

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #7M – Sochoe
April 8, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #7M
2. Interviewee: Sochoe
3. Age: 70
4. Date of Birth: 1940
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Tomkho
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 8, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 03 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Sochoe was born into a nomadic family. His family possessed sheep, horses, yaks, *dri* 'female yak' and *dzomo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow.' *Ba* and *nagtsang* were two kinds of tents that nomads used as living quarters. Sochoe gives a vivid account of how a *ba* is made from *tsipa* 'yak hair' and stoves are built inside from stone and clay. He also gives a clear profile of the social and religious life of the nomads. He remembers with nostalgia how it was a big challenge to protect their herd from bandits who came in groups with guns and drove away their animals.

Sochoe describes the multitude of people from different regions of Kham fleeing from the Chinese army through his nomadic region. Thousands of Chinese pursued them, shooting guns and dropping bombs on villages. Sochoe's family joined the escapees heading to Lhasa, which took four to five months. They avoided the Chinese soldiers by hiding during the day and travelling at night.

Sochoe joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] upon reaching Lhasa. He describes the encounters between the Chinese soldiers and Tibetan resistance group. After hearing about His Holiness the Dalai Lama's escape, Sochoe decided to flee also.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, nomadic life, customs/traditions, invasion by Chinese army, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences.

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Interview #7M

Interviewee: Sochoe

Age: 70, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 8, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:21

Interviewee #7M: Sochoe.

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

#7M: Yes, you can.

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

00:01:29

#7M: Okay.

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

#7M: That's not necessary. There's no need to stop.

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

00:01:55

#7M: Okay.

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

#7M: There will be no problem.

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

00:02:21

#7M: Thank you.

Q: *Gen-la* 'respectful term for teacher,' when you were a child, what kind of work did your family do?

#7M: My parents were nomads. So, they were engaged in milking the animals during summer.

Q: How many animals did your family own?

00:03:04

#7M: We owned many animals. We owned many sheep and about 40 horses. We owned sheep, yaks, *dri* 'female yaks' and *dzomo* 'female animal bred between a yak and a cow.'

Q: How many sheep did you own?

#7M: There were about 500.

Q: *Gen-la*, can you tell me when you were a little boy, what did you do as a nomad child?

00:04:00

#7M: When I was a small child, I did not have to work much because I had siblings who did the work. I spent my time playing.

Q: Tell me about the life of a nomad family. What is it like in the different seasons of the year? Can you tell me?

#7M: There was not much work during summer. After the Chinese appeared, we had to go for transporting things.

[Question is repeated.]

00:05:06

#7M: There was not much to do in winter. In summer, my siblings went to gather *yar-tsa gun-bu* 'summer-grass, winter-worm' [caterpillar fungus, *cordyceps sinensis*].

Q: Continue and tell about each season.

#7M: We gathered *doma* 'tiny sweet potatoes' in the autumn season. Then in winter, we spun wool and animal hair. There was not much work in the winter.

Q: And what about in spring?

00:06:30

#7M: We gathered *doma* in spring.

Q: In autumn?

#7M: There were *doma* in autumn too. We went to gather *doma*.

Q: *Gen-la*, tell me when you think today back about your childhood as a nomad, what pictures come to mind? What do you like to remember or think about?

00:07:18

#7M: Yes, I remember.

Q: What do you remember the most?

#7M: I remember being a nomad.

Q: What work do you remember doing?

00:07:26

#7M: I herded the animals wherever the best grass and water were found. In my region, there were many robbers and bandits. So, in order to protect ourselves, we carried guns.

Q: Where did these robbers and bandits come from?

#7M: The robbers and bandits came from the place called Nyarong. They also came from Lithang.

Q: Were these Tibetan bandits?

00:08:26

#7M: They were Tibetans. Many of them arrived, armed with guns. They came in groups of 10, 15, 20 and 30. In order to overcome them, our boys carried guns when they went with the animals.

Q: How often in one year would a family have encounter with bandits?

#7M: They normally came in the summer but there was no telling. They arrived from a long distance and the entire village knew that they were bandits. So we carried guns to resist them wherever they were. They normally did not come in winter. They did not come in winter as it was very cold.

Q: What did they do when they arrived?

00:09:53

#7M: When the bandits arrived, they drove away our animals. They drove them away in the night, because since we had guns they feared coming in the daytime. They came stealthily at night and drove them away. Then we pursued them. We pursued them for 15-16 days and brought back [our animals]. However, there was no killing of humans. We brought back our own animals, but killing would mean problems with the law. Therefore, humans were not killed. If the situation became desperate, there might be a killing. Otherwise there were no killings.

Q: What kind of trouble would you face?

#7M: If a person was killed, we would face immense trouble because they would come to take revenge. They would come and keep watch day and night, looking for the man [killer], where he lives, what he does, where his family live, where he sleeps. We would have to remain ever suspicious. After killing a man, the problem was intense.

Q: Were there any government officials who would capture bandits and punish them legally?

00:11:44

#7M: There were none.

Q: No law, no order?

#7M: The law was maintained by individual villages. They could take care of the local thieves. However, they [the bandits] came from far away places, at a distance of 15, 16, 20 days' journey. Some even came from a distance of a month's journey. So it was difficult to maintain law in such cases.

Q: Did you ever have an experience in your own life of the bandits coming to your home or your tents?

00:12:45

#7M: Yes, the bandits came.

[Question is repeated.]

#7M: I did experience the bandits coming. When the bandits came, they drove away our animals and my father would give chase. I was not allowed to.

Q: How many animals could they steal at one time?

00:13:24

#7M: Oh, they drove away many animals. They drove away 20, 30, 40 or 50 animals. They took horses or whatever animal they could lay their hands on. Once the bandits arrived, they took 20 to 30 horses. So, in order to face them, we were many in number and they dared not come too often.

Q: How could you protect your animals? You could see them coming or did they come at night? How would you protect your animals from being stolen?

#7M: If they were thieves, we would know when they came and could catch them. However, those that came from far away were bandits who robbed. So, the people formed a protection by encircling the animal enclosures armed with guns from 9 to 12 o'clock in the night during summer. There was a lot of wariness in the summer. During summer, the animals were taken far away [to graze]. They were not driven far in winter due to the cold. The people did the protecting.

Q: If the robbers were coming, they had guns and you had guns, would you try to shoot them or shoot above their heads? How did you handle them?

00:15:52

#7M: When the bandits came and if they drove away [our animals], we would start shooting. Then both sides would shoot and kill. In the melee, their people might get killed or our people might be killed. If we could not kill them, the bandits would get away with our animals.

Q: But if they were coming at you with guns, would you shoot back?

#7M: Yes, we would shoot. They would not dare come straight at us.

Q: Tell me what do you know about these robbers? Were they family men? Were they boys from other villages? Or were they always robbers in their everyday lives?

00:17:22

#7M: They came from a very bad place. In that place, if a person could not go to rob, he was not considered a man; he was labeled a woman, however rich his family might be. So bad was the place. They traveled a great distance to rob and we had to face them when they drove away our animals. We faced them at night when they came to get our animals.

Q: And what area was that?

#7M: They came from Nyarong and Lithang. Many also came from Molatsosum. They ambushed many traders. They rob the traders, kill men and drive away their yaks. Molatsosum was further away from Lithang.

Q: Could you describe what kind of clothing they wore? What did they look like?

00:19:10

#7M: They wore clothes made from woolen cloth interwoven with fur. The others wore *chupa* 'traditional coat.'

Q: Who? The women?

#7M: No, those that came from Molatsosum, the region which was beyond Lithang. [The robbers] from Nyarong wore *chupa* made from animal hair. They did not possess very good guns.

Q: Did they carry knives or bow and arrow or hats? What did they wear?

00:20:15

#7M: They wore pointed caps. They had on pointed caps like this [makes a pointed gesture above head with hand]; those from Nyarong.

Q: Did they carry bows and arrows or knives?

#7M: They did not have bows and arrows but they had knives. They only had short knives and not long ones. In the early days, they were armed with swords, but later when good guns became available, they carried only short knives. Guns were much easier to fire. Earlier the guns were not good ones and you had to work on them manually. But, such guns existed very, very long ago. Later good guns became available, where each gun could hold five bullets. It was easy to fire. Only short knives used to be carried and not the long ones.

Q: Was there a group called Goloks in that area?

00:21:59

#7M: Golok was very far away. One must travel a long way. It would take a month from my village. The people of Golok went on a robbing trip once a year. They went to Tho and drove away all their animals. The Goloks were very bad.

Q: You mentioned this one group, those from Nyarong who wore *chupas*. What did the other bandits wear? Did they ever have special headdress?

#7M: Those from Molatsosum wore *chupa* made from woolen cloth. They also wore fur coats.

Q: How many times can you remember that your own family was robbed?

00:23:47

#7M: The robbers came many times to my house. We fought the robbers. They did not enter the house and rob household goods. They drove away the animals and then we gave chase. We snatched back the animals. We had several such encounters.

Q: Was there ever any danger to the women or young girls in your community?

#7M: They did not normally trouble them. The bandits came from very far away and did not trouble them. They took away our animals and things.

Q: Can you describe the nomad tent that you lived in?

00:25:08

#7M: It is called *ba*. The *ba* was huge. For example, it was as large as from here to there [gestures]. It was made out of *tsipa* 'woven yak hair.' There was also another [tent] called *nagtsang* and that was also made from *tsipa*. Rainwater did not leak inside in the summer. All the nomads lived in *ba*.

Q: Can you explain how they were made of yak hair? How was that process done?

#7M: It [the yak hair] was untangled and spun into thread. The thread was rolled into big balls. And then the women wove them into lengths, which were stitched together to make a *ba*.

Q: Were they very heavy in weight?

00:26:51

#7M: They were heavy. If the *ba* was large, it was carried on two yaks. A large *ba* was loaded on two yaks.

Q: Would you put the two yaks together to carry it?

#7M: They did not have to carry it together. They were separate. For example, this is half of the *ba* and that is the other half [gestures to the roof of the interview room]. One half was carefully folded into a square. It was then tied with a rope. A man lifted it up and another helped him load it on the yak. There were two halves.

Q: When the *ba* was opened up, how big was it—like in comparison to this room? How big?

00:28:19

#7M: The bigger *ba* were almost the size of this room. Wooden poles were used to hold up the *ba*.

Q: Was it the size of this room?

#7M: Almost, perhaps half of it. The *ba* were very large. Wooden poles were used and these were loaded on one yak. When we moved place, the poles were tied together into two bundles and they were loaded on to one yak.

Q: Half of this room would be 25x40 feet and would it be round?

00:29:30

#7M: The one called *nagtsang* was round in shape and water did not leak inside. The nomads called it *nagtsang* and it was circular. The *ba* was large.

Q: Was the *ba* round as well?

#7M: The *ba* was not round but rectangular. The *nagtsang* was round. There were two kinds. The size depended on the number of family members. A large family owned a large *ba* and a small family owned a small *ba*.

Q: Did a person have both types of tents or just one?

00:30:52

#7M: Yes, [both] if they were a large family. A small family did not have both. Some had *ba* but not *nagtsang*, while those who owned a *nagtsang* did not have a *ba*. A small family owned either of the one. The big families owned both.

Q: How long did it take to assemble a *ba* or a *nagtsang*?

#7M: It did not take very long, perhaps about 2 hours. It did not take more than that.

Q: *Gen-la*, how often did the family move from one location to another?

00:32:06

#7M: We moved in summer, in winter, in spring and in autumn. We also moved if grass was scarce.

Q: You might move four or six times a year?

#7M: Yes, we moved that many times.

Q: Can you take us inside the *ba*? What does it look like? What would we see if we looked at the floor, the ceiling, the walls?

00:33:02

#7M: For example, let's say this place is the *ba*. The stove was built there [points towards his left]; the stove to make tea. It had three or four openings [to place utensils on]. After the stove was built, the things were placed over there [points next to the stove]; things like butter, cheese, clothes and whatever household items. Saddles for the yaks were also kept there. Over that side [points closer to the fireplace location] were stacked the utensils and all the dishes. They were placed closer to the women, on the left [of the *ba*]. The men sat on the right side.

Q: How was the stove made? What was it made of?

#7M: The stove was built of stones and soil. There was a type of red soil which was used. It was carefully smeared over the stove and the clay did not fall off. The clay hardened. It became hard just like cement here.

Q: Was this a stove that you could take from one place to another or did you have to build it each time?

00:35:20

#7M: We did not need to take it but built a new one. It was made of stones and soil and you could find it at the new place.

Q: Was this a stove that you could bake bread in or cook on top or both?

#7M: We cooked on the top. There were two openings, one this side and one on that side of the stove from where you could make fire. Three utensils were placed on top of the stove. So we cooked [on the top] whether it was bread or whatever. The stove was very beautifully made.

Q: What kind of food did your mother make on this stove?

00:36:44

#7M: My mother made *thukpa* ‘noodle soup’ and *tingmo* ‘steamed bread.’ She boiled *doma* and milk and she also prepared curd. She made all kinds of food on the stove. Fire was made using wood in summer and dung in winter.

Q: Can you tell us what *thukpa* is?

#7M: First a ball of dough is made from flour and kept aside. Then you fill a large pot with water; add *tsampa* and pieces of meat - if there was no meat, anything could be added - and then you added the dough [in tiny pieces]. Delicious *thukpa* used to be cooked.

Q: Flour dough, did she put it in the boiling water?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In tiny pieces and added meat. Then a little bit of *tsampa*.

Q: Okay. And *tsampa* is the...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The flour made out of roasted barley.

Q: So meat and *tsampa* and any other vegetables or anything else?

00:38:52

#7M: There was no rice.

Q: Vegetables?

#7M: There were not many vegetables. Vegetables were scarce in my region. We did not use many vegetables. They did not grow because of the cold weather. They did not grow even in summer and in winter we hardly had any vegetables to eat. Our diet mostly consisted of meat, cheese, butter, wheat and barley.

Q: What was the *tingmo*?

00:39:44

#7M: Flour was obtained from grinding wheat. Then [prepare dough] into small pieces and boil in water. We also called it *zona*.

Q: What did you add to the wheat flour dough?

#7M: We did not add anything. Only the flour was kneaded to make dough. Nothing was added to it.

Q: Like a small steamed bun? Who did the cooking?

00:41:00

#7M: My mother did the cooking. If my mother was not available, my siblings did the cooking. It was the women who did the cooking. Men normally did not cook.

Q: Were there certain times in the day that you ate in the morning, afternoon or evening? What was the eating schedule like?

#7M: Yes, there were certain times. We ate lunch at noon. At about 10 o'clock, we drank tea and ate *tsampa*. Lunch was eaten at lunch time and in the evening, *thukpa* was prepared. *Thukpa* was cooked or meat would be boiled. *Momo* 'dumplings' used to be prepared frequently.

Q: Was there enough food most of the time or did you go hungry?

00:42:34

#7M: Yes, yes. In winter people traveled to far away places like Nyarong to get grains. Taking along 15-16 yaks, they went to make purchases for summer consumption as well as for the winter.

Q: Did you always have enough yaks to go buy grains, so could survive?

#7M: Yes, we did. We went there every year.

Q: We were talking about the inside of the *ba* and you said they were made of wood. Where did the beams come from? Where did the wood come from?

00:43:51

#7M: There was plenty of wood. The forest was dense. You found a lot of forests in the direction of Kham. You could find as much wood as you required. There was no worry on account of that. There was plenty of wood available.

Q: When you were a little boy and when you grew up, was there still plenty of wood when you left as an adult?

#7M: At the time of my escape, there were regions where you found forests and certain regions where there were none. When we came through Zachukha towards Thoe, there were no woods. Around the region of Gapa, never mind wood, you would not even find water. Such was the emptiness of the region. It was a very difficult region with no wood.

Q: Who was in your *ba*? How many people were in your family?

00:45:09

#7M: There were four members. There were four siblings of whom two were left behind in the village.

Q: We are talking about when you were a child. So there were your two parents and...

#7M: There were five or six children. There were five or six daughters when I was young.

Q: Was it five or six?

00:45:32

#7M: There were six.

Q: And where were you in that order?

#7M: The two older ones have reached India.

Q: We are talking about the old days. There were six children in your family. Were you among the older ones or younger?

00:45:57

#7M: I was the older one. There were four younger ones and an older one.

Q: Were you the oldest?

#7M: There were some who were younger to me. I was in the middle.

Q: How were the girls treated? Were the girls treated differently than the boys and how so?

00:46:45

#7M: Yes, they [parents] were very loving with the boys. When I was a little boy, if visitors came to our house, my mother took me far away with her. That was when I was very young.

Q: How about the girls?

#7M: They were not fussed over much and did the work. Since I was the only son, they treated me very lovingly.

Q: Why would she take you far away?

00:47:39

#7M: She feared that I would be contaminated. They [the visitors] might pet me and remark, "What a beautiful child," and I might become messy through their hands. She wanted to keep me clean, which is why she took me away.

Q: What does messy mean?

#7M: Some people smell and some came from certain kinds of bad caste. So, she thought I might get contaminated.

Q: What kind of visitors would come to your home?

00:48:35

#7M: Oh, many kinds of people came. There were many families and people from far and near who came. Many kinds of people arrived; among them some could be good people and some bad. So fearing that I might get contaminated, my mother took me away.

Q: When people came, did they have different smells if they were from different regions or different works?

#7M: No, there were not any different smells.

Q: But your mother was worried that you would be contaminated by people who were less clean or smell more?

00:49:48

#7M: Yes.

Q: Among the nomads, was there any leader? Was there a tribe or a leader of a group of nomads or was every man independent?

#7M: Yes, we appointed leaders. There were many leaders.

Q: How did somebody become a leader?

00:50:36

#7M: A person who spoke well and who was a good person was appointed.

Q: What kind of responsibility did the leader have to lead the men? In what ways did he lead the community?

#7M: His responsibilities were to remain alert to the enemies and when the enemies came from afar, to gather the men for defense. He also advised the nomadic people about grazing their cattle and informed them about the availability of good grass in certain regions. He looked after their well being. He had a lot of responsibilities.

Q: Who were the enemies?

00:52:05

#7M: Many enemies came from Nyarong, Lithang Molatsosum and Zachukha.

Q: Were there any other enemies coming from other countries or anything?

#7M: Yes, there were from other countries.

Q: Who were they?

00:52:45

#7M: Those from Nyarong, Lithang and Molatsosum.

Q: How would the leader know where was good to do the grazing?

#7M: He knew where the good grass was because there were different areas where we grazed the animals in summer and winter. When grass grew well in summer, we protected the area from the animals, so that they could graze on it during winter. We grazed them on an area further away in summer. So, he knew where we could find good grass for the winter. It snowed heavily in winter and he organized the feeding areas in such a way as to save the grass for this period.

Q: How did he have this knowledge? How did he know which one was good to eat and which was one to hold back?

00:54:28

#7M: He knew where all the good grass was for the summer and winter. No nomad could take his flock to the region that was restricted. If a nomad entered the region, he would be penalized. Good grass grew in that region and when he informed all the nomads that they could use the area, whether it was summer or winter, only then did they do so accordingly. Nobody went there until then.

Q: Who enforced the fine? Was it the leader or was it the police or what?

#7M: The fine was enforced by the man himself. For example, I own some animals and if I let them graze in the area that was forbidden, then I would be fined.

Q: The one who enforced the fine was the leader?

00:55:45

#7M: Yes, it was the leader himself.

Q: What kind of penalty?

#7M: The penalty was in the form of money, like 50, 60 or 100 units.

Q: How many nomad families would there be under one leader?

00:56:28

#7M: There were areas with 100, 200, 300 or 150 families.

Q: Each under one leader?

#7M: Yes, under one leader.

Q: Do you have any understanding of how many leaders there would be in the nomad world, like that would have 200 or 300 families?

00:57:15

#7M: The region was vast. It was a vast region.

Q: How many nomadic sites would there be in that region?

#7M: It would be more than 50 or 60. There would be more than 50-60 nomadic groups with their leaders. Each group had their leader and there were many such groups.

Q: Was there any relationships of the nomads to the Tibetan government in Lhasa?

00:58:15

#7M: There was not much relation because of the distance.

Q: Was there any relationship to any monasteries in the areas where you lived and grazed?

#7M: Yes, there were relations.

Q: What kind of contacts were they?

00:59:01

#7M: We went to the monastery when prayer assemblies were held. Both men and women went to view the prayer assemblies and made offerings of money, milk, curd and butter. We had a good relation with the monastery. We went there to practice dharma. We practiced the dharma most devotedly.

Q: People went to the monasteries for religious ceremonies and they took as gifts butter, and milk. What did the people get from the monasteries? Why would they go there?

#7M: The monastery was very sacred. If a family had two sons, one son joined the monastery. There were holy lamas and the monastery was very sacred, which was why we made the donations. We practiced dharma there. In winter, we offered prostrations and performed retreats. However, in summer we did not get to spend much time at the monastery because of our heavy workload.

Q: How many monasteries did you know about in your childhood and adolescence? How many were in your region that you went to?

01:02:01

#7M: In my region, there were about six or seven monasteries.

Q: How many monks were there in them? Were they little ones or big monasteries?

#7M: There were big monasteries as well as little ones.

Q: Can you tell us the names of some of the big ones?

01:02:41

#7M: Yes. There was one called Dhokhoe Gon. And Anzom Chogoeten was located on the way to Dhokhoe Gon. Then there was Dhokhoe Ritoe. This was my monastery, a small one.

Q: What made it your monastery?

#7M: This was the monastery where all the nomads from a large area gathered in summer to perform retreat and other practices. That was the Dhokhoe Gon. There was a huge nomad community.

Q: You just mentioned that Dhokhoe Ritoe was your monastery.

01:03:51

#7M: Dhokhoe Ritoe was my monastery. The one called Ritoe Gonpa was my monastery. It was a small monastery. In summer *cham* 'religious dance performed by monks' was performed for three days.

Q: What made it your monastery?

#7M: It was my monastery because it was built by us, the 50 or 60 families led by our leader. The monastery was built by us. So, I can say that it was my monastery.

Q: Did the families stay in one area or constructed it every season or how did they do it?

01:05:05

#7M: It [the monastery] did not have to move [like the nomads] irrespective of seasons. A building was constructed there and it was permanent. When we moved there in summer, the nomads went to the monastery.

Q: But how many years did it take to construct such a monastery?

#7M: There were separate dormitories built by each individual. It might have taken a year or two to build the actual monastery.

Q: What did people contribute besides labor?

01:06:26

#7M: Besides that, people offered *dzo* 'male animal bred from a yak and cow,' yak, sheep and whatever one wished to, after the construction of the monastery.

Q: But who paid for the materials to build the monastery?

#7M: It was the people who labored. We took turns to build the monastery. Two or three members from a family took part. In Tibet, the walls [of a building] were made of compressed earth. Wooden planks were placed like this [keeps both hands parallel to each other to show how two planks were fixed] and earth was poured in the space in between.

Then the earth was beaten continuously until it reached the height required of the house. That's how it was done. I participated when I was quite young.

Q: How many monks were at that monastery?

01:08:07

#7M: There were about 100 to 150 or 160 monks. They came in the summer but did not stay there in winter.

Q: Were there more monks in the summer?

#7M: There were more monks in the summer.

Q: How many monks were there in summer?

01:08:22

#7M: There might be 150-160 monks in the summer. Many did not stay back.

Q: How about in the winter?

#7M: It was very cold in the winter, so not many stayed in the monastery. They went to the nomadic camps.

Q: So monks would come and stay in the nomads' tents?

01:09:05

#7M: They came to the nomadic camps. At times they came and at times they left.

Q: It sounds like the nomadic houses were warmer than the monastery?

#7M: Yes, they were warm as we made a fire.

Q: Who was the spiritual leader of the nomadic people?

01:09:57

#7M: There were two or three lamas who were the spiritual leaders of the nomads. There was Dondha Lama who was called Gyaku Tulku. In case a person died, someone went a long distance to invite a lama. There were many holy lamas. They would be invited in the event someone passed away. The nomads invited a high lama who performed the last rites and then the body was taken to the *dhutoe* 'burial ground.' The lama would be offered a good horse. The people held the lama in high esteem.

Q: When someone died, they brought the lama back even from a great distance to say prayers for the cremation? So there was no sky burial?

#7M: There was a place for sky burial as well as one where sky burial was not conducted. Some buried the dead, while others offered the body to the vultures. There were two types.

Q: You mean bury underground?

01:11:49

#7M: In my region, the dead were mostly buried underground.

Q: Was there a cremation as well as a burial?

#7M: No, there was no cremation. The bodies were buried.

Q: Was there any special place that you would bury bodies?

01:12:33

#7M: There was a burial ground. The bodies were taken there. There was a burial place for the 50 or 60 families of that region.

Q: Were they near a monastery or why were they special places?

#7M: It was near the monastery. It was at a distance equal to that of the distance from this place to Camp Number 3 [Mundgod] there. If the monastery was located here, it was located at Camp Number 3.

Q: Did the nomads have any knowledge of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa?

01:13:42

#7M: They knew because many went to Lhasa. The trip took about three, four, five or six months as one had to go on foot, carrying their provisions [gestures of load on back]. They went to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Lhasa.

Q: What did you know about the Dalai Lama? Did you have any understanding of him or who he was?

#7M: I was quite young when I lived in Tibet, so my knowledge was limited.

Q: It would be very interesting to know more about life among the nomads, for instance how were partners selected for marriages?

01:15:19

#7M: That was arranged by the parents. The mother and father would look for a good girl of gentle nature and one who belonged to a good family. They searched for such a girl. They would not seek just any girl. The parents arranged a match.

Q: What would they look for if they wanted a boy?

#7M: The father would approach the family of the girl for her hand and similarly for a bridegroom. He would request for the hand of the bridegroom and his [the boy's] father

would give it. However, that would depend on the family [who was seeking the bridegroom] as the request would be granted if the family was a good one and refused otherwise.

Q: What qualities would parents look for in a daughter?

01:16:38

#7M: [The parents] looked for a boy who was hard working, of gentle nature and belonged to a family with good background.

Q: What made a good family background among the nomads?

#7M: A family who was friendly with others, one who was rich, owned assets and was cordial. They looked for a good lineage.

Q: When a couple came together, where did they go to live or did they start a new *ba*?

01:18:00

#7M: Yes, there were some who did that. There were those who started a new *ba* and others who did not.

Q: Was there any kind of formal celebration that joined two people together as man and wife?

#7M: Yes, there was. The couple would be given horses, yaks and *dri*. The parents divided whatever the family possessed and gave the boy his share and the same applied to the girls. Even a *ba* was prepared ahead of time.

Q: So whether a boy or a girl, either one was given assets of the family?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, that is right.

Q: Did any of your sisters or brothers get married?

01:19:39

#7M: My sisters were given away in marriage.

Q: And what about you?

#7M: I was small at that time and so was not married. At the time my sisters went away, I was not married.

Q: When you get older, you are no longer a child, you are now 16, 17, 18—what's happening in your life at that time?

01:20:32

#7M: There was not much change. Everything remained as it was.

Q: What were you doing when you are no longer a little boy, but you are a young man at 16? How were you helping your family?

#7M: There were the animals to graze, but I did not do a lot of work. I was the only son and was not allowed to do much. I whiled my time playing, grazing the animals and toying with a gun. I did not do much and there was no need to because my sisters did everything. My father gave the instructions and my sisters carried them out. I did not do much.

Q: But did you do anything with the animals?

01:21:48

#7M: Yes, I went to graze the animals. There were horses and sheep to herd, which I did.

Q: *Gen-la*, did you ever have an education: how to read or write?

#7M: I did not get a chance to study. I had no education because we generally did not. There was no where you could get an education. There were no such aims.

Q: Did you ever wish you could or even know about that?

01:22:38

#7M: I did not know about education.

Q: Did anything change in your life from this peaceful existence as a nomad? When did your life change?

#7M: There was not much change. Everything was constant. There was not much change.

Q: There was a change because if it were not, you would still be in your country. A change did take place, which is why you are here. What was that change?

01:23:30

#7M: I do not know what changes have taken place at the nomadic regions because I have never gone back there. If I go back to my region, I would know what changes have taken place with the nomads.

Q: You mean there was no change when you left?

#7M: There was not much change because they were there in the same region when I left. They lived in the same nomadic region.

Q: When you [left and] came where?

01:24:00

#7M: When I left my region, I was 25 years old.

Q: Left for where?

#7M: When I left for Lhasa because of the war by the Chinese.

Q: How did you know there was a war with China?

01:24:35

#7M: We would know a war was going on because many Chinese arrived. The Chinese told us to surrender our guns. They demanded that the Lithangpa [people of Lithang] surrender their guns. They fought a war there and then the Chinese came away.

Q: Where?

#7M: In Kham. You know Gyari Lodoe Gyaltzen? He was just a small child then. We were together during the flight.

Q: But you did not live in Kham? Did you? By then the Chinese had come to Kham and they asked for weapons to be surrendered. Where were you when that was happening?

01:25:52

#7M: I was there at that time. We did not surrender our guns.

Q: Did they come to your area in the nomadic region?

#7M: The Chinese? Yes, they did.

Q: Did they come to your camp?

01:26:22

#7M: The Chinese came. We did not surrender [our guns]. Their soldiers appeared from various directions like Nyarong, Lithang and Palyul Tsondu and converged in Tomkho. For two to three months, there was no end to the sound of gunfire. Some people were captured and some were killed. All the escaping people were there. Those people escaping from Kham were gathered there. They were destroyed. Then we fled towards Zachukha. We were about 40 people.

Q: The Chinese appeared from the direction of Nyarong,

#7M: They came from different directions, like Nyarong, Palyul, Lithang and Dege Yulung. The Chinese arrived from all these directions and the escaping people had gathered there. All those who were fleeing converged in the valley. There were no Chinese in the valley, but they surrounded the people. They laid siege for two to three months. Then Chinese reinforcement arrived. They dropped bombs from above and destroyed everything.

Q: Was that [the Chinese converging in the area] suddenly one day or one night or slowly?

01:28:58

#7M: They arrived within one day. They descended there suddenly from every direction. They arrived suddenly. They knew about the escapees. When people fled, they did so in large numbers. So they knew they were down in the valley and surrounded them. There were many thousands of Chinese; thousands upon thousands arrived.

Q: Where were these escapees from?

#7M: The escapees were from Nyarong, Lingkhachopa, Shanlangchopa, from the direction of Lithang and also from the region where [another interviewee] lived. Some were from Palyul Tondho and Garje Samar. All the escapees were there. They came from different regions.

Q: Were there many *ba* or nomad tents nearby when the Chinese surrounded you?

01:30:40

#7M: They dropped bombs as well as fired from their guns.

Q: I mean *ba*, the tent. Were there many *bas*?

#7M: There were not many *ba*. Some who owned them had put them up. Everybody there had fled their homes.

Q: Wasn't that the area of your nomadic camp?

01:30:59

#7M: No, that was not the nomadic camp.

Q: Had you already fled from the nomadic camp?

#7M: Yes, we had. We had fled from the nomadic camp by then.

Q: Were they [the Chinese] on foot or horses or what?

01:31:31

#7M: Some of them came on horses and some were on foot. Most of them were walking because there were no vehicles. Roads had not been constructed then for vehicles to pass through.

Q: What were they carrying?

#7M: They had a small bundle on their backs and also their guns with them. They did not have much to carry.

Q: How many were they about?

01:32:30

#7M: Perhaps 150-160 of them. However, that was not all because they emerged from every direction: 100 from that side, 100 from this side, 200 or 300 from another side and so on from every corner. They carried wireless sets, so they could communicate with each other. They could call each other to relay information about sighting the escapees and to converge at that point.

Q: They had to come just at the time people were escaping together, the nomad people. How many nomad people were in a group along with the escapees and were escaping?

#7M: There were many nomad families because many of them were escaping along with the other escapees. There were a large number of people. Some were captured and some were killed. Many things occurred.

Q: Like a 100 or 1,000 [nomad families]?

01:34:04

#7M: There were thousands. Many nomads were there.

Q: Had they left their nomad tents and *bas* some place else or were they carrying them?

#7M: They were left behind. We left all of them behind. We left all the things behind. We left our *ba* and all our things except our horses. Horses would come in handy as we could ride them and flee. Other than that, we had nothing with us.

Q: What about the flocks of animals?

01:34:59

#7M: All the animals were left behind. Some of the nomads surrendered to the Chinese and they took away all the animals.

Q: You mean those who surrendered took away the animals?

#7M: Yes, those that surrendered drove away the animals.

Q: Did some surrender?

01:35:17

#7M: Yes. Those that surrendered drove away the animals. They would have taken away all our animals, the horses, sheep, yaks and all our belongings. They took away everything. There were many nomad families who were forced to surrender to the Chinese. They were being surrounded day and night. Their leaders were captured and some were killed. So, they surrendered and took away all our animals.

Q: I don't understand. What had happened to the nomads that a thousand of them would come together and start fleeing? What had led up to that? Why were they running away?

#7M: The Chinese were causing us suffering. The Chinese took away our weapons, captured the lamas and beat them. They perpetrated such things. That was why we were fleeing due to fear of the Chinese.

Q: They had already beaten the lamas and they had already demanded your weapons and you became afraid. Is that correct?

01:37:52

#7M: Yes, that is correct.

Q: Had you seen any of the lamas being beaten?

#7M: No, I did not witness that. I heard that they were beaten. We had escaped by then.

Q: Where were you going to?

01:38:23

#7M: We were told to surrender our weapons and once we give up our guns, there was nothing left to do but give ourselves up to the Chinese. Once the weapons were surrendered, we'd be forced to give ourselves up to the Chinese. So we refused to surrender our weapons and started to flee.

Q: Where were you going to?

#7M: We were fleeing towards Lhasa. We took the route to Yarlung to go to the direction of Shangju.

Q: That morning when you were all surrounded, tell me in a little more detail what did the Chinese do when they saw you as a group?

01:39:13

#7M: They had surrounded us from far away. It was at a distance of more than a day's journey. The Chinese arrived from different directions and the region was very vast. There was firing and some escaped, some were captured and some killed. The Chinese captured and arrested and everyone surrendered to them.

Q: They killed many?

#7M: I heard many were killed but I did not reach there. We'd escaped. I would not dare go that way.

Q: There were about maybe a thousand nomads. Were there that many Chinese soldiers or more than that?

01:40:21

#7M: Of course, they were [more].

Q: Was there any airplane overhead or anything?

#7M: I did not see any airplane. I could see them flying in the night. They did not come where we were.

Q: *Gen-la*, about how old do you remember you were when this happened?

01:41:03

#7M: I might have been 26 or 27 then.

[Confusion over the age of interviewee. Interviewer and interpreter try to help interviewee remember his correct age.]

Q: When did you come to India?

#7M: It was at the same time His Holiness the Dalai Lama came to India.

Q: How old were you then?

01:42:10

#7M: I wonder how old I was then.

Q: How old are you now?

#7M: I was born in the year of the bird. I might be 73 or something. I do not know.

Q: When this happened, had Lhasa fallen yet? Do you know?

01:43:05

#7M: Lhasa had not fallen then. I was in Kongpo then, in the army. When we were in Kongpo we learned that Lhasa had fallen and that His Holiness had left. Then we too fled. I was in Kongpo when Lhasa fell.

Q: What happens next? Is your family with you—your mother, your father and sisters?

#7M: No, they were in Mon Tsona. We went separate ways when I joined the army.

Q: Were you together when you escaped from your region? Where did you become separated?

01:44:21

#7M: Yes, we were together and became separated when I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]. After we reached Lhasa, I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: But on the escape out of Kham, was your mother and father still with you on the escape?

#7M: Yes, we were together.

Q: What was that journey like? People had been killed, shot and some arrested. What was the rest of the journey like? Were you attacked again? What happened?

01:45:29

#7M: We did not encounter any Chinese on the journey. We traveled during the night. The Chinese passed by in their vehicles on the road. We fled in the night on the road the vehicles had passed. We traveled throughout the night.

Q: What kind of supplies of food, water and clothing did you have?

#7M: We'd brought provisions on the horses. We were about 40 people in the group. Our food was loaded on the horses.

Q: What about clothing?

01:46:17

#7M: We had on fur coats, which were warm. We did not feel cold as we were nomads.

Q: What month, what season was this you were traveling?

#7M: It was winter. We left during winter.

Q: You had to go over many mountain passes?

01:47:02

#7M: We had to cross over many mountain passes and steep drops. It was very far and there were high mountains. There were not many rivers except the Drichu [Yangtse River] in Dege.

Q: What did you do there at the Yangtse River?

#7M: We took a detour at the Drichu Chumaraza, the source of the Drichu River. There are seven tributaries. The river was frozen and we walked across it.

Q: Did any people die or get sick on the journey?

01:48:19

#7M: There was a sick man in the group, who died on the way. The rest did not face any illness or death before we reached Lhasa. All of us escaped successfully. That was because of our competent leader. If not for his good leadership, we would have been captured by the Chinese. We followed every instruction given by the leader and that was how we could escape successfully. Otherwise, we would have been captured and killed by the Chinese. We obeyed our leader.

Q: Was he a leader from back home where you lived?

#7M: He was a nomad leader. But no, he was not from there. He was another one, the leader of the Garok.

Q: How many people were making this journey together?

01:49:43

#7M: There were about 45 people.

Q: Were there other groups besides your group or were you the only group of 45?

#7M: There was none other because all the groups had been scattered by the Chinese. There were many when we started, but they were scattered and we did not know where they were.

Q: On the way, did people decide to settle down in other places or what?

01:50:49

#7M: No one settled on the way. We journeyed for sometime and then camped at a place like Mundgod here. We continued our journey in this way. We did not settle anywhere. We would not dare because the Chinese would arrive there.

Q: *Gen-la*, did your horses make it over the mountains?

#7M: They could go over the mountains because the mountains were not very lofty.

Q: How long did this journey take?

01:51:46

#7M: Oh, it took a long time. It might have taken us four or five months.

Q: In your travels, did you go through other Tibetan villages and hear stories about what was happening?

#7M: We were not allowed [by the leader] to go to the villages. There were many villages in the distant, but we were not permitted to go there because they might report that there were escapees. They might report to the Chinese that we were escaping. Once the Chinese get the news, they would pursue us on horseback. They had the best of horses and we'd be overtaken within a day. Five hundred, 600 to 1000 Chinese would pursue us. We would be killed within a day. That was the reason we were not allowed to visit the villages. We never went to the villages.

Q: So you had to avoid the villages.

01:53:17

#7M: Yes, that is right. We avoided the villages or passed them in the night.

Q: What happens to you? In four months you get to Lhasa?

#7M: Yes, we reached Lhasa.

Q: What happened when you reached Lhasa?

01:53:54

#7M: For about 15-16 days, we went to visit the holy places and the Jowo 'statue of Buddha Sakyamuni' of Lhasa. There is a big river in Lhasa and we crossed to the other side. We dare not remain in Lhasa because we heard that the Chinese were arresting all the Khampas [people from Kham]. When we learned that we might be captured by the Chinese, we crossed the river and went towards Kongpo and then the border village of Mon Tsona. That was on the border of India. They [the women and children] stayed there and we went to join the army, the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Did the whole group go? Did you join them?

#7M: About 15 men joined the army while the rest, including the women and old people stayed at Mon Tsona.

Q: Mon Tsona, that was near India?

01:55:47

#7M: Yes, that is near India.

Q: Were you one of the men who joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#7M: Yes, I was.

Q: Can you please tell us about your experiences with *Chushi Gangdrug*?

01:56:14

#7M: I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* and went to places like Chatsa Diguthang and fought many battles. Many of my colleagues were killed in the encounters with the Chinese. We had an encounter at Tsethang, where there were many Chinese.

Q: Can you tell us about that encounter?

#7M: There was a very big house in Tsethang constructed atop a hill with a fort. The encounter took place there. They [the Chinese] lay in wait, so we could not overcome them. Many people got killed there.

Q: Were the Chinese in foxholes?

01:57:14

#7M: Yes, they were in foxholes.

Q: Where was the house constructed?

#7M: The house was built in Tsethang. They had channeled water into the ground up to this level [indicates chest level]. If one ran across, he fell in the water. When a person fell in the water, they fired and killed him immediately. They lay in wait and could easily fire and kill us, while we could not see them. That was an act of stupidity, which is the result of being uneducated.

Q: When they came running, were they going to drink the water or ...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They didn't see the hole.

Q: Oh, they didn't see the hole? The Tibetan soldiers didn't see the holes and fell into them?

01:58:11

#7M: Yes, they fell into them. They [the Chinese] had dug the ground and camouflaged it with branches and grass. When someone came running, he fell into it. Then he became immersed in water up to this level. He could not get out and run away. The Chinese killed him.

Q: You told us many sad things, but I want to go and ask one more thing about the grasslands where the nomads are.

#7M: Okay.

Q: When you were a little boy and lived as a nomad, were there usually plenty of good grasses if you moved around at appropriate times?

01:59:51

#7M: Yes, there was good grass. There was very good grass, which came up to here [indicates waist level]. During summer, there was plenty of grass. We cut, twisted and piled up grass for the winter. That was for the small animals. There was plenty of grass. My region was the happiest place from Kham to the Indian border. Plenty of grass grew there.

Q: Over your lifetime, did you see any decrease in the grass or did the land get more and more dry?

#7M: At that time, there was not much change. Later I heard the region got drier. In my region, we used to gather *doma*; earlier the *doma* were round and very tasty. Now the *doma* that grow are very slender and resembles grass. That's how much the fertility of the soil has decreased. When the fertility of the soil decreases, that's what happens. Grass also does not grow much. In the early times, plenty of grass grew and there was *doma* to gather. The region was a very happy place. Though it is the same region, there is no *doma* to gather and grass does not grow, after the arrival of the ill-omened Chinese.

Q: What do you think caused that [decrease in fertility of soil]?

02:01:57

#7M: The Chinese mined gold and silver by digging the mountains. They bombed the place; thereby decreasing the fertility of the mountains which led to decrease in grass.

Q: We are going to have to stop right now. I would like to ask if this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you.

#7M: There will be no problem.

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

02:02:59

#7M: Yes, you can.

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

#7M: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW