

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #10 – Norbu
July 2, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #10
2. Interviewee: Norbu
3. Age: 70
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Sang
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: July 2, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged and Disabled,
Lugsung Samdupling Settlement,
Bylakuppe, Mysore District,
Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 40 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Norbu had a very adventurous childhood in Tibet, hunting and fishing for both fun and for his livelihood, as his family was poor. At age 17, he killed a bear with his knife in self defense. A prize kill would be a musk deer, which sold for a good price. Norbu gives a fascinating and suspenseful account of the villagers' hunting expeditions.

Norbu narrates how he and other Tibetans worked at Chinese road construction sites, how the Chinese appeared to be friendly at the beginning in order to gain their confidence, and how they gradually tightened their control. Norbu recounts the horrifying events of when Sangay Dorji, one of the richest people of the village, was subjected to *thamzin* 'struggle sessions.'

Norbu describes a confrontation with a Chinese officer, who called Norbu, "a wolf in sheep's clothing." Fearing that he and his family would be subjected to *thamzin*, his large family embarked on a month long escape to India.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, forced labor, Chinese oppression, brutality, *thamzin*, escape experiences, life as refugee in India.

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Interviewee: Norbu

Age: 70, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: July 2, 2007

[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #10, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Question: The reason we are here to interview you and to tell you how it came about. A group from abroad met His Holiness the Dalai Lama and asked him what they could do to help the Tibetans. His Holiness asked that the Tibetan elders be interviewed, about their way of life in Tibet so that the younger generation will know what life in Tibet was like before the Chinese came.

Interviewee #10: Okay.

Q: And also just tell him that no matter what kind of life it was, we are interested in all different kinds of life: farming life, city life, every kind of life. So nothing is unimportant.

#10: Okay.

Q: Does he remember talking to Tenzin Yangchen about the project? I just want to make sure he knows—that he understands that she was part of the project.

#10: Yes.

Q: So thank him for coming and ask for his full name.

#10: My name is Norbu.

Q: Norbu-*la*, do we have your permission to use your story for the Tibet Oral History Project?

#10: Of course, it is okay. You are doing this for the benefit of Tibet and not something against it. You can certainly use it.

Q: Thank you. If he needs to take a break anytime, just let us know.

#10: Okay.

Q: If there is anything that he doesn't want to talk about, that's fine.

#10: Okay.

Q: So first of all Norbula, could you describe your village in Utsang where you grew up? Can you describe what it looked like?

#10: When the sun rose, it first shone in my village. If it snowed, it didn't stay for more than two days; it melted. On the other side of the river it lasted for about a month. The landmark of my village was a high sand pass. Opposite to the river, there was a hill which faced it and it was called Sang Jema Karpo. High up among the rocks, there was a white stone. We went there to worship it once a year. If we had pests like birds and insects in the fields, after worshipping there, they would vanish.

Q: Was it very beautiful? It sounds very beautiful. At the white rock, was there a story connected to the white rock?

#10: There was no special story but it was called Sang Jabo Karpo. The name of my village is Sang; Kongpo Sangpa. Sang Jabo Karpo. That was the name. I do not have any other description to give.

Q: Does that mean anything?

[Interpreter to interviewer] *Karpo* means white.

Q: Why did they think it had the power to help the...

#10: A stone, it was a huge rock.

Q: A huge white rock?

#10: Yes, it was the size of one story.

Q: Oh really? It's huge. Why did they think it had the...that was a good place, an auspicious place to do ceremonies or *pooja* 'rituals of worship'?

#10: If insects infested the fields or if birds came to eat the crops, at that time, if we worshipped it, they vanished.

Q: Everything goes off, so it was traditional. Did he play a lot in the hills? When he was a kid, did he run around in the hills and play?

#10: When I was a child, I would be looking after the animals and used to play in the waters and run around.

Q: What did they used to do in the river as children? How did they use to play in the river? Did they have boats of any kind?

#10: As little children, we would swim and splash water on each other. Then when we felt cold, we lay down in the sand.

Q: How did they use to cross the river? Was it an easy river to cross or was there a bridge? How did they use to get across?

#10: It was a big river. It started from Lhasa and flowed down towards Kongpo. Then it emerged in Assam in India. It is called Brahmaputra which flows in Assam.

Q: How did they get across the river? Was there a bridge? How did they get across?

#10: We couldn't cross over to the other side. We would just go a short distance and then come back. Again go a short distance and then return. It was not possible to cross it to the other bank. It was a huge river.

Q: If you had to go to the other side, how would you go?

#10: For that you had to use the *du* or some sort of boat. It was a large raft of wood, which could take two horses or mules. Then the men rowed it to the other side.

Q: What was the boat made out of?

#10: Wood, it was made of wood. They were made from huge trunks of wood, which were made hollow by scraping out the wood inside. You could put horses and mules in there. Two trunks had to be joined together. If it was just one trunk, it would wobble and that was not good. You couldn't put horses and mules in there. So if two were joined together, it could take about 20 horses or mules.

Q: Two huge trunks were joined together? The trees were made hollow by scraping the insides?

#10: That is right.

Q: 10 to 20 horses and mules?

#10: Like a raft.

Q: Could you please tell Pa-*la* that he has a wonderful memory and that he is giving us such good information?

#10: Okay.

Q: I'd like to ask about his household. How many people lived with him in his house?

#10: My parents had 11 children. There was my father's mother, my mother, my father and us 11 children.

Q: His grandparents, his father, mother

#10: My father's father was dead. As long as I can remember, he was dead. My grandmother was there. It was my grandmother, my mother, and father; there were 14 people in the house.

Q: What kind of things did he learn from his grandmother when he was young? Did she teach him many things?

#10: My grandmother taught me the field work. My father also taught me. He would teach me how to plough the fields and so on. From the age of 13, I was ploughing and working in the fields.

Q: Did they have any pets?

#10: Yes, I had a dog. It was red in color and it followed me wherever I went. If I went to the forest, it followed me. If it killed a rabbit, it wouldn't eat it but bring it to me. When I went to look after the animals, I brought bread in my pocket, which I fed him and I would go hungry that day. I would clean the animal and feeding the insides to the dog. I would smash the legs with stones and feed him. I would take the rabbit meat home.

Q: What was the dog's name?

#10: It was called Lomo.

Q: Was he a big dog?

#10: No, it wasn't very big, about so high [gestures].

Q: What other kind of animals did he see? Did he ever see any wild animals?

#10: I have seen wild animals like bear, musk deer and antelope. I have killed, too.

Q: Which did he kill?

#10: We hunt them by sending the dogs after them and also by lying in wait. We had Tibetan made guns, but we did not have the other types of guns in Tibet. We would take the guns and a dog and hide in the hills waiting for the wild animals. When they came to graze in the morning or evening, we killed.

Q: Which ones did they hunt?

#10: Mostly we hunted the musk deer. The musk deer had the musk. If we had musk, we could sell it. My family was poor. We had only about five acres of land. So we hunted

animals. We had to pay tax to the Tibetan government. Then when I became older, I went to work on the Chinese road construction.

[Discussions among the interviewer, interpreter and videographer about the animal, *lawa* or musk deer, which the interpreter is not able to interpret in English.]

Q: I have never heard of a *lawa* and you haven't either. So what does it look like?

#10: It was not large, only so much [shows the height of the animal with his hand]. If it was a male musk deer, it had long fangs. A female musk deer did not have the fangs. The color was somewhat yellowish. The fur was black at the tips and white at the roots. It was like that. It looks like a goat. Its bleat was also like a goat's.

Q: Can he describe what a hunting trip would be like? What kind of weapons they used? Would they go for a few days hunting out in the countryside? What was a hunting trip like?

#10: We had what was called a *bhondha* or Tibetan gun. In it we stuffed the gunpowder and bullet, which were packed in tightly with the help of *sinpo*, a long iron rod. A *bithi* or *rendha*, which was a piece of material woven from hemp was lit and placed in the slot. Then we aimed and fired. When it was fired, the shot was similar to that of the gun *enji khadhum*.

Q: Any other besides guns?

#10: We didn't have anything else.

Q: He used only guns. Guns were his main weapons?

#10: Yes. We were poor and did not possess guns like *palmolay* or *enji khadhum*, which were available, but we did not have the means to buy them.

Q: Like a musket. Muzzle loader, we call it. So you'd have to get very close to the animal to shoot?

#10: We had to get very close. If we didn't get to at least a 100 *gaji*, it would not hit the animal. At around 100 *gaji* you could kill.

Q: How much is a 100 *gaji*?

#10: It would be the distance from here to that fence over there [points with his finger].

Q: Up to where those steps are?

#10: Still further than those steps. You see the wall there behind the steps? It's about that distance.

Q: Did you enjoy hunting?

#10: At that time I was young and I used to love hunting very much.

Q: Did he ever have any dangerous moments with wild animals, like he mentioned bear? Were there any other dangerous animals around apart from bear and did he have dangerous encounters with wild animals?

#10: I have encountered a bear. It was a baby bear about this size [gestures] which the dog had chased. Then I took out my gun and checked it. I found that the gun powder was damp with the rains. So I placed the gun down on the ground and with my knife - it was a very fine knife and about this size.

I waited a little further away near a tree. The bear came running chased by the dog. I struck with my knife around the location of its eyes, but it leapt on me. I stepped back and then struck again. It hit him in both the eyes. After striking twice, it fell. After it fell, I ran towards it and tied its legs with the dog's leash to a tree. Then it died.

Q: What did he do with the body? Did he do anything with the body parts?

#10: The skin was very expensive and the gall of the bear was very useful. In some regions they ate the meat, while some didn't.

Q: How big were the bears? Can you show us how big they were?

#10: If it stood up, it was as tall as a man. When it walked, it was just so high [gestures]. When they leapt on people, they stood up. I must have been about 16 or 17, maybe 17 years old. When it came walking, I struck with my knife and it growled and stood up. Then I struck again when it stood up. It was not able to attack me and it fell.

Q: What did they farm in the family farm?

#10: We grew wheat, grains, peas and *tawo* 'buck wheat.' There were two kinds of wheat that we grew; one was called *gyado*. There was a type of grain called *sowo* and also the usual grain. There were two types of grains, two types of wheat, peas and buck wheat.

Q: What is *tawo*?

#10: You do not have *tawo* in this region. If you go towards Spiti, the whole area cultivates *tawo*.

Q: What was his favorite food as a child?

#10: In my region the best food was called *momo* 'meat dumplings.' The rich people could afford to prepare *momo* daily if they wanted to. My family was not rich, so we cooked it only once in a month or two.

[The room darkens due to the rain outside and lighting is adjusted.]

Q: What did he like to do with his friends?

#10: Sometimes we used to go hunting together in the hills and at other times we went to the river to fish. Sometimes I fished, sometimes I hunted and sometimes I ploughed the fields. During the sowing season, I worked on the farm and when there was no fieldwork, I hunted or fished.

Q: So it sounds like he had a lot of freedom as a child to do, like when he went hunting, would he go just with his friends or would there be adults with him?

#10: There were adults too.

Q: Did they come with him?

#10: The adults would keep watch at the more important locations and as we were agile, they would tell us to go here or there and do this or that. They would tell us to take the dogs and go there or wherever. They would lie in wait with their guns. The dogs would chase and they would fire and kill.

Q: So it was very organized hunting. Did they ever camp out at night away from the house? Did they ever spend the night away from the house during these hunting trips?

#10: We had to leave the house around three in the morning to go to the hills to hunt. If we didn't go far, there was no game close to the village. We had to climb higher up in the hills. Then we let the dogs loose and they would search out and chase the wild animals. When they started the chase we would lie in wait, watching the direction the animals took. If it was a musk deer being chased by the dogs, it would run towards the rocks. The dog would keep barking at the rock and we would stealthily look for it among the rocks and shoot.

Q: So it sounds like he has a lot of happy memories as a child.

#10: At that time my parents were there to provide me with food. The Chinese had arrived by then. For about a year they let us live freely. There was not much work for everybody. There were no taxes to be paid to the Tibetan government. In this way, we were left for about a year. During this time, we were naughty and went hunting and fishing.

After that the Chinese started the so-called liberation. Then we had no freedom. We had to work from morning until evening as per their orders. We couldn't go to the hills. We worked and worked; irrigating the fields and making channels in the fields for the water to flow. The fields were irrigated before the sowing of the seeds.

Once that was done, the adults went to check the moisture content of the soil. Then we sowed the seeds, whether it was wheat or grain or whatever. The plants grew very well.

When the plants were this [shows with hand] high, they were called *jongma* and again irrigated. After irrigating twice and when the plants were this [shows with hand] high and about to flower, they were again irrigated and it was called *nyingma sharchu*.

The fields were irrigated three times. Then there were weeds to be pulled out and hoeing to be done; it was a lot of work. At that time I must have been about 18 years old. We couldn't go to the hills and worked only in the fields. The harvested grains were collected by them [the Chinese] and we were given some amount of money called *motse*, which was made of paper. Earlier we used to be given *dhayen* 'silver coins' but later there were no *dhayen*, only paper *motse* were given.

Q: How old was he when he first saw the Chinese in his area?

#10: When I first saw the Chinese I was about 13 years old. I was ploughing in the field when the Chinese arrived.

Q: So at first what were they doing?

#10: When they first arrived, we were children around aged 13 and they were very kind to us. They gave us cigarettes and candies; they were very kind. Then as time passed, they became worse and worse.

Q: Cigarettes and sweets. This system of farming he was describing with channels, was this very different to the way you farmed before?

#10: It was the same channels that we had before. We had to make the same channels for sowing the seeds. The channels for water; it was the same from the time Tibet came into being.

Q: It was something like a channel?

#10: Yes, the channels. In the fields we had to make channels at every distance from here to there [gestures] for the water to flow. The water had to be fed through the channels very fast and in our region, there was only one large water body. The water had to be divided among all the farmers and if water was not channeled fast enough in one's field, the person whose turn it was the next day would complain. He would argue that it was his turn for the water to be channeled into his field.

Q: So in order for the water to flow quickly, many channels were made in the fields?

#10: That is right.

Q: So the kind of farming that they did for the Chinese was that different at all to the way they farmed before or was it exactly the same kind of thing?

#10: It was exactly the same thing. It was the same until we escaped. However, later I heard that their way of sowing the seeds after ploughing was more in a straight line than we used to do. When we were there it was the same as we used to do and the Chinese did not make us sow their way. After we had fled, I heard that was how they sowed. People who traveled there told me.

Q: That's not the way it used to be done. This change in attitude when they stopped giving them presents—did that happen very quickly? Like, suddenly there was a change in attitude or was it very gradual from the Chinese to the villagers?

#10: It was not their custom to do anything suddenly, it was gradual. They are very cunning people. Gradually as time passed, they became worse and worse.

Q: Did he ever go outside of his village when he was young? For any reason, did he travel outside? Did he see what was going on around?

#10: I have not traveled to other places much. I was from a poor family. I had traveled around Kongpo, but not outside of it.

Q: Did he go on pilgrimage at all ever?

#10: I had been to Kongpo Beri and Kongpo Gyalak. Besides these I have not been anywhere. Gyalak is at a lower area than ours and Beri is three days' journey. If we circled it, we would reach back home in three days.

Q: Does he remember anything particularly about the pilgrimage trips that he took?

#10: On our pilgrimage when we passed the Chinese army camps, they questioned us as to where we were going. When we answered that we were going to Kongpo Beri, they replied that it was good. There were some people who knew a smattering of their language and they would say that going to Beri was good. One said it was *shi shi la la* and we shouldn't go to Beri. When they said *shi shi la la* it meant that it was bad.

Q: Did he have any suspicions as a young man of what was going to happen in Tibet? Did he have any sense of where this was going to lead?

Q: [Repeats] Did he have any idea or suspicion of what was going to happen in the future and how the Chinese were going to act in the future or was it like really like surprised people when things started really changing for the worse?

#10: I had a lot of suspicions because they were large in number while we were few. I thought in my mind that these people were going to be no good. Even though it was in my mind, I was helpless because we had no weapons. Whatever work they ordered us to do or wherever we were told to go, whether it was on road construction or other works, we had to go. If we didn't go, they would arrest us and put us in prison.

Q: So he said there was no freedom to go up into the hills anymore? Was that because there was restriction on movement? They were not allowed to travel around like they used to?

#10: Later they did it. Later when I was 19, they said we were not permitted to go up into the hills. We were not allowed to go here or there. The *Chushi Gangdrug* Resistance Force had already come and at that time there was a lot of turmoil. We were told that we were not permitted to travel to places that were two or three days' journey. We were not allowed up the hills. The Chinese troops guarded the site of the ferry at night. They said we shouldn't move around in the night, else they would shoot and kill us.

Q: What did he hear about *Chushi Gangdrug*? What was the information coming to the villages about what *Chushi Gangdrug* was doing? What they were achieving?

#10: The Tibetan government made an announcement about the *Chushi Gangdrug*: that the *Chushi Gangdrug* would be arriving; that we shouldn't show pleasure to the Chinese; that when the *Chushi Gangdrug* arrived, we should provide grass to their horses and provide food to the men. We were informed secretly by those who came. Everybody believed these to be true and did likewise. However, they [*Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas] just fought for about three days and then they fled. After they had fled, we were left behind and they [the Chinese] became worse and worse and worse. Food became more and more scarce.

Q: Does he remember the name of the person he received the message from?

#10: The men were the *U-yon Tsukdon* 'leaders selected by the Chinese.' They received the information from the Chinese and then passed it to us. Their names were Ngawang Dhondup, another one was called Ladu and the other was...In our region there were three of them.

Q: Were these three men of the Tibetan government?

#10: They were Tibetans.

Q: They informed him that the *Chushi Gangdrug* was arriving?

#10: It was not these people who gave us the message. The Tibetan government sent an emissary. The emissary from the government met the heads of our villages. Each village had its head or *shinyo* and secretly gave them the message. They [the heads] slowly spread the message among the villagers until it came to everybody's attention. If they [the *U-yon Tsukdon*] had come to know about this, they would be fuming. They were on the Chinese side. They liked the Chinese—those three men.

Q: What were the names of those three men?

#10: One was called Ngawang Dhondup, one was Ladu and the third man's name was...he was a Khampa.

Q: Did they provide weapons to *Chushi Gangdrug* as well? They had a lot of weapons because they were hunters, the villagers.

#10: In our village there were none who had weapons. We went to provide the *Chushi Gangdrug* with grass and *tsampa* ‘roasted barley flour.’ Many ran away along with the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: He came with them?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes.

Q: You mean he went with them?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes.

Q: Can he talk about that?

#10: I was not with the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: He escaped along with them?

#10: No, no. I escaped later.

Q: Who escaped with them?

#10: They were people from villages surrounding our village; single men who said they would join the *Chushi Gangdrug* and left. Later in 1959, we fled. When we fled in 1959, we faced a lot of hardships on the way. The way was extremely bad.

There were ladders woven from grass hung from the top, [of rocks] which dangled but did not reach the ground. When we climbed the ladder, it made a sound that went '*tsarak, tsarak, tsarak*' and almost broke. We had to climb up the rocks. We were many children. My father was in better condition and so was my mother. There were my grandmother and the children, among whom I was the oldest, the rest were small. Ten children were small.

Here in the camp I have two brothers, who were old enough at that time to carry their own bedding. All the rest were too young, so it was up to my father and me to carry everything. We walked for a distance, like from here to Bylakuppe [2 miles] and then we stopped. The whole day we carried the things, walking up and down. Half of the family stayed at one point and the other half at the other point. We walked up carrying some of the things and then back for more things; in this way our trip took one month. The natives in that region would have taken just five days!

Q: Why did it take a month?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Because they had a large family. One part of the family stay back and one group would take the things to the other side and again they did that. They couldn't actually go along together.

Q: They sort of went in stages. And just while he is changing tapes, just to clarify; did he actually say he joined *Chushi Gangdrug*? He didn't join?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Others joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* and ran away with the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Others joined, but he didn't join.

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes.

Q: Tell him that it's so interesting; everything he is telling us.

[Videographer to interviewee] *Pa-la* is terrific, just terrific.

Q: Norbu-*la*, did you ever think about joining *Chushi Gangdrug*? Did it ever cross your mind? Did you want to join?

#10: At that time it didn't cross my mind. I do not want to lie.

Q: Did he know were there people from his family or friends of his who joined?

#10: There was a friend, a distant relative of mine from a neighboring village named Tsering who joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force. There was a place called Yarpang. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was stationed at a higher location and the new recruits were put at this place. They were instructed to block the way. So when the Chinese came, they blocked the way while the *Chushi Gangdrug* men were at the higher location.

They told those at the lower point that they would prepare for war. But while they [those at the lower area] were fighting, the *Chushi Gangdrug* men had fled. They were under the impression that those at the higher location were making preparations for the battle, while in actuality they had already fled.

He [Tsering] was about to be caught when he sort of leaped out into the water, but in actuality he hit the ground and was hiding in a crevice. The Chinese came to look for him, but thinking he might have fallen into the waters, they went away. Then he went looking for the *Chushi Gangdrug* and was able to catch up with them after two days. He was with the *Chushi Gangdrug* since then and later reached India. When I arrived in India, he was here.

Q: So this man Tsering fought first, as part of the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#10: Yes.

Q: So later when they realized that the *Chushi Gangdrug* was not there and when they were about to be caught by the Chinese, they went away?

#10: Yes, he escaped.

Q: So he was working along with the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#10: Yes, that's right.

Q: Before the decision was made within your family to leave, what changes had the Chinese brought to your way of life in the village? What other changes had happened in your village that you have seen?

#10: There were tremendous changes in my village. Where there were no roads, they made roads. I was about 18 or 19 when I was fully engaged in building roads for the Chinese. They said that roads had to be built from Pema Koe. If you went onwards from my village, you would reach Pema Koe. From Pema Koe you would reach the tribal region and from there, it was India.

Some of the *Chushi Gangdrug* men were fleeing from that area. We were told that if not drivable, we should make a path for the horses. We were all herded for road construction. For three months we were taken beyond the mountain pass. It rained incessantly and at night we removed our soggy clothes and dried them by the fireside. The next day we went to work and again in the evening we dried our clothes by the fireside.

Then I don't know what change took place, but they told us one day that we had to go back. We had built a road for horses beyond the pass. After that was done, I don't know what change took place but they said we had to return. Then we came back and were sent to another place for road construction.

Q: For the horses. They were using horses at that time. Did you ever witness *thamzin* in your village?

#10: I saw another person undergoing *thamzin* 'struggle session.' I did not see anyone from my village being subjected to *thamzin*. There was a man called Thamnyen Sangay Dorji, who was one of the richest people around the villages. When we were at the road construction site, they said, "Today is Sunday and a holiday. Today Thamnyen Sangay Dorji will be subjected to the struggle session. If anyone among you wishes to *thamzin* him, you should go." We were many workers at that time, maybe around 500 to 600. They kept us in a huge enclosure.

Thamnyen Sangay Dorji was brought out carrying something on his back, which contained written documents. They said, "Earlier this man sucked the blood and pus of the people which is all written down here in the documents. Today these will be burned and from this day, if he has loaned anything, they cannot be claimed back. He cannot do anything. From

this day, he is over and done with." The papers made a huge pile and it was lit with fire. When it was burning, one of our people gave him a stick upon which they [the Chinese] said, "You shouldn't give him the stick. He has written with his hands and he should burn the papers with his hands." They made him to stir the fire with his hands. The people subjected him to *thamzin* and slapped him on his cheeks. They pulled him up by his hair and slapped him on his cheeks. I have seen such incident once.

Q: What was the name of the man?

#10: Sangay Dorji.

Q: He was not from his village?

#10: Very close to our village.

Q: Close to his village?

#10: Yes, but we belonged to the same Kongpo area. The distance may be from here to Periyapatna [10 miles].

Q: What did he do? What was he thinking when he saw this?

#10: I thought that they were doing such things and eventually they would do the same thing to us. I told my parents that if we remained here, one day surely we would also be subjected to the struggle sessions. I told them that we were sure to be subjected to *thamzin* and that we shouldn't stay and that we should flee.

Q: So that was like the key event that made him decide to go and take his family out?

#10: Yes.

Q: Were there family meetings where they talked about this, where they discussed the trip or did they leave suddenly? Did they meet and talk about it and or discuss it?

#10: We all discussed it, but the main person was my father. I told my father and he said it was right. He said that we would escape at a time when there were not so many Chinese there—at times when the Chinese officers went away to attend meetings. I have made some mistakes in relating this story. There was a Chinese *thongsu* with whom I had a fight.

Q: Who is a *thongsu*?

#10: When we had the fight, he tried to shoot me. I was a young child and had a knife in my waistband, which I drew and wanted to strike him. Everybody there stopped us. Usually every morning we had to carry away the manure. Someone loaded some manure and I, still quite sleepy, carried it to be thrown on the manure heap. He (the *thongsu*) said, "You have not learned your lesson. Why is there grain husk in the manure?"

Actually, someone had put grain husk together with the manure and I had carried it to be thrown on the manure heap, which had made him angry. He said that I was bad and that I had not learned my lesson. I replied, "Whether I have learned my lesson or not, you called me very early in the morning and I have come accordingly. Whatever they put, I carried it away and tossed it on the manure heap. I did not look and I cannot even see [in the dark]."

It was at night, around 3 a.m. I said I couldn't see. He said, "What can you do?" and tried to draw his gun and so I almost stabbed him. Then everybody who was around stopped us. From then onward he wouldn't leave me alone. He would say I should be arrested. He said of me, "He is a wolf in sheep's clothing. The wolf is wearing sheep's skin and is moving around with the sheep. That is him." He almost arrested me. If I had stayed two or three days more, he would have arrested me. So I escaped and managed to get away.

Q: The one with whom he had the fight was a Chinese official? Tibetan?

#10: Yes, a Chinese official, but he was a Tibetan. A Tibetan *thongsu*, an interpreter; the Chinese called it a *thongsu*.

Q: Going back to the struggle session that he witnessed with the landowner. When he was having to stoke the fire with his hand, how badly was his hand hurt?

#10: His hand became red.

Q: Were the Chinese also discouraging religious practice? Were they discouraging them to do dharma practice?

#10: They told us not to practice religion. They said, "What is the use of practicing religion? If you want to practice religion and worship the gods, and if they will provide you with food, you can go into the caverns and do your practice. Live in the caverns and do whatever practice you want to do, if anybody is there to provide you food. We will see." That's what they said.

Q: Were people doing lots of *pooja* and prayers for the Chinese to home?

#10: That was done only secretly. Secretly we prayed that bad things should befall the Chinese and that they should go back. These were only done secretly. If these were done within their sight, we would be immediately caught.

Q: So when he left with his family, what happened when he arrived in India? What part of India did ...he went to Assam I think first? What happened when he arrived in India?

#10: We reached the tribal area Tuting in Assam. There was the Indian army at the tribal area. They were black people and we wondered what they were. They carried guns and there was a large army camp. I had never seen black people before that as a child. Then we went where the refugees were staying. We were kept there and told to receive food rations. The Indian government gave us rice, oil and food in plenty.

Q: Assam Tuting?

#10: Yes, Tuting.

Q: What happened to him just briefly if he could tell us, what happened to him between then and arriving in Bylakuppe? What happened in between?

#10: They kept us in Tuting, Assam for three days. After three days an airplane came and took us to Dibrugarh where we landed at the airport. We were there for two days. Then we were taken to Balingpur, in the forest and it was extremely hot. It was unbearably hot.

They told us that we people from Kongpo were experienced in cutting trees and cultivating lands. So we were to set up a settlement there and get settled. Perhaps all the elders accepted it. We cut down the trees, dried the wood and burned the bushes. We piled all the logs on the sides of the clearings.

Then we grew paddy, a type of paddy which grew without standing water. Later we couldn't bear the heat and left for Gangtok. At that time the paddy plants we grew were so high [shows height with hand]. Then we complained to various offices to send us to a place with a cooler climate. We were sent to Gangtok. Then from Gangtok we were sent as coolies to Lachung. For about two years we stayed as coolies there.

Q: By coolies he means road construction workers?

#10: Yes, to work on road construction.

Q: When did he come to Bylakuppe?

#10: In 1962, there was the war; India's war and then we were not allowed to stay there as coolies. They said we had to go down because on the hills were people who wore a certain type of cap [makes a sign with hand] and that they would capture and take us back. They told us that we shouldn't stay there and that we should escape. Then from Lachung, we came to Gangtok. I stayed in Gangtok doing some work. Then my mother and siblings later went to the settlement while I went to join the army at Chakrata.

Q: He joined the army. Did he actually fight the Chinese at that time?

#10: I did not fight the Chinese because I went only for the wars against Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Q: Tell him he had a very exciting life, an amazing life. A couple of questions from earlier; this is going way back to the beginning of the interview. Tell him we are almost finished. When you would hunt an animal when you were young, did you do any prayers for the animal after you had killed it?

#10: At that time I was young and I never thought of religion. I liked to kill, but as I was young, I didn't think of religion.

Q: You told the story about the bear and attacking the bear with the sword. When you went back to your village, did you, did people gather around and did you tell the story? Were they excited to hear the story?

#10: The people told me that I was so very young to have attacked the bear and they asked me if the bear bit me. I replied no and that before it could bite me, I struck it with my sword, so it could not bite me. I boasted about it to the boys of my age.

Q: So he enjoyed telling the story. Did people believe that bears had any kind of special powers or that they were any kind of special being?

[Interpreter to interviewer] Special beings?

Q: Special being or did they have any special powers, the bears? Were there beliefs around the bears?

#10: It would bite men and that sort of thing. In our regions, apricot was plenty. The entire hills were apricot trees. The bears came to eat apricots and if it encountered a man...My late father was bitten by a bear. When the bear leapt, my father struck with his sword. The bear clawed him on his hand, pulled him forward and my father sprawled in front of the bear. He had two bite marks on his side. At that time the Chinese had already arrived. Many Chinese troops arrived with guns but the bear had run away by then, no one knew where. The Chinese treated him and he became well.

Q: This happened later actually. This happened after he was attacked?

#10: Before I killed the bear. It was a different bear.

Q: Does he remember anything his father said to him after he told him the story about his encounter with the bear? Does he remember anything his father said?

#10: My father said that it was great that the bear did not leap onto me. I told him that it did leap, but I struck it again and again and it fell down. Then he didn't say anything.

Q: Does he think about Tibet very much these days?

#10: I do think about it these days because I have many relatives. I think about going to meet them once, but I heard that we need travel documents and so time passed and I have not been able to do so. I would love to go.

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

#10: I do not know. I don't know if there would be problem or not. But I think it may not be a problem because I won't be able to go now. I am now in the Home for the Aged.

Q: Would it be a problem for his relatives there?

#10: No, I cannot go there. As of now, I feel it's for sure.

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

#10: There would be no problem. We are now separate individuals.

Q: And last question, we ask everybody the same question. What advice would you give to the new generation of Tibetans in exile now, if they would listen to you? What advice do you have for them?

#10: To give advice, I am not educated. So if I were to advise them to do this or not to do this, they would not listen to me. They would say, "You do not know anything and you are advising us. You have green [unripe] brains!"

Q: Tell him that if I took any of these kids in exile today and put them in his village and told them to go and fight a bear, I don't think they would know what to do. Tell him that.

#10: No, they cannot do that.

Q: If they would listen, if there were some out there who would listen, maybe, what advice would he have for them? We think this is very valuable, the experiences that he has had.

#10: I would tell them to desist from doing the bad things. There are some here who smoke grass, some who play *sho-bak*, some who do not obey their parents, wasting away their time, but eating their food on time, when I tell them they do not listen. If they do listen, I would say, "Do not do like this. When you were young, your parents worked so hard for you. Now you are a grown up. You should listen to your parents. Work hard for your parents. You have to look after your parents in their old age." It is our duty to say so but they do not listen. If there are some who would listen, this is my advice.

Q: Tell him thank you very much. We have a gift for him from the project.

END OF INTERVIEW