: His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left Norbulingka around 2 o'clock in the night but nobody knew of it. Nobody was aware of it. Chinese soldiers surrounded the Norbulingka and there was no way out. However, [His Holiness] got through due to the miraculous power of the Buddha and the protective deities. There was absolutely no exit, as there was a river on one side and Chinese soldiers surrounded the area. We had no knowledge about His Holiness' departure then. Only two days after His Holiness' departure did people become aware of it.

Monks who had fled from the Norbulingka told us later that [the Chinese] shelled the *changma* 'willow trees' in the Norbulingka. We could see that from the Potala. Almost a thousand people must have perished when the *changma* fell on them. [The Chinese shelled the Norbulingka] believing that His Holiness was inside. People were sleeping around the Norbulingka.

Q: Did 1,000 people die?

00:44:20

#42D: It must be over 1,000; there were many [that perished]. People protested in Lhasa and were sleeping [around the Norbulingka]. [They] were there day and night believing that His Holiness was within. Nobody was aware of [the escape] except a few aristocrats and soldiers. *Chushi Gangdrug* [men] waited across the river at Ramagang with a boat. There were also some people present. So [His Holiness] had been escorted in that way. We learned of it only after two days.

There were some monks who survived [the onslaught at the Norbulingka] and they told [us] that [the Chinese] claimed to have killed His Holiness the Dalai Lama by looking at every person under the *changma* that had a shaven head and was dressed in monks' robes. They were certain that [His Holiness] was in the palace and rained shells on it. [The Chinese] turned over the monks [bodies] under the *changma* and said, "[We] have killed the Dalai Lama." That is how it happened. [The monks from Norbulingka] said that [the Chinese] turned over the bodies of those dressed in monks' robes thinking it could be the Dalai Lama. It was two days since the Dalai Lama had left. [They] said that such things took place. I did not witness it, but those who fled from the Norbulingka said that [the Chinese] did such things to the injured lying under the *changma*.

Q: Were you still wearing your monk's robes at this point?

#42D: Who?

Q: Were you still wearing monk's robes?

#42D: [I] was not wearing monk's robes then but a *chupa* 'traditional coat.' [We] had to remove the monks' robes and don *chupa* when leaving [the monastery].

Q: What did you see next?

#42D: There were the tall *changma* that were felled by shelling. However, there were no Chinese in sight. We were looking from the window of the Potala at the *changma* being shelled and falling down. There were numerous *changma* there. These were big nice *changma* that were felled by shelling. [The Chinese] moved everyone under [the trees] that was dressed in monks' robes [looking] for the Dalai Lama among the dead claiming they had killed the Dalai Lama. Even the Chinese were not aware of His Holiness' escape until after two days. That is my experience.

Q: And then?

00:47:47

#42D: And then the main thing that happened just before we lost our land was that there was someone called Phakpa-*la* Khenchung [holding the rank of a clergyman in the Tibetan Government]; Chamdo Phakpa-*la's* *khenchung*.

Q: Phakpa-*la*?

#42D: Yes, Chamdo Phakpa-*la's* *khenchung*. He was an aristocrat. In the mornings he used to attend meetings at the Kashag 'Cabinet' as an aristocrat. [He] attended the meeting. There was a lot of unrest then with His Holiness the Dalai Lama being asked to attend a meeting at Silonpa unaccompanied by servants or soldiers. That is what they [the Chinese] said, that [His Holiness] must come alone. The people knew about this. Therefore, people arrived at the Norbulingka and slept there to request [His Holiness] not to go. That is the gist of the matter.

At that time, the Khenchung, who was an aristocrat—[he] was the Chamdo Phakpa-*la's* *khenchung*—attended the Kashag's meeting in the morning. [He] had to attend the meeting dressed as an aristocrat. He went back after the meeting got over and then rode a bicycle, covered [his] mouth with a cloth and armed with a pistol in his *amba* 'pouch of traditional coat' [came to] the Norbulingka thinking he would not be stopped as an aristocrat.

Q: Cloth over his mouth?

#42D: He came on a bicycle with a cloth over the mouth. From amongst the people that lay there, [I] heard that an old woman flung a stone. I did not witness it. An old woman flung a stone and he was injured. Once he was injured all the people mobbed and killed [him] there.

Q: Why did [they] kill? Did [they] think [he] was a spy?

#42D: He was a Chinese spy.

Q: I see.

00:49:34

#42D: He was an aristocrat, the Phakpa-*la*'s *khenchung*; the principal *chanzo* 'business manager.' [He] could attend government meetings. In the morning he attended a meeting. People were suspicious [of him]. In the evening he again came to the g with a cloth over the mouth but was stopped. An old woman threw a stone and injured him. Then [he] was killed there. That was the initial reason for the unrest.

The reason for unrest started from there. There were thousands of people sleeping [around the Norbulingka] leaving aside their work to plead with His Holiness not to go. The Chinese had said that His Holiness was to come to a meeting at the place called Silonpa at Maga Sapa and that there would be shows and such.

Q: Did the Chinese attack after Chamdo Phakpa-*la* was killed?

#42D: No, no.

Q: The unrest...

#42D: After Chamdo Phakpa-*la* was killed...And then there was another aristocrat called Samdup Phodang. His father was a senior army official. He was also stoned. And then the unrest took place from there. The unrest began from the 12th day.

Q: Which month?

#42D: Yes?

Q: The 12th day of which month?

00:51:45

#42D: [I] think it was in the 3rd month but I cannot recall much. All the people were lying around the Norbulingka because His Holiness the Dalai Lama...to Silonpa. [I] heard that His Holiness had said, "I would have to go." So the people requested him not to go and lay on the roads for many months. [I] heard that such events took place. I heard about it but did not witness the people lying on the roads. That was the main reason the unrest occurred.

These are my experiences of what happened and what I saw. Other than that, I would not know much about politics. That is it.

Q: What did you think about the stoning of Phakpa-*la*?

#42D: That was not good [what Phakpa-*la*'s *khenchung* did]. In the morning [he] attended the meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and in the evening, he dressed in Chinese

clothes, rode a bicycle and carried a gun. Everybody was observing [him]. Even otherwise, [people] did not like him.

Q: Was [he] a Chinese spy?

00:53:29

#42D: [He] was similar to a spy, attending the meeting in the morning and changing clothes and arriving in the evening. Someone among the people stoned him and [he] was killed there. People stoned him relentlessly and then dragged [the body] around the Bakor [Square] of Lhasa.

Q: Okay *pa-la*, so what did you do next? What did you and the group you were with do next?

#42D: Then carrying the guns, we were outside of Lhasa. [We] heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left and we thought, “There’s no reason to remain. The Buddha has left. If we stay back, we must challenge them and die. If His Holiness could reach India...” We carried the guns and left to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Lhoka because if His Holiness was staying at Lhoka [we] could be of help in protecting him. That was the reason for our leaving. However, His Holiness had left for Mon Tawang [Arunachal Pradesh]. He had already left for India.

Q: Can you tell us a bit more about your meeting with *Chushi Gangdrug* and how you joined them?

#42D: [We] did not reach the main *Chushi Gangdrug* base. Trekking through another region we passed the *Chushi Gangdrug*. [We] were on foot. [We] walked for a month and 16 days. [We] did not encounter the Chinese. Even if [we] had encountered them, we were not capable enough.

Q: Did you ever discharge your weapon in this whole time?

00:56:16

#42D: [I] did not get to discharge. [I] had to surrender [the gun] to the Indians. We did not have training and if the bullets were spent, that was it, whereas the Chinese were trained. Later, [we] gave up the guns to the Indian army at Tawang. There was nothing but sorrow. [I] felt that [we] had failed. However, [I] felt very satisfied that His Holiness had reached India. We did not get to fight them [the Chinese] but hoped that [we] could escort His Holiness during the journey and serve the Tibetan Government. [I] felt extremely happy that His Holiness had arrived [in India]. At that time he had arrived in Mussoorie.

Q: Did you ever get married, *pa-la*?

#42D: No.

Q: Why not?

#42D: [Speaks before translation] After I left the army—this is my experience—I did not have a capital to start a business. I served the Home Department of the [Tibetan] Government for 18 years. [I] worked for the government. Then [I] retired and am at the Home for the Aged now. That is the conclusion.

Q: Did you ever think of becoming a monk again?

00:58:29

#42D: [I] cannot become a monk again. [Laughs]

Q: I just want to go back a little bit before you left Tibet when you were assisting *Chushi Gangdrug*. Can you just say a little bit about what that life was like in that time when you were travelling with them? Can you just say what that was, you know what kind of things you saw and what kind of experiences you had because we have no idea and we can't imagine it at all?

#42D: Well, there were no new experiences as such. As we grew older and gained experience, we hoped to serve the monastery and *khangtsen* but the attack occurred and we did not get to do it.

Q: Didn't [you] have any experience with the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#42D: There was not any time to experience anything with the *Chushi Gangdrug*. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already left and we felt, "Now that is great. Even if we cannot fight we will get to do something when [we] reach a foreign country." Then I joined the army and that is it.

Q: *Pa-la*, can you compare life at the monastery to life in the army? Are there some things that are similar from being a monk and being a soldier?

01:00:33

#42D: I have been a monk and a soldier and have gained considerable experience. Now in order to gain further experience, my body—there is just a year's difference with His Holiness' age—I am 78 years old. Due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, [we] have enough to eat and drink. Thanks to this Buddha, Tibetans in general are happy. There is no worry.

However, what I feel in my heart is...the Chinese are so unrelenting even though the world is doing something [for the cause of Tibet]; they are so unrelenting. [I] always pray when I wake up that due to the grace of the Buddha, even if we cannot get complete independence, we will achieve self-governance. [I] pray that His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives long and that the Buddha's work is fulfilled. [I hope that] with the grace of this Buddha our cause will be somehow resolved and organizations like yours are doing great work. The food we eat at the Home for the Aged are provided free of cost. Mainly it is the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the foreign aid organizations that we can live happily like this. We pray but the Chinese are so unrelenting and full of lies.

Just last night it was in the Indian news that the Chinese are trying to poison His Holiness the Dalai Lama and that the Himachal Government must take responsibility [to provide security]. They [the Chinese] are trying such things. They are not afraid of the world but fear one person. They wish to eliminate the Buddha. I am not worried myself because the Tibetans have protective deities and [I] feel content, but such dangers come about these days.

Q: *Pa-la*, what do you think about the self-immolations happening in Tibet these days? What are your thoughts on that?

01:03:36

#42D: One group states, “When the Chinese are causing such suffering on us, it is useless to live. We have to try and do something.” The world must be made aware. Until now the world never knew for sure [about the situation in Tibet] and were in doubt. Now [the self-immolations] reveal the real situation. I feel that it is not right to kill oneself but this is helping the cause of Tibet. Really, it is. For instance, I wished to do something when [I] was younger but am old and helpless now. The world must become aware. They [the Chinese] do not allow people of the world inside [Tibet]. [I] think [the self-immolations] are great though it is not right to kill oneself. However, the enthusiasm of the people living in Tibet is incredible. I laud them.

Q: *Pa-la*, is there anything else you’d like to tell us? Is there anything else we’ve not covered?

#42D: Like what?

Q: Is there anything you’d like to say?

#42D: The Buddha is striving so hard and the new [Tibetan] government is striving so hard, yet they [the Chinese] become firmer. There is no other way for us but to give up one’s life and property. Once this is done, the world will become aware. At present they [the Chinese] are concealing; what the Chinese speak in the morning is different in the evening. [They] speak only lies and no factual clarity. [They] speak only lies and for the progress of Communism. Though [China] is a powerful nation, it is about to undergo a change. The change is under progress. Due to the benevolence of the Buddha, they should undergo a change. That is about it.

Q: Okay, we hope so too. Thank you very much for sharing your story and I’ve to ask you one more time. Is it okay to use your interview? Do we have your permission to use your interview?

#42D: Yes.

Q: If it’s shown anywhere in the world it’s fine with you?

#42D: [Nods]

Q: Thank you so much.

#42D: [Joins palms]

END OF INTERVIEW