

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #71 – Tsetin (alias)
July 5, 2007

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #71
2. Interviewee: Tsetin (alias)
3. Age: 69
4. Date of Birth: 1938
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Jongmay
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1983
9. Date of Interview: July 5, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Interviewee's residence, Jampaling, Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 40 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tsewang Dorjee
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tsetin's father travelled often to China to trade goods and witnessed hardships imposed there by the Chinese government. When she was 12 years old, Chinese soldiers arrived in Tsetin's village and at first they were "very loving" and even started schools for the children. Later, when many people were arrested, the entire community rose up in rebellion. Chinese airplanes bombed monasteries and bullets killed villagers as they tried to resist the invasion.

Many monasteries in Tsetin's region were completely dismantled and turned into agricultural land. People were afraid of being captured and began to flee into the forest. Her parents were able to escape to India, but left Tsetin with relatives in Tibet. She and her relatives attempted to escape at a later time, but two relatives were killed by the Chinese. Tsetin was forced to return to her village and was later imprisoned for one month and beaten.

Tsetin describes the failure of the commune system implemented in 1973-74, which caused severe starvation among the people. When she learned around 1980 that her mother was still alive, she escaped to India and was reunited with her family.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, destruction of monasteries, imprisonment, forced labor, Chinese oppression, brutality/torture, thamzing.

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Interview #71

Interviewee: Tsetin [alias]

Age: 69, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: July 5, 2007

Question: Please tell us your name.

Interviewee #71: Tsetin.

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

#71: Yes, you can use it.

Q: Perhaps we can begin. If you could please tell me, what province are you from in Tibet?

#71: I am from the Dhotoe [Kham] province.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do?

#71: Until I was about 15 years old, my father went to trade in China and Lhasa. My mother and the rest of us, used to engage in fieldwork.

Q: How many children were in your family?

#71: There were seven children.

Q: Where were you in the line up?

#71: From the seven children, there were three older than me and three younger than me, so I was the middle child. [Laughs]

Q: Did you like being in the middle?

#71: The middle one is most unfortunate.

Q: When your father went to China, what kind of business was he doing?

#71: My father went with the mules to China and Lhasa. I don't know what goods he took when he went to China but when he returned, he brought tea [leaves] and *jaggery* 'brown sugar blocks.'

Q: When your mother was working on the farm, what kind of food did you raise?

#71: We did field work as well as raised animals; we were nomads. We had about 10 to 15 *dzo* ‘domestic animal bred from a yak and a cow’ and one person went with them to the nomad camp. We also owned goats and sheep and another person engaged in grazing them. The rest of the family did the field work.

Q: What did you grow in your fields?

#71: We grew wheat and barley. We could grow all types of grains. Our region was the place of *gyasho*, which means you could grow everything. In a year we grew two crops.

Q: What was your favorite memory of the kind of work you did as a child?

#71: I don't know which work I was fond of as a child. Until I was about 11 years old, I was free to roam around and I did not work. At the age of 11, I went to graze the animals. Then as I grew to be 14 or 15, I could milk them.

Q: Did you ever go to school until the time you were 14?

#71: There were no schools in my region.

Q: How would you describe your childhood? Would you say it was happy or peaceful or whatever?

#71: I don't know whether I was happy or not as a young child. I was about 10 years old when my father returned home after one of his business trips to China and told us about the hardships perpetuated by the Chinese in Sadham and Gyaydham. He said that the rich people were beaten and captured by the Chinese while the children were left alone. He told us that those children picked up the grains found in their [the traders'] horse dung and ate them. I felt so sad but could not cry in front of the others. I would cover my head and weep.

Since then my life has been about suffering. Some people said that Tibet would be okay, since those things were happening so far away, while others remarked that we would face the same situation. There were problems from then on.

Q: Did the Chinese come to your village?

#71: They didn't come immediately. When I was about 12 years old, a Chinese soldier arrived in our village and he was very loving. He gave candies to the children and he liked them. The leaders in our village—they were not elected by the people, but they were leaders since early times—were treated very well along with the poor people. People talked about it, but I did not see them [the Chinese treat the people]. I saw the Chinese soldier come.

Q: Just one man?

#71: No, it was more than one. There were about 300 soldiers.

Q: Three hundred soldiers?

#71: People said there were 300, but nobody took a count. I heard people say that about 300 have arrived. I saw them arrive. They prepared a fireplace and searched for firewood. They did everything themselves without saying anything to the villagers. They offered help to the villagers who were working.

Q: Given that you had heard these stories about the Chinese and what happened, what did you imagine or think was going on when these Chinese were so nice?

#71: We were relaxed. For two to three years the Chinese said that they were going to start schools and constructed houses. They were treating us well and we were deceived. We lived under the Chinese in this way for sometime.

Q: You felt safe, but you later found out these things were not gestures of kindness.

#71: When I was between 12 and 15 years old, we were deceived and lived under the Chinese. Even some schools were started. Though we were many children in the family, my father did not admit us into the schools.

Q: Do you have any idea what they were teaching in the school?

#71: I heard that they were taught Chinese and Tibetan reading and writing. That was not in our village. Ours was a small village with only eight or nine families. The schools were in the larger village called Dhu, where our leaders lived. There were schools in Riyon Zongtsa areas too.

Q: Who was teaching in these schools? Were they Tibetans or Chinese people?

#71: They [the teachers] were Tibetans, but not people of our village. They were from other regions that they [the Chinese] must have captured and brought there.

Q: What happened at age 15?

#71: It was when I was about 15 years old that all our leaders were taken away for a meeting. They were taken to Ba for the meeting. When they were taken away, the prominent people in our village said that it was not a good sign and that they might have been taken to prison. Then the people of Badhe Ngari Shingkhram, covering an entire district staged a rebellion and expelled all the school children and destroyed the [school] house. They rebelled.

Q: Who rebelled?

#71: All the influential people were imprisoned. It was the people living in Ngari Shingkham. Each region had its own leader, who rebelled. The leaders of the regions gathered and decided to go to Ba to create destruction there. They rushed to Ba to fight there. The leader of our village was also imprisoned at Ba.

Q: They destroyed the school buildings?

#71: Yes, they destroyed the school buildings. They didn't kill anyone, but expelled all the people who had come from outside the village.

Q: Do you have any idea how many villagers went and how many Chinese there were that they felt brave enough to take on the Chinese? I am interested in knowing what the proportion was?

#71: I have heard about all men below the age of 60 and above age 18 as the number of people who were to go [and fight]. I don't think that many went, but I think it was every male member. There was no Chinese army at Ba, but a large number of their officials were there.

I do not know the figure, but there were many houses. I heard all the houses were destroyed except for two. They destroyed about 12 to 13 houses. When they came to the last two houses, the Chinese airplanes arrived and they couldn't destroy them. It took [the men] more than one month [to accomplish their mission]. All those leaders who were called for the meeting were imprisoned there. More than half of our elders died there.

Q: Did they succeed in freeing the prisoners?

#71: They could not free them.

Q: Were those houses that they destroyed built by the Chinese and did they fight for about a month?

#71: Yes, they were Chinese houses. For about a month they [the men] surrounded the Chinese. Then airplanes flew over and dropped bombs on them. Ba Chodhe Monastery was destroyed by bombs. Then they returned.

Q: Were the monks in the *gonpa* 'monastery'?

#71: All the monks were also engaged in the fight. I think there were no monks inside the monastery. I heard that many monks of Ba Chodhe Gonpa were killed.

Q: I didn't quite hear how many Tibetans were fighting the Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Most of the boys and men from the surrounding villages, but no proper figure.

Q: And then what happened next?

#71: The prisoners were there [in the jails] while the fighters returned and they said that when the Chinese fired their guns, the bullets penetrated right through two to three floors. They brought some bullets with them. The bullets fell like rain, they said.

Q: They didn't get to bring any of the leaders back. Where they all killed?

#71: Not all of them [the leaders] were killed. Later they released all those who were not dead saying that the dispute would be discussed later. They returned to their respective homes. All the older ones were dead. The prisoners narrated that they did not have drinking water and were forced to drink their urine. I noticed that they looked terribly skinny when they returned.

Q: When the Chinese dropped the bombs, did the dead die then and the others return home immediately?

#71: They didn't drop the bombs where their officials lived, which was where the prisoners were jailed. They didn't bomb that place. The prisoners died from starvation and dehydration.

Q: These prisoners were coming from prisons in your village or around your village?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They were leaders of the villages, who were arrested by the Chinese.

Q: When the bombing came, did they get to escape then?

#71: They were not bombed. Our fighters did not have proper guns to fight with while they [the Chinese] had guns. They [the Tibetans] sent men on the roofs of the houses with ladders and then the others fired through the windows.

Later at the foot of each ladder, five or six men lay dead. My late father was one of the leaders during that fight. When he said, "Don't go. It is useless now. We are losing too many men. Let's leave," the monks of Ba Chodhe Gonpa would not listen. They still climbed up on to the roofs. Some of them were killed by [Chinese] firing from within the house. At the foot of each ladder, there were five or six corpses.

Q: Where were they going climbing on the ladders?

#71: They were going to the roof. The houses in our village were not like the houses here. Our roofs were made of wooden planks and they were going to set fire to them.

Q: Were there Chinese in the houses?

#71: They were planning to destroy the Chinese houses by setting them on fire. However, they [the Chinese] shot from inside the houses and they [the Tibetans] were not able to succeed.

Q: And then what happened?

#71: Even in that situation they [the Tibetan fighters] persisted, but three houses were left standing. They couldn't destroy the three houses as six to seven airplanes flew overhead. I saw that, too. They [the Tibetan fighters] said they could even see the people in the airplane through the windows. They dropped bombs in the Tsangtoe Kago [a river] and even after three days, the water did not clear up. They dropped bombs in the water and everywhere, except their houses. They bombed the villages. Seeing the destruction, they [the Tibetan fighters] returned home.

Q: And what happened next?

#71: They returned and then there were more fights. From the time I was 15 until 19, people were resisting the Chinese in the village.

Q: Many villagers must have lost their lives or were arrested?

#71: No one was arrested, but many died. When you fight a battle, you die. Many died. About two to three days journey from my village was Sawmithang, I have not been there, and the people lay in wait for the Chinese at a narrow passage. They succeeded in blocking them for two to three years. Then when I was about 19 years old, they came through.

Q: If this fighting went on for four years, how did you continue your livelihood like farming and taking care of your animals?

#71: Those that went to fight engaged in the resistance and the women and children worked on the farms.

Q: What were your feelings when all this was going on?

#71: I was not particularly alarmed because I believed and hoped our people could fend off the Chinese. I thought they were successful when they resisted them.

Q: Do you remember what your mother's reaction was to all this turmoil in her family life and in the village?

#71: I don't remember my mother saying anything. However, my father said, "We will not be able to defeat the Chinese. The Chinese will arrive. They will beat us and cause us hardships."

Q: What happened to you at age 19?

#71: My father came back from where he was fighting saying that they were defeated. He said, "It is useless now. We have to go." We left everything behind. This sister [pointing to woman off-camera] was given away in marriage and had children, so she was left behind with her family. Another older sister was married elsewhere. Her husband was not home, so we brought her son along with us.

Q: Who were there in the group when you escaped?

#71: My parents, my older sister and I...

Q: Were all the unmarried children in the group?

#71: Yes, there were three unmarried daughters and a son. We were still living with our parents then.

Q: Can you tell us about the escape? Where did you go?

#71: When father came back saying that they had lost to the Chinese, we fled the whole night. After a night's journey, we reached the place called Rasi. Then we had to cross the Drichu [Yangtse] River. We crossed the river at night in a boat. When we reached halfway up a mountain pass, we could see men and women making their escape. Everybody reached the next mountain. We were the first to flee. We saw that the Chinese had not arrived in the areas we covered in three days. Many people were fleeing. Chinese were at Dhewu. However, we didn't encounter any Chinese during our escape.

Q: Where did you reach?

#71: We reached my father's hometown Chashay. That was under the Gongkar Lama.

Q: What happened then?

#71: When we arrived, Chashay was peaceful. People told us that the Chinese were at an army camp at Gathok, but here were no Chinese around there [Chashay], and they were not doing anything. Everything was quiet. At Chasahy my father's relatives said, "They [the Chinese] will not come here. Even if they come, they will not ill-treat us. They will not beat us." They had no plans of escaping.

But my father was adamant and said, "When the whole region is flooded, you will not find one dry stone, so I am not staying here. I am going." He made preparations for about a month in Chashay, packing things and buying horses. Then my parents and three siblings left while my sister and I were left behind with my father's family who had told my parents, "We will look after them. You are too many people and you will find it difficult." They were convinced that the Chinese would not come and wanted us to live with them, so we were left behind with them.

Q: Why would they make that decision?

#71: The relatives said, "The Chinese will not come. We will look after them." I heard later that was what they told them [my parents]. My parents agreed with the relatives and left us. When they left, though they didn't trick my younger sister, they tricked me by sending me to another place for work. When I look back, it makes me cry. [Crying] When I came back, they were gone. It was five days since they'd left.

Q: When you discovered that they were gone, what was your reaction?

#71: They were gone and I was left there. I wanted to follow them, but they [the relatives] watched me and wouldn't allow me [to follow my parents]. Then as days went by I thought they would be too far away and I did not dare go. Initially, when it was just five days after they'd left, I wanted to follow them thinking they might not be too far away.

Q: Why would your relatives want to keep you there?

#71: My younger sister was not able to work. The relatives were farmers and I worked in the fields. It remained calm for one year. After one year when I was 20 to 21 years old, the Chinese arrived there in the third Tibetan lunar month. The regions that were close by were Sodhay and Chashay. The Chinese were stationed at Markham. They [the Chinese] asked the people to surrender to them. The people of Sodhay surrendered and gave up their guns.

Those regions came under the same district. The Chashay people did not want to surrender and did not give up their guns. When they did not give up the guns, they [the Chinese] planned to attack them. They arrived on the third or the fourth day of the third Tibetan lunar month. A messenger came to the village where I was living with my relatives that the Chinese were on the way from a distance of two days' journey. Then we fled to the forest and reached there at around 4 o'clock in the evening. The next morning at about 3 o'clock, we heard bombing at Suwo Monastery. We couldn't see it but could hear the sound. We were in the forest. At Chashay all the monks had run away into the forest.

Q: Did you run into the mountains with your sister and your relatives? Who was with you?

#71: My father's younger sister, her son, seven children of my father's relative, the relative's wife and the relative himself.

Q: Was your sister with you?

#71: Yes, she was with me.

Q: As you said before, this family had never prepared for escape. So they probably didn't have very much with them?

#71: They never had such plans. Chashay fell on the other [western] side of the Drichu River and people belonging to the eastern side of the river, the Gongkar Lama district

started arriving there [in Chashay]. The people [of Chashay] believed that their area would be kept apart and spared.

Q: Did you carry anything with you when you fled into the forest?

#71: We didn't carry anything as we had to flee right away.

Q: What was the name of the monastery that was bombed?

#71: It's called Suwo Monastery. Situated on the inner side of the mountain was Suwo Monastery and on the outer side was the Kandha Monastery. Within minutes of each other, both these monasteries were destroyed at 3 o'clock in the morning. Both the monasteries were destroyed within minutes of each other, at the same time. All the monks of Suwo Monastery had escaped while the monks of Kandha Monastery were inside. All of them were killed, including the Lama.

Q: Any idea if that was a large monastery or how many monks were there?

#71: Kandha Monastery was not a large monastery. It used to be said that there were about 60 monks.

Q: You are in the mountain now with your relatives and your sister and you are about 21, what happens to you now?

#71: From the forest we went to the home of a relative who lived in Sodhay, where the Chinese had not arrived, and he provided us with food. It was close to Chashay and we planned to escape from there. The night the Chinese came to the monasteries, in my village of Jomay with only eight families, four people from one family, two from another family and one from a third family were killed. That was during the time they [the Chinese] arrived.

Q: Jomay was where you lived?

#71: That was the village where I lived.

Q: Where did you go from Sodhay?

#71: They [the group of fleeing people] said they would go to Phopa. They took the direction to Phopa through the mountains where the Chinese had not yet arrived and where it was calm. I fell ill and was unable to walk. A younger sister of my father lived at a distance of three or four days' journey. I was sent to my father's younger sister. At that time everything was peaceful there. The Chinese had not turned up yet. I stayed there while they [the group] carried on. The Chinese did not fight, so they [the group] went to the villages or hid in the forests. That went on for about a year. I lived with my aunt for a year and I turned 22 years old. We celebrated *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year.'

Q: Was that place Jomay?

#71: No, I lived a year in Jomay from age 20 to 21. The latter village was in Sodhay and it is called Lawu. My father's youngest sister lived there.

Q: Did you begin to feel better? You were sick for a while?

#71: I became well while I lived there.

Q: Did you have any understanding of what was the matter with you?

#71: I had chest pain. When I arrived there, there were monks and a doctor who could treat me. My aunt had the monks read prayers for me. I was told that the illness was due to pressure.

Q: Was the pressure from worry and concern?

#71: That was from the worry. I was vomiting something, which was not blood but looked like a piece of liver. There was a Tibetan doctor who gave me medicines and I became well. I had a very good aunt in my father's younger sister. She took very good care of me and I recovered.

Q: I want to understand what was your heart feeling? In your heart, your emotions about being cut off from your family, in staying with these relatives and being sick and then having the Chinese around you and danger, what were your feelings?

#71: I thought I would never meet my parents again. I was terribly sad.

Q: Did you have any spiritual practices that helped you at that time?

#71: I do not remember practicing dharma.

Q: After that year was over, what happened to you next?

#71: After the year was over, at the start of the eighth Tibetan lunar month, the prominent people of that village including my aunt's husband were called for a meeting and then they were imprisoned. They [the Chinese] took away all the important people of that village; all those who were influential since many generations were led away. They were led away to attend a meeting at Gathok, but when they reached Gathok, their waistbands and bootlaces were removed and they were shut up in a dark room.

Q: Why were the waistbands and shoelaces removed?

#71: That was because many prisoners hanged themselves using the waistbands. They were not allowed such things in the prison.

Q: Were there many people who were committing suicide in those days out of fear and worry?

#71: Yes, many died. In the old days the *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ bags had a long string to tie the mouth with and many committed suicide by using the strings in the prisons.

Q: Given the Buddhist teachings, how was suicide understood at that time? Were people just trying to avoid suffering? What was the thinking about it?

#71: After we had lived many years under the Chinese, the older people's refrain was, “I hope I don't have to commit suicide.” Many people committed suicide.

Q: Because you had suffered so much already, had you ever thought about taking your life?

#71: Yes, I did think of committing suicide, but I couldn't do it when the actual time came. Everyday I thought about dying, but I could never do it. Perhaps that was not my fate. Many people died so easily.

Q: I wonder where you got your strength from.

#71: The reason I couldn't die was because they [the relatives] assured me that they would bring back my parents, but they didn't and there was no news if they were dead. So I thought there might come a good time when I might be able to see my parents again. That gave me strength. Otherwise, there was nothing I had to hold on to by not dying. I pondered over that a lot.

Q: Many men go to prison and they take away their shoelaces. What are you doing at this time when these leaders have been arrested?

#71: We did not have much work to do because they [aunt's family] had many servants. Then the servants were taken away, given properties and kept separately from us. That's what they [the Chinese] did.

Q: Were the properties of your aunt's family divided among the servants?

#71: They [the Chinese] did not give much to the servants. They packed everything and took them away. I don't know where. The servants were made to live separately and given *tsampa*. We were kept apart from them.

Q: Where did you stay then?

#71: We were made to live in the *dzo* shed of my aunt's family.

Q: You and who was still living with you?

#71: My aunt's oldest daughter was 14 years old and the youngest 6 months old. In between there were other daughters; in all she had six daughters.

Q: What was the feeling of the daughters and the aunt and you under these conditions? What were you feeling?

#71: I do not remember much. My aunt said, "Let's go back to our village. Let's go back to Jomay. All our relatives are living there and that might be much better." They [the Chinese] brought back my aunt's husband to the village and he was beaten, and my aunt fell ill.

Q: Her husband was brought back to the village?

#71: Yes, he was brought back to be beaten.

Q: Did you witness the struggle session?

#71: I saw him being beaten. Those that did the beatings were not Tibetans. The Chinese beat him.

Q: How was he beaten?

#71: They [the Chinese] said, "Tell us where you have hidden your wealth?" Actually, there was no wealth or possessions that were hidden. Whatever they [aunt's family] owned was right there, but they [the Chinese] wouldn't believe it. They thought they were rich and that they owned a lot of wealth. Whatever they owned was there, as they did not hide anything anywhere. They told him [aunt's husband] to bring the wealth and explain what plans he had. It was a high-ranking leader [of the Chinese] who demanded to know what plans he had.

Q: With what was he beaten?

#71: They kicked and pulled his hair.

Q: There were no sticks?

#71: They did not beat with sticks. They kicked, pulled at the hair and ears. They dragged him here and there. It was the Chinese who did the beatings and not Tibetans.

Q: You witnessed this terrible suffering of your uncle. Was the whole family seeing this or just you?

#71: The whole village had to be there to witness the beatings. Except for those children who were below 15 or 16 years old, the rest of the village had to come and watch it.

Q: How were you feeling about the Chinese under these conditions?

#71: I thought how true were my father's words when he said that he had witnessed such things earlier.

Q: Up until this point, is there anything in your story that I have neglected to ask you that might be important for us to understand the picture of what was going on?

#71: There is nothing that has been left out.

Q: So when your uncle was being abused in the struggle sessions, who were the participants in that session?

#71: There was one Chinese leader who accompanied him. Those that brought him to the village were Tibetans appointed by the Chinese. The Chinese police in the village [carried out the beatings].

Q: Where they Chinese soldiers?

#71: The Chinese called them *ka-nga-choe*. They carried guns. Some of them were Tibetans and some were Chinese.

Q: They were not soldiers?

#71: They were not soldiers.

Q: They were the police?

#71: I think so. In Chinese they were called *ka-nga-choe*.

Q: Besides the Chinese leader, how many policemen were there?

#71: There were not many policemen. From the village called Khachangchoe, they brought one man [prisoner]. Then three other men were brought. There were eight to nine from Wochuchok and another eight or nine from our village, who were all brought there [for the beatings]. All the people were made to sit there and ordered to beat the men. The people sympathizing with the Tibetans bent down lower and lower when they were called upon to do the beatings. No one went up to beat them.

Q: How long did the session go on and what happened afterwards?

#71: The session lasted for three days and then they were led back [to prison] again to Gathok.

Q: All day and all night?

#71: They were not beaten during the night. They were locked up at night.

Q: What were the people in the village thinking? Is this the first time the people witnessed this kind of struggle session?

#71: Yes, that was the first time. The people were so dreadfully scared that no one walked up to beat them. No one beat them and no one said that they [the prisoners] were bad. Everyone including the old was crying.

Q: What happened to your uncle when those three days were over?

#71: Then they were taken back to the prison. They were led away to Gathok. They were brought there just for the beating.

Q: What happened to you, your aunt and all of these daughters of your aunt?

#71: All of us stayed there. Then my aunt said we should go back to Jongmay, her birthplace. All our relatives were there, while at this village [Lawu], we had no relatives. She said it would be better for us to go where our relatives were. When we wanted to leave, the people of the village helped take us there. They gave us food and dropped us at the village [Jongmay], which was at a distance of three days' journey. Each village on the way helped us to the next and in this way, we were dropped home.

Q: Why did people think it was good to go back to your birthplace because they were being invaded by the Chinese like every other village? So why would that place seem a better place to go?

#71: She felt that it would be better there as that was her home and all her relatives lived there. She had settled in that village [Lawu after her marriage] and did not have any relatives. That was her husband's home and now he was taken away.

Q: So the village would provide more family support. Was that the major reason?

#71: That was the place of her birth. Her relatives lived there and her house was empty. She thought it would be better for us. Her husband was already taken away and she was unhappy [in Lawu].

Q: In your story so far you have mentioned many monasteries that were bombed. Do you have any knowledge of how many you actually know of personally that were bombed?

#71: The largest monastery of my village as well as many smaller ones was destroyed. Innumerable small monasteries were ruined. There was one called Lagonkha, which the Chinese destroyed and strew the scriptures on the road. At that time I was captured by the Chinese and was being taken away by them. I could see the scriptures on the road as far as the eye could see. That was Lagonkha, which I saw with my own eyes.

Q: Any other monasteries?

#71: The Romo Monastery was destroyed. I saw that with my own eyes. Romo Monastery was situated in the village where I stayed when I fell ill. Then there was a small monastery called Jonga Sathong Monastery. That was very small. Then there was Parathang Monastery. I saw the Para Lama being beaten. These monasteries were located close to each other.

Q: Then?

#71: Then there was the Norbuling Monastery. The Norbuling Monastery was noted for its divine protector. The one who destroyed the monastery was found murdered, which was said to have been committed by the protective deity Palden Lhamo who rides a mule. He had gone to the monastery and was returning when he was found murdered.

Q: Who killed him?

#71: No one could be named for the murder. It took place at a bushy area. People saw that the bushes had been uprooted, evidence that the man had tried to defend himself. There was no killer who could be named. I heard that the Chinese, upon investigation said that [the murderer] was a woman riding a mule.

Q: How could one person destroy the monastery unless there was a pilot dropping a bomb?

#71: The destruction was carried out earlier. Since the monastery had a divine protector, people still used to make offerings there; people still worshipped there. The man [murder victim] often used to go and check what the people were doing. The monastery was not destroyed completely; it was left in a crumbling stage. It was a small monastery. The man often checked there. He was called Shangdang Dhamchoe and was a very bad man. He was a Tibetan. People made offerings of tea and prayed at the monastery. Though there was hardly anything left of the monastery, people left offerings there. The man went there daily to check what the people had left.

Q: But how did he destroy the monastery?

#71: He was the main person who raised his voice for carrying out the destruction of the monastery. Knowing the power of the fierce divine protector, he did not dare do much of the destruction himself.

Q: Was this man Tibetan?

#71: He was a Tibetan. His name was Shangdang Dhamchoe.

[Disc 1 ends; Disc 2 begins]

Q: It sounds like the monasteries were never given warning that they were going to be bombed and you gave at least one occasion when two monasteries were bombed in the middle of the

night. Were they all bombed at night or were the monks ever given a warning to get out by the Chinese that they were going to destroy the building?

#71: There were no warnings. The monasteries that the Chinese bombed were the larger ones. Gathok Wooser Monastery, Suwo Monastery and Kandha Monastery were bombed by the Chinese. Later the Chinese told the people that the smaller monasteries were not to be left standing. Everyday they called meetings and said, "You have to destroy the monasteries. Why have you left them standing? Are you trying to raise the dead, old system? What is the use of the monasteries?" So the bad leaders of the villages forced the people to destroy the monasteries. The Chinese did not come and destroy them.

Q: Were the monks from the three monasteries bombed by the Chinese able to escape?

#71: The monks of Kandha Monastery were not able to escape. The monks of Suwo Monastery, which is located in my village, had already fled. However, not everyone was able to flee and many were killed.

Q: So there were no warnings by the Chinese?

#71: Of course there were no warnings. They purposely did that in the night, at around 3 o'clock.

Q: What would they use to destroy their own *gonpa*?

#71: The tools they used were hoes and hammers. They dug at the foundations and made the walls topple. There were instances when a wall fell over the diggers killing them underneath.

Q: I wanted to clarify something about the people who used hammers to destroy their *gonpa*, the smaller ones. Were they doing this because they were afraid of the Chinese and they were forced to do it?

#71: If they were not destroyed and left standing—the Tibetans are a strange people because even if there was nothing in the monasteries, even if the monasteries were empty—they offered prayers. So they [the Chinese] said that was a waste. They said, "There is no one who will eat the offerings. You are wasting it. You have to destroy it."

Q: What would the Chinese do if they were not destroyed?

#71: Some were destroyed and the sites converted into agricultural fields.

Q: If the people did not destroy the monasteries, what would the Chinese have done to them?

#71: They [the Chinese] held innumerable meetings and if a person said he did not want to destroy the monasteries; who knows whether he might get a cap on his head or be imprisoned. Due to fear, people said "Okay."

Q: What is meant by “put a cap”?

#71: When a person got a cap he had to go to work like the *ngadhak* ‘those who held leadership positions,’ even though he was a common man.

Q: Where would he be sent to work?

#71: Wherever there was hard labor to be performed. He would not be permitted to be with the common people. If anyone spoke out that the monasteries should not be destroyed, he would be treated like the *ngadhak* who were forced to work or imprisoned. Those who they thought required strict vigil were put in jails and more lenient ones would be forced to labor with us, like the *sakhak* ‘land owners’ and the *ngadhak*. So due to fear, the people said “Yes.”

Q: So there were terrible consequences if you said no. You mentioned at some point that you had been arrested. Can you tell us what year that was and what led up to that?

#71: I was arrested by the Chinese. First, we have to come to the part of the story where we reach my aunt's home. We arrived there and fled into the hills. [Laughs] The people helped us reach there at Jomay. We reached Jomay and for about 15 days, no one said anything to us. We stayed happily. We had very rich relatives who lived some distance away. The women [of the two families] lived there, while their husbands had fled to the hills. About 15 days later we were informed that we had to go to beat the women. The two mothers of the [relatives'] families were to be beaten. Their husbands were not there, having fled to the hills. We were told that they were to be beaten that day and told to attend. So I had to go. Alas, they were beaten so much. Both the mothers were quite old.

That day a thought crept into my mind. I thought it was good if my parents were dead. I was very happy [that they were not there]. When the mother was dragged to one end, the children, boys and girls clung to her and were dragged along with her. They could not be separated. It was the Chinese who were beating them. That was the first occasion of beatings and the Tibetans did not do it. The children were not beaten. They [the Chinese] separated the children [from the mothers] and made people hold the children, but the children ran and clung to their mothers. When I saw that I was very happy that I did not have my mother and my father.

Q: Were you happy because you were afraid that something like that might happen to them?

#71: Yes, I thought they would also have had to undergo that. Since then I did not miss my parents. Later when I was able to come here [to Bylakuppe], I said that I was happy I did not miss my parents. Everybody would laugh at me. [Laughs]

Q: So what happens after that session in your life?

#71: They didn't tell us anything then. When I returned I told my aunt about the mothers being beaten and the children clinging to them. I related to my aunt what I witnessed there. My aunt became greatly alarmed and said, "I am not going to remain here." She was ill since the time she saw her husband being beaten. I told her how the mothers were beaten and what the children did. She panicked and said she would also be beaten.

There were some relatives of ours who had helped me earlier, but now the boys and men were hiding in the hills. She [aunt] said, "Let's ask them to come and get us. Let's go there. I am going to die, so it's all the same if I die in the hills. You must also come. They might not do anything to you and the children and even if they do, nothing can be done. I am not going to remain here. I am going to die soon. I want to ask them to take me." Her brother, who is also my father's brother, was hiding in the hills, so we sent a messenger to the hills to take my aunt. At that time the people were free to move, so we all moved to the forest.

Q: It sounds like your aunt became very, very frightened that something was going to happen to you and to the other girls?

#71: My aunt was scared that she would be subjected to the beatings. She said, "It's certain that I am going to die. I will not allow myself to be beaten. I might as well die in the forest." She wanted her relatives to take her into the forest, so that she could die there. She didn't want to die from the beatings.

Q: Did her daughters also accompany her to the forest?

#71: Yes, all the daughters were also taken to the forest. We all went together.

Q: Were your cousins among many people living in the forest?

#71: There were many. Among my relatives, my uncle and his three sons, an aunt and her monk son were living in the forest. All the men from other families were moving about in the forest. They did not all live together. They hid in different places.

Q: Were you afraid, like your aunt, that you would be killed by the Chinese at that point?

#71: Yes, I was afraid but I couldn't die. I thought the Chinese would beat me though not kill me because I was a child. I was frightened. All the men were hiding in the forest for fear that they would be killed by the Chinese, but the women lived in the village. Then the women were told to bring back their husbands.

First they [the Chinese] said it gently and later they began beating the women. The women were told to bring their husbands back and that they [the men] would not be beaten or killed. Some came back and they were treated well and not beaten. So gradually one by one they came back, until almost all the husbands were back in the village. However, there were many who dare not return and continued to live in the forest. They hid in the forest.

Later I heard that the leaders of the village said [to those hiding in the forest], "If you wish, please surrender. If you do not want to surrender, please move away to a distant place. We cannot bear the hardship. We are being pressured to reveal you." They [the villagers] had to provide us food because we had nothing to eat in the forest. If the Chinese saw the villagers taking food for us, they were beaten and taken away to prison. They even took away women to be imprisoned when they saw them taking food to the "bandits." Whether they were women or men they were put in prison. Many people were locked up in prisons.

Q: Who asked you to surrender?

#71: That was a person from my village. He was not a leader in the early days. He was one of the poor, but I heard he was knowledgeable. He said, "If you can, go to a far away place. If not, come and surrender. We are facing a lot of problems [on account of you]." He thus told the men who lived in the forest. Many were locked up in the prisons. If they [the Chinese] saw anyone taking food [to the forest] they were captured and imprisoned. They were beaten and imprisoned.

Q: It sounds like the entire community was living under fear of torture, of imprisonment and of death.

#71: When the villagers who lived in the village went to contact those in the forest, they had to cross a gate. If they were seen at the crossing, they were seized, beaten and imprisoned. That's how they [the Chinese] did. So they [the villagers] must have suffered a lot. "If you can, do go far away. If not, please come back. It's a lot of problems for all of us. We can no longer bear the hardship." I heard that was what they said.

Q: What did you want to do at that time?

#71: I was looking after the children and cooking for them. At that time we lived in the forest. We were no longer in the village. The villagers brought food for us. When we were asked to leave, we left. We had to cross the Dachu [Mekong] River. There were many of us. All those who dared not live in the village were there and we left.

Q: Where did you go?

#71: There was a mountain called Dhamolongcho. We crossed that and then the Dachu River. You couldn't cross it except in boats. There were more than 300 to 400 people and around 300 to 400 mules and horses. We were over 300 to 400 monks and laypeople.

After journeying for eight days, we reached atop Dhenchu, a pilgrim site where we encountered some Chinese. Before encountering the Chinese and just after crossing the Dachu River, my aunt died. She passed away and we threw her body into the river. Her children and I continued along with the others. We were three families and there were many from other villages. I heard people say that there were about 300 of us. After journeying for eight days, the Chinese arrived. There was an immense fight and we fled. We were able to escape. However, a distant uncle and a boy were killed.

In the early days, there were certain people called *chogye*, who were not exactly monks, but lived like monks on the beautiful mountaintops engrossed in practicing the dharma. I think there were over a hundred of them and they proceeded to the area [of the fight]. Every one of them was killed. It was on a mountain pass called Golakha and everyone there was killed. They encountered the Chinese head-on. We reached there [the place where the *chogye* had encountered the Chinese] after taking a long detour and I saw a whole line of corpses with their heads falling on their sides.

Q: Were they escaping from the Chinese or living there on the hilltop?

#71: They were living there, but when the Chinese arrived, they fled and encountered the Chinese on the way.

Q: Were they living on the hill in retreat?

#71: That was how they led their lives in the old days. Those were the people of the village who were not exactly monks, but whose wives might have left them or in such situations. They wished to practice religion and so lived that way. The surrounding area was beautiful and they built small houses to live in. About a hundred of them were killed. Perhaps one or two might have escaped.

Q: So this is where you met up with the Chinese. What do you mean you met the Chinese; personally or that you were just involved in a fight?

#71: The Chinese had seen the convoy of people from another mountain called Shoela through binoculars. They arrived around the mountain to where we were. They saw the host of people climbing up the mountain. A whole lot of Chinese arrived and killed many people. Two of our people were killed.

Q: What happened to you in the attack?

#71: Nothing happened to me. I fled into the forest. Behind us were our two uncles who were resisting the Chinese and they killed a Chinese officer. When their officer was killed, the Chinese soldiers retraced their steps and did not pursue us. During the first encounter, a distant uncle and his son were killed. Then we fled.

Q: During the fight the Chinese officer was killed, were there many men fighting them?

#71: On our side there was only my uncle who was fighting them. My uncle shot and killed the Chinese officer and then the Chinese went back. We managed to escape.

Q: So how did your life proceed from there?

#71: The Chinese took away all our belongings and our animals. We were completely broke. We were at the top of a mountain like this [gestures]. While we were up there, the

Chinese took the exact route taken by the fleeing *chogy* and encountered them head-on. We fled through a route from the other side of the mountain.

Q: Where did you go when you fled?

#71: All our belongings were gone and we were empty-handed. Then we went to a place called Gala where there were no villagers. From there we proceeded towards Tsawa Choten, the site of a famous *stupa* 'shrine' and a village. We did not find any Chinese in the village. It was quite a large village. Since there were no Chinese, we went there to look for food and the villagers provided for us. We ate the food. By then there were not many people [left in our group].

After eating, we planned to go back to our village. We thought we'd return to our hometown. When we could not continue onwards, we turned back. We went towards the river, which we had to cross in a boat. The water had swollen and we couldn't go across. While we were there, the Chinese arrived on the other side of the river. The Chinese couldn't cross to our side nor could we go across. When we fled from there, the Chinese fired at us. One of our relatives, a mother and her children were hit by the shots. We had taken a boatman with us [to help us cross the river] and he suffered a broken leg. The mother and her two or three children received many shots on their arms. I was not hurt. We fled from there. The river was flowing between two mountains and they [the Chinese] were shooting at us from the other side. If they could cross the river, they would have captured us. But they couldn't and nor could we.

Now we had to carry the boatman. One of my relatives had a servant, a nun about my age. She and I carried the boatman. We had to carry him for a long distance as his leg was broken. We had hired him from his village to take us across in the boat. His leg was broken as he had been walking ahead and was struck by a gunshot. It was so very difficult carrying him. We had to reach him to his house since he had a broken leg.

Q: Were you a nun at that time?

#71: I was a nun. I did not have long hair.

Q: When did that happen?

#71: I didn't have long hair when the Chinese arrived.

Q: Were you a nun when your parents moved on and you stayed with your aunt? Were you a nun then?

#71: No, I didn't have hair then. I have never had long hair.

Q: When you were a little girl and taking care of the animals, were you a nun?

#71: When I was young, I had not shaved my head. My hair grew a little long when I turned 18 or 19, but I cut it off at the time the Chinese arrived. That was when my parents had left me.

Q: How does a little girl decide to become a nun?

#71: When I was young, I did not make a decision to either become a nun or not. Though the Chinese always said that people were not allowed to become monks or nuns—they [the Chinese] had told me that I should keep long hair—the leader in our village was a nice man and he did not report me [to the Chinese] and so I escaped [harassment for being a nun].

Q: The Chinese said that one should keep long hair?

#71: The Chinese said that one should keep long hair and that one was not allowed to shave their head. The Chinese said that during the leaders' meetings. But there were no Chinese in the village where I was living, so time just went by.

Q: Did you belong to any nunnery in your community?

#71: No, I did not join any nunnery. There were no nunneries in our village. The *chogye* retreat in Chashay was a sort of nunnery, but the nuns did not have to wear robes. They wore the *chupa* [traditional dress], went to the village to work, cooked food and then went to live up there.

Q: Where was the nunnery?

#71: That was called Chogye. The Lama was Gen Jampa Kunga.

Q: Have you lived in the Chogye nunnery?

#71: I have been there, but I did not live there.

Q: How far was the *chogye* from your village?

#71: It was at a distance of three days journey from my village. However, it lay closer to where I lived with my aunt. It was just a day away.

Q: It sounds like you always wanted to be a nun from the time you were a little girl and you still are a nun.

#71: Until I was separated from my parents, I did not have any thoughts of either to become a nun or anything else. After my parents left, I did not think of anything else, except to become a nun. I thought I would search for my parents wherever they were, if they were not dead.

Q: So just to get back to the story. You and another nun helped this person who had a broken leg after the fight with the Chinese from the river. How does your story go from there?

#71: Now we were not many people left [in the group]. I told you that my late aunt had many children. I requested a family living at Tsawa Choten to help look after the three younger ones and my younger sister.

Q: Which family was that?

#71: The family did not have a name. The couple was quite young and they did not have children. I requested them to look after the girls for a month or two and they did, s I left four of the children there.

Q: You left them there because you had nothing to eat?

#71: Yes, we had nothing to eat.

Q: Can you tell us about your arrest by the Chinese?

#71: I left the girls there. The men [in the group] did not dare go to the village as they suspected the Chinese might arrive there. The other nun and I went to look [beg] for food at the Choten village. We carried a cloth and a bowl in which the people gave us a lot of *tsampa*. It amounted to a whole bagful. It was in the eighth Tibetan lunar month and peaches were in plenty, so both of us went to gather some peaches.

We were caught by the Chinese then. At first we did not see any Chinese, but then they suddenly rushed in and captured us. The first time they caught us, we were released as we told them that we were residents of the village. After being released we did not go back to the forest. Had we done that we could have escaped, but we didn't. I thought we would go and meet the children who were living in a nearby village. On our way there, we encountered another group of Chinese that captured us. They took us to Tsawa *Gonpa*, then to Tsakha and brought us to our hometown. They dropped us at Chashay.

Q: To Chashay?

#71: We were led to Tsawa Zogang and locked up for 15 days. I saw many people imprisoned there. There were about 500 to 600 people, both male and female whom they [the Chinese] had captured. The people were imprisoned in the Dayab Monastery. We were also locked up there. We were 12 to 13 captives led together [to Tsawa Zogang]. During the time of our capture, they killed three people.

Q: Did they say why they arrested you?

#71: The reason for the capture and imprisonment was that we did not belong to the village where they found us. Since they did not know anyone, they just jailed anybody. Then they questioned each one where he came from. When you are questioned you can't

say that you belong to that village. You have to say that you do not belong there. They asked where we were from. Then when you mentioned the name of your village, they took you there.

Q: How long were you in prison?

#71: I was in the prison at Tsawa Zogang for only 15 days. That was in the Tsawa Dayab Monastery.

Q: And then next?

#71: Then we reached Tsakhalowa, which is close to my hometown. After two days in Tsakhalowa, I was sent home to Jomay, but there was no one at home.

Q: Then you were released?

#71: Then we were released.

Q: Why?

#71: They sent me there because that was my original village. I stayed for a few days, during which I did not face any ill-treatment. Then they ordered that I was to go and call back those who had been with me [hiding in the forest]; the 12 -13 people, including my uncle and his whole family and my aunt and her monk son. I was forced to tell the truth. I had to explain that I was begging for food in the village and that the others were [hiding] in the forest. They [the Chinese] told me, "Go and bring them here. Bring them and let them surrender. There is nowhere to go and nowhere to stay. It is better for them to surrender. We will not beat them and we will not jail them." I was told to go and bring them back. I left, but I did not go where they were. I thought they would refuse to come back. Even if they did, I did not know if they might be beaten or spared. [Instead] I went to the place where my three nieces and sister were living. All five of us came back.

Q: Were these prison experiences the only times that you were in prison in your whole life?

#71: No, I wasn't in prison other times.

Q: When you were in prison, were you tortured at all? Were you abused in any way?

#71: No, I was not beaten.

Q: You were not molested or attacked in any way?

#71: No, they did not. There were many other prisoners.

Q: They released you and you went to find your nieces instead of the men and then did you escape again?

#71: I crossed the river on a *ding*. The bridge was being constructed and I went by the *ding*. I went to the place where they [nieces and sister] were. The family was treating them very well. I stayed there for about a month.

Q: Where?

#71: The village was called Tsawa Nashoe. We left after a month's stay.

Q: Where did you bring them?

#71: I did not go to the group hiding in the forest. I brought the girls to Jomay. I did not know any other place where we could go. We returned. We were made to live in a house, which was in a dilapidated condition.

Q: Was that the house your parents used to live in?

#71: That was not the house my parents lived in. Long ago we used to keep our goats there. Half of the house had fallen while the other half was standing. We lived there. They gave us some land.

Q: Were you given land by the Chinese?

#71: They gave us a share of land. We were given the worst piece of land.

Q: Then?

#71: We did not even have a morsel to eat. We were provided with just about enough to prevent starvation. When we settled in [the house], it was around the second Tibetan lunar month and there was nothing to be found in the fields. Our relatives and some kind people of the village gave us food. They fed us. The Chinese only provided enough to save us from death. We were given 16 *di* [a measurement] of *thue* in a month for four people.

Q: What is a *thue*?

#71: *Thue* is what you made *tsampa* from.

Q: Was it wheat?

#71: It was barley.

Q: For one person?

#71: No, for four people.

Q: But you were five people?

#71: They [children] were four and including me, it was five.

Q: Then?

#71: We lived like that for sometime. If I have to narrate all my experience, there is no end. So we lived there tilling the land. I can't mention all the sufferings that I have undergone. We were not allowed to speak to anybody. Whether they were common people or *ngadhak*, I couldn't speak to anyone. We had to stay within the family.

Q: How long were you in that situation?

#71: The policies of the Chinese are strange. There was a period of relaxation at one time, during which there was freedom of religion. We enjoyed happiness for a year or two. We could talk to each other. They said it was "*lirabji*" policy, during which it was very good.

Later that was changed and then we underwent very strict rules. The Tibetan leaders in our village were beaten. They were beaten very badly. It was said that their minds were poisoned and they were all thrown out. Chairs were placed on top of each other, the leaders made to stand on that and they were beaten. All those who were appointed as leaders by the *lirabji* were beaten. Then for about three years, we had a happy period.

Then I think it was in 1970, when the *ngadhak* were beaten [again] from the children to the elders. In our village, in a small *shankha*, a father and a son were killed. They were beaten everyday and then locked up and then beaten again. Later they were suspended from their arms. Girls of the family said that worms were crawling on [wounds in] their arms. They [the father and son] lived in that condition for two to three months. Later people said he died by banging his head against the wall, while some said he was stabbed. I think it was a relative of his, unable to watch his condition stabbed him to death.

Q: Was that the father or the son?

#71: I heard the father died earlier. It was the son. He was 25 years old. It used to be said that a relative stabbed him.

Q: Did he die in the prison or at home?

#71: He was locked up on the ground floor of his house. Everyday he was brought out during the day to be beaten and locked up at night. It went for on two to three months. He was infested with worms, I heard.

Q: Then?

#71: One of my nieces who went everywhere—she and I were beaten. She was beaten for visiting people's homes and I, because I was the oldest in my family. During the beatings they asked, "What did the village leader tell you? What did he say during the relaxation

period? What did you all discuss?" I replied that we did not discuss anything. That was the truth because we did not discuss anything. There was nothing to discuss. They beat and beat and beat me for that and imprisoned me for one month. However, I was not killed. They tied my hands behind my back and suspended me. There was no other reason.

Q: You were suspended in the air?

#71: Yes, I was suspended in the air and even these days, I have pain in my shoulders.

Q: Was she [the niece] your aunt's daughter?

#71: Yes, my aunt's oldest daughter who went everywhere.

Q: How long were they doing that to you?

#71: The beatings, imprisonment and suspending me by my arms went on for one month.

Q: Did they hang you up everyday?

#71: They didn't hang me up everyday. They visited other places for meetings while we were locked up. Then some Chinese would return and beat us again.

Q: What were they trying to find out while doing this?

#71: The *lirabji* had announced the policies of "freedom of religion" and "no discrimination among the classes." After this announcement we led a relaxed life for a year or two. During the period all the people moved around and spoke to each other. So what they wanted to know from us was, "What did you talk about then? What did you discuss? Who did you talk to?" We would have talked among ourselves, but there was nothing of importance to discuss. They insisted that we had discussed important issues. They were persistent.

Q: Was your niece in prison with you? Or how many women were with you in the same cell?

#71: My niece and I were put in one cell together. The others were locked up in their houses. We were kept separate from them. They were beaten more than us. No one beat us for five to six days except that they kept us locked up.

Q: Were you locked up in your home?

#71: We were not locked up in our home. We were taken to the village and locked up in an empty house.

Q: Did they do any other abusive things to you in addition to the hanging you with your arms?

#71: It was only at that time, but generally the Chinese did not beat us everyday. They kept us locked up and we couldn't go anywhere and then they forced us to work everyday. It [the beatings] happened once in a month.

However, I was taken to witness others being beaten. The influential people used to be beaten everyday, while I think I was too insignificant for such attention. The elders were beaten several times a year. Everyone had to witness the beatings kneeling down on the ground. Those people that were to undergo beatings stood in the center [of the crowd]. We sat there kneeling.

Q: You had to kneel and watch?

#71: Yes, we had to watch them being beaten. In those days we suffered a lot. It was very difficult [to witness] though I was not subjected to it everyday.

Q: Can you talk about what was in your heart and mind during these days?

#71: I thought perhaps that is how I have to die. Some people used to say that there would come a time when we might see happiness. Some monks and elders said times would certainly change. So I hoped and hoped that the change would take place. I thought perhaps that is how I have to die. There were some who said that we must have faith in the dharma and that things would change. I hoped the change would happen and nothing else.

Q: And did the change come to you?

#71: There were older men in their 70's who would say, "You must have faith in God. In my lifetime, I have seen a change of five leaderships. They [the Chinese] will also change [be replaced]. Long back there was another Chinese who came and went away. The Chinese will go back one day. China belongs to the Chinese and Tibet belongs to the Tibetans. They will not remain here." I was happy when I heard such words, hoping that they would go back.

Q: You were in prison. Do you remember what year it was or how old you were?

#71: I think I was about 33 years old when I was subjected to the beatings by the Chinese.

Q: Would you like to continue and tell your story?

#71: We were released after a month and after those men were killed. It was not just the two who were killed; in another area about ten men were killed. Nobody knows if they were killed by the Chinese, or they were killed by their own people. They were continuously beaten and were dead within that month.

Q: Did you remain in the village or move on to another place?

#71: I returned to my home. The strict rules of not venturing further from the fields and not speaking to anyone else existed. However, no one beat us. We could live in our own homes.

Q: What did you do to provide food for yourself?

#71: Initially they [the Chinese] gave me a plot of the worst piece of land of about 10 acres. I worked hard on the land. Although I faced a lot of problems initially, later things became better. Then they started taxing us exorbitantly. The people have suffered so much.

Q: What year would that have been?

#71: I lived for 13 years fending for myself. I lived separately from other people and worked on my land. Then they levied the tax. People suffered terribly then because those who knew nothing in the village were appointed as leaders. They claimed that the harvest from one acre of land was 25 sacks of grains! When poor people of the village who knew nothing nor had any knowledge about the harvests were appointed leaders in the village, they simply gave such an answer.

After the Chinese received the information, they made some calculations and levied the *shungde* and *tsungde* taxes. Each person was entitled to 30 kilograms of grains a month and the rest of the harvest was to be given [as tax]. They [the poor who gave the wrong information] naturally had to pay this tax and so did the other people. That caused them [the poor] to remain hungry. They faced more hardships than the rest of the people.

Q: How much tax did you have to pay?

#71: The Chinese wanted to know the production from one acre of land. They asked how many sacks of grains were harvested from an acre of land to the leaders they had appointed, who were not farmers, but people whom they [the Chinese] liked. The ignorant ones did not know that they were “pouring dust over their own heads.” They quoted a high figure as production from the fields. So they [the Chinese] made some calculations based on that figure and finally the quantity left for each person was very little. The majority of the harvest was taken away. We couldn't survive on what was left and people almost died of starvation. The situation turned such.

Q: A great deal of hardship. Continue, please.

#71: Earlier each person was allotted 30 Chinese kilograms, which was later changed to 15 kilograms. We were entitled to only so much and it was measured and allotted to us. That could suffice us only for half the period.

Q: Then?

#71: Those people, in their ignorance had informed that the yield per acre was more than what it actually was. They [the Chinese] collected [taxes] based on that information.

Q: Then what happened?

#71: The common people almost starved to death while others, though none was rich had enough to eat.

Q: Who?

#71: Those of us *sadhak* who were segregated. We were kept separately from the common people. We did not give [wrong] information like they [the poor who were appointed leaders by the Chinese] did. We would never say that we harvested more than we actually did. Instead we would try to minimize total production. They made the mistake of saying that they harvested more than they did because of their ignorance.

Q: When they said they harvested more, they had to pay more taxes.

#71: Yes, they had to pay more taxes. So the people hardly had anything to eat and almost starved to death.

Q: Then what happened? When did you see development?

#71: There was no development at all. Until the imposition of the policy of relaxation, people underwent a lot of hardships. The leniency period came around 1978. We were allowed to move from place to place then, so people could find food to eat. Until then we were not allowed to go anywhere. Some people would say, "The policy of the Communist Chinese is like the summer sky."

Q: What does it mean by "like the summer sky?"

#71: In summer it often rains now and then. Some people said, "In the old days when the rich people were in power, we did not go hungry even for one day. Now we are hungry for 15 to 16 days and we have no one to turn to. Everybody is in the same situation."

Q: Then what happened to you?

#71: Then our livelihood improved. Unseen by the Chinese, the common people came to us for help. They would come in the night.

Q: Who?

#71: The common people. We were the *sadhak* class. The poor Tibetan people came to us to supplement their food ration. A time came when they had to beg us to lend them food in the night. I think it was 1973 or 1974 that we [the *sadhak*] were grouped among the common people. All our animals were collected and put together with that of the common people. By then we owned three to four *dzo*, five to six cows and 60 to 70 goats. We were required to give up all the animals for the commune. Then we had to work along with them

[the common people]. Everyone worked together and as a result we only got a share of what was divided [among everyone] from the harvest. Thus, we faced a lot of hardships.

When the commune system was started, at least we did not face any beatings. We worked, but did not have enough to eat. They [the Chinese] allotted each person a portion [of grains] measuring it on a scale. Animals and lands belonging to everyone were pooled. All the people worked together. Our leaders [the earlier poor people] were those who had no work experience except for depending on others on a daily basis—they were now the big leaders and their planning was awry. We never again saw a good harvest and there was hardly anything left to be divided. We faced a lot of suffering as the food was never sufficient.

Q: Why did the poor people just not have enough to eat? Why would they have more than the other poor people?

#71: We were private people, toiling hard in our fields. We did the sowing ourselves and stored the harvest in our houses. Since they [the poor, common people] were in the commune system, they did not work hard. They did not know how to work; while some of them worked, the others did not. Not everyone worked hard. Normally the thrashing of crops was carried out on the roofs of houses. In such cases, before it rained private people quickly gathered everything up. However, in the case of the commune, each one tried to keep himself dry by running away. The crops were left there [in the rain] without a care since it belonged to the commune.

As a result there wasn't much to divide and people were hungry. The commune system had been going on for 13 to 14 years. The beautiful *dzi* [special beads made of agate stone] and coral necklaces that families owned in the olden days were never seen again. Everything was sold for food. These days the *dzi* and coral necklaces you see people wear are fakes. Those of the old days are gone.

Q: When did you escape [to India]?

#71: It was after six years [of the commune system]. I think it was around 1979 that I escaped.

Q: The leniency period was in 1978.

#71: Since the announcement of the death of Mao Zedong, things eased. Everyone was relaxed, the common people and the leaders.

Q: When did you escape?

#71: Perhaps it was 1980. I stayed [in Tibet] for two years after the death of Mao Zedong. The commune went on for another two years and ours was the first to be dissolved. The lands and the animals were divided. It was around autumn. Since then we were free to work or stay at home.

Q: Was there any particular reason why you chose to escape?

#71: The sole reason for my escape was because I heard my parents were here [in India]. In 1980 to 1981 a monk from India came to our village and he knew my family. He said that my father was dead, but that my mother and others [siblings] were alive [in India]. Since then I never had any plans to live [in Tibet]. I was determined to escape.

Q: Did you find your mother?

#71: Yes, I met my mother and lived with her for 16 years. My father was dead.

Q: What was that reunion like?

#71: There was nothing to be done. My mother did not do anything. I thought this [reunion] was not true. I wondered if it was real or if it was just a dream.

Q: Did you recognize your mother?

#71: I recognized her.

Q: Could she recognize you?

#71: I am sure my mother recognized me. I came alone and she was informed that I was arriving. I would have recognized my mother anywhere.

Q: Wonderful ending.

#71: Yes, let's end because there is no end to my narration.

END OF INTERVIEW