

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #59M – Kelsang Dorjee
April 12, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #59M
2. Interviewee: Kelsang Dorjee
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Khorkya
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 12, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Palace, Camp No 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 38 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Namyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Kelsang Dorjee's hailed from a nomadic family, who owned about 100 yaks and 600-700 sheep. His was the wealthiest family in the village. He gives a detailed account of grazing the animals in a systematic manner and describes the differences between summer and winter grazing lands. He also describes how the herds were guarded by dogs to protect them from wolves. Grasslands were leased from the *gyero* who owned the lands and payment was in the form of sheep and bags of salt. He describes how the tax was calculated and felt that the payments were fairly made for use of the land.

Kelsang Dorjee's village was not directly affected by the Chinese invasion. He witnessed the conditions of a prison in Gyangtse, where wealthy Tibetan were interned by the Chinese, when he tried to deliver food and tea to his wife's uncle. The prisoners endured forced labor and a shortage of food causing them to eat rats, dead horses and leather. Kelsang Dorjee also witnessed a *thamzing* 'struggle session' during his visit to Gyangtse and the shocking impact it had on him.

Unable to bear the terrible sufferings he saw being meted out to the wealthy Tibetans and fearing his own capture, he chose to escape. He and his family escaped in the night and successfully reached Indian territory. Many of his family members passed away after making the journey.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, herding, taxes, oppression under Chinese, *thamzing*, imprisonment, forced labor, escape experiences.

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Interview #59M

Interviewee: Kelsang Dorjee

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 12, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00.00.16

Interviewee #59M: Kelsang Dorjee.

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

#59M: Yes.

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

00:01:45

#59M: [Joins palms and bows]

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

#59M: Okay. [I] do not think there is any such problem. I am very happy from the depth of my heart that you are extending help to us at a time when Tibet is undergoing a very difficult period. [I] do not think that the little problems we face [here in exile] can be considered as problems. [I] will relate whatever is there in my mind and the actual happenings in Tibet.

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

#59M: [Nods]

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

00:03:08

#59M: [I] do not think there will be any problems. Even if I do face problems, I am not afraid.

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

#59M: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ can you please tell us how old you are and were you were born?

00:03:50

#59M: The name of my birthplace is called Gyelu.

Q: Yes?

#59M: You can mention it as Khorhya. The name of my family is Khorhya Kyemen. And my name is Kelsang Dorjee. We were nomads when [I] was little. We earned our livelihood by rearing animals and selling meat and butter. We were not farmers but lived as nomads.

Q: How many people lived in your village?

#59M: The district was small with only three clusters [of villages]. There were 8-9 families in our cluster. Nearby were two other clusters of eight, nine or 10 families each. Sorry, there were four [clusters]. There were four [clusters] in Khorhya. On the other side was Gyelu whose [residents] were landowners. We did not own lands. Since long ago, we tended animals. There were four clusters.

Q: I don’t think I got *pa-la*’s age.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: When?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: How old is he?

[Interpreter translates as: How old were you when you tended animals at the nomadic camp?]

00:05:49

#59M: When I stayed at the nomadic camp...My parents passed away when I was young. When I tended the animals...My parents passed away when I was 13 years old. Earlier to that, when I was about 11 or 12, I used to assist those who herded the animals. From the age of 16, I took responsibility of looking after the *dri* ‘female yaks’ and yaks, milking them and selling the butter and cheese.

Q: Who was it that passed away when [you] were 13, father or mother?

#59M: Father passed away.

Q: How old is *pa-la* right now?

00:06:38

#59M: I am 73 years old now.

Q: *Pa-la*, how did your father die?

#59M: Father died from illness and not due to any violence. Do you need specific details about my family?

Q: Yes?

#59M: Should [I] tell you about the number of family members?

Q: Yes. How many were there?

00:07:04

#59M: [After] father passed away and there were my mother, four brothers and three sisters. My late mother and late paternal grandmother were with us when we escaped from Tibet.

Q: Mother's grandparents?

#59M: [My] father's mother could come here while father died young. My grandmother passed away in Bhutan after we arrived here. We struggled a lot. First we arrived in Gangtok [Sikkim] and then in Bhutan. [She] passed away in Bhutan. Should [I] relate the Gangtok story? [I] do not think that's necessary.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So in his family, there were mother, four boys and three girls. So that's seven.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Seven plus mother [is] eight.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Plus mother is eight.

Q: *Pa-la*, can you tell us before your father died, what did you do as a child before age 11?

00:08:43

#59M: My work entailed tending the cattle. I engaged in tending the *dri*. My older brother drove the load-bearing yaks. We did transportation work as well as any work that was available. My older brother did that and the younger one was a shepherd. Each of the three brothers performed a task.

Q: Each son was assigned a different group of animals?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, yeah.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes, a different group of animals. Okay.

#59M: My late mother and grandmother could come [to exile]. My late mother passed away after we arrived here in Mundgod.

Q: Did the family as nomads own many animals? Can we please understand how many animals that were owned by your family?

00:09:57

#59M: We owned about a hundred *dri* and yaks. The yaks were for transportation and *dri* for milk; we owned a total of about a hundred. Then there were around 600-700 sheep. [I am] not exactly sure, but you can say between 600 and 700.

Q: *Pa-la*, can you please tell us what economic level was your family compared to other nomads in the area? Were your family wealthy, medium or lower income?

#59M: Mine was the wealthiest family from our village. The others were modest ones and most of them were [my] relatives. I was the *kyopon* and the wealthier one. In our village, mine was the richest family. There was someone called the *kyopon* in each cluster.

Q: *Pa-la*, by biggest do you own the most animals?

00:11:34

#59M: That's right. For the nomads it's only the animals: animals, *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' assets and money. That was it. There were not many gold or silver ornaments.

Q: You had many brothers and sisters, where were you in the line-up: in the middle or oldest or what?

#59M: There was a brother older to me who shouldered the responsibility of fending for the family. Since the age of 16, I took the main responsibility of the family like a father.

Q: Among the 7 siblings, where were you...?

00:12:24

#59M: I was in the middle. There were two who were older to me. The oldest was a sister and then a brother. I was the third in line.

Q: If you are the third in line, were there sisters above you?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: First is sister, then second my brother and I am the third.

Q: Why did you take the responsibility over your older brother?

00:13:12

#59M: My older brother who used to shoulder the responsibility earlier said, "You should take the responsibility of fending for the family." I was considered more able. The well-wishers in the village also said, "It would be better if you took the responsibility." My brother was somewhat... [he] did not mix much with people and did not take much care of the home. So he said, "You are better. You should take the responsibility of fending for the family." That was what was said, but there was nothing much to do for a living, [we] being nomads.

Q: And in the nomad family, is that how reasonability is usually assigned to the most responsible boy in the family or is it the oldest usually?

#59M: [The responsibility holder] is considered like the father of the family.

Q: What are the girls doing in your family while the boys are attending the animals? What are the responsibilities of the girls?

00:14:52

#59M: By the time we left [for India] only two of the girls lived at home. The others had been given away in marriage.

Q: What were they doing before they were given away?

#59M: Before they were given away, they milked the animals, did the spinning and weaving. We did not have fabric in Tibet and one had to make *chupa* ‘traditional coat/dress’ out of woolen cloth. So they did the spinning, made yarn, milked the animals and churned curd and that’s how they earned their livelihood.

Q: What kind of clothing did the girls weave and what did you use for winter clothing and in summer?

00:15:58

#59M: Yes, [they] made [different clothing for winter and summer]. For the winter we used what is called *puruk*. The richer families made *puruk*, which is thick and shiny outside with short fur within. A thicker type was created for the winter.

Q: Was it *puruk* that you used for the hotter months of summer?

#59M: No, for the hot summer months there was the [fabric] called *therma*.

Q: Where did you bring *therma* from?

00:16:35

#59M: Basically everything was made from wool, but [some] were made thinner. In summer [we] wore the thin variety and in winter the thicker ones.

Q: Did you use animal skins for clothing and what kinds were the fabric kind of animal skins to make clothing from or animal fur?

#59M: In my region wearing animal skin...[shakes head]. When little lambs died, the skin was removed and prepared well and then it was used as inner lining for the woolen clothes. In Tibet it was mostly used as inner lining for clothes when it was very cold in winter. Other than that, we never wore skin in my region. There were some who wore fox skin as caps.

Q: While you were still a young boy around 16, 17, 18, did your older sister marry? You had one older sister.

00:18:58

#59M: [She] was married. When I was 16 or 17...the boys were married earlier. My older sister married later than me though she was quite a number of years older. [My] older sister married at around 22 years of age.

Q: You married before the elder sister, I see. How old were you when you were married?

#59M: I was married very young. [I] married at the age of 16.

Q: Sixteen?

00:19:44

#59M: [Laughs] She [interviewer] is surprised to hear the young age. [Laughs] There was not much education in my region.

Q: Was that a typical age for a nomad boy to get married?

#59M: That depended upon [the status of] the family. The richer ones married at such ages while the others did not marry at the appropriate age. They married at a time when their livelihood was in better condition. The wealthier families believe that when the parents are in good health, they should make proper arrangements for their children by getting them married. I am not boasting, but when we lived in Tibet mine was a rich family.

[My] parents were very loving and they especially got the older children married early. My father passed away but mother was very loving. Mother worked hard to make a living for the family and saved all the money, making the family sound. [She] made very good arrangements for the children's [future]. The marriages were celebrated on very grand scales.

Q: Did your mother select your bride for you?

00:21:50

#59M: Yes. In Tibet the richer families did not fall in love and marry. One studied the background and financial soundness of the other family and the parents [of the other family] would seek to know the background [of the first family] and if they matched well, [the bride or groom's] hand was sought for.

For example, if it was your [to the interpreter] daughter, the parents will seek [a groom] for her irrespective of the children's likes or dislikes. The custom in the olden days was that the [bride or groom] was selected depending upon the parents' wishes and then the marriage performed. That was how it was.

Q: Can you tell us how did your life change after you were married and took on the responsibility of the family?

#59M: Well, the change was like...In Tibet there is a saying “wherever the parents lay the pillow, the children must put their head.” If one did not obey one’s parents, the children will not succeed in their work. A lot of respect was given to the parents. The parents tried their best and performed the marriage. My wife died in Bhutan—she is not the wife I have now—had she not died, [I] had full trust in that marriage and we shared our livelihood and anything that we needed to talk to each other. [We] lived our lives that way.

Q: How many years were you together with your wife?

00:24:37

#59M: We started to live together at age 16 and [she] passed away at age 27.

Q: The first wife?

#59M: Yes, the first wife. She had four children of whom only one survives. The rest passed away. Only the daughter survived and she lives in the United States.

Q: When you married your wife, what was her age and why did she die at 27?

00:25:19

#59M: She and I were of the same age.

Q: Why did [she] die?

#59M: Poor thing. She’d given birth and due to some complications from that [she] passed away. Tibetans believe there are some harmful effects, due to which—though she seemed okay, she died suddenly. [She] passed away about 20 days later.

Q: After giving birth?

00:25:43

#59M: After giving birth.

Q: Together you had four children and three of them died. What did the children die from?

#59M: [We] brought one of the children out from Tibet during our escape and [he/she] died just like that in Gangtok. At that time many people died there as the people had arrived in a new place.

Q: Where?

00:26:38

#59M: In Gangtok. We arrived initially in Gangtok and not Bhutan. The child fell ill and was treated, but it did not help and [the child] passed away. The other two children...One

of them was a baby when the mother passed away in Bhutan and I took care of [the child] for about six months and the child passed away. I took care of [the child] by feeding goat's milk. Another child was miscarried. It just about had taken the form of a baby. That was how I lost four [three] children.

Q: Did the second child live for about 6-7 years?

#59M: The second child survives.

Q: Which one's the one that died in Bhutan?

00:27:40

#59M: The one that died in Bhutan was the last child. The mother passed away and the child was left behind. [He/she] lived for about 6-7 months and died. Earlier to that a child was miscarried.

Q: So many losses of children. But these children, it seems like they died after you went into exile—the children died.

#59M: We arrived in India and one of the children, the oldest died in Gangtok.

Q: And the others?

00:28:42

#59M: One child died in Gangtok. The daughter that was born in Gangtok is living now. The next one which died was miscarried. That was also in India, no it was in Bhutan. Then another child lived for 5-6 months after the mother's death and died in Bhutan. The mother, my wife, expired in Bhutan.

Q: You were already out of Tibet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, out of Tibet.

Q: All three children died outside of Tibet?

#59M: Yes, none passed away in Tibet.

Q: The reasons were the conditions were so difficult in exile, the weather or disease or what caused the death of these children?

00:29:48

#59M: The first child's death was on account of the weather and lack of hygiene. At that time we did not have good hygiene. We were struggling to make ends meet and living in someone else's house. One had to live in houses that did not keep out the rains and it was difficult to live well. Under such circumstances the child became ill and received treatment at the hospital, but there were no good doctors. The treatment did not help and [the child] passed away. The second one was miscarried—no it was the third one as the second child

lives. The third one was miscarried. [I] brought up the fourth one after the death of the mother but [the child] passed away. All of them died from illnesses and not otherwise.

Q: So before all these losses occurred, you were living in Tibet from the age of your marriage 16 and you left for exile when you were 22. So, can you tell us what was life like in Tibet; in your area between the years like 1953 to 1957? You were a nomad, newly married, big family, many children; what was happening in your life?

#59M: At that time people did not have much knowledge and there was no fear of depleting food as we had plenty. People were happy and there was no awareness about education. Ours was an isolated region. Basically our village was a very happy place. Food was aplenty and Phari was close by. It was a happy place and [we] never faced any problems in making a living. After arriving in India we have faced difficulties on various counts. Over there, there were no problems and [we] were happy.

Q: *Pa-la*, could you give me an example of what would be a daily schedule for you as the father of such a big family? What was your daily life like, in the morning, afternoon and evening?

00:33:34

#59M: Well, it was like this. In our region, we got up in the morning and...the mother [of the family] got up first. The woman got up first and cooked the food. After having breakfast, each one left for the assigned tasks whether it was tending the *dri* or going with the load-bearing yaks or the sheep. Each one performed his task during the day. Those who were old and did not have any duties, spent their days happily. That was how [we] lived [our] lives.

Q: *Pa-la*, what did you do on a daily schedule?

#59M: I was small then and mainly engaged in tending the yaks and *dri*. During the day [I] grazed the *dri* and fed them grass. One must look after the animals well. If the animals were not fed grass and water, it was not good for them. [I] mainly engaged in that sort of work.

Q: How early in the morning would the mothers and daughters get up to make breakfast?

00:35:17

#59M: There were no watches in Tibet then, but compared to the time here, it was around 6 or 7 o'clock that they got up. It was around 6:30 or 7 o'clock that they got up.

Q: What would the family eat for breakfast, *pa-la*?

#59M: Breakfast was mostly *tsampa* in Tibet. [We] drank *thukpa* 'noodle soup' made from *tsampa* with pieces of meat and cheese added to it. Every morning [we] drank *thukpa*. [Laughs]

Q: When the weather was very cold in the winter, did you still go out to take the sheep out?

00:36:23

#59M: Yes, one went out. If a family did not have a large number of children, servants were hired especially to herd the yaks and sheep. Take my family for example: when the children grew older, each one was able to take the responsibility of the yaks and sheep. Those without [children] hired herders by paying money—in Tibet there was no money but they were paid in kind. Servants were hired to look after the sheep and yaks.

Q: *Pa-la*, please explain the biggest worry you had was where to find water and where to find grass for food for the animals. How did you decide where to go? Did somebody tell you or did you have to figure it out yourself?

#59M: It was like this. There were different areas for the summer and winter. The grazing was done in a methodical way. If the area was this region, the grazing started from Camp Number 1 [Mundgod] and moved in a sequence. [The animals] were not allowed to go everywhere lest they destroy the grass. People herded them from one part to the other and likewise continued the same the following days. Normally that was how herding was done. If [the animals] were let loose, all the grass would be over. There'd be no grass left to eat as the grass would be broken and swept away by the wind.

Q: You had to confine the animals, so they would only eat a certain place and then maybe, how much longer ...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Period of one or two days; then after that to another area. Area-wise to area-wise, we have to go like that.

Q: When you took the animals out to eat in one place and then did you come back home that night or were you out for a few days?

00:39:48

#59M: [We] returned in the evening. [We] herded during the day and returned in the evening.

Q: Was there any competition with other nomads to use the same land or did you have a part of land that was just for your family?

#59M: The owner of our lands was called the *gyero* and each one [of the nomads] had to pay them a grass-cost annually, which was in the form of sheep. A particular tract of land cost a certain number of sheep.

Q: Was it *gyelu*?

00:40:44

#59M: It was *gyero*, the owner of our land. The owner of the lands in our village was called the *gyero*.

Q: What was he?

#59M: They were the owners of the lands from whom we bought the grass.

Q: Was it not the Tibetan government?

00:40:54

#59M: They were Tibetans, same like [us].

Q: Were they the Tibetan Government or what?

#59M: [They] were not the Tibetan Government. It was like Karnataka [India], a state. We did not own any lands in the state, so one had to buy it. We paid sheep as the cost of the lands. And the lands were allotted accordingly. If one allowed the sheep to graze everywhere, one would be fined.

Q: Who made the allotment to each family? What body of government?

00:41:45

#59M: There were different bodies in the state. If it was Karnataka, there is Karwar [a district] and one had to purchase land here. Land was allotted according to the number of animals a family owned. The rule [book] contained how much each tract of land cost. Annually one remitted the cost of land in the form of bags of salt and the exact number of sheep that was required to be paid.

Q: Was the district administrator— were they part of the Tibetan Government or of a monastery? Where was their power coming from?

#59M: It was a part of the Tibetan Government. For example, taxes were paid starting from the small villages and then the bigger districts. Actually our [village] fell under Gyantse District.

Q: Can you tell us what kinds of taxes did you have to pay for the land based on the number of animals? Can you tell us how much?

00:43:37

#59M: In my village, we were not actually tax payers, but only paid for the cost of grass [land]. We were not tax payers.

Q: How much did you have to pay for the grass?

#59M: They [the district officials] arrived in the summer to take count of the animals and how much we would have to pay. And then we paid the grass-cost accordingly. Taking my family as an example, annually we paid around six *dhongpa* [male?] sheep.

Q: How many sheep is *dhongpa*?

00:44:07

#59M: [We] paid around six [male] sheep and 7-8 female [sheep]; in all we had to pay around 15-16 [sheep] annually. After paying that, one could use the land for grass the whole year.

Q: Actual animals were given. To whom did you give the animals?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The district administrator.

Q: You had to actually deliver the animals to the district administrator, *pa-la*?

#59M: Yes, the district administrator. They arrived to collect and take a count of the animals called *gyerudangyar* once a year. The locals made arrangements for their stay at our area for a day. All the people of the region assembled and we spread out mats and cooked food and tea; breakfast was offered like we do here. That day they would calculate how much each area of land cost and gave us a statement in writing, “You are entitled to this much area of land. You are required to pay this many *dhongpa* and female sheep.”

They drove away that many sheep when they left. The *gyerudangyar* left with a flock of sheep, as they would have received some [sheep] from our village and some from the next and so on. Fifteen to 20 [sheep] from here and 15-20 from there and they left driving away a flock of sheep.

Q: Did it feel like the...If you felt bad, why were you feeling bad?

00:46:41

#59M: We did not feel anything because that was the cost of the land on which our animals were feeding. We'd paid them and the land was entitled to us for the period of one year. There was sufficient grass for the animals to feed on for a year. [We] paid for it and the animals ate [the grass]. [I] did not feel any loss for the animals [that were paid] because that person was entitled to those animals. [I] did not think anything else.

Q: What was the administrator going to do with the animals?

#59M: The animals were distributed in the region.

Q: Were they distributed in that very region?

00:47:36

#59M: There were the land owners. Just like the settlement in Mundgod, there were the *gyerudangyar* families and based on how much each was entitled to, they divided [the animals].

Q: Then?

#59M: They made the division.

Q: Did they keep them?

00:47:48

#59M: They made use of them [the animals]. They'd received them as cost of the lands.

Q: But it belonged to the government?

#59M: They received [the animals] as cost of grass. They were tax payers and had to pay taxes at the Gyangtse District. They collected the grass-cost [from us] and in turn paid taxes to Gyangtse District.

Q: *Pa-la*, did you feel that the taking of taxes was a fair amount or not fair or excessive or not excessive? What did you feel?

00:48:59

#59M: I did not feel anything [unfair] about it. They charged us the amount for the period of one year which was the cost of grass for the animals. I thought they were entitled to it and did not feel anything [unfair] about it.

Q: When you had to give sheep and animals to, sheep and yaks to the government officials, did you pick the animals or did they pick the animals?

#59M: We would have made the selection of animals earlier and marked them.

Q: Did you or did they?

00:49:48

#59M: They did not seize the animals and take them away. They did not take hold of our animals. We kept aside the selected animals; good animals were given.

Q: Good sheep and good yaks, not the sick ones.

#59M: No, [we] gave [animals] which would be useful.

Q: Why?

#59M: Yes?

Q: Why did you give good ones? You could have given bad ones, right?

00:50:27

#59M: [Laughs] [We] did not give bad ones. If [we] gave them useless ones, they'd be of no use to them, poor things. Animals which would be of use to them were given.

Q: *Pa-la*, you said for a nomad there were two big problems. One, where to feed the sheep and how to rotate the grasslands, but the second problem was to find water. Tell us about finding water and how was that a problem?

#59M: In Tibet the water [source] was not the tap as it is here. Take this [place] as example, a river flows nearby. There are certain parts in the river where the animals could drink. So the animals were taken to that area around noontime. They drank in an orderly manner and then ate grass. They were let loose and about an hour later, they'd have drunk and then we drove them to wherever the grass was good.

Q: Was there no problem feeding them water?

00:52:03

#59M: There was absolutely no problem. There was no problem because the waters of Tibet were not small. There were rivers that flowed by. [The animals] put their mouths to it and drank.

Q: Was there only one water source [for the animals to drink from]?

#59M: There were many water sources they could drink from. There were big rivers and small ones too where [the animals] were fed.

Q: Was the water in lakes or streams or coming from the mountains? How is the water found?

00:53:04

#59M: There was no water coming down the mountains. There were huge rivers that flowed, some so big that people could not swim across. There were also some moderate sized rivers that the animals drank from which came up to this part of the leg [gestures off camera]. There were various kinds.

Q: How high would the grass grow for grazing in your lifetime? Could you tell us if there were...How high the grass grew and if there was any changes that the grass was less productive, that the land was less productive?

#59M: There were differences. In the places that we went to during the summer, the grass was very short. It did not grow high. The grass was very short, like this [gestures off camera]. The grass that grew in the winter place was called *nama* or *na*. *Na* grew to this height [gestures off camera]. It looked like the fields that are sown here. There was plenty of grass available. If [the animals] were let loose everywhere, they would trample the grass and spoil it. So [the animals] were confined to an area that they could eat in a day. The animals, especially the *dri* would eat away every blade of grass. That evening when [the land] was shorn, we went back home.

Q: In which month did you go to the short grass area?

00:54:56

#59M: One went to the area with the tall grass during wintertime, in the 9th and 10th months. During summer the grass was short. In the 7th and 8th months, the grass was extremely short and scanty, such that one wondered if there was any grass or not. The land

was fertile and grass was very nutritious. The yaks licked at them. The grass was extremely nutritious and the animals grew plump.

Q: And what would be the good manner? Would you take them so they rotate the growth? Explain that. What's a good manner of taking them?

#59M: [The animals] did not wander away except for one or two. We could talk to the animals like humans and when confined to one area, they stayed put there. The animals did not stray here and there.

Q: So the animals can actually understand your voice, *pa-la*?

00:56:48

#59M: Yes, they did. They could not talk back but understood [us]. If they strayed and if we shouted, they came back. There was the sling shot. They returned when the sling shot was used.

Q: *Pa-la*, could give us an example of how you would call the sheep or the yaks back? Very loud, how would you do it?

#59M: [Laughs] If an animal went beyond the border, one took the sling shot and moved it like this [makes rotating motion with right hand] and shouted, "Yey, where are you going? Will you not come back?" and the animal came back.

Q: If I was a sheep, I couldn't hear that. You have to say it louder.

00:58:10

#59M: [Laughs] Should I say in a loud voice? "Ya, where are you going?" [Speaks in Hindi] [We] have to say like that.

Q: Do it again.

#59M: "Ya, where are you going? Will you not come back?" [Rotates hand] And "thak" went the sling shot. Then they came back.

Q: And so what you threw...

00:58:32

#59M: One could place a stone in it [the sling shot] and [makes rotating motion] throw it. It made a "thak" sound.

Q: How far could you throw it? How far?

#59M: The sling shot [stone] did not go far. It did not reach further than that large shop over there [points]. During the day the animals were driven out to graze and towards evening when it was time to return, one went to the edge [of the grassland] and shouted,

“Yey, it’s time to go back” and sounded the sling shot without a stone and the animals turned back.

Q: Is there any milking time for the animals?

01:00:04

#59M: Yes, that’s right.

Q: Is there a milking time at the end of the day?

#59M: We did not milk the *dri* in the evening. During summertime the sheep were milked in the morning as well as evening. The *dri* were milked in the morning and not in the evening. Goats and sheep were milked both in the morning and evening.

Q: What season do you do the milking?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Summertime.

Q: *Pa-la*, can you talk to us about your responsibilities around delivering animals? Do they need help sometimes and how do you learn how to do that?

01:01:25

#59M: If an animal fell sick...There were some that suffered broken legs. We were like doctors because we had always taken care of animals and we knew what the animals suffered from. Though we did not have hospitals in Tibet, we had special [medicines] like *gyamzachola* and *latsi* that were used to treat the animals. Being nomads we could give the necessary treatment to the animals. If one had a broken hind or foreleg, *chapching* ‘binding cloth’—a [piece of] wood was placed on some rags and it was tied thus [shows winding around leg]—and *tsipshing* ‘flat piece of wood’ were provided. Within 6-7 days [the animal] could stand on its leg.

Q: Was there a certain number of animals that you would lose every year by accidents or problems in delivery or was the flock very stable?

#59M: Yes [we lost animals]. The weather was extremely cold and at times it snowed and a few animals might die. There were some animals that became sick and died. During autumn there was a certain grass which was very nutritious and this was cut and packed in sacks and fed to the weak animals during wintertime.

Q: Do you have that grass stored somewhere or is it dry or do you have to go to that place?

01:04:09

#59M: The special grass that was fed to the weak animals was cut and dried during autumn when grass became slightly dry. It looked blue and was very nutritious. It was packed in sacks and stored. It was mixed with a little *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and kneaded into a *pa* ‘dough made from *tsampa* and tea’ like humans eat and fed to the weak animals.

Q: Is there a special name for this grass?

#59M: It was called *saptsoe*.

Q: When the sheep were out grazing, did they have a leader that they would follow or did that sheep wear bells or something?

01:05:21

#59M: There was [a leader]. There was a main person called *yangpon* who led the sheep.

Q: Not a man. Was there one among the sheep?

#59M: There was no leader among the sheep as they moved together. However, when the sheep were moved into the pen or had to cross a river, there was one sheep [tries to recollect name]...I cannot recollect the name for the sheep which leads. [Laughs] There was one sheep which shows the way and, yes, it's called a *rapo* 'goat leader' or *lukpo* 'sheep leader.' It was adorned with jewels and made to look grand. It was given a name and when the name was called, he entered the door first. Then the rest of the sheep followed. It was the same when a river had to be crossed. When [the flock] hesitated in crossing a river, if the name of the *rapo* or *lukpo* was called, he immediately moved.

Q: Will you have to show him where to lead or will he know? Will the major sheep leader, will he know where to go when you call his name?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, he knows because when he comes across water, then he knows he has to cross the water. So he crosses. If he comes inside the house or nearby the house, if you just go inside the area and tell his name and "Go inside the area" and then all the animals follow him.

Q: *Pa-la*, do you have to go first and call his name or do you just tell him?

01:07:50

#59M: Just to give an example, there are dogs in foreign countries. If one talks to the dogs, they do all the work of humans. It was similar to that. The animal was given a name and if his name was called, he emerged first.

Q: *Pa-la*, do you remember the names of any of your favorite leaders of the sheep?

#59M: [I] can recollect just a few.

Q: What were they called?

01:08:51

#59M: I had one called *Khyonzey*. He was a *rapo*.

Q: No, I meant when you called the name of the leader, what name do you call him?

#59M: His name was Khyonzey.

Q: What I meant is, does that animal who is the leader, does he have a name like Tashi or...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, that's Khyonzey.

Q: Oh, you just say Khyonzey.

01:09:43

#59M: There was Khyonzey and another one called Lendhen.

Q: So the sheep had leaders. Did the yak and *dri* and the goats also have a leader?

#59M: Yes, there were. [Laughs] One of the yak leaders was called Khuyuk who was blue. Another one was called Yerpa.

Q: Were there any wild animals that endangered your sheep? Animals you had to keep away and how did you do it?

01:10:56

#59M: [You] mean to prevent the predators?

[Question is repeated.]

#59M: The main preventers were the dogs. There were dogs that we took along with us called *lukhyi* 'sheep dog' that were fed and taken very good care of. There were also dogs that followed human speech. It depended upon a family's economic situation. A good shepherd owned exceptional dogs which were well-fed and could follow speech. Some dogs were stupid who were just fed something and taken along and knew nothing. Our dog was called Dhomtuk and followed every word.

He was fed in the evening. During daytime, if the shepherds were engrossed in talking among themselves—one might meet colleagues and become absorbed in conversation and there were wolves in Tibet that killed sheep—we could tell him, "We are going to rest for sometime. Dhomtuk, keep watch." The dog would lie upon a mound like this [crosses hands] and as soon as a wolf was spied, he sprinted. The shepherds could sit relaxed. If the dogs behaved poorly, unless the shepherds sat alert circling the sheep, wolves ate many sheep.

Q: If your dog heard or saw a wolf coming, he would come back and tell you and you would go after him?

#59M: He would dash [after the wolf] and then the men too gave chase. If [the wolf] was close, sling shots were used and people screamed. It ran away. A good dog would pursue it while a poor dog chased for a short distance. It [the wolf] also did not run far—just a short distance—the dog could not chase it. A good dog would overcome it.

Q: What would you do if you saw the wolf up close? What did you do?

01:14:06

#59M: If we reached close, we shouted and used the sling shot. There was nothing else to use. There were guns which could be fired, but the guns were not carried all the time, perhaps by one or two [shepherds]. Sling shots were used. [The wolves] were very scared of the sling shots and ran away.

Q: Were there many wild animals in the hills when you were a nomad and can you tell us the names of the animals?

#59M: [You] mean [animals] that ate our animals?

Q: Yes.

01:15:19

#59M: Yes, there were. There was one that ate our animals called *samo*. Some people called it *sa*. It killed our animals. The other one that killed was the wolf.

Q: What other animals were there?

#59M: Other than that there were no animals that caused harm in our region.

Q: What other animals were there besides those predators?

01:15:41

#59M: There were no other animals that caused harm in our region.

Q: What harmless [animals] were there?

#59M: There were blue sheep, Tibetan gazelle, Tibetan wild ass, wild sheep.

Q: And wolf.

01:16:13

#59M: The wolf is a predator while the others like Tibetan gazelle, Tibetan wild ass and wild sheep did not cause any harm, except perhaps by eating grass.

Q: In all the years from the time you were a little boy until you had to leave your area, the nomad area, had the grass stayed...had the land stayed fertile and had there been enough water, had the climate stayed the same during...from the time he was born? If he can remember when he was a little boy until the time he left when he was 22.

#59M: One would know [if any changes occurred]. When we lived in Tibet, there might be slight changes in some years on account of less or heavy rainfall or snow, but there were never any big changes that happened. It was an incredibly happy place. The soil was fertile

and there was never any worry over whether the animals would have enough to eat. As I told you earlier we bought an area of land to cover a year from the *gyero*, the owner of the land. There was enough grass on it to last a year. There was the right quantity to satiate the animals. There was no change when we lived there.

Q: There was no special environmental change?

01:18:03

#59M: There never was. There was never any change. Everything was good.

Q: *Pa-la*, can you please tell us when your life as a nomad began to change? You said it was very peaceful and relaxing and hard work, but a good life. When did this good life begin to change?

#59M: That is what I told you. I told you about the man who was initially imprisoned. He had not been captured from my village, but from the village of my wife, which was called Gyangtse Zamdang. The name of the family was Gyangtse Tango. [He] was captured from there and imprisoned by the Chinese. He was captured there and taken to...At that time huge changes had occurred in the bigger towns. *Thamzing* ‘struggle sessions’ and various other things had been done. My village was in a remote area and there was not that much of a danger to us.

The reason I left—[to the interpreter] please interpret this—I fled into exile because when I went to deliver food to the maternal uncle of my wife who was in jail at Gyangtse, I witnessed the sufferings caused by the Chinese. Having witnessed that I thought, “I will never be happy living in this land” and we immediately escaped. In my village except for forced [labor] to construct roads, [the Chinese] did not cause other sufferings. However, those people that lived in bigger towns like Gyangtse, Lhasa and Shigatse suffered immense *thamzing* sessions. The country was turned upside down and we felt sad and did not feel like staying back. It was like that.

Q: To back up a little bit, *pa-la*, you said “in our village we used to hear something about the Chinese”. *Pa-la*, what did you hear with your own ears?

01:21:24

#59M: At that time the wealthy families were categorized as *sadak* ‘land owner’ or *chukdak* ‘the wealthy.’ They were made powerless over the wealth that they had saved [and were told], “It must be distributed among the poor people and you shall have no right over it. Earlier you have acquired the wealth by exploiting the people.” They were thus charged and subjected to *thamzing*. What is *thamzing*? The servants they [the rich people] had earlier—if you [to the interpreter] had a servant, he [the servant] was asked, “When you served as servant, tell us what did you suffer? Now is the chance for you to punish him [the employer].” That was how miseries were caused then.

[Interpreter’s translation of “struggle session” is mistakenly heard as “sterilization” by interviewer]

Q: You used to hear, *pa-la*, that there were a lot of sterilizations of whom? Who was being sterilized and where?

[Interviewer's question of "sterilization" is mistakenly heard as "struggle session" by interpreter and interpreted as such to interviewee]

#59M: [I] heard about many such struggle sessions. There were *thamzing* in Kala and in Samada and many people had already been jailed. [People] were imprisoned in Nyero and in Gyangtse. Many had been subjected to *thamzing* and imprisonment. [I] heard of these then.

However, what I witnessed with my very own eyes, I have related it the last time [during the pre-interview]. That was what I witnessed.

Q: How far was your village from Gyangtse? How many days' walk?

01:23:53

#59M: If one had a good horse, one could reach in two days.

Q: By walk?

#59M: If one walked it would definitely take three days. It would be difficult to cover in three days. It was a distance of four days' journey.

Q: You heard that villages around Gyangtse, which was like a four days' walk from Gyangtse that these villages four days away by foot from Gyangtse that there were sterilizations going on. Who was doing these sterilizations and were they doing it to men and women or only women? Can he please explain? What did he hear?

[Interpreter translates "sterilization" as "struggle session" to interviewee]

01:24:55

#59M: I wish to say this because if we cover a vast area, it is too much. I wish to talk about what happened in Nyero: the unimaginable *thamzing* that was meted out to the family of my present wife which I can relate. This will be very clear because the people are still living here. [I] will talk about that, right?

We left the village in 1959 and [I] think it was between '57 and '58 that my wife's father and two paternal uncles were arrested and imprisoned. Every father of all the wealthy families were seized and imprisoned and then subjected to *thamzing*. At that time the Khampas were preparing to fight the Chinese.

Q: The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]?

#59M: Yes, the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Accusing them [the prisoners] of having contact with the rebels, with the Khampas, they were named the *Chushi Gangdrug* Eleven and subjected 11 times to *thamzing*. All the fathers were lined up before the people of the village.

Naturally there would be different kinds of people in a village; some beat them and some scolded them, which they were forced to do by the Chinese. They were helpless and did so. [The fathers] were subjected to *thamzing* 11 times.

Q: To *pa-la*?

01:26:16

#59M: Not to me, but my wife's father. There were three brothers: the father and two paternal uncles. Theirs was like the wealthiest family in their village. There were this family and another one called Pashi. Over the other side were other rich families. What I can say with certainty is that the three brothers were arrested and subjected to *thamzing* 11 times in front of all the people of the village.

[The Chinese said,] "They must be punished. What charges do you have for them? Earlier they have oppressed and caused you misery. Now you can take revenge. What do you wish to do?" Just like the poor families here, [they were told], "You can say whatever you wish to say to them." They [the Chinese] used their might and said such things. After doing these things, they were finally sentenced and dispatched to Gyangtse Dakhang Prison for one year. We can start from there.

01:27:10

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: *Pa-la*, I made a mistake. I thought you said sterilization but you meant struggle session. So we'll go back and enquire what happened in terms of struggle sessions—they were going on in your area. Who was conducting these struggle sessions?

[Interpreter translates previous narration of interviewee]

Q: *Pa-la*, did you see your wife's uncles struggle sessions or did you hear about it?

#59M: [My] wife told me the whole thing. It is the same as my witnessing it. This is not something doubtful, but what actually occurred. I told you that I went to deliver food to a man called Tenzin. He was the maternal uncle of my earlier wife who [I] told you passed away. He was in Gyangtse Dakhang Prison when I went to take him food. The people [father and two paternal uncles] of my [present] wife were also dispatched to that very place. I suggested talking about this because if [the story] moves in a sequence, investigations in the future will be easier. Both the villages [of present wife and late wife] fell under Gyangtse District.

After being subjected to *thamzing* as the *Chushi Gangdrug* Eleven, all the three brothers were dispatched to Gyangtse Dakhang Prison. Six months later the middle brother was released and sent home. The other two were taken to Samye and so was the maternal uncle of my late wife. Actually there were innumerable people, but [I] will talk about the ones I know. He was also sent to Samye.

While they were discussing the *thamzing*, reformation took place and whatever they [present wife's family] possessed; their entire family wealth was distributed among the people. They had barely had something to eat and that was an extremely rich family. [They] were given a donkey, two or three *dri* and yaks and 40-50 sheep. The mother, two daughters and a son were allowed to stay in the cow shed on the ground floor of their house while their father and uncles were sent to Gyangtse Dakhang Prison and then to Samye. All their possessions were divided among the people. It was an extremely rich family. I say that I am from a well-to-do family, but my wife's family was incredibly wealthy.

Q: So *pa-la*, you witnessed the removal of the property of your wife's uncles but you did not witness the *thamzing*. Is that correct?

01:32:46

#59M: The *thamzing* that I witnessed was the one at Gyangtse, which I recounted last time [during the pre-interview]. I did not witness the *thamzing* perpetrated on my wife's family members, [but] it is similar to [my] witnessing it because my wife is right here. The punishment and *thamzing* occurred and they [wife's father and uncles] were sent to Gyangtse and then to Samye [prisons].

They were forced to work in Samye and not provided any food. Breakfast was watery gruel with black tea and lunch was a spoonful or two of *tsampa*. That was how the prisoners lived and day by day people...They lay together at night and the next morning two or three of them would be dead. Prisoners were kept in groups of 40-50 to 100. My wife's father was named Wangdu and the middle paternal uncle was called Migmar Tsering. They were both sent to Samye and were given hard labor.

01:33:58

During the day they were provided with spades and made to work in the fields and not given enough food. They did not have anything to eat and, do you know the prayer wheel? [I] was told that they removed all the outer covering of the prayer wheels, roasted and ate them. While they were digging the earth, if a mouse emerged from an area where a person was digging and it scampered to the other side where another person was working, and if the mouse was killed, each of them claimed it to be his and they fought over the mouse. The scarcity of food was such that [they fought] over who could get to eat the mouse. As soon as a mouse was killed, a fire was made and it was eaten. There was no food to eat and they suffered so. This is the truth and what actually took place.

Q: What were the names of those who were subjected to struggle sessions in Gyangtse?

#59M: Kungo Phende and Khangnyen Dapla were subjected to *thamzing* at Gyangtse. I do not know if they were sent to Samye or not. Perhaps they were not sent to Samye, but were imprisoned right there.

Q: Before we go to Gyangtse and what happened, I want to know something about the uncle. What kind of...Your wife's uncle and father as well, father and uncle, were rich men. Were they nomads?

01:36:36

#59M: They were farmers. They were like *samadok* ‘farmers and herders’ as they also owned a few animals. They were like *samadok*. Their major work involved farming.

Q: Did they live near you?

#59M: They were far away. We lived in Gyeru,[I mean]in Khorkya, while they lived in Nyero. I met my present wife in Bhutan and not in Tibet. There are two different stories. My late wife’s maternal uncle and my present wife’s father and paternal uncles were all sent to the same prison. [They were] sent to Gyangtse and from there to Samye. Their stories in prison are similar.

Q: *Pa-la*, was your wife’s father and uncle, were they leaders, were they good men, what was their relationship like with the people?

01:38:18

#59M: Theirs was a rich family. They were not leaders. The family was very wealthy but they were not leaders. They earned their own livelihood and had become rich.

Q: What kind of a relationship did they have with the people in their community if they were one of the richest families? Do you know?

#59M: As I told you, the relationship was what it was normally in the nomadic community. There were two rich families [in their village] called Pashi and Sera Rangpa, which is my wife’s family. The other one was Pashi. Both these families were rich and both went to prison.

Question is repeated.

01:39:28

#59M: Normally the relationship was very good. They were friendly and used to help them [the people]. Whatever benefit [they] had given was overturned by them [the Chinese]. “[They] have harmed you. They have made you suffer and exploited you,” that’s what the Chinese said for all the help rendered earlier.

Q: *Pa-la*, did you actually go to the prison to try to take food? What year was that and what prison did you go to deliver food to the uncle?

#59M: No one ever went to deliver food to them [father and paternal uncles of present wife]. They were sent far away.

Q: But you have been to deliver food to someone.

01:40:33

#59M: It was at Gyangtse where I went to deliver food.

Q: Who was there in Gyangtse?

#59M: I went to deliver food to the maternal uncle of my late wife when he was imprisoned there. My present wife's [father and uncle] were dispatched from Nyero to Gyangtse. We did not know each other then.

Q: Please talk about your previous wife.

01:40:51

#59M: It was the [maternal uncle] of the previous wife whom I went to deliver food to. Later [I] learned that they [maternal uncle of late wife and father and paternal uncle of present wife] were all sent to the same place. They were in the same prison, but at that time I did not know them. I did not know my present wife in Tibet.

Q: When you took the food to your wife's uncle, *pa-la*, what did you see with your own eyes?

#59M: I will tell you in detail the reason for taking food. At the time I went to deliver food [late wife's maternal uncle] was jailed in the Gyangtse Dakhang. He had been assigned the task of fetching water. When I went to take him food, he was inside the prison and I was not allowed in to take it to him personally. For every group [of prisoners] there was a person appointed to receive the food. His [late wife's maternal uncle's] name was Menga Tenzin. Somebody shouted, "Is there anyone who has brought food for Menga Tenzin?" When I answered "Yes, I have" the food was taken away. I could not see the person [prisoner]. I was not allowed to meet the uncle. That's how I went to take food which was dinner. I went to deliver dinner. I will tell you about it.

The person who received the food was a Tibetan. He said, "If you really wish to meet him, tomorrow morning at around 5 o'clock wait on the road leading to the Changlo Bridge from where the Dakhang's water supply is brought. They [the prisoners] will be sent to the Changlo Bridge for work." That was what I was told that evening, but it was changed the next morning.

01:42:54

I prepared some tea but in Tibet we did not have thermos flasks like we do here. I made a pot of tea, wrapped some cloth over it, packed it in a bag and left at around 5 o'clock in the morning. I waited and waited and then when it was nearly 6 o'clock, the prisoners arrived on their way to work. Each of them carried a hoe [shows hoe being carried on the left shoulder].

When one saw them, it was simply incredible to look at their clothes. They were the best of people and were dressed in *sherma* [woolen fabric of superior quality made from fur under the neck of sheep] and *puruk* [woolen fabric of ordinary quality]. They walked grandly with the hoes over their shoulders. If one looked at them, one would be so surprised. But once they reached the spot, they were forced to work without any rest. By the time evening arrived, the men were dead tired. They were thus worked and not provided food. They [the Chinese] sent them to construct roads.

I looked among them [the prisoners], but could not locate him [wife's uncle]. Fortunately, after sometime the man who received the food said to me, "Tenzin has not been sent here today. Go and look for him where they are fetching water for the Dakhang. You will find him there." He whispered this to me as a Chinese was standing not far away. A Chinese holding a gun marched after every 20-30 prisoners to oversee the work. [I] think there were about 200 men that went by. In the meanwhile the tea became cold. [I] saw a mother with another person and requested them to heat the tea. And then [I] went to the place where the water for the Dakhang was being fetched.

Q: Were you able to meet the uncle?

01:46:59

#59M: [I] was told that he would be at the water source. There I found a mother and a daughter and requested them to heat the tea. Then I could see the water fetchers come. I recognized the uncle, but could not meet him directly as Chinese soldiers were following them. They were carrying water on either side of a pole across the neck. I went closer and he whispered, "Do not come now. We will not be allowed to drink [tea] before hauling two trips of water." [I] heard him and immediately turned back.

Fortunately, there was a lady whose man was imprisoned and she had come to bring him some tea. She was accustomed [to meeting prisoners] and said, "We cannot meet them immediately. They must make two trips of water and then will be allowed to drink the tea. We should not look at him [the prisoner] and speak. It's good that we are two people now. Whatever you wish to tell him [wife's maternal uncle], speak aloud looking at me. What I wish to relate to my man, I will look at your face and speak." She told me that. [I] felt very lucky.

01:48:12

[She] was right. Then [the prisoners] were allowed to rest and drink tea. We were told to take a sip of the tea first as [the Chinese soldiers] suspected that it was poisoned. I poured a little quantity in my cup and drank it and then it was given [to uncle]. After giving the tea, I spoke by looking at the lady, "How are you? What problems do you face in the prison? What are the sufferings? Do you need anything to be delivered from home? Do you need food or clothes?"

He heard it and answered to the other prisoner who was the lady's person, "We have problems but they are not unbearable. One problem is a change of clothes because of the infestation of lice in them. Please tell them [family members] to deliver a change of clothing. It's okay if you cannot come to bring food." [I] think at that time they were provided with some food. "Please tell mother and the others not to worry." When he spoke he was emotional and we too felt teary. They were allowed to rest for only a short time, perhaps about five minutes. They drank tea and brought the tea pot back and left.

Q: And then?

01:52:11

#59M: That's what occurred. I stayed that night [in Gyangtse]. I had been able to take him some tea. I had delivered some food the previous evening and had been told by the person who took in the food, "If you wish to see him again, you can watch from the edge of the water source but cannot talk." He was right because I went near the Gyangtse Dakhang building and could see them going to fetch water, but was not allowed to speak. That evening I saw him twice or thrice going to fetch water. Unseen [by the Chinese] I said, "I am leaving tomorrow. You should not feel sad. Take care of yourself." I said that, but how can he take care of himself when they [the Chinese] made him suffer? "I am leaving tomorrow."

I hired a room for the night at Sichen Lokhang and the next morning when I went to inform them that I leaving, the landlady said, "You cannot leave as today is the *thamzing* of Gyangtse Phende." [I replied,] "What if it's Gyangtse Phende's *thamzing*? I am a visitor and I am going back." "That is not the right thing to say. You are speaking like someone from a remote village. This is not *thamzing* but a lesson. One can learn from it. [You] must follow this course and cannot say anything else. You must learn about the *thamzing*. I shall be punished if you leave. You must attend the *thamzing* meeting."

Q: Who said that?

#59M: The landlady, the lady of the house where I had hired a room to stay. [I said,] "Please do not say that. I need to go home because I have work there." She would not relent, "If you left suddenly like this, I will be punished since you have stayed in my house. You will be punished for not attending the meeting. I was asked this morning about the guests staying here and I have given them [your details]." So [I] was forced to stay. [I] fed some grass to the horse and went to the meeting. When I attended the meeting, I witnessed the entire happening that I had recounted earlier.

01:55:53

The reason I fled was on account of witnessing the *thamzing* of Phende Nyingpa and [I] also heard that *thamzing* were happening in nearby places. [I] witnessed that *thamzing* with my eyes and it was shocking and made me realize that assets and properties were useless in life. That led me to think of escaping.

Q: Can you tell us, *pa-la*, what did you see with your own eyes during the struggle session?

01:56:45

#59M: They were big leaders who collected and dispatched the taxes and settled disputes in the region. Phende Nyingpa was like that. Khangnyen Dapla was the person who called people and sent messages like the leaders we have here. Phende was the one who passed judgments. During the *thamzing*, all the poor families, the beggars and the worst of people were collected and they were made to ask questions just like we are doing now. "What did Phende Nyingpa do earlier?" "He gave us grains on loan. When giving [the loans] he gave in a small measurement and while receiving, he used a huge measurement. They ate food like this—showing some fine *tsampa*—and this is the food that they provided the servants—and showed some poor quality *tsampa* mixed with stones and such. They have exploited us

in this way. They became what they are by oppressing us. Now your sun has set and the people's sun has risen.”

All the beggars were seated higher, upon chairs. [People] like you [to the interpreter] who are the President of the Cooperative Society, the Settlement Officer and Camp leaders would be made to sit on the ground. The worst of the beggars were seated higher up and when asked, “Who suffered under him?” The one who suffered spoke out and Phende Nyingpo was beaten.

Q: How was he beaten?

01:58:47

#59M: [He] was beaten and Khangnyen Dapla was thus accused, “When I approached you for this matter earlier—I cannot remember the exact matter now—you tied me to the tail of your horse and dragged me. You tied my braided hair to the horse and dragged me.” They said such things, but I do not know if it were true.

Q: Were they physically beaten?

#59M: [He] was held and beaten countless number of times by a woman and a man who were from Kharka. Perhaps he [Khangnyen Dapla] might have acted a little rough. He was told to speak up whether he accepted the charges. He replied, “Yes, [I] accept” to a few of the accusations. However, [I] think some were baseless because he did not accede. Even though he was beaten he never said, “Yes, [I] accept.”

He was beaten and shouted at, “Your sun has set and our sun has risen.” The people were made to scream, “Annihilate, annihilate.” He was beaten exceedingly. Phende Nyingpa fell down by evening and had to be carried on horseback. I was able to escape [from the scene] around 5 in the evening. I could not get out until then. I managed to run and escaped. [I] heard Khangnyen Dapla could just about walk that evening though he was beaten a lot. Phende Nyingpa was old and he fell down. There were to be three days of *thamzing* and he had to be carried on horseback on the first day. Such was the beatings meted out.

Q: So to go back to the struggle session for just a little bit, you had to go because your name was given to the Chinese. Where were the prisoners placed and where were the Chinese and where were the people? Can you give us a picture of the situation?

02:03:13

#59M: It was an open ground just like this [moves hand around]. It was circular in shape like our previous Settlement Office area [of Mundgod] where the people were seated. There were chairs on which the beggars and the worst of people sat while the general public sat on the ground. He [a poor person who was conducting the *thamzing*] made the charges and said, “Do you accept or not?” He [the prisoner] said, “Yes, [I] accept” to a few charges and did not accept a few. “He is shameless. He is a wolf. Earlier he consumed all our wealth. Do you accept it or not? From this day, your sun has set and our sun has risen. Annihilate [him]!” He did this with his hand [makes fist and raises right hand]. The general public

had to shout, “Annihilate [him]!” That was how the *thamzing* was conducted. That was an attempt to humiliate and dishonor his name.

Q: What kind of problem would they face if they didn’t join in the shouting?

#59M: In case one did not join in, he was not arrested that very day but it would be taken note of that he did not show his support and that he was one of the rebels. He would suffer punishment.

Q: *Pa-la*, how many Chinese officials were sitting on chairs and how many poor people were with them? Was it outside?

02:05:42

#59M: There were not many Chinese that day. [I] think around 20 Chinese soldiers surrounded the area. There were three or four officers while the majority were *tsodang* ‘poor Tibetans appointed as leaders by Chinese’ and a few *shangdang*, who were our people acting as interpreters. Perhaps there were seven to eight people, but I am not exactly certain. They acted as interpreters and explained the charges.

Q: Were there poor people up there with them?

#59M: Yes, there were. The people responsible for conducting the *thamzing* sat along with the public. Just like someone giving his opinion, the perpetrators of *thamzing* got up one by one.

Q: Did the first person come out...Dapla was brought out first or were both the people brought out at the same time?

02:07:10

#59M: Both of them were made to stand together. Over their necks were hung huge pictures like this [gestures off camera]. The pictures contained a man holding a whip, another man with a rope in his hands and a pair of handcuffed hands. The pictures were hung over their necks; one on Khangyen Dapla and another on Phende Nyingpa. The person [*thamzing* conductor] standing there spoke to Phende Nyingpa and then to the other. The *thamzing* took place in turns.

[The pictures also contained] a man with folded hands like this [joins palms] and another holding a rope and whip.

Q: Was the person kneeling down and where were their hands?

#59M: They stood bent like this with the pictures over their necks [gets up from chair and bends halfway]. “Do not raise your heads. The time to raise your heads is over.” They were not allowed to raise their heads.

Q: And their hands?

02:09:03

#59M: The hands were shackled.

Q: Were the hands shackled in the front?

#59M: The hands were shackled in front.

Q: With iron?

02:09:14

#59M: Yes, with long fetters so that the hands could move. [The hands] were not fettered close together, but with this much gap [shows a gap of a foot and half].

Q: *Pa-la*, this whole size of the group, the village people and the government officials and the soldiers, about how big is this experience? How many people were there in total?

[Interpreter translates as: How many villagers were there under the leadership of Phende and Dapla?]

#59M: It was a very large town as [they] were the leaders of the entire Gyangtse District. Besides the district, there were Khorhya, Gyeru and Nyero. He was the leader of all these villages, a big leader.

Q: But in the struggle session, how many people attended or were forced to come?

02:10:24

#59M: The *thamzing* perpetrators did not come from outside. They came from their district like if this was the venue, they arrived from Mundgod or Hubli [nearest towns to the interview location]. The majority of the people arrived from there. If I make an estimate, there were around 1,000 people.

Q: So at that struggle session with Dapla and Phende, were there about a thousand people there?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, a thousand people.

Q: *Pa-la*, this is the first time you are seeing with your own eyes a struggle session. What is the impact on you?

#59M: I felt that since time immemorial, Tibet has had a series of leaders—this man is such a big leader but he has not an iota of power and the people have been misled by lies. The time to make wealth is over and the wealth that has been saved was worthless. That was what I thought. I did not have to worry over not having sufficient food as I was quite well-to-do, but I thought everything was worthless and decided to escape. Once I returned home, [I] immediately thought of fleeing.

I did not succeed the first time as I was stopped at the mountain pass. However, I was not imprisoned as we lived in a remote area. I succeeded in escaping on the next attempt.

Q: If I understand, you were saying...you felt very unsecure when you saw these very high important people suffer so much because you could see that wealth was no protection?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, like that. So I left everything. I felt that we should leave everything as wealth is nothing in front of this one.

Q: *Pa-la*, who was the woman who told you where to go see your uncle and who helped you? Was she a Tibetan woman? Who was she, a Chinese woman?

02:13:46

#59M: [She] was a Tibetan. Her husband was in the prison and he had been given the task of fetching water, similar [to wife's uncle]. My late wife's maternal uncle was in the prison and he was sent to fetch water. They were working at the same spot. So when I went to take him tea, I met this woman and she gave me that advice. So that was how I spoke [indirectly to uncle through her].

Q: So even if people were working in the fields, whatever or carrying water, you could just be standing nearby and pretend that you are talking to each other and they could hear you?

#59M: It was okay as long as the Chinese who was escorting the prisoners did not hear. If he heard, he would punish them immediately. We spoke in whispers without being heard by him [the Chinese guard].

Q: Didn't the other people around say anything?

02:15:01

#59M: The colleagues did not say anything as they were all Tibetans.

Q: *Pa-la*, when you first saw the people in the fields working, can you describe how they looked; what they were wearing? Can you tell me what clothes they had on when they were working in the fields?

#59M: When they were interred at the [prison] called Dakhang, it was shortly after they were captured. Since those that had been captured came from the wealthiest of families and the most important of all people, when [I] saw them I thought they could not be workers. When they came marching, [they] had on incredible clothes made of *sherma* and *puruk* with linings of brocade. When I or people from the outside looked at them, it was hard to believe that they were people who were being punished. When they marched they swung their hands like they were soldiers. Once they reached the work spot, they had to pull out grass or stones irrespective of whether their clothes became soiled or not. That was how they were forced to labor.

Q: You thought it looked like they were slaves?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Hmm.

Q: So were they very...were their clothing...What kind of shape was their clothing in?

02:17:13

#59M: [They] wore proper Tibetan dresses. You know, the high people did not tie their dresses too high and were stylish. [They] were all like that. At that time, [they] had just been imprisoned and their clothes were new. However, once they were sent to Samye, they could not see their spouses, relatives and children for years. Once they were many years in prison, the new clothes would tear. [They] had problems with clothing and became very weak. The sufferings were unimaginable.

When they were sent to Samye—I am not lying at all—there was a person named Menga Tenzin. [The prisoners] did not have enough to eat even for one day. When they lay down to sleep, they felt, “If only I could eat my full today, I do not mind dying.” [I] was told that that was what they thought. One day he was sent to a place where many horses were being transported by a boat. Water rushed into the boat. Tibet is very cold and many horses died. So a certain number of men from their group were called to clean the horse meat. Tenzin was able to go as one of the group leaders.

That day they made a fire and ate their fill of horse meat. Otherwise there was not a day when they had a full stomach. If only there was something to eat! [I] heard later that people even ate human flesh. In Tibet we had a lot of leather products. Even the boots were roasted, ground with the help of a stone and eaten. Nobody ever had a full stomach.

Q: *Pa-la*, after you saw the suffering, you said, “I have to go back.” Did you go back to your village and what did you decide to do?

02:21:03

#59M: After I came back to the village my decision was like this. We lived in the nomadic region and once when we planned to escape, people came to know of it and I was almost caught. Though not actually captured and imprisoned, we were informed that there were guards and we could not flee. When we planned our next attempt, about 11-12 *la-sung* ‘sentry on mountain pass’ arrived near the place we lived called Napshung.

Q: What does *la-sung* mean?

#59M: *La-sung* means people who stop us on the way. Such people arrived and they knew that we were trying to escape. We were every stupid then. All of us in the neighborhood were very close and the neighbors did not allow us to leave during the first attempt. On the next attempt they said, “If you, the wealthiest family leave first, we will all suffer punishment.” So we discussed and came to the decision that if we had to escape, everybody would escape together. That was the conclusion and we were very stupid.

Plans were afoot to capture me then. When the plan to capture me was formulated [by the Chinese], the neighbors said, “It is certain that there is a plan to capture you. If you wish, you can go or stay. There is danger because the *la-sung* have arrived.” I told them, “I am going and you should not stop me.” So the neighbors did not stop me. We loaded our belongings on the animals and left in the night. That’s how I was able to escape.

Q: So you left. You did not leave with the whole village? You just left with your wife and the children? Who left with you?

02:23:46

#59M: There was only one other family with us. Two families made the escape together.

Q: Who was with you besides your wife?

#59M: In my family were my late wife then and the seven brothers and sisters. No, there were eight; we were four girls and four boys. There were eight siblings in total. There were also my late mother and late grandmother. So in all we were 10 members in my family then.

Q: And the other family?

02:24:20

#59M: The other family consisted of a father, an uncle and two sons. They were four members in the family.

Q: And how long did the journey take?

#59M: It did not take a long time. We were very close to the mountain pass of Lachen and Lachung. One could reach within one night. We left around 10 at night and reached Indian territory around 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning. It was very close.

Q: What kind of things were you able to bring with you from your home?

02:25:41

#59M: Since we were nomads, we did not possess many valuable things. We brought some provisions and clothing and drove some animals.

Q: Any gold or silver?

#59M: The nomads did not possess exceptional gold or silver [ornaments].

Q: Any images or *thanka* 'traditional scroll paintings'?

02:25:57

#59M: There were no huge *thanka*.

Q: *Gawu* 'amulet'?

#59M: There were *gawu* and such stuff. [We] did manage to bring some things but sold them all on the way. When we reached Gangtok [Sikkim], there was no value [for the animals]. It was like giving them away free of cost. A yak fetched 50 rupees and a sheep seven or six rupees. That was the price.

Lachen and Lachung, the routes through which we arrived were like this. There was a mountain pass called Dongkyala. Opposite this pass was the place we camped during summer where there was plenty of grass. It resembled a Tibetan region. But there was the border and if one was in Indian territory, the Chinese could not cause any harm. The reason we could escape easily was due to the proximity.

Q: *Pa-la*, one question about before you left, you came back to the village and you saw what happened to your uncle, did you tell the people what you saw? Did you tell the people what you saw in the village happening to your uncle and what was their reaction to that?

02:27:50

#59M: [I] told them. Everybody expressed shock but the nomads were stupid. They were not deeply concerned because nothing serious had occurred in our region. They did not feel much concern. Majority of them just continued to live there.

Q: *Pa-la*, we're going to have to stop now, but I wanted to ask you what has it been like to share your life story with us? What is this experience been like for you?

#59M: There is no other feeling except that when you arrived here last time [for the pre-interview], I felt extremely grateful when you called me [to share my story]. These few words might be of help. Tibet is like a precious jewel which is like none other in the world, but it has had to suffer like hell on earth. If speaking about their [the Chinese] misdeeds would help, though it is of no purpose personally, if it would help the people who are living in Tibet, I feel that way and nothing else.

Q: Thank you, *pa-la*.

02:30:10

#59M: If we are concluding, please [interpret] this. There was the father and two uncles of my wife who were imprisoned. However, one of them was released after five or six months. The other two were dispatched to Samye. Then there was the other person for whom I took food. I request you to please record the villages and family names clearly. My present wife's family is from Nyero. They are called Nyero Sera Rhangpa. The village was called Nyero Thoe—Sera Rhangpa of Nyero Thoe. The name of the father was Wangdu. One of the brothers was called Migmar. They were both dispatched to Samye together. Please record that.

Tenzin's [family name] was Khangmar Mengna. He was from Khangmar and was dispatched to the same [prison] of Samye. The reason I could recount this story clearly is because of these two men. The father of my wife either died in prison or whatever as he was never seen or heard again, but the younger paternal uncle and my late wife's maternal uncle escaped and arrived in Bhutan in '65-'66. These two men recounted the story and there is no error in what I have related. It is accurate. These two men arrived and I could tell you a clear story which is accurate. [To the interpreter] Please interpret that.

Q: It sounds like you want the facts and what happened to these people who are special to you to be very well known.

02:33:07

#59M: That is right. [I] wish it to be clear.

Q: Why do you think it's important to have an accurate picture of what happened to the Tibetan people?

#59M: That is because there might be people who comment that these stories are lies. It is a possibility. This is to avoid such things from happening. However, the two men who arrived have passed away. Tenzin is dead and so are my wife's father and paternal uncle. The paternal uncle later arrived in Bhutan and to tell you the story, it is like this.

When he arrived in Bhutan, he had suffered so much in Samye that when he arrived in Bhutan, my wife and her older sister—I told you that a lady would relate her story, a lady of short stature who recounted her story—when they heard that their father [paternal uncle] had arrived at the army camp in Bhutan, they were able to identify [him] through the family name as it was impossible to recognize him.

They reached there and looked for their paternal uncle and found a man they could not recognize. [The sisters said] that he had a mole here [points to left temple] and looking at it, they felt it might be him but just could not recognize him. So they asked him who he was and he replied, "I am Sera Rhangpa and my name is Migmar Gokey. I have two children called Tenzin Tsomo and Yangchen Dolkar and you are them." Then they leaped on each other and everyone fell unconscious. Such things happened when he arrived in Bhutan.

Q: *Pa-la*, we've talked about many things in this interview, so if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

02:35:56

#59M: There will be no problems. There will be no problems because though there are relatives of my wife [living in Tibet], we are separate families and [I] do not think there will be any problems. During their escape, my wife and [her family]...I escaped easily but my wife and family suffered excruciating hardships. Their mother was arrested and jailed and they were being pursued. The two daughters, a son and the mother fled to Bhutan. If [I] relate their escape story, they suffered unimaginable difficulties.

The mother and the [junior] father or younger paternal uncle fled at night. They walked stealthily as there were sentries around the area. They'd sent the daughters out earlier. The children were sent on the escape journey earlier and they [mother and paternal uncle] left in the night. They could not bring anything except the clothes they wore and their cups—it was the custom in Tibet to carry cups. They had nothing else besides that. That's how they came to exile. It rained at night and there was a huge river called...[not discernible] which [they] could not cross. [They] took a long detour and feared traveling during the day. [They] hid in the hills for two days without food. [They] arrived in Layak in Bhutan after an immense struggle.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project?

#59M: Yes, you can. You can use my name. It's not too good if we used their [the uncles] names, but I am the one who is recounting the story. There is a little difference.

END OF INTERVIEW