

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #24 – Kalsang Yangchen
June 30, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #24
2. Interviewee: Kalsang Yangchen
3. Age: 78
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Miling
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 30, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 74, Old Camp No. 1, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 40 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Kalsang Yangchen played tug-of-war and wrestled with boys as a child, but most of the time she was busy with household chores. After she married a lama from the *Ngagpa* tradition, she traveled to pilgrimage sites, and received the *Kalachakra* blessing given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Norbulingka Palace.

Kalsang Yangchen's husband was a traditional doctor as well as a *Ngagpa*, who are believed to possess special tantric powers, such as controlling rainfall, taming and vanquishing souls which have risen after their death, and curing mental and physical illness. Kalsang Yangchen describes a few of these practices in detail.

Kalsang Yangchen's husband joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force and shot a Chinese army leader. To avenge their leader's death the Chinese planned to capture and disembowel Kalsang Yangchen if they could not find her husband. After the Dalai Lama escaped to India, the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerillas began to flee and took Kalsang Yangchen with them. She was separated from her husband, who went off to battle the Chinese again, and she continued on to India. She was later reunited with her husband in Missamari.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, religious festivals, *Ngagpa* tradition, life under Chinese rule, *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas, Chinese oppression, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #24, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Question: So first of all, we'd like to ask Kalsang-*la* about her childhood in Kham and in India too and if she could talk to us about her village, first of all. What did her village look like? Can she describe it?

Interviewee #24: As a young child, what should I talk about? The way we played? When we were little children in Kongpo, we used to play hacky-sack. Then we played with small balls or sort of toy vehicles. Other than that, we didn't have much time to play because our parents were farmers and very busy.

Q: What are like the happiest memories of her childhood?

#24: The happiest time was when we had the tug-of-war. The boys would stand on one side and the girls on the other side. Then we pulled at the rope. We played this a lot. The winner would be given a present, while the loser got nothing. That was a game we played.

Q: Did the girls ever win this game?

#24: Yes, the girls did win. The girls were very arrogant and they won.

Q: I just want to ask her a little more about this tug-of-war. How many kids on either side of the rope and what was the rope made of?

#24: There were 10 on either side and twenty in all. The rope was the general one which we used at that time. It was made of *sopam* [a plant which was skinned] and woven and looked like the ones we use here.

Q: Was it made of wool?

#24: It wasn't made of wool. It was made of *sopam*. It was just like the ones we use here, if you know. In the middle of the rope, a knot was made and a *khata* 'ceremonial scarf' tied to it. A line was drawn on either side and in the center of the ground [gestures]. You started

pulling and the loser would cross over the line and come to this side. If you were the winner, you did not go over there.

Q: What other games did she play?

#24: Another one was wrestling. During *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year,' the people would sit in a circle and one man and a woman wrestled in the ring. There would be a lot of gifts. Gifts were walnuts, apricots, apples, and pears; all of which were placed there and a man and a woman wrestled. If the woman won the game, the fruits were distributed to all the women in the audience. If the man was the winner, all the men who sat on one side would get the fruits. We did a lot of wrestling.

Q: I never heard of this before. When they wrestled, did they wear just the normal clothing or what did they wear?

#24: Just the normal clothing was worn. It must be good and neat. One would hold here [points to waist area] and the other would hold here [points behind the back at waist]. You couldn't hold the body. One held the waistband here [front] and the other held it here [back]. Then you wrestled. The loser would crash to the ground. The area was laid with stones.

Q: And then did they kind of push them out of a certain area?

#24: You didn't have to push one outside an area. It was just the show of strength. There were no lines drawn on the ground.

Q: Did she ever participate in this or any members of her family?

#24: I used to, but my late older sister never played such games. She wouldn't wrestle nor take part in any other game. I have participated in many.

Q: She is very strong?

#24: I was strong. When I wrestled with the men, I was the winner. If it was against other girls, I might lose.

Q: I'm curious about this. I never heard about the wrestling between men and women before. So was there a lot of equal feeling between men and women in your region?

#24: We played like equals. The girls would stand in a line here and the boys would stand in a line there. There was a man, who pulled the hand of one of the girls from among the group and the hand of a boy from among the boys. Then they had to play without saying that they couldn't.

Q: Was everybody cheering and there was a lot of excitement about this?

#24: There was a lot of cheering, just like we do here during a football match. In foreign countries, people cheer and wave flags—just like that, there was a lot of cheering. The women would scream, "Don't lose!" and the men would shout, "Come on! Stronger! Stronger! Stronger!"

Q: How many people lived with her in her house when she was a child?

#24: Now my family members are dead. There were 10 family members and four are living now while the rest are dead.

Q: Did she live with her grandparents?

#24: Yes, including my grandparents and my siblings, we were 10 in the family.

Q: Was there a strict division of labor in the household with the men and the women? Did everyone sort of share the work equally or did the women always do the cooking and gathered the wood? Were there different roles for different sexes?

#24: After eating our dinner, either the father or the mother would divide the work for the next day. Every morning there was a custom of feeding warm *chang* 'home-brewed beer' to the older children. We got up early in the morning, drank that and started on the work that was proportioned the night before. We didn't have to ask the parents again. Each one did his own work.

Q: They had warm *chang* for breakfast?

#24: Our mother gave us warm *chang* in the morning. The night earlier our father would have told each of us, "You go to the field. You go to cut wood." So after we drank the *chang* in the morning, there was no need to talk, we went on to our work.

Q: Did the women always do the cooking?

#24: The cooking was done by the mother.

Q: Was her mother a good cook?

#24: She cooked well. The mother had to cook for all the people, even those who worked for the family outside [in the fields].

Q: What was Kalsang-*la*'s favorite thing to eat as a child? Maybe something she did not get very often?

#24: The most delicious food was *momo* 'dumplings.' [Laughs]

Q: How often would she be able to have *momo*?

#24: We made a lot of it, more than enough for the family. It wasn't made very often, maybe once in four or five days.

Q: What kind of work did she do in the field? Was she planting, or what was the kind of agriculture?

#24: Should I start from when we sowed? Just before we began the sowing, the most fortunate child of the family was taken to the field and incense was burned and prayers were offered. The ploughing was done by the *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow.' The women scattered the seeds. The children dragged a stone across, while the mother scattered the seeds.

Q: When she said the most fortunate one in the family, is that the person who they felt had good karma? Is that why they were chosen?

#24: After a child was born and if the family saw good progress, like if the cows gave good milk, if the horses gave birth to female foals, if the crops grew well or if the family saw such progress, the child was considered most fortunate.

Q: What kind of education did she get?

#24: There was no opportunity for any education.

Q: Did she get any education in dharma?

#24: Yes, religious education. There was a big monastery where we practiced retreat. We did a lot of dharma practice. We made offerings and had lamas and monks come over to say prayers. We went to the monasteries and did a lot of dharma practice. People paid a lot of attention to religion.

Q: Who did she most learn about dharma from? Was it somebody in her family who taught her as a young child? Who is the person she most learned about dharma from?

#24: Regarding religion, in our region of Kongpo we had the recluse, who lived in retreat. When we had sicknesses in the family, we invited monks from the Nyingma and Sakya sects into our homes. If we wanted to make offerings, at times a horse complete with saddle or an offering of tea for everyone, these were made to the monasteries.

Q: Did you have a lama from whom you learned or received teachings?

#24: I did not actually learn as such, but we had many lamas come. Whether they were from the Nyingma, Gelug or Sakya sects, we received teachings from them. We received teachings equally from all.

Q: When she would receive the teachings, she would go to their *gonpa* 'monastery' and then they would give teachings to a group of people? Is that how it was?

#24: We went to the monasteries. If they were Nyingma or Sakya lamas, if requested they would come to our homes. The Gelug Monastery was very large, so we had to go there as they did not come to our homes.

Q: Can she describe some of the teachings, that she received as a young girl, that she remembers?

#24: The teachings that I heard as a young girl were that we should not commit any sin, recite the *mani* and *benzaguru*. One should practice one's religion well and not commit sin. One should practice retreat, which would prevent one from going to hell upon death. There are the hot hell and the cold hell. The hot hell is like being immersed in boiling water and the cold hell is similar to cold ice. Keeping these in mind, one should practice religion well.

Q: Was there a morning routine of practice in her household? Did they have a prayer room and was there a routine when her parents and her relatives would do practice in the morning? What kind of practice did they do?

#24: We gathered in the evening to recite the *Dolma* prayers and in the morning we recited the *kyabdo*.

Q: How long did that take?

#24: In the evening we recited for about an hour, but in the morning just half an hour because there was no time.

Q: Did she ever go on pilgrimage when she was young?

#24: I have been on pilgrimage. I went to Tsari Rongkor. I have been to Yiru Bakor, which is a pilgrim site in Tsang. We went through and reached Lhasa. I went to Lhasa when His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave the *Kalachakra* [initiation]. There is no place that I have not been to.

Q: In Lhasa? What year was that?

#24: It was when the *Chushi Gangdrug* Resistance Force constructed the Golden Throne. I do not know the year. The *Kalachakra* was given when the Golden Throne was constructed. The following year we lost our country.

Q: This was the last *Kalachakra* His Holiness gave in Tibet. I have never spoken to anyone who went to this last *Kalachakra* that His Holiness gave in Tibet, so I would really love to hear as much as possible that she can remember about this event because it's truly a historic event. First of all, how long did it take for her family to travel to Lhasa and how did they travel there?

#24: You couldn't come to Lhasa from Miling. We first went on horseback from Miling to Nyitri, which took two days. From Nyitri we came by truck for one-and-a-half days. We heard that a smaller vehicle would take just one day.

Q: When she arrived, what did she think about Lhasa and seeing the Potala for the first time? Can she describe the passions and the liveliness of the city? What she thought?

#24: On my first glimpse of Lhasa, I thought the place where His Holiness the Dalai Lama lived was like heaven. I thought it was very grand and everything was available.

Q: How old was she?

#24: I was 25 years old.

Q: Where was the *Kalachakra* given? What part of the city?

#24: It was given at Norbulingka.

Q: Outside?

#24: Norbulingka was located toward one side of Lhasa. It was given inside the Norbulingka Palace.

Q: So can she describe what that was like, all the people that she saw, how many there were what the atmosphere was like and obviously what it was like when they all saw His Holiness?

#24: There were a huge number of people. Norbulingka was filled to the brim and people were sitting outside. There were loudspeakers placed outside for the people. Many people were sitting outside because Norbulingka was crowded inside. On the last day, His Holiness said that he was bestowing the *Tsedup Wang* 'Initiation for Long Life' for the people who had come from afar. Also, that the people of Lhasa should not rush and let those who have come from afar receive the initiation, so we received the *Tsedup Wang* on the last day.

Q: What is that?

#24: It is said that if you receive more *Tsedup Wang*, your life would be lengthened.

Q: Can she describe what receiving the *Kalachakra* initiation means for Tibetans? Can she describe some of it to one who doesn't know what the significance is?

#24: If you receive the *Kalachakra* initiation, you will have a long life in the present birth and it would prevent you from going to hell in the next life. All Tibetans who receive it have this thought in mind and His Holiness would bestow the same consideration on us; that we should not face anything bad in the next birth, that we should have success and not face misfortune in this birth.

Q: Has she received *Kalachakra* since, in India?

#24: In India I received the first *Kalachakra* here at the palace. Then I received the *Kalachakra* at Dorjiden [Bodh Gaya in Bihar, India].

Q: So she must be very protected from hell.

#24: Yes, I am.

Q: She was 25 years old at this time. Was she already married?

#24: I was married.

Q: Can she tell us about her wedding?

#24: As my husband was a lama, we could not have the usual ceremony of garlanding with *khata*.

Q: But he wasn't a monk, he was a teacher, right?

#24: He was dressed in the monk's robes. He was from the *Ngagpa* 'Tantric Buddhist' tradition, which allows them to take a wife as well as practice religion. In times when people fell ill, they [the *Ngagpa*] either prayed or through *ngag* 'Tantric mantras' cured them.

Q: But it was still not considered traditional? Why was it that they couldn't have the wedding ceremony?

#24: Since he was in monk's robes, one couldn't garland him with a *khata*.

Q: I'm assuming this was not an arranged marriage?

#24: The friends and relatives from my husband's side approached my family for my hand in marriage.

Q: Did she get a chance to meet him and get to know him before her wedding day?

#24: No, we did not.

Q: That was the first time she'd seen him, on her wedding day?

#24: I had seen him once before, but had not spoken to him. It was the custom in Tibet, that you went wherever your parents arranged your marriage, irrespective of whether you had seen the man or the man had seen the woman. You could not voice your likes or dislikes. There was nothing to talk about, as it was within your parents' power.

Q: Did she feel that they made a good choice?

#24: I thought they had made a good choice. As a young girl I was very obedient to my parents and never talked back at them. I performed all the tasks that they set me for and never refused. I was obedient and never said no to them.

Q: So this was another example of that. How old was she when she got married?

#24: I can't remember.

Q: But it was before you went to Lhasa?

#24: It was before that.

Q: How many years before you went for the *Kalachakra*?

#24: Perhaps about four years went by.

Q: Can she say anything about the actual ceremony and what happened because a lot of people in exile, a lot of Tibetans, don't get married in the same traditional ways? What was the traditional ceremony like?

#24: My family had to give me a share and I was provided with six boxes full. There were summer clothes and winter clothes. In Kongpo it was very cold during winter and it snowed. Then they gave me horses.

Q: They gave you horses?

#24: They gave me horses and sheep.

Q: So she moved into her husband's family?

#24: Yes, that is right.

Q: Was that a difficult adjustment living with a whole new family? Did she miss her family?

#24: When I was living with my parents, they took all the responsibilities. Now here, I had to do the cooking and take care of the many visitors for my husband. For about a month, I found it difficult. I felt incapable, but after that I had no problems.

Q: How far away was it from the house where she grew up?

#24: If you rode a horse, it took you one day.

Q: When she said a lot of visitors came to see her husband, what did he do? Why did he have so many visitors?

#24: My husband was practicing as a doctor.

Q: With traditional Tibetan medicine?

#24: Yes, Tibetan traditional medicine. The medicine would be purchased from Lhasa and we also could find medicinal plants in Kongpo. He used to treat all the people as a doctor.

Q: Lots of people would come to his house for treatment.

#24: Yes, the patients came.

Q: Did she see a lot of people getting cured through traditional medicine?

#24: Many got cured. If someone suffered from headache, he would let out blood and if someone had pain in the lower area, he would let out blood from the leg. He checked pulse and gave medicine.

Q: Did she ever have any ailment that he helped her with?

#24: If I suffered from stomachache or headache, he would give me medicines.

Q: Did she have children?

#24: I have never had children.

Q: When did she start to notice the Chinese presence in her region? What was her first encounter with the Chinese presence there?

#24: I don't know which year it was because I suffer from hypertension and my memory is not stable. Should I tell you a story about my husband?

Q: First, could you tell us when the first time you heard about the Chinese in Tibet was?

#24: I cannot remember the year. The Chinese had already come to Nyitri before I went for the *Kalachakra* in Lhasa.

Q: How about Miling?

#24: Ada Dhachok was the *U-yon* 'leader appointed by the Chinese' and he came there for short visits, but not many Chinese came there.

Q: Did life in her village change at all because of the Chinese being around or did life not really change too much?

#24: There was a change when the Chinese came because they invited us often saying that they were holding parties. During these parties, they questioned us a lot. They asked questions like, "Are you happy or not that we have come to Tibet? Is it beneficial or not?" To this we replied, "At the moment, you have not helped us in anyway. When you extend help, we will say you did and if you didn't, we will speak the truth. Just because you asked us, we will not flatter you by saying that you have helped us when you haven't. When you are helpful we will say so. And if you are not, we will say you are not. As of now, you are not helping us."

Q: At that point the Chinese weren't doing any...they weren't actually helping any of the villagers?

#24: They were not helping.

Q: Was she one of the people who were questioned?

#24: The questions they asked me were about my husband. My husband had fought along with the *Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force at Kongpo Mey—besides that they hadn't questioned me earlier.

Q: Did many of the men from her village go to join the resistance?

#24: When the call was given to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*, one man from each house went.

Q: When you say the call, would people actually come to their house and try to recruit people from the household?

#24: The leader of the force told the administrator who, in turn gave the call to the people. They [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] didn't have to come to each door.

Q: How did she feel about that? It must have been very difficult for her. Did she ask her husband not to go? Was she very supportive of him going?

#24: The *Chushi Gangdrug* had come to Kongpo in order to fight the Chinese. One day there was a meeting at Miling. We were told to attend the meeting and so I went. After the meeting was over and people were dispersing, I was told to stay back. I was scared as to what they were going to do to me.

Q: You were called by the Chinese?

#24: Yes, by the Chinese and the *U-yon*. A person from each house was told to attend the meeting.

Q: At that time your husband was already in the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#24: He had already left to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*, though he hadn't reached there yet. He had already left from our village. I attended the meeting and at the end when everyone got up to leave, I did, too. But they said I was to stay back. I wondered what they were going to do. They asked me, "Where is your husband?" I replied, "I don't know where he is. Though he is my husband, he never told me where he was going. He left for Nepa in upper Kongpo." Then they said, "Tomorrow you have to call him back. He will not be killed nor tried by law, so you have to go tomorrow to call him back. Then when you are back, inform us through the *U-yon*." I had to accept and left along with a companion.

When we reached Kyimdhong, my husband had left a note saying that he was going to Diguthang to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I thought it was good that he had left for Diguthang because it would do him no good to be arrested by the Chinese. They had told me, "We want to question your husband, not kill him. There is no one in the village who has spoken against him. We want to question him, so you must ask him to come back. Nobody in Kongpo has said anything against him; in fact many said that he has been very helpful. However we want to meet him face-to-face, so you must go and ask him to come back."

When I went, I was not able to meet him. He had left a note which said that he was going to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Diguthang and that we were not to worry. I thought it was good that he had left to join the army. If he were to meet the Chinese face-to-face, they would do something dreadful to him rather than good.

Q: What happened then?

#24: Then later the Chinese came to lower Kongpo and the *Chushi Gangdrug* also came there and they fought a battle. There was a hill on the top of which were three Chinese and their leader had planted a flag. When they saw it, my husband had said, "That one who is planting the flag must be a leader. You just watch. I am going to shoot him." Saying this he fired and shot dead the one who had planted the flag.

They [Chinese] saw this through their binoculars and then they found out that it was Lama Chodak Gyamtso [husband of interviewee] who'd killed their leader. When this happened, they [the Chinese] said it would be fine even if they could capture the wife and that once the wife was caught, she should be disemboweled and the intestines stretched from the trees.

Then word came from Lhasa that Lhasa was lost, so everyone fled towards India. I had to flee along with the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas. Their leaders said I would not be left behind. I didn't have time to change my dress or carry anything. My father gave me a horse. I touched foreheads with my father and mother and came away with the *Chushi Gangdrug*. When we arrived at Kyimdhong, we saw that they were pursuing us with guns; there was fighting and airplanes flying over us. It was impossible for me to go forward and so I rented a house and stayed here. The guerillas went towards Sanga Choeling to fight.

[A break and then interview resumes]

Q: Where we left off, she had just met up with the *Chushi Gangdrug*. If she could describe in as much detail as she could remember, what it was like when she met up with them and what happened then?

#24: When we escaped from Kongpo, there was a place called Yaripang. When you looked up, it was a mountain and when you looked down, it was water and there was only one path in the middle. The Chinese, after replenishing their food stock at Kongpo pursued the *Chushi Gangdrug* and there was a big battle. It was said that the *Chushi Gangdrug* killed about 2,000 Chinese during this battle.

Q: Where was the mountain?

#24: It was called Yaripang. It was a place near Kyimdhong. The mountain was called Yaripang. There was no way to climb up because it was rocky and down below it was a river. At the middle of the mountain was only one path. Here the *Chushi Gangdrug* killed 2,000 Chinese and it used to be said so in Kongpo. They [the Chinese] were not able to kill any from the other side.

Q: The *Chushi Gangdrug*, were they traveling with their families? Were there children with them? Were there older people there? Or was it all young men soldiers?

#24: There were only the fighters. When they fled, their family members were not with them. After the fighting, the people of Kongpo thought the Chinese would cause them suffering and so it was partly thanks to the *Chushi Gangdrug* that those people of Kongpo were able to reach India.

Q: Were there any women who were also fighting?

#24: There might be a few women who were fighting, but I did not see any.

Q: Can she describe her experiences what happened to her during that time and her husband?

#24: When we were fleeing and had reached Kyimdhong—after they [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] had fought many battles—my husband said that I should not proceed further. He knew a family in Kyimdhong and asked me to stay with them. He said that he would enquire about me from time to time. I didn't know the family, but my husband did and so I stayed there.

After about a month, my parents sent a messenger with this message, "Do not stay there. They know that you are there. If they capture you they are bound to kill you. They will kill you in a most horrible way. They have said that they will disembowel you in Miling. They say that you have escaped with Lama Chodak Gyamtso, who is the killer of their leader, and that it would suffice if they could kill his wife."

I had to cross the mountain pass called Longla. It was full of snow and I sank up to here [gestures at chest level]. I thought it was better to die in the snow than be killed. Taking the

messenger with me, I crossed the snowy pass. We could cross the pass only when dusk fell. It was a very high, snowy mountain. When I pulled one foot up, the other sank in. In this way, we reached Nepa. I stayed at Nepa for one month.

Then I learned that there were Indians soldiers welcoming people who gave themselves up to them. I thought the Chinese would cause me more suffering and so I went further and came to where the Indian soldiers were stationed.

Q: Where is Nepa?

#24: It is close to Kongpo.

Q: Was it at the Indian border?

#24: We had not reached the Indian border. If you crossed the mountain pass, then you were at the Indian border. There were Indian soldiers at the border.

Q: Your husband did not allow you to stay with the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#24: My husband was with the *Chushi Gangdrug* and I did not meet him until Missamari. We were separated. My husband had come from Sanga Choeling to India through Tsari. At Tsari, the Indian soldiers said that the airplane transporting their food could not come and said to my husband, "We have heard that you have the power to stop rains. If you can, please stop the rains for one week and we will send you to Dibrugarh by airplane." The people of Tsari who knew about the powers of my husband had told this to the soldiers.

Q: Were all the guerrillas there?

#24: All the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas who escaped had reached Tsari. When they reached Tsari, it was raining hard and the soldiers' food rations were exhausted because the airplanes could not come. They [Indian soldiers] said, "You are said to have power to stop rains. If you can do it, we will send you to Dibrugarh by airplane. You have to stop the rains for one week." So my husband stopped the rains for one week. Then they were able to fly the airplanes and bring food for the soldiers. My husband was then taken to Dibrugarh by flight.

Q: Before she moved to the family, was she the only woman in the group?

#24: I was the only woman. The reason why I was the lone woman was because my husband had killed the [Chinese] leader and if I stayed back, I would be killed. That was the reason I escaped.

Q: When she was with the *Chushi Gangdrug*, did they do prayers before they went into battle? Was her husband one of the people, if he led the prayers because he was a *Ngagpa*?

#24: Where was the time to say prayers when we could hear the sound of the guns and bombs and the Chinese pursuing us? They stopped for tea and food, but there was no time to say prayers.

Q: What was it like when she met up with her husband again, assuming she must have thought probably she was never going to see him again? What was that reunion like?

#24: I never thought I would see him because the leader, who my husband killed in Kongpo, was wrapped in a cloth. All the people of Kongpo were asked to line up at Nyitri and were told that they would be shown the body of Lama Chodak Gyamtso [interviewee's husband], who had been killed. When the Chinese ordered the people to assemble and line up, they had to do so. The people felt very sad that such a thing had happened. The corpse of the leader was wrapped in white cloth and was to be taken to China. They said that it was the body of Lama Chodak Gyamtso. The people saw them take the corpse from the vehicle and lay it on the ground. Though the people felt very sad, they couldn't express it and then they [the Chinese] took the corpse and left.

Q: The people thought the corpse was Lama Chodak Gyamtso's?

#24: They [Chinese] claimed that it was the body of Lama Chodak Gyamtso whom they had killed. In fact it was the body of the person Lama Chodak Gyamtso had killed. The body was later taken to China in an airplane.

Q: So they were really interested in capturing her husband. Had he been injured at all?

#24: He was not injured. His cousin who was fighting alongside him had his *chupa* 'Tibetan coat' flared by gunshots. My husband was not hit.

Q: Did her husband, and the other men who went into battle, did they wear a kind of talisman and things to protect them? Did they believe they had protection from the deities and can she describe what talismans they used?

#24: Yes, they had talismans. If they didn't have good amulets and talismans, they would be hit by the bullets. My husband was not hit by bullets because he had a good talisman.

Q: Did he ever have any conflict in his mind between being a Buddhist and believing in non-violence and fighting for the resistance? Was there ever any conflict in his mind about that?

#24: The Chinese attacked and killed people to destroy the Buddha dharma. My husband had practiced meditation and retreat for years, but when the Chinese were destroying the Tibetans, invading our land over which they had no rights and ready to harm His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it would be difficult to feel compassion for them when you fought or killed them.

Q: For people, who don't know, many people don't know and even Tibetans don't know what a *Ngagpa* is. Can she describe this particular tradition, *Ngagpa* tradition, and anything that she can tell us about that?

#24: *Ngagpa* have the power to stop rain or to bring about rain. These days the times have changed and it does not happen. In the earlier days if a person died with many thoughts in his mind, his corpse would rise up. There were many cases of the dead who rose in Tibet. The people would request my husband to come saying that a corpse had risen. The corpse would be there sitting by the fireplace. At the time of its death, it might have been very arrogant and the blood pressure had shot up, so it rose with its eyes and mouth open. When that happened my husband would take the *kangling* [a religious instrument made from shinbone] and slap the corpse. He would sit on the corpse and perform the *choe* 'cutting-off' ritual [severing the root of cyclic existence]. The blood from the inside of the corpse would come out and then it would become a real corpse. He had powers and such were the stories of the *Ngagpa*.

Q: Did she believe her husband was born with this power or is that something that he learned and he had developed through training?

#24: Right from the start. He came from Kham at the age of 25 years. He was a reincarnate lama called the Jongkong Tulku. His Holiness the Palyul Rinpoche sent him to Hong Kong because of his vast practice and also because he was a reincarnate lama. He visits me only occasionally and is mostly at the monastery.

Q: The prayers he would do to overcome the corpse, is that to help the being kind of move through the *Bardo*'in-between state?' To kind of move their conscious spirit along into the next life? Is that the purpose of it?

#24: He would help the dead to pass along because it had died with a lot of anger. When the *choe* ritual was performed and he sat on the corpse, it turned into a real corpse. Once that happened, it would find its own way.

Q: Has she ever witnessed her husband doing this?

#24: I have not witnessed. My husband had a lot of practice and women were not allowed. The other people tell me that such things happened. I could not follow my husband when he went.

Q: What is the reason for women not allowed?

#24: There are many types of the *choe* ritual. When the *choe* was performed near a corpse, women didn't go. However, if there was a misfortune or sickness, then anyone could attend when the *choe* was performed.

Q: Does she know why?

#24: I think there was no custom for a woman to go to a corpse and watch it. Women never did that.

Q: When her husband came to India and the Indian army asked him to perform the ceremony to stop the rain and he stopped the rain. Did she see him do this ceremony and if so, could she describe what he did?

#24: I was not there with him because the guerillas went on to Sanga Choeling and they were pursued by the Chinese, artilleries were fired and airplanes flying overhead. I was left with a family. When I was there, my parents sent me a message through a messenger saying, "They know that you are living at Kyimdhong. You have to escape from there. If you are captured, they will disembowel you and stretch your intestines and hang them on the trees. You will be killed. This is what we heard from Thongsu Tashi. You have to escape." So though there was a thick blanket of snow reaching up to the waist, I thought dying in the snow was better than being killed, so that's how I made my escape to another country.

Q: Had she ever seen him do that before?

#24: I have seen that in my village. In Kongpo when we did not have rain, it was requested of him to bring rain and if required to be stopped, he was requested to do so. He would go near a water spring where a tent was put up. My husband would sit in the tent. He would take along with him an assistant who should be of fine birth, not just anybody. He would burn incenses and perform the cleansing and other rituals. Then the rains would fall. That was how it was done in my village.

Q: Can she describe a little bit of what he does during the ceremony or what instruments he uses and the movements he does? Can she describe any of that?

#24: He has scriptures to which he refers. My husband has years of religious practice behind him and I would not be able to talk about what goes on within his mind when he contemplates on bringing about rain. He doesn't offer information nor has anyone questioned him about it. He would tell us to practice the dharma and the consequences of sin if we did not follow our religion and also taught us the paths to follow. He never told us about bringing on rain or stopping it.

Q: Did he have any religious instruments in his hands when he performed the ritual?

#24: Yes, he had the bell and *dorji* 'lightning bolt ritual instrument' and the scriptures.

Q: Did he perform sitting down or standing up?

#24: He sat down. The assistant would burn the incense. In some clean water, a little milk was added and when instructed, the assistant would sprinkle this mixture around the water spring. After sometime, thunder rolled and clouds came. And then it rained.

Q: He was bringing rain in this particular instance. He could bring rain and stop rain. What else could he do?

#24: Besides that he was a doctor.

Q: How long after he did the ceremony did the clouds start forming?

#24: If there were mentally unstable people; for example a son of a rich family in the Philippines became mentally unstable. A Tibetan girl told the family that a relative [interviewee's husband] of hers could cure him, so they invited my husband to the Philippines from Hong Kong.

The boy was very violent, beating and scratching people and had been locked up in a room. So the *choe* ritual was performed again and again and the boy looked as if he was just about to get into a fight. My husband hit him a few times with the *kangling* and asked him to sit down and he obeyed. Then my husband said that they should take the boy along with them when they went to eat in a restaurant. But the family said that they wouldn't be able to control him if he was taken along. My husband held his hand and led him to the restaurant and he ate just as they did.

Q: Has her husband ever asked to do the weather ceremony in India? Has he done this since he's been in exile?

#24: No, he has not done it. A long time back people requested His Holiness the Palyul Rinpoche and he went atop the nearby Bettadapura Hill. The Palyul Rinpoche brought rain twice but none after that. My husband has not done it after coming to India.

Q: Is there any reason he hasn't done this? Was it his choice not to?

#24: In India not many people know that he has the power and he is not one to proclaim it.

Q: I'd like to ask her little more about her life in exile. Is there anything she can tell us what happened after she came to India with her husband, like what did they do after that and before they came to Bylakuppe?

#24: When I came to Missamari, my husband was already there. We were told that we had to go to Dharamsala. On the same train that we were taking to go to Dharamsala, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was on his way to Dharamsala from Pathankot. We had the chance of seeing His Holiness for the first time in India at Pathankot. Then His Holiness went to his Palace in upper Dharamsala.

We lived for about a year at lower Dharamsala. His Holiness then told us, "You should not stay like this. Go to construct roads. I am looking for a place where all the Tibetans can stay together. It would be good if all the Tibetans were together. One cannot spend his whole life on road construction. If you remain in Dharamsala, you get food but no one will give you meat, butter and money. We Tibetans are used to eating meat and butter. So go to

construct roads and you will receive money." So we went as road crew to Kulu Manali. There we were enlisted to go to the Settlement in Bylakuppe.

Q: How long did she work on the road construction work before she came here?

#24: We were about five months on the road construction site.

Q: Is there anything else that we missed about her story that she'd like to share with us?

#24: No, there's nothing more. I would like to say thank you for coming from so far away to work for the cause of Tibet.

Q: I just want to quickly ask her about the dances as I know she was a dancer and maybe she could tell us what kind of dances she did and who did she learn the dances from and what kind of dances did she do as a young girl?

#24: There was no particular person who taught me. We learned it by watching the elders do it. If you sang with the elders, the youngsters would be dancing. We did not have teachers and students like you have here. Whatever dances and songs the elders did, the youngsters learned it automatically.

Q: Did she remember any songs that she danced to? If she could sing one, it would be wonderful.

#24: [Laughs] I cannot sing now because I suffer from hypertension, so even if I sing I don't remember the words. If I begin a song, I don't know the ending.

Q: Can she hum a tune?

#24: [Laughs] You can't sing without words!

Q: We've been asking everyone this question because the Tibetan youngsters today, they don't know Tibet, they have never seen Tibet. So what advice would you give to the younger generation of Tibetans and if they would listen, what would you say?

#24: My advice is that they should carry out all the wishes of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. That is very important. There are certain youngsters who do not listen and the Tibetan Youth Congress and the Tibetan Women's Association should advise them to abide by and carry out the wishes of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I do not have any other advice.

Q: What is the most important thing she thinks that should be preserved about Tibet?

#24: The most important thing is independence.

Q: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW