

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #64 – Pema Wangdu  
July 3, 2007

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #64
2. Interviewee: Pema Wangdu
3. Age: 77
4. Date of Birth: 1932
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Powo Yong
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: July 3, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 64, Old Camp No. 6, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 21 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Pema Wangdu is from Powo in eastern Tibet. He gives a detailed account of how Powo was an independent state since the time of the *Chogyal* 'religious kings.' Pema Wangdu explains that these historical chronicles are handed down by oral transmission from generation to generation.

Pema Wangdu recounts details about how people in his region raised their livestock for special breeds with unique feature. He explains how the animals were named and how they grazed on their own and returned home to be milked. Traditional natural methods such as bled-letting were used for treating diseases in animals. He also describes the marriage customs in Powo, which involved many community members and elaborate rituals. Pema Wangdu explains traditional clothing, weapons, and funerals.

Pema Wangdu fled Tibet with his family after the Chinese began to inflict hardships on the Tibetans. During their escape, Chinese soldiers killed some of the people in his group, including his wife, leaving Pema Wangdu to care for his 7-month-old son. He arrived in India in 1960 and married a woman from his village who had also fled from Tibet and helped him care for his son.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Kham, herding, customs/traditions, life under Chinese rule, escape experiences.

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[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #64, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Question: First of all, I'd like to know more about his village of Powo Yong. Could you describe your village? Tell us about your village in Tibet.

**Interviewee #64: As I told you earlier, if I have the opportunity, I can tell you about how the area of Powo was a separate state during the early times. Then about it coming under the Tibetan government and finally the present situation.**

Q: Please do.

**#64: Powo was an independent state in the early ages. During the time of the *Chogyal* 'religious kings' the three provinces of Tibet used to be four independent states. They were Golok, which was likened to wind; Nyarong, likened to iron; Sanyen, to earth; and Powo to people. So these were all independent states.**

**Then gradually the four independent states came under the Tibetan government. Let's not talk about Nyarong and the others, but I will tell you about Powo. Powo has six divisions consisting of three larger areas and three smaller ones. The king of these six divisions was called Powo Kadham Gyalpo. The Powo Kadham Gyalpo originated from the religious kings of Tibet, one of whom had three sons called Chati, Nyati and Shati. The minister of the land killed the King and the three sons fled the country. The three sons escaped to Powo, Kongpo and Nyapo.**

**Chati [one of the sons] lived in Powo for many years and his descendant was Powo Kadham Gyalpo, which is why he [Powo Kadham Gyalpo] is said to have originated from Tibet's religious kings. The palace of the king was right in the center of the area called Kadham Siwa Zong. The king had a minister who was an old man. In the year 1600 there was a war against Mongolia, and King Kadham was defeated and fled.**

**After journeying for a day, he came to a place called Showakha. On the other side of a river at this place, there was a wealthy family called Jongkhong. The Kadham Gyalpo was crossing over the Showa Ghondhela, a short mountain pass on his escape journey towards Lhoka and Bhutan. The head of the wealthy family called out to him, "Where are you**

going, King of Kadham? Please do not leave but stay in this place. Please come back and I will offer you servants and lands. I will offer everything and build you a palace." So the king lived in the village of Showa and the head of the Jongkhong family offered him servants, people, land and everything. In the later times, Showa became the capital of the kingdom of Kadham. When the area came under the Tibetan government, Showa was the administrative headquarters. That is the story of Powo Kadham Gyalpo.

The son of this king was called Kadham Nyima Gyalpo. During the reign of Kadham Nyima Gyalpo, he became very powerful and besides the six divisions, the region expanded towards Kongpo and Nyarong. He received tax from every region. He ruled over Pema Koe, the six areas of Mon, Dak Kanak, Kyindu Yontso and built 11 forts in these regions. He established tax system and laws. The King [Kadham Nyima Gyalpo] made laws and the penalties he awarded for those who committed grave crimes were reconstructing the monasteries. Lower crimes attracted punishments in the form of constructing water canals and other such repair works. The penalty for breaking the law with non-serious acts was cleaning the roads and water canals. Kadham Nyima Gyalpo constituted such laws in the land during his reign.

Then a few generations passed, but I do not have a clear story. At the end when the region came under the Tibetan government, the Kadham king was Wangchen Dhondue. The reign of King Wangchen Dhondue corresponds to the time of His Holiness the XIII Dalai Lama Thupten Gyatso. During His Holiness Thupten Gyatso's reign, the minister was Kalon Tsarong Thupten Dasang Damdul. Dasang Damdul and the cabinet discussed Powo not being under the Tibetan government.

In the case of the Tibetan government having to go to war in Kham, in the east, the way was extremely difficult. The route to the east lay right through Powo, so it has to be brought under the control of the Tibetan government by waging a war against it. Dasang Damdul said, "If we go to war immediately we will face problems. The people of Powo and the King Kadham are very brave people. Even the environment is not feasible for war considering the hills, waters and rocky mountains. I think it is better to gain control through peaceful method."

Then a notice was sent to King Kadham and the daughter of Dasang Damdul was given in marriage to King Wangchen Dhondue. I think it was in the 1920s that she was given in marriage. After two years, the *Kashag* 'cabinet of the Tibetan government' sent a notice to King Khadam in 1922 saying, "There is no need for King Kadham and the princess to live in Powo. If you come to Lhasa, the Tibetan government will bestow an entire district to you. A new leader will be appointed in Powo. So isn't it better for you to live in Lhasa?" When this notice was received, they [King Kadham and his queen] came to Lhasa and in this way, gradually the Tibetan government gained control of Powo.

During the reign of the Kadham King Nyima Gyalpo, when he went to Lhasa, the Tibetan government received him grandly because he was a descendant of the religious kings of Tibet. Whenever he visited Lhasa, a *thapso* was sent. The first *thapso* was sent at Kongpo Jamdha, the second *thapso* was sent at Meda Gongkar and the third at Lhadong Shenkha,

which is presently known as Lhasa Zamchen. Such was the relation. At Digung Thayabthang, land was provided to the Kadham king [Nyima Gyalpo] as a share for Powo. There is such a historical story.

However, during the reign of King Wangchen Dhondue and the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, in 1924 there was turmoil in Powo for about two to three years. Then around 1927, the Tibetan government sent a colonel with 1,500 cavalymen each to the four areas in Powo. They attacked Powo simultaneously along with soldiers from surrounding areas of Shota Lhosum. Powo was defeated and came under [the Tibetan government]. The Kadham king escaped through Pema Koe to India. At that time India was probably under British rule. The English ambassador was stationed at Dibrugarh in Assam. King Kadham approached the English ambassador.

In those days the elders used to talk about the Queen of England, and related all his experience of being attacked, just as a big insect attacks a little insect. The English authority accepted [his words] and allowed him to stay in a house. The next day a major of the Tibetan government [army] arrived there. The English ambassador did not hand over the king, but made him [King Kadham] see him [the major] through a glass window. The English authority presented the king with four loads of long-barrel rifles, gave him the title "Sahib" and said, "It's not enough to just talk about it. You have to bring proof that you are an independent state."

Of course, being the king he was able to provide the required proof. "You are an independent state. After four or five years, you must return," saying thus the English presented him with the guns. Some say that he returned through Zayul and the savages killed him with poisoned arrows. Another version says that he returned through Pema Koe, which came under King Kadham, drank excessively and was poisoned to death. Whatever the version, the king vanished from that time. That was how it was.

Q: Where did Pema-*la* learn all this history?

#64: When I was living in Tibet, whether it was during the New Year or at a party everyone gathered together. We sat in a circle drinking *chang* 'home-brewed beer' and the elders, with prayer wheels and rosary in their hands, related the histories and stories of our region. I heard the stories then.

Secondly, from my father—he died at the age of 79 here [in Bylakuppe]. Though he did not know the general story about the whole of Tibet, he would always drill it into our ears that the state of Powo was independent since ancient times and about their miseries and happiness. So what I heard then is what I still remember, even as an old man. It is not very exact because I do not know to write, but this history was handed down orally and I remember it.

Q: What kind of a religious education did he receive growing up? Where did he learn about the dharma?

**#64:** When I left my village [in Tibet], I was not literate. Except in Lhasa, there were no schools in Tibet. In the villages, as you know, there was not even one school. Each individual family took care of themselves in educating their family members so that they could learn more about the dharma. Perhaps it was my destiny because I did not like to study.

When we arrived at the settlement in India, thanks to the blessings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Adult Education Program was started. So while we were engaged in clearing the forest, during the free time, we were taught to read and write. We did not attend classes at a permanent school. The attendees were people ranging in ages from 20's to 40's. During the day we went to work, and in the evening from 7 to 9 o'clock we studied. Our teacher was Lama Tenzin, who is now dead. Then there was Ada Wangyal who was a very dedicated teacher. We were 82 people in the Adult Education Program, coming from Utsang and Kham. The Tibetan script I know now was learned during that period.

However, I did not concentrate in learning the English language. I was contented just learning Tibetan, which would help me to study the dharma. I was able to study only for eight months because by then we were allotted lands. There was a lot of fieldwork to be done and then the children came. Learning for eight months enabled me to just about read the prayer books.

Q: Were his mother and father very religious? Did they do a lot of spiritual practice?

**#64:** They were very religious. My ancestors were so religious that for generations a son from the family was made a monk. So as the son of my father, I continue with the tradition of practicing the dharma. I read the scriptures, buy objects of worship like *thanka* 'paintings of deities on scrolls' and icons and receive teachings from lamas. Due to these blessings, I am able to conduct myself with love and kindness towards others. I engage myself in practicing the dharma in my room keeping the traditions of the family.

Q: What are some of the first things that he remembers learning about the dharma?

**#64:** The first step towards learning the dharma was attending the Adult Education Program for eight months. Once I had mastered the alphabets in the eight months, my main wish for this lifetime was that I should be able to read the various scriptures of the Buddhist dharma.

There is a book called *Chamoe Dhemon* written by Chamoe Rinpoche in Kham. The *Chamoe Dhemon* is one of the most important books and by reading this, one can attain Buddhahood and not have to undergo suffering. I visited a lama named Pema at Camp Number 4 and requested him to give me a copy of *Chamoe Dhemon*, which I could read and pray to. I read the *Chamoe Dhemon* day and night and contemplated over every word and found that every meaning of the dharma was in there. So that was the main reason that I have great faith in the dharma.

Q: I was actually asking him like when he was a child in Tibet, what are the first things that he learned about the dharma? Did he learn the mantra? Did he learn about the three jewels? What were the first things he learned?

**#64: When one is very young, there is nothing but playing with sand and water. As one grows older, we see our parents practicing the dharma and inviting monks over to the house to read the scriptures. We can see and learn the traditions. That this is how the Buddhist religion is practiced. When we grow still older, we follow the custom of practicing the dharma from our elders.**

Q: What were the first mantras that he learned as a child?

**#64: As soon as a child is able to speak, he gets the Tibetan habit of reciting the *mani* and *benza guru* from his parents. One doesn't have to teach him that. It just happens naturally as a blessing of the Buddhist dharma. The first prayers I recited were the *mani* and *benza guru*.**

Q: Did he ever go on pilgrimage with his family? If so where did he go?

**#64: My father and other elders had been on pilgrimage to Lhasa 13 times. During my time, I did think of going to Lhasa but I couldn't. I have never been there. In the lifetime of my father and grandfather, they have gone to Lhasa, seen the Jowo Rinpoche, filled the golden butter lamps and made offerings to the monks. My father went 13 times to Lhasa including to the Yiru Bakor [a pilgrimage site]. He also took the route through Shongchang. If one were to go through Kongpo to Shongchang, it took 28 to 29 days to reach Lhasa. The direction through Lhoka and visiting all the holy pilgrim sites meant a month and four or five days.**

Q: He mentioned animals earlier. What kind of animals were around his village? What kind of animals did he see?

**#64: There were *dri* 'female yak,' yaks, *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow,' *dzomo* 'female *dzo*,' cows and oxen. Others were horses, mules and donkeys. From the whole of Tibet, it was our region which contained everything; the *dri*, yak, goats and sheep of the cold north and the cows, *dzo*, *dzomo*, horses and donkeys of the south. The region had everything in plenty. When people gather and talk about one's region, its environment and natural wealth, I think there is no other region which has everything available like Powo.**

**When I was living in my village, I had never been to Dhotoe or Dhomay. However, in exile, people of all the three provinces [of Tibet] live together. When we discuss our villages [in Tibet], the natural wealth, the kinds of grains, kinds of animals, and the waters; not many regions have everything. There is nothing that is not available in my region.**

Q: Did he ever have any pets?



**#64: Yes, I did. We had cats and different types of dogs. There were lambs and kids to which we fed the leftover food. We also loved the beautiful calves and took care of them inside the house.**

Q: Did the dogs go out with them to graze the cattle when they were herding?

**#64: Unlike the nomads, in our region people did not go to graze large herds of cattle for months along with dogs. Some people owned 500 to 600 heads of cattle while others 100 to 200 and some just 10 to 15. The animals were driven into the forests. No one went to graze them. Those animals that had to be milked were done so early in the morning and then they were driven away. In the evening they returned, by themselves, in time for milking at 4 o'clock. They did not need to be tended. There was no way to feed the large number of animals. The person who milked the cow carried a bag in which there was *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' mixed with salt.**

The *dzomo* were much disciplined animals and stood in line to be milked. When the person with the bag and rope in one hand said, "Come, come," the animals came and stood there. A pinch of the *tsampa* and salt mixture was given to it and it stood there with its front legs together. The rope was used to tie the front legs together and the milking began. Once the milking was over, the end of the rope was tugged to untie it and the *dzomo* walked away and the next one came and stood in that very spot. That was how naturally obedient they were. Only at times if the animals gave birth in the forests did people go to look for the calves. Other than that, they did not need to be tended.

Q: Does he remember the sound that he used to call the cattle in? Can he recall that?

**#64: Each region has a different way of calling the animals in. In our village we used to call, "Gey, gey." The animals heard the sound and came. If the animals were far away we shouted, "Gey, gey" and they returned. That was in my village. I don't know how it is said in other areas.**

Q: Will the cattle recognize the voice of the individual person who owns that cattle like if somebody else called the same name, will they go to that person or recognize the individual voice?

**#64: "Gey, gey" is the general sound, but animals are like humans; they recognize the voice of their owner. It's the same with the horses, *dzo*, *dzomo* and *dri*. The animals recognized the voice of their owner and came. If they do not recognize the voice, they do not come.**

Q: What would happen when the animals got sick? Was there a certain person in the village who specialized, like equivalent of a vet? What would they do if the animals got sick?

**#64: In foreign countries you have separate doctors for animals and humans, but in Tibet we did not have such particular doctors. There were some with traditional knowledge**

handed down through heredity. Like a father would teach his son and he would do the same work that his father did and then the son's son would do the same thing.

There was an illness in animals called *ghom*, during which the skin of the animal shrunk and it became very lean. Then when the animal had a wet snout and its fur stood out, it was said to be suffering from fever. There were no special pills to be given for the illnesses, but we let out blood. We made a sort of needle that was injected into the animal in a certain way. There were no measurements like inches in those days because we were stupid in Tibet, but we measured using the thumb [gestures] and pierced the skin. The fever was concentrated under the stomach, so without actually touching the stomach, which would kill the animal, blood was let out and the animal became fine again. When an animal suffered from *ghom*, a small split was made on the skin covering the shoulder joint. A fresh pat of butter was warmed and it was applied on the cut and massaged. Then gradually the animal became well. That was how it was done.

[Tape change]

Q: How is he doing? We are enjoying ourselves.

**#64: I am relaxed. I am very happy with all the questions so far. Because generally even though one does not know the situation of the whole of Tibet, it is important to speak and let people know about the environment and the produce of one's own region. I am very happy to be asked questions and talk about my region, which comes under the greater Tibetan country.**

Q: That is why we are here.

**#64: [Nods]**

Q: I am very interested in the syringe that he talked about that they used for the cattle. What was the syringe made out of?

**#64: It was not a syringe. It was iron pounded into a point. When the point was inserted, blood automatically came out. After sometime we stopped the bleeding, but we did not have ointment to apply. Then the animal became well naturally.**

Q: So they were kind of letting the blood out in certain areas. Were there different names for the cattle? Did they have different names?

**#64: The yaks and *dri* were named according to the [color of their] hair. If they had a *gapa* 'white face' they were called *Gapa* and if they had a *ze* 'white patch or stripe,' the *dri* or the *dzomo* was named *Zekar*. They did not have special names as the animal number was huge. One with *khamba* 'light brown' color fur was known as *Khamba*.**

Q: Did they have many different colors?

**#64: Yes, there were animals with *khamba* color hair. Some were completely black. There were animals, which were *ze*, with white stripes running down the back to the tail. Some animals were red in color. There were some red animals with black stripes like tigers. There were animals with different types of hair.**

Q: Was he always able to recognize his own yaks?

**#64: One knows his own animals. If there were a hundred heads of animals, we would recognize our own animals among them. For example, if a few families owned a hundred animals each, we would be able to recognize our animals and the animals also knew where to return in the evening.**

Q: How many did his family own?

**#64: We were not a rich family, but we owned about 70 to 80 *dzomo*. We did not own *dri* and yaks because my village was situated lower down where it was hot. Those situated higher up in our region reared yaks and *dri*. *Dri* and yaks could not live in the hotter regions. We owned only *dzo* and *dzomo*.**

Q: What type of animal is the *dzomo*?

**#64: *Dzo* is the male and *dzomo* is the female. If a *dzo* and a *dzomo* were crossed, they cannot give birth to pure *dzo* or *dzomo*. When you cross a *dri* and an ox, the offspring was a pure *dzo* or *dzomo*. Or if you crossed a *dzomo* with a yak, the progeny will be a *dzo* or *dzomo*. In case an ox was crossed with a *dzomo*, the offspring were cows or oxen. They were called *gamo*, a tad superior to cows and oxen and a little inferior to yaks and *dri*. Its head looked like a *dzo* and the back portion resembled an ox.**

Q: Was this a particularly hardy animal?

**#64: They are extremely strong animals. Yaks were the largest and next to them were the *dzo* and *dzomo*, which were also very big. The oxen in India are comparatively very small. Our *dzo* and *dzomo* were very big.**

Q: Were they also killed for their meat?

**#64: Not many were killed for their meat. The *dzo* were used for ploughing the fields because we did not have any machinery, while the *dzomo* were reared for milk. We needed milk to produce butter, cheese and curd.**

Q: So the *dzo* and *dzomo* were not killed for meat?

**#64: Just one or two. If a family had to hold a large prayer assembly, then one or two might be killed, but normally they were not killed. Instead of killing them, the old ones which could not bear calves and did not have milk were freed for the rest of their life. They**

were offered to the lamas who said a prayer and then they were free to go to the forests or plains or wherever they wished.

Q: So the ones that were very occasionally killed for the *pooja* ‘rituals of worship,’ was there a special way that they would kill them?

**#64: The reason that one or two were killed was...could be because a lot of people gathered for a party. In Tibet we did not have many types of vegetables and people were not familiar with them [vegetables]. People were used to eating meat and butter. So in order to provide food for the group, one or two might be killed. There were different methods of killing [the animals] and those people that did the killing were the butchers; they were different people. Not everyone did the killing. Some butchers killed by stabbing beneath the animal's arm, some killed by hitting on the animal's head with a hammer and some tied up the snout [to suffocate it]. There were such different ways of killing. Not everyone did the killing.**

Q: And would this be done by somebody in the village?

**#64: The butchers were there in our village. They have been butchers for generations.**

Q: How were butchers regarded by other villagers?

**#64: In Tibet there were many different castes. [The butchers] were considered among the lowest. The majority did not mingle with them.**

Q: In the beginning he was talking about the history of his region and how they didn't come under the control of the Tibetan government until much later than other parts of Tibet. Did this instill in the people of his region a sense of feeling of independence, of separateness? Did they feel like a little bit different to the rest of Tibet? When he was growing up, did they have a feeling of a little bit of independence from the rest of Tibet?

**#64: Yes, that was there. The Kadham kings originated from the religious kings [of Tibet] and they were able administrators and cared for the people. The King traveled around the six areas of Powo every year, questioning the people about their problems. The King did not send an emissary, but personally went around all the six areas once every year.**

Q: Did they dress differently to the other parts of the country?

**#64: In general, the *chupa* ‘traditional coat/dress’ was the same. However, we wore it a little differently. In ancient times the *chupa* of Powo—a few of them can be seen these days and since the time I remember, there is a slow decline—a person's attire was made using 16 *dhampa* of material. The sleeve alone was this big [gestures]; the width was so large that even two people could fit into it. Such clothes used to be made in the ancient times. Since the width of the *chupa* was so large, it was worn by making many pleats. I have seen those as a child. Now of course times have changed. Though it was the same design as a *chupa*, I have never seen anyone else wear this type of the Powo *chupa*. The men did not cut their**

hair but wore it loose on their shoulders with a cap, like the *Kongpo* caps we see during the cultural shows here. Two strands of hair were used to tie the cap in place. The men's dress was like that.

Q: Did the men carry weapons?

**#64:** They had spears, *dhongshok* and swords. We couldn't use the weapons of the ancient people because of our smaller stature. When measured, the *dhongshok* were five *tho* in length. When people walked with the swords at their waist, its tip touched the ground making a “*tak, tak*” sound as they walked. The scabbard's opening was made bigger to enable one to draw the sword to stab someone. The person had to sort of bend himself to draw the sword out to fight. I have seen a spear, *dhongshok* and a long sword in my home. The people of Powo had a fondness for weapons. There is none in Tibet who could use a sword like a Popa [an inhabitant of Powo]. Later when the Chinese came, they were scared at the way the Popas used the swords. There were such customs.

Q: Did his father show him how to use it when he was a young boy?

**#64:** He didn't teach me, as I was a child then. As a child those swords of the ancient times were too long to be handled. As was the custom in our village in the latter stages, I learned to fight with a sword.

Q: Did they play like sword fighting?

**#64:** There were no swords when we played. However, we were taught to use the sword on woods. Since early times people, whether hitting out at a man or anyone, want to cut it off at one go. So we learned to use the sword on the trees. We initially started learning with small trees of one inch or two inch in thickness, which we could slice at one strike. We continued practicing on trees. In the ancient times, the people could cut off a six-inch tree at one strike. In the latter generations, people were less fortunate and smaller in stature. In my time, we could cut off a four-inch tree at a strike. We used to keep on learning to strike on the trees.

Q: What did his father used his weapons for?

**#64:** Weapons are meant to protect one's life and also to use it on your enemy. Except for those, weapons were of no use. If there was an enemy, one should aim at slicing him into two parts at one strike. So if one had a sword at the waist, it was for trust. A sword was more trustworthy than a friend. We did not have faith in every friend. The one to trust is the sword. If I had a sword at my waist, I would trust it more than if I had 30 friends with me. That was the aim.

Q: It sounds like his area had some unique customs and a unique way of life. Can he talk a little bit about some customs of his area that were different to the rest of Tibet?

**#64: There were customs like the marriage ceremonies between a boy and girl. Also if someone died, there was the custom of performing the rituals. Every region had similar or different customs. However, if I were to talk about the custom of my region, for example, if one were to bring a bride over for one's son or if one had to give away a daughter [in marriage], there were strange customs involved.**

Q: Can he talk about that a little bit?

**#64: Tibetans do not discriminate between a son and a daughter. There is no difference at all. Whether one has to send a son away [in marriage] to another family or bring home a daughter [in-law]; whatever it may be, in Tibet it was never the custom for a boy and a girl to have met [to make the decision of marriage]. The two sets of parents met to make the decision. Even if they [the two families] were not from the same village, they made enquiries about the background of the other as to what caste they belonged to. After that was established, the boy or girl was brought home.**

**However, they [the boy and girl] were never consulted in the olden days. They were never allowed to make the decision. If the two sets of parents came to an understanding, then the correct astrological date and time was calculated. On an auspicious day, one side [of the family] had to go to bring over the boy or girl, while the other side had to come to leave their boy or girl.**

**The way it was conducted depended on the economic status of the families involved. If the family who was bringing home a bride or bridegroom was rich, they would send 10 to 15 horsemen [as escorts for the bride or groom]. If the next day was the auspicious day, the horsemen reached the other family [who was giving away their daughter or son] in the evening and spent the night there. The next morning, the family would ready a group of their people, whatever the number who would accompany their son or daughter. From the earlier group [of horsemen] who had come to escort the bride or bridegroom, a special person, a narrator accompanied them. This person would describe in detail the origin of the village if possible and if not, he would describe the history of the family [who was taking home the bride or groom], about the purity of the father's ancestors and about the purity of the mother's ancestors. He was then offered a ceremonial scarf and he would then make a grand portrayal about the origin of the scarf. The family would have had to seek a person who could give a good narration on the reason for the marriage.**

**Then the bride or groom proceeded [to the new] home. Once the entourage reached the family's home, to welcome her/him two loads of firewood was placed on one side of the entrance to the home and a pot full of water on the other side with a *khata* 'ceremonial scarf' tied on each. If it was a wealthy family, they would place two boxes which were covered with a carpet for the bride or groom to dismount from her/his horse. The pathway into the house was grandly laid with a *thalawa* 'long black and white woven cloth' if it was a wealthy family. [When the groom/bride arrives, the *thalawa* is spread on the ground for him/her to walk on.] If it was a poor family, they also observed the custom of placing the firewood load and others, but the place for dismounting from the horse would be just a bag of grain covered with a *chingpa* 'small mat made from wool.' [To make the *chingpa* wool is**

**not spun and woven, but is matted together.] If it was a very poor family, they also consulted the astrologer for the auspicious times and similar to inviting a guest home, one or two persons went to bring [the bride or groom] home. So there were three types of pre-marriage customs.**

Q: So Pema-*la* should be good at marrying people then. He should be good at officiating weddings. He knows so much.

**#64: I do not know much because I was quite young then. When I left [Tibet], I was quite young and I had just heard about it. I didn't take much interest and I am not good at explaining. However, I have seen many people narrating, so I just repeated that.**

Q: Was it more common for the bride to move in with the groom's family or the other way round? What did it depend upon?

**#64: That was the same. It depends on the population of the village. It was equal. If the village had more number of boys, then more brides would be brought in and if there were more girls, then more grooms were brought in. There was no difference nor can we make an estimate. Now when the bride or groom has entered the house, like I said earlier, there was a narrator from the bride's side as well as one from the groom's side. It was very difficult to find a narrator who could narrate the history about the family. The groom's narrator described the nobility of his ancestors and the narrator from the bride's side narrated the goodness of her family. Both the narrators tried to outdo the other in the narration and at times the one lagging behind might even pick a fight.**

Q: Pa-*la* has such a great memory and all over the world when kids are young, they enjoy scary stories. Were there any scary stories that he had heard when he was a child?

**#64: I don't have scary stories to relate.**

Q: What would make him afraid? Does he remember being afraid when he was a child?

**#64: When we were young, our parents would habitually tell us not to go out at night, as we would meet ghosts. So being accustomed to hearing such things, even when I grew older, I was afraid thinking that I might meet a ghost if I went out at night. Though there were no actual ghosts to be seen, having been used to hearing about it, I was afraid.**

**Otherwise, we didn't fear that we might meet with enemies because if we met one, he is a human and so am I. I would proudly think, "Why can't I challenge him?" I never feared that an enemy would overwhelm me. Our village was not used to such things. We were told that there were ghosts and demons that would harm us, so we feared them because they had no form and they could not be seen.**

Q: During the wedding was there a lama's presence?

**#64:** Yes, there was. During a wedding, when a lot of people came together and it became renowned, spirits might cause harm. So rituals were performed to ward off the evils. The number of monks varied according to the economic status of the family. The monks performed *pooja* in another room for about three days. When the wedding entourage arrived, it was customary to fire a gun in the air; a gun without a bullet. It was said that when many people gathered, ghosts and harmful spirits might also come with them. So in order to overcome them, an empty gun was fired.

Then the bride or groom was taken inside the house. Once the bride or groom was inside, she/he stayed there for three days. The bride or groom had two escorts called *bhayok* with her/him. After three days, she/he went back to her/his home. In the three days that the bride or groom stayed in the house, there was no [physical] contact between the bride and groom. [Physical] contact was not allowed. After three days, she/he went to her/his home.

Q: There was no physical contact?

**#64:** Physical contact was not allowed during the three days. After returning to her/his home for a month or 20 days, the family [who was taking home the bride or groom] had to go to request her/him to come to the house. Then once she/he came to the house, she/he stayed permanently. For the son or daughter who was given away in marriage from his/her family, from that day onwards he/she was separated from the house.

Take for example, my family. I have five children and we are two parents, so we are seven in all. Whatever wealth we have, whether gold, silver, brass or iron—they will be divided equally among the seven members and one part given to the son or daughter who was leaving the family. That was the custom.

Q: What is the purpose of waiting for three days? What is the reason for that?

**#64:** I do not know the reason, but it was the custom since the early times. They cannot have physical relations for three days and then they went back. That was the custom and I do not have an explanation. It was the custom.

Q: He knows so much about how things were done in the village and the lifestyle. What would happen when somebody died in the village?

**#64:** If somebody died in the village...the village had people from different [economic] backgrounds. If a rich man died, there was a particular person who carried the body. Normally people did not touch nor carried the corpse. Suppose in my family I was to die, my children and wife would not touch my body. They will never touch [the corpse]. A person who does that kind of job was called. When that person was called, it was his [the corpse bearer's] right to receive the mattress, carpet, blanket and such things that belonged to the dead person. No one in the family used them as it was the right of the corpse bearer to take those. Not only did he have that right, he was also given a high wage. A horse, *dzo* or *dzomo* was given as wages to the person who carried the corpse.



Just as we follow the same traditions here, as soon as a person dies, the astrological calculations are done to know when the body should be removed [from the house], within how many days and in which direction should the body leave the house. If the dead father of the family was a man of good merit, his body might have to be kept in the house for one year or one month. There was such a custom of keeping the body wrapped tightly in a container for one or two years in the house. This was to say that the dead person was a man of great virtue and that the piety might leave the house in case the body was taken away immediately. That was an old custom, which is followed, but very rarely.

There were three types in disposing a dead body, feeding it to the birds [vultures], offering it in the waters and burning as also burying depending on the economic condition of the family. If the dead were from a poor family, [the body] might be buried or offered to the river. There was saying which goes, “The superior corpse is for the birds, the middle corpse is for the waters and the least corpse is for the fire.” Some were offered to the birds. In some cases monks performed elaborate rituals and made the fire offering ceremony.

So depending upon one's economic situation, such were the customs that were followed. So that was how the bodies were disposed. Then for seven weeks, which is 49 days, a rich family would invite 15, 16 or 17 monks to perform grand *pooja*. In case of poor families, one or two monks performed *pooja* once a week [for seven weeks], while some might not be able to continue the seven-week rituals. However, irrespective of the status of the dead person's family, it was the custom to have one monk remain in the house for the 49 days to care for the dead person by praying and performing the related *pooja*.

Q: Earlier you spoke about the dead person's blankets and things, were those that belonged to the dead person that was given to the bearer of the corpse?

#64: Yes, that is right. The clothes whether they were good or not became the property of the bearer of the corpse. The family members did not keep even a stitch of clothing.

Q: So in his family, what was the preferred method? Was it the river, burial, vultures or cremation?

#64: My family cremated their dead. In our region, we did not follow the custom of offering [the dead] to the vultures. I heard that in the very ancient times the custom existed, but the birds did not eat [the bodies], whether it was due to the protective deities or not. Since then the custom was never followed. So there was cremation and the river. However, the body was not just thrown in the water.

A senior *Ngagpa* lama was invited who made 100 *tso* ‘small conical dough offerings’ and 100 *chombu* offerings. He made cuts on the body using a knife. Then as he completed performing one *choe* ‘cutting-off’ ritual [severing the root of cyclic existence]; a *tso*, a piece of the body and a *chombu* was thrown into the river. The *Ngagpa* lama did this a hundred times, each time throwing a *tso*, a piece of the body and a *chombu* into the river. This ritual is called *sha gya, sem gya*. That was an offering to the fish and it was considered very good.

[Tape change is announced.]

Q: We are not going to be much longer.

**#64: I am fine.**

Q: Tell him if we are going to get all the information from him that he has in his mind, we have to move into this room and then live here for a year.

**#64: Your coming here is neither trouble nor tiring for me. I am very happy because it is due to the wishes of His Holiness the Dalai Lama that you have come here for the cause of the three provinces of Tibet and its six million people. Today I feel happy that I received the opportunity to relate [my story], which is beneficial for the cause of Tibet. Since this is a work connected to the wishes of His Holiness, even though I do not have anything to offer you, I am very happy that you have come here.**

[Tape change. The question and the beginning part of the interviewee's statement are missing. The interpreter's version is used below in brackets.]

**#64: [Actually, I don't have any old pictures from Tibet because in Tibet, at that time we never had cameras. Even people did not like to be filmed because they considered this as] shortening one's life and decreasing one's merits. It was the custom in our region not to take photographs. That was why we did not take photographs or read the palms. It was not allowed. It was said that people from outside would take away our good merits and potency by clicking pictures and reading palms.**

Q: I hope he doesn't mind me filming him?

**#64: No, I don't have such doubts. I feel very happy about the filming today. This filming is for a reason and not just a game or a movie, so I am very happy.**

Q: Were there any bandits in his area?

**#64: There were no big bandits. Thieves and bandits were very rare in our area. The reason was that the area of Powo was very constricted; the people very disciplined and close knit. There were hardly any bandits or thieves in our region. Some might stealthily take away an animal to kill or some poor people might steal a sheep or goat or at times a thief might enter a house, but such happenings were like stars in daytime.**

Q: Does he ever recall hearing about a murder in his village?

**#64: There might be some murders; that is a possibility. The reason for such a thing to occur might be that a thief was caught. If he was, he would be killed immediately. In today's world the worst situation is when someone comes between a husband and a wife. In such a case, the husband considered this a great insult and in a fit of anger might kill the wife's lover.**

Q: That was actually considered like quite reasonable to take that action? The person who killed the thief or wife's lover would not be punished?

**#64: Since the person who killed had a valid reason, he was not punished. If he committed the act unnecessarily, he would be punished. If there was a valid reason, he was not punished or fined.**

Q: Was he able to carry anything with him when he left Tibet?

**#64: We fled Tibet on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the sixth Tibetan month of 1959. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already left. The Chinese were reforming our society and tormenting us. They were segregating the [Tibetan] society into different categories like those holding leadership posts, those who were rich and those who owned lands and so on.**

**Starting at the top of the category, they began to inflict misery on the people. Since we also came under one of the categories, and when the liberation process began, we fled in 1959 on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the sixth Tibetan month. There were no routes to escape because all the roads and bridges were blocked by Chinese soldiers. There was no way to escape. However, since we knew our surroundings, we fled into the hills.**

**At that time we carried some possessions and drove a few animals. We fled from one hilltop to the next and after nine days, on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the sixth month, we reached Kongpo Lunay. There also we could not find a route for our escape. One had to cross valley, after valley, and then came to a road. When we tried to cross the road at night, we encountered Chinese soldiers. We lost all our possessions; some of our people were killed and two captured. My wife, my previous wife was killed there that day. She was killed by the Chinese in Kongpo Lunay. We had a 7-month-old son. I lost my wife, some of our people were killed, two were captured and we were left with nothing, not even a cup or a spoonful of *tsampa*!**

**We fled from there, I carrying my child. There were three families in the same situation. We fled into the hills where we had nothing to eat for four days—we just ate some greens from the hills and drank water. Then we came to Kongmay Gyalha after crossing a mountain pass. Gyalha Singdham is a holy place where there are natural formations of the religious kings [of Tibet] and people of our region used to go on pilgrimage there. We spent a night there and the Chinese army arrived saying that the bandits [meaning the Tibetan escapees] had escaped there. Many Khampas and Kongpos had gathered there—no Utsang people were there. We fled from the area and the Chinese pursued us. We fought the Chinese as we escaped in the deserted regions. Many people were killed. My friend Sonam Nyima, a few Khampas and Kongpos were killed there. We kept resisting the Chinese, but it was futile considering we were outnumbered and possessed no weapons. Escaping through deserted regions, we fled to Pema Koe.**

Q: Did he say what happened to the baby? He said his wife was killed.

**#64: I brought the child with me. He was 7 months old.**

Q: Can he tell us how he met his present wife?

**#64: She and I are from the same village, we escaped together and we have faced the suffering together. We [the escapees] were held up in Pema Koe in 1959. In 1960 we were able to come to India and we were still together. My late father was alive then. My child was [semi-]orphaned and so we formed a relationship and she took care of my child. From then on we were together.**

Q: Was that in Pema Koe?

**#64: Yes, it was from Pema Koe.**

Q: Did they actually come out of the village together?

**[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, their houses were nearby. They were neighbors.**

Q: We have pretty much come to the end of my questions. Is there anything else that he would like to talk about?

**#64: I do not have anything particular to say. I have already told you the history of Powo, though it is not in much detail. From Pema Koe, we reached Indian Territory in 1960. If you'd like to know the story of where I have been in India from 1960 to the present year 2007, I could tell you.**

Q: Has he ever thought of writing a book about the customs and history of his village in his region?

**#64: If I could write a book on my region's history and origin, it would be there for the future and it would tell the special situations of this particular place of Powo, just like they [special conditions] are there for every region. Such a book would be a legacy for the future generations. Though my generation may not get to go back to Tibet, the future generations—it is just a matter of time—with the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama will definitely meet in Tibet. At that time the children will realize what their village was like, its history and origin and especially how plentiful their village was unlike every other region in the three provinces of Tibet. I do hope that I will be able to write a book, but writing a book is not a simple affair. One should have the finance and education. I do not have an education nor do I have the money. So such things hinder my wish.**

Q: Tell him that this is also the purpose of this project to educate the Tibetans in exile about the way Tibetans used to live and I hope that he can find some people to help him with this project because I think it is really worthwhile for him to record this.

**#64: Thank you very much. You are doing this work for a great cause and for us, too—we think of the future of Tibet everyday and even in our dreams in the night. But they are**

**mere thoughts because we do not have the capability to do anything. In the future if someone is able to write the book just as I relate it, I would be very grateful for any help.**

Q: If the young generation of Tibetans in exile would listen to their elders, what advice does he have for them?

**#64: I do not have education to give them grand advice. However, to advise them with whatever knowledge I have—the younger generation has never seen nor experienced the situation in Tibet, except what they have heard from their parents and from the books. Therefore, you should never doubt what your parents tell you. In the future, it may be your children's children or their children or perhaps within the next two generations, they may get to return to Tibet or perhaps it may be many generations before that happens.**

**However, many generations may be left [outside Tibet], you should hand down the history and stories about Tibet from father to son continuously. You should think day and night about the three provinces of Tibet and that through the blessings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it is just a matter of time before the Tibetans are back in Tibet. Keeping this in mind, you should not waste your time. At the same time since Tibet is a Buddhist country, you should pay attention to the dharma. There are four sects [of Buddhism] and including Bon it is five. We should not discriminate among religions as advised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be secular. Religion is like *bhoram* ‘square-shaped brown candy’ and from whichever side you take a bite; it is sweet and not bitter. So your principle should be secular.**

**Your parents are not there for your whole life. Perhaps you will have them for a few years or a few days. They are not permanent and nobody can say at what hour or minute they will be gone. Therefore, even though we parents do not have education, this is my ardent advice with my limited knowledge and you should always ponder on such lines. This is what I always advise my children. I have five children, four sons and one daughter. Since I keep advising them, all my children are well behaved. They are obedient to their parents and highly devoted to the dharma and zealous about the Tibetan cause.**

Q: Is he a follower of the *Rigmay* ‘non-sectarian’ tradition?

**#64: This is a custom since earlier times and also upon reading the texts, I understand that it is very important to be non-sectarian. I have faith in all who wear the Buddha's red robes. I never discriminate saying that he is Gelug, he is Bonpo, he is Kagyu or that he is Nyingma. I never have such discriminations in my mind.**

Q: Is there any part of the interview that he does not want us to use and does he want his name changed?

**#64: I don't think there is any part. Whatever I spoke about now was what I actually experienced and not something else. The story I related about the miseries inflicted by the Chinese is the truth as seen by the whole world. So since I related the facts and if the Chinese happen to hear or see it, I have no fear.**

Q: If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for him or his relatives in Tibet? If so, should we change his name?

**#64: If there are portions that might cause problems, you would know that. As for me, there will be no problems because though I have relatives in Tibet, I am almost 80 years old and there's no hope that I will go. I have many relatives spread all over [Tibet] and if there are parts that seem harmful, they will suffer for no reason. So personally I don't have any problems or doubts, but if it may cause problems for my relatives...I won't say that my name should be changed, you should weigh the situation and decide.**

Q: Tell him that for everybody on this Project, the safety of these people and their relatives is a consideration. So we will make sure, if anybody thinks there's any problem at all, we will act accordingly. Ninety-nine percent of the interview was about before the Chinese came, I don't think that's a problem. Does he think that that will cause a problem for anybody?

**[Interviewee nods to indicate no.]**

END OF INTERVIEW