

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #36 – Thupten
June 28, 2007

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #36
2. Interviewee: Thupten
3. Age: 68
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lhasa
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 28, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Thekchenling Monastery, Old Camp No. 2, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 17 min
12. Interviewer: Martin Newman
13. Interpreter: Lhakpa Tsering
14. Videographer: Tsewang Dorjee
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Thupten's earliest memories of the Chinese are from when he was a monk. He explains how the Chinese befriended the monasteries to gauge the actual power of the monks. He believes the Chinese feared the monks more than the Tibetan Army, which had limited arms and manpower.

Thupten was in Lhasa in March of 1959 and describes the uprising of the Tibetans, who stood united against the Chinese' plot to kidnap His Holiness the Dalai Lama. During the mass uprising of March 10, 1959, a Tibetan was publicly stoned to death at Norbulingka for conspiring with the Chinese to kidnap His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

When the war began in Lhasa, Thupten and many young monks stood guard at the Sera Tseri. After seven days, the monks learned that Lhasa was lost to the Chinese and that His Holiness had left for a foreign country. They began their own escape, walking for over a month and evading the bombs dropped daily by Chinese airplanes. In contrast to his early tranquil days as a monk at Sera Monastery in Tibet, Thupten joined the Indian Army and fought in Bangladesh.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, Norbulingka defense, March 10th Uprising, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #36

Interviewee: Thupten

Age: 68, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Martin Newman

Interview Date: June 28, 2007

Question: Please tell us your name?

Interviewee #36: Thupten.

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

#36: Yes.

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

#36: Okay.

Q: During the interview if you wish to take a break or stop the interview at any time, please let us know.

#36: Okay.

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or discuss something, please tell us.

#36: Okay.

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

#36: No.

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

#36: Okay.

Q: So to start, I would be very interested to know what your life was like as a child in Tibet where you grew up and what kind of things you did as a child?

#36: As a little child, I was a monk at the Sera Monastery, which is very close to Lhasa and Norbulingka and studied the dharma. Later I have been to many places.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#36: My father had died when we were young. There was my mother, an elder brother, myself, and a younger sister. My younger sister is dead and my brother has come here.

Q: How did your mother support the family?

#36: My mother cultivated the land. She had many brothers and sisters. We were her two children. Our father was dead and also the younger sister. My mother's livelihood was agriculture.

Q: Do you remember what kind of games you used to play as a child in your village?

#36: Yes, I remember.

Q: What kind of games were they?

#36: In the monastery we are not allowed to play much, but there were certain times we could play. We used to play ball.

Q: How did you feel about going to the monastery? Did your mother send you there? How did it come about that you went to the monastery?

#36: It was my mother's relative who thought it would be good for me to become a monk.

Q: Did you want to go? Were you happy to go?

#36: Yes, I wanted to become a monk.

Q: How long did you spent in the monastery?

#36: From the age of 8 until 1959. Until I was 19 I was a monk.

Q: What do you think was the most important...What were the most important things that you learnt in your time in the monastery?

#36: I had to work for the monastery, like going to the villages to collect grains and transporting.

Q: Did you think at that time that you would be spending the rest of your life in the monastery?

#36: Yes.

Q: Was life then generally—would you say that it was peaceful?

#36: Life was sort of peaceful. We studied the dharma and went to the villages.

Q: Did you enjoy celebrating any special holidays?

#36: Yes. We used to go to Lhasa and enjoy being by the river, washing clothes.

Q: What did you do there?

#36: When we were small we would play.

Q: What did you play?

#36: All types of children's games. We didn't have many games in Tibet like here.

Q: There you were a monk in Sera Monastery, when did you start to notice that things around you were changing?

#36: As a child my only wish was to learn the scriptures. But later the Chinese came. I knew there would be no happiness, that things would not be good.

Q: When did you first find out that the Chinese were coming? How did you learn that?

#36: We heard that the Chinese were coming because roads were being constructed. When they arrived in Tibet we knew we would have no happiness. They were doing nothing good.

Q: How soon afterward did the Chinese actually come into the area where you lived?

#36: When I was around 12 or 13 years old the Chinese came to Tibet.

Q: Did they come to the monastery? Did you see them? How did you know they were there?

#36: Yes, I saw them.

Q: What did you see when they came?

#36: They are people from outside. Tibetans and Chinese are different, so we knew they were Chinese. First not many Chinese came but later the number increased. In my heart I thought these are people who have come to harm us.

Q: When they came to the monastery, what did they want or what did they do?

#36: First they made offerings to all the monks of the monasteries, in order to assess the number of monks in each monastery. They knew from the offerings the strength of Sera, Drepung, Gaden, and all the monasteries.

Q: So you are saying that at first they did not act badly, they gave money because they were gathering information?

#36: That's right.

Q: Then what happened?

#36: They feared the monks because the monks were single. During Monlam, the great prayer festival in Lhasa when all the monks were gathered, they made offerings to the monks saying it was from the Chinese government. They did this for a few years to learn the monks' strength. They feared the monks.

Q: So you are saying they tried to act like they were friends?

#36: They were not friendly with the monks because they feared the monks. The three monasteries of Sera, Gaden, and Drepung had a huge number of monks. The monastery authorities did not allow the monks to have contact with the Chinese. Because there was not much contact, they made the offerings to assess the number of monks. They feared the monks because they were single. There was only a small army in Tibet, so the Chinese did not fear the army.

Q: But I am saying the Chinese tried to act like they were the friends of the monks?

#36: That was their strategy to find out how they should fight later, how the monks would react in a situation.

Q: Do you know what year this was that this happened?

#36: Maybe in 1954 or 1955.

Q: So for how long a time did the Chinese act friendly?

#36: For around four or five years they acted friendly by making the offerings. They certainly did not consider the monks as friends. It was just to gather information. The Chinese did not like monks and considered monks as bad.

Q: How could you tell they did not like monks?

#36: That is a fact. Monks are single, so the Chinese knew that if they were to fight, Tibet has only a small army and the monk population is large. So they fear the monks. When monks from Sera Monastery went to Lhasa, the Chinese, who were many in Lhasa, did not like them and the monks too did not like the Chinese. The monks would brush against them in the streets and do such things. So if there was anything important happening in Lhasa, monks were not allowed to attend. Later when the Chinese parachuted some people, monks were not permitted.

Q: So they thought the monks could become soldiers and fight against them in the future?

#36: Yes.

Q: So that went on for a few years. When did that change—that their attitude had been friendly? How did you notice that something different was happening?

#36: Some time after the Chinese came, the elders would say that the Chinese were bad; that they had come to occupy Tibet. All the monks did not like the Chinese and always suspected their intentions. We heard a lot of what was happening. Tibet had such a small army and it was the monks that the Chinese feared. Everyone said the Chinese had come to occupy Tibet.

Q: Did you think that was true?

#36: Yes, I thought it was true. The elders and everyone in the monastery said that the coming of the Chinese was very bad. They pretended to like the monks by making offerings, but actually they were covertly trying to assess the strength of the monks. Tibet had a very small army with three divisions—the Kusung, the Dapche, and the police. The strength of Dapche was 1,000; Kusung, 500; and the police, 500. The total strength was only 2,000. The Kusung supplied the personal bodyguards of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The police would remain around the palace of His Holiness.

Q: How many monks were in Sera Monastery at that time?

#36: In Drepung Monastery, 7,700 monks; Sera Monastery, 5,500 monks; and Gaden Monastery, 3,300 monks. That was the figure but it may be a little higher.

Q: When did you notice that the Chinese started to behave differently towards you?

#36: The Chinese came to Tibet in 1954-55 and by around 1957-58 we knew they were bad. Until then they engaged in observing the areas, assessing the number of monks in all the monasteries, which were many, and similar things. They constructed an airfield. If I talk about everything, it will take a long time.

Q: But the attitude of the Chinese who were in your monastery, did it change suddenly? Were one day they were friends and the next they started acting differently?

#36: We knew they were our enemies. Wherever they were, the Chinese would always be finding faults with the monks. They would make complaints to the monastery officials that the monks were misbehaving, like letting the air out of the wheels of their vehicles and cycles and fighting with them. The Chinese would say, "We have planted a good crop of trees in Tibet, but there are a lot of red insects at the roots. So first we have to clear the red insects and only then the trees will flourish." The red insects were compared to the monks.

Q: Please continue telling me what then happened next.

#36: The Chinese said, "In China we have planted a crop of radishes and it has grown extremely well. So we would like to offer a feast for Tibet." Later in 1959 they bombarded Tibet, so that was the feast of radishes that they had spoken about.

Q: Artillery carrot? I don't understand.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In China a lot of carrots [radishes (correct translation)] were grown and instead of offering that to Tibet as the Chinese said they would, they instead attacked Tibet with artillery shells and bombs.

Q: You understood what the Chinese really meant?

#36: Yes, we understood that later. The Chinese had said that they had a bumper radish harvest and that they would give a feast of radishes to Tibet and then they shelled Tibet. They had likened the radishes to the shells.

Q: And at that time you believed them?

#36: I never trusted the Chinese. I was always in fear of them. I would wonder when they would start suppressing us. The elders said that the Chinese were no good. Meetings were constantly being held among the Tibetan officials—the three abbots, the intelligence officers, the aristocrats, and others in Norbulingka—and we knew something was not right. There were some soldiers of the Dapche army who were close to us and they said that something bad was going to happen, but that Tibet cannot be lost as the Tibetan government had a lot of arms and ammunitions.

Q: What were they discussing, as far as you know, what were they discussing in these meetings?

#36: There were people called *u-yons* [leaders appointed by the Chinese] who took letters back and forth and there were also noble families who were paid by the Chinese; besides them there were also some poor monks of the Sera Monastery. Those people would provide all the news about the monasteries and about Lhasa to the Chinese. Those were mostly the poor people.

[Question is repeated.]

#36: Usually there would be meetings at the Tse attended by the Tibetan officials every day, but during that time the abbots of the three great monasteries, the aristocrats, and the intelligence officers were in consultation the whole day and people surmised that it was not a good sign. Their discussions would be about what the Chinese were doing and what was happening to our country. Even among those who attended these meetings, there were Chinese spies among the Tibetan government officials. We lost the war because of those spies.

Q: There were Tibetans who were spies for the Chinese? Is that what you are saying?

#36: Yes, they were spying for the Chinese army.

Q: Did you know they were spying then or did you only learn that afterwards?

#36: At first we did not know that those people were doing that. The Chinese paid many disabled people to gather information about the monasteries and report to them.

Q: If you would continue telling us then what happened? What was the next thing that happened?

#36: Then the war began. Before that the assembly meetings were going on among the officials. It was the time between the end of the meetings and the start of the Monlam Festival, in the year 1959, that this happened.

At that time, on the other side of the Tsangpo River, there was a Chinese camp. The Chinese said that His Holiness had to attend a party across the river at a place called Dip. The person who came to escort His Holiness was a Tibetan official, belonging to the Lhopa Khangtsen. On hearing about the invitation, the people of Lhasa, monks from the monasteries—my brother was also there—everyone went to Norbulingka.

The person who was in charge of inviting His Holiness to the party was a Tibetan. Earlier in the day he had attended the meeting and then been to the Chinese camp. He returned with a vehicle. The public, the monks—there were many from Sera—and the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas—some were engaged in fighting elsewhere—they all gathered and said that they would not allow His Holiness to attend the party. The car was waiting there with the person—I forgot his name—he was an aristocrat from the Lhopa Khangtsen. At the site were Tibetan government officials—Lukhangwa, Shakapa and Tsepon Namsel. They said that it was up to the Tibetan public whether they wanted His Holiness to attend the party or not. And all the people said His Holiness should not attend the party.

Q: Can you tell us what happened after the Dalai Lama was invited by the Chinese to some reception?

#36: He [the Tibetan man who came to escort His Holiness to the Chinese camp] had attended the assembly meeting earlier in the day. Then he had gone to the Chinese camp, changed his dress to a Chinese army uniform with a gun in his pocket, and returned to Norbulingka with a car. He got in through the gate, but the people stopped him from entering Norbulingka.

Q: Who went to the army camp?

#36: He was the secretary of the Chamdo Phakpala.

Q: And then what happened?

#36: Then he was not allowed into the Norbulingka. Lukhangwa and the others said now it was the people who would decide whether His Holiness attended the reception or not. And everyone said His Holiness would not be allowed to go. Then the people rose. They killed and dragged him on to the streets. And then China declared war.

Q: Let me back up a minute because I don't understand, there's still this part where you say the minister went to the Chinese after he left the meeting with the Tibetan officials, he went to the Chinese camp and what happened there?

#36: He went there, changed his dress, and came back with a gun. He came in a car. He must have accepted the task of bringing His Holiness over to the Chinese camp.

Q: What do you think he was trying to do when he took the gun and the jeep?

#36: He would have thought the people wouldn't let His Holiness go, while he must have promised to bring over the Dalai Lama to the Chinese. The people didn't let him in and killed him. His corpse was dragged out.

Q: Now I want to know, where were you when all this was happening?

#36: I was in Lhasa at that time. I was in Lhasa because of my brother who was at Norbulingka.

Q: Where in Lhasa?

#36: I was going from the Bakor. My brother was a voluntary guard at the Norbulingka and had asked me to bring him a religious amulet from Sera Monastery.

Q: Where in Lhasa?

#36: I was coming from Sera Monastery, which is close to Lhasa. I stayed at Ramoche because I couldn't return that night to Sera Monastery. It was crowded at Norbulingka and I was not able to give the amulet to my brother. Finally I tied it to a string and managed to pass it on to him.

Q: Did someone tell you? What did you see and what did you hear from people? How did you learn all of this?

#36: I saw it. I went there to give the amulet. There was a mass of Tibetan people. All the shops of Lhasa were closed and sellers on the streets had all packed up. I was a child and in my monk's robes. The Chinese did not do anything to me. It was a multitude there at Norbulingka with all the people and the women's groups.

Q: You saw the crowd dragging this man?

#36: Yes, I saw them dragging him.

Q: How did you learn about the advance of the spy and the invitation to the Chinese reception? Where did you learn that from?

#36: Everybody was talking about it. They said he was the man who had come to invite the Dalai Lama. That was why he was killed.

Q: When you saw the body being dragged to the street, what did you think was going on?

#36: The body was being dragged at the Bakor and there was a melee. That evening I couldn't go back after giving the amulet because I was watching this.

Q: What did you think was happening when you saw a body being dragged?

#36: People were talking and I heard about it. They dragged the body to the Onkhang and the door was closed. Nobody could enter the hall. I was a child and watching all this. It was late and I couldn't return to Sera Monastery, so at Ramoche I knew some people and spent the night with them.

Q: At the moment you saw it, what went through your mind? And what did you think was happening?

#36: I learned the reason for this man's death from the people. I thought, "Now the war will start," and I wondered how it would begin. I was about 19 then. That night I stayed at Ramoche and then I went to Dapche, where I heard there were guns. But I couldn't get a gun. I went back to Sera monastery and all the youngsters were sent to guard the Sera Tseri. My brother was at Norbulingka.

Q: Did you think the war was starting?

#36: The war was inevitable but as a child, I did not know how it would start.

Q: How old were you at that moment?

#36: I was at the start of my 19th year.

Q: Okay, I now have a picture of a little bit of what was happening in Lhasa. What did you do next?

#36: When I went back to Sera Monastery, all the younger monks, about five to six from each Khangtsen [house] were sent to guard the Sera Tseri, which is the top of the mountain behind Sera Monastery. All the older monks were told to go and fight the Chinese.

Q: How were you supposed to guard the mountain? By doing what?

#36: All of us stood in line on the mountain top. Behind that was the Chinese electrical center. They had pointed all the artillery towards us. We dug trenches on the mountain and piled stones, in case the Chinese came from that side.

Q: I don't understand; you kept the stones on the mountain?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: So that they could push it down when the Chinese came.

Q: I see. So you rolled stones on top, so you can drop them down on the Chinese if they come?

#36: Yes, so we could roll them down on the Chinese.

Q: Please continue.

#36: The government gave us guns. We had three guns for ten people, but we did not know how to fire a gun.

Q: So what did you do?

#36: I was at the Sera Tseri. It was the 10th day of the third month of 1959 that the war started. The Chinese had heard that His Holiness had escaped. It was around four in the morning that the Chinese starting shelling. There was shelling everywhere.

Q: I am still on the mountain with you. I want to know; you are waiting there with two guns for ten monks with stones on top of the hill. What happened next?

#36: Early that morning, there was shelling everywhere; you could hear the deafening sounds and see the bright lights. We had never known such things as war and it made us so scared that, never mind rolling the stones, we could hardly walk! It was around four in the morning; the day had not yet broken.

Q: Please continue.

#36: We remained on the Sera Tseri for about seven days. We could hardly sleep. We had dug trenches and on the other side were the Chinese.

Q: How long were you on the mountain for? How long did you stay there?

#36: About seven days. At Norbulingka the bodyguards remained there. Not a soul walked between Lhasa and Sera Monastery. It was so quiet. On the mountain top, very early in the morning we made a fire and made tea. Then for the rest of the day, we did not light a fire, for fear of the smoke being seen.

Q: Were you sleeping outside? Did you have shelter? Did you have any food?

#36: We were in the foxholes. We dug in the rocky mountain and every night, we took turns to keep a watch out, two men together for two hours. That morning when the war started, the shelling was so much.

Q: Did you have enough food?

#36: We made tea and ate *tsampa* ‘roasted barley flour.’

Q: You were able to hold out with that for seven days, and after seven days, what happened?

#36: Then Norbulingka was lost and His Holiness the Dalai Lama went to a foreign country. My brother had escaped from Norbulingka at night and he came to Sera Monastery to look for me. Then he came to the Tseri, where I was. From the mountain top, we could see people fleeing and the Chinese raining shells on Norbulingka and the Potala [Palace]. The bombardment was such that there was nothing we could do.

Q: You saw many people escaping? Were the roads filled with people escaping or few people escaping?

#36: It was mostly at night that the people fled. My brother came to Sera Tseri at around three or four in the morning. He and his group who were guards at Norbulingka told us that Norbulingka was lost.

Q: Was he your brother?

#36: Yes, he is my older brother and he is here.

Q: What did you do next?

#36: Then at night we climbed down the Tseri towards Nyatel. We spent sometime at Chosang Retol. At night we could see that the Chinese had set Ramoche on fire. The monks of Gyutoe and Gyumay Monasteries had fought against the Chinese.

Q: Ramoche was a monastery or a town?

#36: There were two monasteries on Ramoche, the Gyutoe and Gyumay.

Q: How far is Ramoche from Lhasa?

#36: It's the same. It is touching Lhasa.

Q: So you saw the Chinese burning the town, the gates of the town? Is that correct?

#36: Yes, that is right.

Q: What did you do then?

#36: The Chinese set fire to both the monasteries at Ramoche because the monks of Lama Gyupa put up a fight.

Q: Where did you go next?

#36: We were at Nyatel. It was at night.

Q: What did you do there?

#36: From Nyatel, we crossed the mountain pass to escape.

Q: You were escaping by foot or by horse? How were you escaping?

#36: We were walking. There were so many people that there was hardly any place to walk.

Q: You were walking with other monks that you knew or other people that you knew?

#36: There were about 15 or 16 people in our group. Besides us there were numerous people as this was the only mountain pass that you could use to escape from Lhasa. The other mountains passes were guarded by the Chinese, so that was the only route.

Q: Did you know where you were going?

#36: I knew. I knew the way towards Phenpo. We were walking day and night.

Q: Did you know where you were going? Whether to India?

#36: We were going towards Phenpo. From Phenpo we didn't know where India was. We were going northwards from Lhasa.

Q: How long did you end up walking for?

#36: It was over a month until we reached Tawang.

Q: One month?

#36: Yes.

Q: What was that like?

#36: It was not a happy experience. We didn't know where we were going. We were just following where the people were going. We had some weapons with us.

Q: You had weapons? Did you see any Chinese while you were escaping?

#36: Towards Tsethang there was a lot of fighting. The Chinese would drop bombs from the airplanes.

Q: Was anyone injured? Did you meet Chinese on the way?

#36: While escaping we did not see Chinese because there were no roads. We could only see the airplanes.

Q: Did you see anyone injured by the bombs?

#36: I saw some dead people. The bombs made huge craters. Some Tibetans fired their guns at them and they dropped bombs.

Q: That was close to you?

#36: A lot of people were walking. Everyday the airplanes flew, twice a day, and dropped the bombs.

Q: What were you thinking then when you were seeing this and you were escaping? What was going through your mind?

#36: I didn't think that bombs killed people. The airplanes flew twice a day, once at ten in the morning and again at four in the evening.

Q: You didn't think they were killing people?

#36: The airplanes were flying so high and they didn't see the people on the ground. They dropped bombs on the animals.

Q: I thought you just said you saw people who died from the bombs?

#36: At Phenpo, they dropped a bomb on the ground. The bomb burst open and killed two people. There were pieces of metal all around and three holes in the ground.

Q: Did you have food and water when you were making this walk to Tawang?

#36: At times we had *tsampa* and at times we didn't. Once you reached Tawang, it is in Indian Territory.

Q: Did anyone get sick or die along the way?

#36: When we crossed over Mango-la, I saw many people injured.

[Question is repeated.]

#36: I saw one man injured by a shell lying in a cave in Lhoka. We saw quite a few people killed during our fights.

Q: Did you keep fighting the whole month while escaping?

#36: Yes, the whole month we kept fighting. We were a group of 15 strong men. I was the youngest. We had good weapons, two to each man. I was the weakest.

Q: What happened when you got to Tawang?

#36: When we reached Tawang all our firearms were taken away. We were kept in Tawang for sometime.

Q: What did you think would happen?

#36: Our weapons were taken away. We thought, as we were now in Indian Territory, at least there was no danger to our lives. We were thinking more of food than our life there.

Q: Did you get food and clothing?

#36: No, there was not much food. Our weapons were confiscated and we were not allowed to move on.

Q: Did you get food in Tawang?

#36: In Tawang, they gave us food, but we didn't know how to eat it.

Q: You mean it was different food than you were used to?

#36: Here it was rice and *dhal* 'lentil/bean stew.' In Tibet we had *tsampa*. From Tawang onwards, it was rice, *dhal*, and vegetables. We suffered a lot before we reached Tawang, fighting in Lhoka.

Q: How long did you end up staying in Tawang?

#36: We stayed around three months in Tawang.

Q: Three months? Were you in tents or buildings? What was it like?

#36: There were no houses. We lived in shelters made from sacks.

Q: What did you do for the three months that you were there?

#36: There was no work to do. We would go begging. There was no danger to our lives once we were in Tawang.

Q: You used to go for alms. I don't understand. Can you explain that?

#36: There was a nunnery where we used to go begging. There was a food ration being distributed, but due to the huge number of people, it was very difficult to get any. People stood in line but when the distribution started, they began pushing and shoving.

Q: So you went begging at the nunnery?

#36: Yes.

Q: How did you feel doing that?

#36: I didn't know how to beg as I was not used to that in Tibet. I would stand in front of a house waiting and then move on. Some would give us millet flour which we thought was *tsampa*. After eating a little we'd realize it was not cooked.

Q: You were in Tawang for three months. Where did you go from there?

#36: From Tawang to Bomdila and then to Missamari.

Q: How long were you in each of those places?

#36: We were only two days in Bomdila.

Q: In Missamari?

#36: We stayed about five to six months in Missamari.

Q: Was it difficult for you in Missamari?

#36: The heat in Missamari was a problem, not the food.

Q: How did that affect you?

#36: A lot of people died due to the heat.

Q: Did it make you sick too?

#36: A little bit. Since I had no footwear, I got bitten by mosquitoes and had blisters.

Q: What kind of work did you do there?

#36: There was no work at all. All the Tibetans were assembled there and there was no work at all. We just ate our food but the heat was unbearable.

Q: How did you spend your days?

#36: We were just idle. The heat was too much. There must have been around 30,000 to 40,000 Tibetans gathered here.

Q: How did you keep your spirits up at that time?

#36: At that time, there was nothing going on in my mind. I was young and it never crossed my mind as to how I would lead my life. We had plenty to eat and there was no fear for our lives, though I was worried about the heat.

Q: After Missamari, where did you go?

#36: After around six months, 1,000 monks belonging to the Sera, Gaden, and Drepung monasteries were sent for road construction work to Chamba.

Q: How long did you do that for?

#36: For two years.

Q: Was that difficult for you?

#36: It was very difficult. We lost many people there. They fell from the cliffs. Some even slipped when they went to do their ablutions.

Q: Did you have any close experiences yourself when you might have been killed?

#36: No. Once in a rock slide, I almost broke my leg. Some of my colleagues were killed in the dynamite blasts.

Q: After two years in Chamba, then where did you go?

#36: Then I went to join the army at Chakrata. We were told that after a six-month training period, we'd be sent back to Tibet.

Q: What happened after six months?

#36: They didn't send us to Tibet after six months. I continued my stint in the army for the next 24 years.

Q: How many years?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 24 years.

Q: 24 years? Wow!

#36: Yes, 24 years and I was sent to the war in Bangladesh.

Q: At that time were you married or did you meet anyone during those 24 years?

#36: No, I didn't get married. My brother and I were together. He came and married here, so I live with him.

Q: Twenty-four years in the army and how did you get to Bylakuppe?

#36: My brother and I were both monks. He had come earlier to join the Sera Monastery here, but the lands were already distributed. So he got married and lived here. Later I joined him.

Q: How long have you lived here?

#36: I retired from the army in 1987 and since then I have lived here.

Q: And you have children?

#36: My brother has children. We share a wife. I have no children.

Q: Okay. You and your brother share one wife. How many children does he have?

#36: My brother has six children.

Q: How do you feel about the Chinese today?

#36: These days the Chinese are everywhere in Tibet. They have suppressed Tibet.

Q: What would you do if it were possible to return to Tibet?

#36: I don't think I will ever get to Tibet. Independence for Tibet is a far possibility and I don't think I'll go back to Tibet. I am quite old. I am 69 years old.

Q: What advice would you like to give the younger generation of Tibetans? What do you think is important for them?

#36: I would tell the younger generation that they should first understand [who] the enemy, head, and friends of the Tibetans [are]. The enemy is China; our head is His Holiness the Dalai Lama; and our friends the Indians. That's what I advise the youngsters.

Q: What approach, I guess do you think would have the most success to regaining your homeland?

#36: It is futile to fight the Chinese. It is best to follow the non-violence path shown by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We have to pray to His Holiness. I don't think any other country will fight for us to get Tibet back.

Q: Thank you very much for the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW