

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #23B – Samdhong Rinpoche
December 31, 2013

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #23B
2. Interviewee: Samdhong Rinpoche
3. Age: 74
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Nangdug, Jol
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: December 31, 2013
10. Place of Interview: Sera Lachi, Sera Monastery, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 50 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter:
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Samdhong Rinpoche was born as Lobsang Tenzin in Nangdug, a small village of 12 families. His parents cultivated a small piece of land and reared yaks and *dri* 'female yaks' for a living. His father had two wives and there were nine children in the family. At the age of three, Samdhong Rinpoche insisted on going to the local monastery with an uncle, who was a monk, and remained in the monastery with him until he was 12 years old.

At the age of 5 he was recognized as the 5th reincarnation of Samdhong Rinpoche. He describes the lineage of Samdhong Rinpoche and what the name means. As a 12-year old, Samdhong Rinpoche left for Lhasa to complete higher studies, which was a tradition for all reincarnated lamas. He recounts the adventurous 75-day journey to Lhasa and his first impressions of the city. He remembers the first time he saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama and explains how he met his future teachers before travelling on to Drepung Monastery.

Samdhong Rinpoche saw the Chinese military presence in Lhasa and heard their propaganda through daily shows broadcast over loudspeakers. Otherwise, the Chinese invasion did not have much effect on monastic life at that time. He heard the bombardment of Norbulingka, the Potala Palace, Sera Monastery and fled with his teachers. Samdhong Rinpoche continued to study the Buddhist scriptures and practice monastic rituals in the refugee camp at Missamari, India.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, Buddhist beliefs, monastic life, customs/traditions, Dalai Lama, March 10th Uprising, life as a refugee in India.

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Age: 74, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: December 31, 2013

[Interviewee speaks in English. No interpreter required.]

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:13

Interviewee #23B: My name is Lobsang Tenzin, but unfortunately very few people know this and everybody calls me Samdhong Rinpoche. Samdhong is [the] name of all the successive incarnations and Rinpoche is just a title. But when we came into India as refugees, we are registering in the Foreigners Registration Office and at that time somebody told the person who is writing names and they have said, “This is Samdhong Rinpoche” and put that name in that register. So it became my name.

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 in this project?

#23B: [Nods] Welcome.

Q: Rinpoche-*la* ‘respected lama’ perhaps we could begin by your telling us how old you are now and where were you born?

#23B: I am 75 years old according to Tibetan tradition and according to Western tradition I am 74, so to speak. I was born in a very small village, which is called Nangdug and it is part of Jol District. It is [at the] very end of the Tibetan territory and begins the Chinese territory. My native place was under Chinese rule for a long time. So I was born in that remote place which is now in the Yunan Province. At this moment it is called Dechen Autonomous Prefecture.

Q: What did your family do for a livelihood?

00:02:32

#23B: My family was a poor farmer. We have a small piece of land and we also have livestock, about 50 yaks and female yaks. One of my uncles used to go after the animals on the mountains. My father was a farmer who does cultivation on the land. My place is quite low altitude; we do have two crops in a year, sometimes three crops in a year.

Q: That allows for a lot of turnover.

#23B: Yes, yes lots of turnover.

Q: If you said your village was very small, about how many families were there?

#23B: During my lifetime...[when] I was there, there were only 12 houses.

Q: Really?

#23B: Yes. Now I am told there are about 25 or 26 houses.

Q: Small growth.

#23B: Yeah, small.

Q: How many people were in your family?

00:03:40

#23B: I do not remember exactly. My father has two wives and from the first wife, we have two elder sisters and then from my mother, there are seven children. I am the lone survivor; all others, my younger sisters and brothers have all passed [away]. My elders have all passed [away].

Q: You're the only surviving member.

#23B: Yes, only surviving member among nine sisters and brothers.

Q: Tell us what happened in terms of your early life? What are some of the most memorable experiences that you can recall?

#23B: I was very young, about three and half years old, my uncle monk from the local monastery used to visit our house quite often. Then each time I insisted that I should go with that monk to the monastery. Once I very much insisted and I just hold on to that monk and I refused to let him go. Then my father thought, let him [uncle monk] take him to the monastery and the next day he [father] can take me back. So that day he took me to the monastery and when we reached the monastery, the monastery do not allow to keep small children in the monastery campus. And my uncle monk has a very difficult time to seek the permission, later on he had told me. Anyhow the monastery authorities think that I should be allowed to remain there. The next day my father came to take me back but I refused to go back. So since then I remained in that monastery as a very small child and I was looked after by that uncle monk. And then...

Q: Three and a half.

00:05:45

#23B: Yes, three and a half. Then I was about 5 years old I was recognized as the 5th Samdhong. So since then I was very well looked after; all facilities were there.

Q: For people who don't know about the Samdhong, could you please explain what you mean when you say, "I was recognized as the 5th Samdhong"?

#23B: During the 7th Dalai Lama...

Q: Yes.

#23B: The 7th Dalai Lama had sent an abbot to three monasteries of my place. One monastery, my own monastery is known as Gaden Dechenling. Then there is another monastery about 50 kilometers away that is called Ngopo Yangchenling and then yet another monastery which is a bit far away, about 100 kilometers far away that is called Dhondupling.

These three monasteries used to have one abbot and that abbot was to be appointed by the Drepung Loselling Monastery. During the period of the 7th Dalai Lama, a very good practitioner monk whose name was Phagpa Rabga was sent to be the abbot of the three monasteries. He worked [as] abbot of those three monasteries for about 3-4 years. Then he completed his tenure and thereafter he was requested to remain in my monastery Gaden Dechenling [for] they did not have any *rinpoche* that time.

00:07:33

And then he remained and he passed away in my monastery. Then the second was recognized as the reincarnation of Phagpa Rabga and the second was born in a house, which is known as Samdhongtsang, that means 'in front of the bridge.' *Sam* is 'bridge' and *dhong* is just 'in front,' and that name is the family name, Samdhongtsang the family. The boy was born there and at a small age he says, "My monastery is somewhere else. I must go there." And then he was recognized as the 2nd Samdhong, which was named as Tenphel Nyima. Then he was again recognized [and] the 3rd [was] Tenphel Gyaltsen, the 4th Tsultim Gyatso and then 5th me. That comes the Samdhong reincarnations.

Q: Thank you, that's very helpful to understand that lineage.

#23B: Okay, okay.

Q: When you were recognized, were there any events that happened that confirmed that you were the fifth?

#23B: That I do not know. I was recognized by the great teacher, a very famous teacher, Kyabje Phabongka. Kyabje Phabongka gave a description of the village and the river and my house. All these were given but we are two brothers at that time. Then the names of the two brothers were sent back to central Tibet, Lhasa. The Phabongka [had] passed away. Then choosing me was done by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, the junior tutor to His Holiness [the Dalai Lama]. Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche says, "This is the reincarnation of the 4th Samdhong." So this is how it comes.

Q: What are your earliest memories of the monastery? Can you recollect?

00:09:54

#23B: Earliest memory of monastery is just to memorize some of the ritual texts and then go through the study of language and literature. I lived there only up to 12 years old. At 12 years old I come to central Tibet to join my higher study in the Drepung Monastery. I reached Drepung Monastery in 1951, late 1951 just after Chinese occupation. When I reached Drepung Monastery Tibet was already occupied by China.

Q: Were you very adept in your earlier studies or did you have to work as hard as any student?

#23B: Yes, I have to work very hard, but I had a great teacher at my young age. My teacher was the chief disciple of the past Samdhong, the 4th Samdhong. His disciple was a great scholar. He had a very unique method of teaching to children. He was very different from the traditional, very strict teachers. He was very kind and he knew child psychology. He was very talented to deal with children. So therefore, my basic education from the age of 7 until age of 12 was very sound. Therefore, I was able to do my things in the higher study quite easily.

Q: You know it would be very interesting to understand, what did he understand about the psychology of children? You've seen many monks since then yourself...

00:11:55

#23B: He never chose the subject according to his priority. He looked to my interest, and whichever I took interest, he just begin to teach that and from that I never felt boring in the study.

Q: He captured.

#23B: He captured...

Q: ...what your imagination was.

#23B: ...what is my imagination, what is my interest and what is my curiosity. My curiosity is sometimes very ordinary or stupid things, but he never discouraged. He always encouraged to go further, to ask questions and even the silly questions he tried to answer, and even to make it further enquiries.

Q: He respected your questions.

#23B: Yes.

Q: And he honored your curiosity.

#23B: Yes, yes.

Q: What was this teacher's name?

#23B: Most Venerable Ngawang Jinpa.

Q: Ngawang Jinpa.

#23B: Ngawang Jinpa.

Q: Was a very formative time in your life.

#23B: Yes.

Q: Because he taught you not to be afraid to ask questions.

#23B: Yes, yes.

Q: And not to feel stupid.

#23B: Right.

Q: See, this is a brilliant teacher.

00:13:14

#23B: Yes, very brilliant teacher. So that was my most...I feel I am most fortunate to get at an early age such a vast knowledge and great scholar yet able to deal with a child.

Q: He knew the language of a child.

#23B: Yeah.

Q: And the capacity of a child.

#23B: Yeah.

Q: That was a very fortunate event.

#23B: Yeah.

Q: Have you ever encouraged other teachers to use those techniques?

#23B: [Laughs] I do.

Q: Do you?

#23B: I do.

Q: I'm just curious. Have you ever written about that style of teaching the dharma?

#23B: No, I have not written.

Q: So you had that wonderful education and mentoring and then how was the decision made for you to move to Drepung?

00:14:13

#23B: This is a tradition. All reincarnated lamas, they have to go to central Tibet wherever they belong to. For example, the Nyingma tradition, they go to Dorjeeda or Mindoling; the Sakya, they go to the Sakya; and the Kagyupa, they go to Tsurpu and the Gelugpa, they go to either of the four great monasteries, Drepung, Sera, Gaden or Tashi Lhunpo.

So all the higher studies, reincarnated lamas have to go through higher studies and for the higher studies they must join the central bigger monasteries where they have huge [number of] people studying and then they can debate and they can take the whole education, but unfortunately I could not complete my education in Drepung. I lived in Drepung only eight years.

Q: What was it like to go from such a small area where you were to go to Lhasa? What was that like for you?

#23B: It was a... Today I think back, it was a great adventure because from my native monastery to Lhasa when I moved on horseback, it took 75 days.

Q: Seventy-five?

#23B: Seventy-five days, so the journey was very interesting. We have about 100 mules and so many workers and attendants. Altogether I think there were about 50 people and 100 mules. Every day we take journey about minimum 15 miles, maximum 21 miles. And by that way going through very good sceneries and different places, finally we reached Lhasa. And then I entered the monastery. So this was a...yes, very adventurous and also very, very new experience.

Q: An adventure to see the world this way.

#23B: New experience, yeah.

Q: Did it take 75 days because it was so difficult or because you stopped and prayed at different places? What, why...?

00:16:48

#23B: No, we never stopped much, sometimes one day stopped. I think this is through whole journey, I think two or three times we stopped one day for resting. Otherwise, once we have to pass through a snowy mountain and snowing and the next day everybody was...[points to eyes].

Q: Snow-blind?

#23B: Yes, snow-blind and one day we have to stop. So that was a very painful experience and, otherwise as I mentioned, sometimes we move up to a 15 miles. On the roads the miles are marked and so 15 miles is minimum and 21 miles is maximum. Twenty-one miles means about 25 kilometers, something like that.

Q: Yes, it would be. Were you the major reason for this caravan, for this entourage?

#23B: Yes, entourage mostly, but the establishment used to trade between Central Tibet and my native place. They used to go to Lhasa every year with those mules and all this group, but when I come to Lhasa then it was little different. The entourage is more organized.

Q: A little more special and a little more organized.

#23B: [Smiles]

Q: Not so casual.

#23B: Not so casual, that is right.

Q: When you arrived in Lhasa, can you recall what your first impressions were of the Potala Palace and everything?

00:18:30

#23B: Yes, when I reach near Lhasa, three days before, we arrived to the...near a place of the Gaden Monastery, then we heard that Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, His Holiness' junior tutor who recognized me, is visiting Gaden Monastery. Then I went to Gaden Monastery to have his audience. My first audience with him was in Gaden Monastery and I was 12 years old and we have some conversation.

Since then he accepted me as his disciple and I accepted him as my true teacher, and that was established. Gaden Monastery is the monastery of Je Tsongkhapa [founder of the Gelug tradition] and by that way also very important. And then after only three days we reached Lhasa.

Of course, before I am coming to Lhasa I saw the photograph of the Potala Palace. The Potala Palace, I have some picture in my mind, but when to see it in original, there is much difference from the picture. Then of course, the main temple of Lhasa, Tsuglakhang. So traditionally people tells us that when you reach Lhasa, before taking tea you must have the pilgrimage into the Tsuglakhang that I did.

Then thereafter gradually I met Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, the senior tutor of His Holiness that was also my teacher and then my monastery teacher, Kyabje Pangang Rinpoche and he came to Lhasa to receive me. I stayed in Lhasa for 5-6 days and then go to Drepung

Monastery. Once we enter in the monastery, of course the monastery discipline is to be followed.

Q: Right away.

#23B: Yes, right away.

Q: The adventure was over.

#23B: Yes, yes.

Q: The adventure and now it was a new adventure.

#23B: Right, yeah.

Q: His Holiness, how often did you see him, the Dalai Lama?

00:21:10

#23B: I reached Lhasa in the 9th month of the Tibetan calendar. Then 10th, 11th and 12th, three months I have not seen the Dalai Lama. Only in the 1st month of the Tibetan calendar, it might be some time in February or early March in 1952, then His Holiness visited the Monlam Festival in Lhasa. That time I saw him for the first time and also I received teachings for the first time on the 15th of the Monlam Festival, the full moon of the Monlam Festival he gave teachings in the morning. So that was the first time I received [teachings from His Holiness]. Then thereafter in Tibet usually 3-4 times in a year we do have His Holiness' audience. It's not an audience [everybody] can see him or to receive his blessings.

Q: Do you remember any of your first impressions when you saw His Holiness?

#23B: Yes, that memory is very still, very much clear. I first saw His Holiness when he is passing from the first floor of the Tsuglakhang and we are lower down. I can have a glimpse of his face and he is smiling. Then he comes down to the throne and then we hear for the first time his teaching. The most impressive was the unique voice. His voice is...no one can imitate his voice. It's a very unique voice.

Q: Very resonant.

#23B: Yes, very melodious and words are very clear and it goes direct to your heart.

Q: Yes.

00:23:22

#23B: So he gave teaching on that morning from the Jataka stories, and there is a first Jataka story, Gyalpo Jampaytop. I still remember he gave a narration from the Gyalpo Jampaytop's Jatak and he gave quite an extensive explanation. That was the first teaching and since then I do attend almost all his teachings in Lhasa or Norbulingka or the Potala.

Q: You were close in age to His Holiness.

#23B: He is four years senior.

Q: Only four years senior?

#23B: Four years senior to me.

Q: So in that sense that must have been also very interesting to see someone four years older...

#23B: Yes, yes.

Q: ...with such charisma.

#23B: That's right. Yeah, that's true.

Q: Yeah, I think so. Rinpoche-*la*, what happens to you next in your studies? What happens?

00:24:37

#23B: In the 9th month when I entered into the monastery, then of course, we begin our study. The subject to begin, the first subject is logic. Buddhist logic is considered to be key to other studies. Unless you understand the logic, you will not be able to analyze the things in the other subjects. Then thereafter I got a teacher in the Drepung Monastery. Then I studied and I was...I was not a bad student because I have a good background to my native monastery and my teacher has taught many things, so I can cope with my studies quite...

Q: ...quite easily?

#23B: Yes, quite easily. So I don't remember anything, which I find difficult. Of course, I was not able to complete. To complete the study in the monastery, it will take at least 20 years. So I was only able to stay there for eight years.

Q: Eight years, I know that.

#23B: So it's not even half. After coming to exile, my teacher persuade me to continue my study but that study is very shabby and we cannot study like [in Tibet]. Of course, I completed all the texts and all the subjects which is required for a *geshe* 'degree in Buddhist philosophy,' but the latter part of my study is not very thorough.

Q: When you first arrived there as you said, you didn't get to complete it, were there any experiences of the Chinese just that you knew from inside the monastery? What was your understanding of what was happening outside?

00:26:54

#23B: When I arrived to Lhasa, the first and foremost visible sign of occupation is a radio program. The radio program is called Dongkhyer Lhasa Koyul Gyangdag Lungtin

Lekhung. *Dongkhyer* Lhasa means ‘the city of Lhasa’ and *koyul gyangdag* means with a *thar*...with a wire and then on that wire, what you call, the microphones are being placed on the housetops.

Q: Yes, yes.

#23B: Three hours a day the noise pollution used to be there and always talking all the time how Tibet has been peacefully liberated through the 17-Point Agreement and who are the people who signed the 17-Point Agreement. And hearing that we remember everybody’s names and they always used to say *wangcha chatsang yopay Ngabo Ngawang Jigme* that means ‘having all authority Mr. Ngabo Ngawang Jigme.’

Q: Yes.

00:28:23

#23B: Because people used to say the Agreement was concluded under duress and Ngabo was not authorized to enter into such an Agreement and there’s no authority. Therefore, they always repeat this, repeat, repeat that Ngabo Ngawang Jigme has all authority and with all his authority, he has signed this. Each day they repeat what are the 17 points and how important is coming back [for] Tibet to the main house of the big family and so on and so forth. This is visible, one thing, and second visible is, all the places near the monasteries and government establishments, they have put the military camps.

Q: Camps, yeah.

#23B: And right in front of Drepung Monastery, we call it Gyangda Lingka that means right from the Drepung Monastery we can see there are thousands of tents have been put and later on it become barracks.

Q: Yes.

#23B: So this military presence was very visible. Apart from these two, we never care what is going on at the political level. And we don’t have any news what the Chinese are doing at the level of government or what. So we are quite usually living in the monastery.

Q: But the speakers, the loud speakers morning and night?

00:30:00

#23B: Yes, three hours in the morning and three hours in the evening. It was really...

Q: Imposing.

#23B: Yes.

Q: How could you study and meditate with that noise?

#23B: Yes, very difficult. The top of the noise...tried to make it audible to everyone, so it is very loud. Then at many places, I think 5-6 houses in between, there will...you will find one loudspeaker.

Q: Did the monastery officials, do you know if they ever complained to the Chinese and said the noise is bothering monastic life?

#23B: No, monasteries are far away from the Lhasa city and it is only for the city people. I don't know whether they complained or not but when we go to Lhasa, we have to go to Lhasa twice in a year, one is the Monlam Festival 'Prayer Festival' and the other is the Tsogchu Festival. I never joined Tsogchu Festival but Monlam Festival is compulsory for everyone. At that time we feel very uncomfortable.

Q: When you said there was no news inside the monastery, was that because there wasn't an interest in it or just because there was no way to get news?

00:31:33

#23B: I think that is the cultural, the system. The monks never bothered what is happening in political or social level. They are just content with their studies in the monasteries. And what is going on in the world, they have no concern.

Q: They had other interests.

#23B: Other interests and they are living in a different world.

Q: Yes, I understand. When did things begin to really change for you because of the Chinese presence? What started to happen that created more havoc?

#23B: Increase of population, Chinese population...

Q: Yeah?

#23B: Increase of Chinese population means 80% military personnel, just 20% civil workers or some other Chinese businessmen; also they are very few. Due to that increase, for the common people one visible problem is inflation, the increase of cost. All commodities, the butter or the tea or whatever the daily usage of the people, they become very costly, which makes the people...which makes the Chinese persons more unpopular.

00:33:11

Apart from that the Tibetan Government is functioning as usual, there's not much disturbance. Of course, the two regents Lukhang and Lobsang Tashi, these two have to be removed due to Chinese pressure. This was one visible [change]. Otherwise, the things are going...monasteries or the government businesses are going...

Q: Functioning...

#23B: Functioning quite usually. When it was 1954-55 His Holiness has to go to Beijing to attend the National Congress. When His Holiness left Tibet people felt very unhappy. There are so many doubts, when he will come back, how he will come back and the roads are not good and it's a very long journey. So that was...that little bit shake the Tibetan people, but then next year he come back and people become again normal.

Then in '56 he went to India and at that time people did not feel much uneasiness. So the real uneasiness feeling was sometime in 1957 and '58 because '56-'57, the uprising in Kham become more visible and there are armed resistance and then 1958 in Central [Tibet] also. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] armed resistance was established in the south of Tibet. And we hear sometimes the news a little bit about that. And that time people seems to be quite intense but until 10th March of 1959, in spite of little tense and His Holiness' security arrangements are much upgraded. Apart from that there's not much...

Q: Concern?

00:35:51

#23B: ...not much unusual. Concerns were there but things are moving usually. Just before the 10th March, Monlam Festival was concluded and in that Monlam Festival, His Holiness was giving the Geshe Lharampa 'the highest of the four grades of *geshe*' examination which is a very, very important and unique event and everything went very smoothly. We only see, can visualize armed Chinese military personnel, truckloads are moving around. We don't know where they are going to, but sometimes going and sometimes coming. This is not very soothing to your eyes. Apart from that there's not much difference; the things are going usually. The Monlam Festival was completed; His Holiness went back to Norbulingka, and everything was smooth.

On the 10th March morning, we heard that His Holiness had been invited to the Chinese Military Camp and instructed not to carry his personal security people there, and then uprising of the civilians in Lhasa to request His Holiness not to go to the Chinese Military Camp. And if His Holiness might go there, he might be taken away. So this was some information or apprehension both and you might have read in His Holiness' books and many other accounts are there.

Q: Yes.

00:37:41

#23B: So that morning completely, the things are changed completely. Then [from] 10th March to 21st March, the 11 days were, of course, very, very tense; so much tense. Then Chinese also very visibly moving the weaponries and...

Q: Artillery?

#23B: Yes, artilleries and then they are preparing for the bombardment. And then it was midnight of 20th and 21st. I was just went in bed and I think few minutes I slept and I heard this bombardment. Some of my other friends are not yet go to sleep. Then the whole day of 21st was bombardment and Norbulingka was destroyed, Potala was damaged partially,

Sera Monastery was damaged quite extensively. Drepung Monastery, my monastery only two bombshells were exploded near the monastery, but the monastery was not damaged. So that day we escaped.

Q: That very day.

#23B: Yes, that very day.

Q: How did you do that?

00:39:18

#23B: Seeing the damage of Norbulingka, Potala and Sera Monastery, [there was] a sense of insecurity living in the monastery. And then we have the authentic information that His Holiness is not in the Norbulingka and he has already left to the south. So with these two—one, the fear of bombardment and secondly His Holiness is no more there—we should go on that direction and don't know where to go, how to go, but I think it is just spontaneous and then people looking [at] each other. There are many monks going in one direction and the other monks also joined, by this way. Of course, there are many monks who refused to go out. They remained in the...but I think almost 60% of the monks have escaped on that day.

Q: Who did you travel with?

#23B: First I requested to my teacher who is very old, asked him to leave the monastery and I told him, "I am going and you should also go." We only say that we should go to the south, south of Tibet where the Khampa resistance group was there. There is no Chinese military presence and also His Holiness went that side. So this much we knew. Then I joined my other teacher, who is younger than the older teacher, and we come together. One night we stayed in the caves at the backside of Drepung Monastery. The next morning we saw all the monks are going up side and going behind the mountain. So we all joined.

Q: You joined them.

#23B: Yes.

Q: What kind of provisions did you carry?

#23B: What kind of ...?

Q: Did you carry any food, any clothing with you?

00:41:43

#23B: No, not much clothing. We carried sufficient *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and then some tea or some butter, which maybe sufficient for 3-4 days. We cannot carry much in weight because we have to move.

Q: Were you moving on foot or on horseback?

#23B: On foot.

Q: Moving on foot.

#23B: We were moving on foot for about two days and then we reached the border of the south where the Khampa resistance were in occupation. Then I got a horse and we are two people. I did not mount on the horse but the horse is for our luggage. So we become very easy, yes, to move. The horse carries two persons' whole luggage and both of us free to move.

Q: What was in your heart as you made that journey away from your monastery and Lhasa?

00:42:57

#23B: In the first 2-3 days there is not much emotions, feelings. It was a kind of...

Q: Shock?

#23B: A kind of shock, not knowing what to do and not knowing where to go, but not to stay in the monastery and looking at each other. Many people going in one direction and we followed them. Then after a few days we have a heavy heart because of the...because of the disintegration of the monasteries, which are the centers of the Buddha dharma, and which is very difficult to reestablish on one hand, and on the other hand we have the news that His Holiness and his two tutors, all three are safe and they are able to go much beyond the Chinese military's reach. So this was a kind of confidence and then we follow.

Q: A relief.

#23B: Yes, a relief.

Q: A relief in spite of the sadness.

#23B: Yes, yes.

Q: Were you worried that the monasteries were going to be bombed, destroyed by artillery fire and all the manuscripts and everything be destroyed?

00:44:30

#23B: Yes, that fear was there, that fear was very much there.

Q: What about, I know you had to travel lightly, but was there any way you attempted to bring out any particular manuscript or document or...?

#23B: No.

Q: Nothing.

#23B: No.

Q: You had to leave it all.

#23B: Yes. I only carry a very small book of two root texts, which is called *Abhisamaya Alankara* ‘Ornament of Realization [by Maitreya]’ and *Madhyamaka Avatara* ‘Introduction to the Middle Way,’ which are very important. That was handy and it can be put in the pocket. So from Tibet originally I carry only that, nothing else.

Q: And your heart.

#23B: [Laughs] Of course, yes.

Q: And your love of the dharma.

#23B: Right. Yes.

Q: You got to carry that with you.

#23B: Yes.

Q: As you said you had to then begin again. How long did that journey take before you reached safety?

00:45:33

#23B: We continuously traveled day and night for about...The 22nd whole day, 22nd whole night and 23rd a break and 24th whole day and night. And we reached Lhodak that is under the Khampa Chushi Gangdrug Resistance Movement’s control. We feel safe there and there we stayed for about a week. And then again we have to run in the night because we heard that Chinese military is approaching.

From there one night was quite difficult. It was snowing and we lost the way and the whole night we journeyed. We traveled and in the morning we reached Tsona. Tsona is almost the border. Then one day we rested and that night we again come the whole night and then we cross the pass. The next morning, I think it is sometime end of March, I do not remember the day.

Q: Something like that.

#23B: And then we reached the Indian border. [Smiles]

Q: I can only imagine how painful it was to leave but what kind of prayers were in your heart? Can you remember what you were hoping and praying for?

#23B: There are few concerns in our mind. The first and foremost concern is the safety of His Holiness and his two tutors. All three were root teachers to all of us. So that is our first concern, and second concern is the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha dharma, which has

been a very much a living tradition in the monasteries. When the monasteries are abruptly disturbed, that tradition is going to be very much damaged. That is why as soon as we reached India, in the refugee camps the first thing the monks did was try to continue their studies and then continue the monastic rituals, which are necessary to remain as a monastery.

So in Missamari, I very much remember we had the fortnightly rituals of monastic and we continued to study, tried to study and debate. I think for the monks—I don't know for the lay people—for the monks and particularly for the monks who are studying in the monasteries, their great concern was how to keep the study alive.

Q: I think, Rinpoche-*la*, you have helped keep history alive today with your story.

#23B: Thank you.

Q: And for sharing how essential and important the dharma was...

#23B: Right.

Q: ...because that was the heart you brought from Tibet. And I hope that you feel the new beginning that the monks have had, that we have not lost too much.

#23B: Now you can see how much is revived here. This is evident.

Q: Do you feel satisfied with the revival?

#23B: Yes, yes. I need not explain that [as] you can see for yourself. [Laughs]

Q: I do see.

#23B: Thank you.

Q: We have one... We're very honored to record your story and thank you for your participation.

#23B: Most welcome.

Q: May we ask for one moment to take one picture for the project?

#23B: Oh, yes.

Q: Thank you. That would be very nice.

END OF INTERVIEW