

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #45 – Lobsang Khetsun
June 27, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #45
2. Interviewee: Lobsang Khetsun
3. Age: 82
4. Date of Birth: 1925
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Kongpo Dongna
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 27, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 37, Camp No. 4, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 56 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Lobsang Khetsun's parents inducted him into Gaden Monastery as a monk when he was 7 years old. He describes the various monastic organizational structures and daily rituals at the monastery. Gaden Monastery was not initially affected by the Chinese invasion.

In 1959, during the Monlam festival, Lobsang Khetsun along with 50 monks each from the Sera, Gaden and Drepung monasteries were requested to volunteer as security guards for His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Norbulingka, His Holiness' summer residence near Lhasa. The monks relinquished their vows in order to take up guns and changed from their monk's robes into layman's clothing. They were provided with guns by the Tibetan government and were trained to use them.

Lobsang Khetsun tells the complete story of the bombardment by the Chinese army of Norbulingka and Chokpori, atop which stands the Tibetan Medical Centre. After the shelling ended the monks guarding Norbulingka fled and Lobsang Khetsun made his way to the Indian border. In India he joined the Indian Army and fought in Bangladesh.

Topics Discussed:

Monastic life, defense of Norbulingka, Dalai Lama's escape, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Age: 82, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: June 27, 2007

[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #45, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Question: So if he could first describe his village Kongpo Dongna in Utsang—if he could just describe his village and his family life growing up?

Interviewee #45: In Tibet?

Q: Yes.

#45: I was born in Kongpo. When I was young, there were my two parents. When I was around 6 or 7 years old, my parents put me in Gaden Monastery in Lhasa as a monk. I was admitted in Gaden Kongpo [house] and my teacher taught me the scriptures. My teacher was very kind to me.

Q: Why was he sent to become a monk at such a young age?

#45: It was a normal practice in Tibet to send young boys into the monastery.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did he have?

#45: In Kongpo I had three or four siblings—two sisters and a brother.

Q: These were your brothers and sisters from the same parents?

#45: I have one sister from the same set of parents.

Q: From the same set of parents, you have only one sister?

#45: Yes, only one sister. There was one brother who was a monk but he died long back. He was a monk at the local monastery and died early.

Q: How long was the journey from his village to Gaden in Lhasa?

#45: There used to be the practice of going to Lhasa to witness the great Monlam festival at the monasteries of Sera, Gaden, and Drepung. My parents brought me to see the festival and then didn't take me back with them to Kongpo, but admitted me into the Gaden Monastery as a monk.

Q: [Question is repeated.]

#45: It took about eight to nine days on foot from my village if you traveled with the yaks.

Q: And how often did he see his parents after that?

#45: After I had been in Gaden for around seven or eight years, I got an opportunity to go back to my village and see my parents.

Q: After seven or eight years after he joined? So from the age of 5, until like 12 or 13, he didn't see his parents? Was it difficult for him? Did he miss his parents and his family?

#45: I went to see my parents and returned to the monastery after three or four months.

[Question is repeated.]

#45: I did not have any difficulties at that time. I was happy to meet my parents. At that time both my parents were alive. I was very happy. After meeting my parents and spending two or three months, I returned to Gaden—back to the monastery.

Q: After staying for two to three days?

#45: After spending two or three months in the village, I returned to the monastery. Like the previous time [earlier journey], I came along with people who drove yaks because there were no vehicles then.

Q: How did he feel in the beginning to go to Gaden—was he afraid? Was he excited? Did he cry?

#45: At that time, I was too young to feel scared. By the time I met my parents I was around 7, 8, 9, or 10 years old. Then I went back to Gaden Monastery.

Q: What did he feel when he first joined Gaden Monastery?

#45: That time I was very small. I was happy when my parents put me in the monastery as a monk.

Q: No tears?

#45: No, I didn't have tears.

Q: Can he describe a little bit about what life was like for him at Gaden? Can he describe like what his day was like?

#45: In Gaden Monastery we attended the prayer assembly sessions. These were held by different sections of the monastery like the Lachi, Datsang, and Khangtsen. First thing in the morning we had *mangja* [prayer assembly of all monks] at the Datsang, and then *kora* ‘walking circumambulation,’ and then we had *daja* [prayer assembly of monks of one section of the monastery], where we drank tea and so on. Again in the evening, we assembled for *gongzi kora* [evening prayer assembly]. Then we attended *dondhoe* [recitation of Dolma or Tara prayers] at the Datsang, during which we recited the Tara prayers 41 times and other related prayers. After this was over, those who were studying the *tsenyi* [Buddhist philosophical debates] remained, and the rest were free to go back. Those studying *tsenyi* did their debates until 7, 8 or 9 o'clock.

Q: Did he do debate?

#45: No, at that time I did not do debate. At Gaden Monastery we had a group of monks who specialized in *dhon khatel*, meaning the ritual of beating the drums and blowing on the *dhung* [conch shell] for two days and performing *kangso* [prayers to protective deities] at the end of the long prayer sessions.

Q: When did he perform this *kangso*?

#45: We made *kangso* offerings to Jijjay, Lhamo, Gonpo, and Namsel [protective deities].

Q: When did he make the *kangso* offerings?

#45: At the end of the prayer session. If it [the offering] was in spring, it was called *chichoe chenmo*; in summer it was *yarnay chenmo*; in winter we had *gunchoe chenmo*. Those prayers would go on for around a month and a half and some lasted around 20 days. Then we had the *thongchoe*, depending on the seasons; these prayers were not performed everyday except the *mangja*, which we attended every morning. The prayer assembly was held in the main prayer hall with monks of both the sections of Gaden Monastery attending it. *Mangja* means the prayer assembly of monks of the whole of Gaden Monastery and *daja* means the assembly of monks of one section of the monastery. Whether you were in *Shartse* or *Jangtse* sections, the particular bell of the section would ring and you had to assemble.

Q: *Mangja* is held everyday?

#45: Yes, this was held everyday by the main monastery, every morning.

Q: Did he ever get in trouble—sometimes little boys are naughty? Did he ever do anything naughty—did he ever have to be disciplined by the *gekoe* ‘disciplinarian’?

#45: I had problems while living under my teacher. At times he would beat me for things that I did or didn't do or he would scold me.

Q: Can he describe the mistakes that he made?

#45: I was very naughty as a child and would fight with the other boys, and when my teacher found out about that, he would beat me.

Q: In general, were his memories at Gaden...does he have happy memories of Gaden?

#45: Most of the time, I felt happy being a monk. In Tibet, we would attend the prayer assemblies at the main temple, the Datsang and the Khangtsen. I used to be very happy.

Q: And if he could just—last question of this period—I'm going to ask him about when the Chinese arrived in Tibet. Can he describe some of his—he might have already said because he's talked about the *poojas* 'religious rituals'—but strongest memories of Gaden, like some of his—in English the word is vivid, like memories that are very strong, you know. I'm not sure how the translation would be in Tibetan, but you know, like the very clear in his mind of that time like events, things that happened; you know, something that happened to him—if you could just ask him and see.

#45: After being in the monastery for several years, the monastery's common assembly hall was reconstructed. Because Gaden Monastery was situated on a hill, we could not use horses or mules to carry the stones.

Q: What did they do to the main assembly hall?

#45: The common assembly hall was reconstructed. The old one was brought down and a new one was constructed. The monks of both sections of the monastery joined; with orders from the main office that each monk had to bring a certain number of stones. There was a quarry on the other side of the monastery and we carried the stones on our backs. When the assembly hall was being built, the monks of both *Shartse* and *Jangtse* sections of Gaden Monastery had to transport the stones. There was no road for vehicles or for horses and mules because Gaden Monastery was located on a hill. Whether building the common assembly hall or any building, all the stones had to be carried by the monks. We did not have bricks then like we do here. All the buildings were built of stones. That's how the construction was done. First the common assembly hall was built and then the Datsang.

Q: So when he said reconstruction of the prayer hall, this was something—maybe it had gotten old, just needed repair because of age?

#45: Yes, it was reconstructed. In Tibet there was no cement, not even a spoonful of it. The wooden beams had gotten old and those were taken down and reconstructed.

Q: [The prayer hall was] common between *Jangtse* and *Shartse*?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: So things were just like kind of started to fall into disrepair. How long did he work on that reconstruction for?

#45: The reconstruction of the common prayer hall took almost a year. The common prayer hall was huge and so it took almost a year.

Q: Was it very difficult work? Can he describe the work?

#45: Except for transporting the stones, the monks did not have any work. As per orders of the common office, each monk had to transport the assigned figure, whether it was a hundred stones or a thousand stones. For every stone transported we were given a receipt which we had to present to the officials of the Khangtsen who in turn gave it to the Datsang officials and finally the Lachi, which received it.

Q: What's the Lachi?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Lachi is the common office or administration of both the Datsang and Khangtsen sections.

Q: How did he feel when the work was finished? Was it very beautiful?

#45: The common prayer hall? The construction of the common prayer hall was done very well. There were two or three floors. In Tibet we did not have cement. It had to be wide because of the height of the building. It was very well done when it was completed.

Q: And does he recall what year they finished the renovation?

#45: I cannot recall the year very well. No, I cannot recall that.

Q: How old was he?

#45: At that time I may have been 15-20 years old.

Q: And how did he first encounter the Chinese in Lhasa or in Tibet? In what circumstances did he first encounter the Chinese?

#45: I first saw the Chinese in Kongpo, during one of my visits to my village. They had built roads and their vehicles were in Kongpo when I was there. The Chinese vehicles first arrived through Kongpo. I cannot recall the year.

Q: Was this on one of his visits to Kongpo from Gaden?

#45: After that I have been to my village again.

Q: He saw them during this time?

#45: Yes. At that time the Chinese had built roads and their vehicles had come to Kongpo. I was in my village and that was the first time I saw the Chinese vehicles.

Q: In his village?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Can he describe like how life in his village had changed at all and how had it changed?

#45: When the Chinese first came there, there was no change in the village. At that time the Tibetan government was in power. The Chinese went about their way. As they might have been trained to do when they first arrived, the Chinese looked very friendly. If they met someone, they would offer a cigarette and if a family was working, they would offer to help. Initially they were like that. Later it was not the same. Initially they were friendly, very clever. [Laughs.]

Q: So there was a friendly feeling between the villagers and the Chinese?

#45: They used to say that we [the Chinese and the Tibetans] were the same. When people were working in the fields, and if the Chinese happened to pass by, they offered help. They [the Chinese] didn't have to be fed or paid and they helped in harvesting the fields.

Q: There's a collaborative feeling. Did they ever talk to him about the social system or had they talked to the religious about the social system in Tibet? Like the systems of nobles and serfs? Did the Chinese ever discuss these matters?

#45: At that time the Chinese did not have any authority and they said that we [the Chinese and the Tibetans] were the same. They did not talk much and I should say that I did not have much experience with the Chinese.

Q: When did life in the monastery and his life... Can he describe when that started to get affected by the Chinese and his life in general? When did his life start to change because of the Chinese?

#45: When the Chinese came, I was living in the monastery and so I did not have much experience. I could relate about the kind of work, but since I was living in the monastery, I did not interact with the Chinese, so I have nothing much to say about this.

Q: So did life go on at the monastery exactly the same up until 1959? Was life not completely unaffected by the Chinese presence in Tibet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean until 1959?

Q: Up until 1959, was life at Gaden completely the same or was there any restriction or any changes in life there?

#45: There was a rebellion against the Chinese and the Chinese were preparing for war.

Q: The question is, were things the same at Gaden until 1959?

#45: It was the same. The monks continued with their daily affairs as before. There were no changes due to the Chinese presence.

Q: In his village, was it the same or were there any changes in his village life at all, with his family?

#45: At that time there were no changes. After the war in 1959, then the Chinese changed everything. Until then it was the same as it was.

Q: Can he talk about that?

#45: I do not have anything to say about that, because in 1959 I went as a security guard for His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Lhasa. Fifty monks each from Sera, Gaden, and Drepung Monasteries had to go to protect His Holiness and I volunteered from my Khangtsen [“house” or group from the monastery]. So in 1959, in the second month of the Tibetan calendar, during the Monlam Chenmo ‘Great Prayer Festival,’ we were in Lhasa. His Holiness’ palace was the Norbulingka; it was large and we monks were provided with a gun each. We were taught how to use the gun and so for about 10 to 15 days, we stood guard at the surrounding walls of Norbulingka. Then the Chinese began the war. Then from the Norbulingka, I escaped to India through Phenpo, Lhoka. I couldn't go back to the monastery.

Q: It was before the war or after that 50 monks each were sent?

#45: It was before the war.

Q: Seeing the danger?

#45: Yes, before the war started. The [Tibetan] government had said secretly that monks were required to protect His Holiness the Dalai Lama. That was before the war began.

Q: He was at Lhoka also. Going back a little bit, please tell *Pa-la* that we are very interested in this part of the story. When he was sent to Lhasa and provided with a gun, did he participate in any ceremony to return the vows of not killing, his monastic vows? Did he participate in any ceremony like that? Did he remain a monk? Did he return the vows of a monk, or did he not return his vows?

#45: You mean the monks? Now the monks of Sera, Drepung, and Gaden Monasteries had reached there [Norbulingka]. They surrounded the Norbulingka. Mainly the [usual] security guards were already there at the Norbulingka Palace. There is a river in Lhasa which flows between Gaden and Drepung Monasteries; it's quite close by. One night,

without announcement, His Holiness the Dalai Lama—it was the 11th or 12th day of the second month of the Tibetan Calendar—secretly left for India with his retinue.

Q: The question is whether he gave back his vows as a monk when he received the gun or did he continue to remain a monk?

#45: We received the guns.

[Question is repeated.]

#45: The vows of monkhood?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Yes.

#45: We gave back our vows. A *geshe* [a monk who holds a degree in philosophy]—he was either from Sera or Drepung Monasteries because Gaden Monastery was too far away—had come especially to receive back the vows from the monks of the three monasteries. We returned our vows. Without giving back the vows, a monk cannot handle a gun.

Q: There was a ceremony where there was a *geshe* from each...Did this happen collectively or for each group?

#45: It was collectively for each monastery. All the monks of Gaden Monastery came together and the *geshe* arrived [to take back the monk vows] and the same thing happened for the monks of Sera and Drepung Monasteries.

Q: Where was the ceremony performed?

#45: That was done outside the Norbulingka, where we were stationed. We were in groups and the *geshe* came to take back our vows. At that time the war had not started.

Q: It was outside the Norbulingka. When he says the war, he means the fighting in Lhasa?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Did they then give their robes back and then get laymen's clothes?

#45: We had brought laymen's clothes with us when we came from the monastery. We had on our robes when we left the monastery. At Lhasa, which is near the Norbulingka, we left our monk's robes with friends and put on the *chupa* 'traditional coat' and then went to Norbulingka.

Q: Did the *chupas* belong to them or were they provided to them?

#45: They [the *chupa*], which we had brought with us from our house, belonged to us. They were not provided by the government. What the government provided us were the guns.

Q: At Norbulingka, he gave back his vows. When he arrived at Norbulingka, was he already in laymen's clothes?

#45: When we gave back our vows, we were already in laymen's clothes. We were at the Norbulingka and had already received the guns. We had changed into *chupa* at Lhasa and left our robes there and came to Norbulingka, where we gave back our monk vows to the *geshe*.

Q: When he was at the Norbulingka, was everybody in laymen's clothes?

#45: Yes, everybody was in laymen's clothes. None of the monks was in robes.

Q: When did he get his laymen's dress—before he left the monastery or when did that happen? Did they give it to him?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Nobody gave them.

Q: So he arrived dressed like that? Can he establish when he got his robes?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He said that everybody was in laymen's dress. It was not provided by the government—they had it earlier with them, when they first joined the monastery.

Q: Oh, the clothes that they brought with them from the monastery? But he was a small boy. Where did he get his laymen's clothes from?

#45: I brought the *chupa* with me from the monastery.

Q: When he joined the monastery, he was small.

#45: For this very purpose; when I was about to leave, I asked people in the monastery who owned *chupa* and managed to get one. Generally in the monastery you are not allowed to wear the *chupa*, but when monks traveled further into the villages they wore it, besides the robes.

Q: Did he volunteer to go or was he selected as one of the 50?

#45: When it was announced in the Khangtsen that monks were required to go [to protect His Holiness at Norbulingka], I volunteered. I said that I wanted to go. The place to die when Chinese were doing such things...I said I wanted to go. The Officials of the Khangtsen asked of the monks if there was anybody who wanted to go and I accepted.

Q: And can you ask him why he volunteered?

#45: The reason why I volunteered was that we heard in Lhasa about how badly the Chinese were treating the [Tibetan] people in the East and that eventually the Chinese were sure to occupy Tibet, as they were very powerful. I thought whatever happens—even if I couldn't do much—I must do whatever I can. It didn't matter if my death happened at the hands of the Chinese.

Q: And going to the ceremony, were the ritual of returning the vows outside the Norbulingka, if Lobsang-*la* could describe anything that he remembers about that ceremony: the time of day, just how long it took, what was said and anything that he can remember about that ceremony; we'd really like to hear about it—the weather, anything.

#45: When we had returned the vows, there was nothing in our minds except that we should confront the Chinese.

[Question is repeated.]

#45: We had given back our vows and all the monks present there felt, "Now we have returned our vows and we must fight the Chinese to the end and if we cannot do this, it is very regrettable."

[Interpreter relays to the interviewer that the answer is not to the question. The interviewer tells interpreter to let the elder speak—even if he is not answering the question, if it sounds interesting, then let him go on, give them the translation and then they could go back.]

Q: If you could actually ask him again if he can sort of put himself back in that moment of when that ritual happened, that particular, just that moment not the events leading up to it.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The happenings in the ritual?

Q: The actual ritual of returning the vows outside the Norbulingka. You could sort of set it up for him, you know, so he knows that's exactly we want. If he remembers anything—what the weather was like; the time of day; what he was feeling; anything that he can describe about that particular event. You know, how long did it take—an hour, did it take ten minutes, what did they say, any details he can remember about that event.

#45: After the *geshe* arrived, there were some prayers which he recited. We [the monks at the Norbulingka] prostrated three times to the *geshe* and sat there kneeling. The *geshe* gave us a discourse and then explained to us the reasons for giving up our vows, the consequences if we didn't return the vows—how we were like ordinary laymen once we gave up the vows. Once he'd explained us all these [things], we again prostrated three times and that was it. There were prayers that he [the *geshe*] recited, and we listened to these. Other than that there was nothing special or anything particular to do.

Q: Can you ask him, I know he thinks it probably isn't an interesting question—what was the weather like?

#45: The weather was very bad; there was no rain and the whole place was very dusty. It was very bad. That was the only time we saw such weather in Tibet. Just before the war began, the place was so dusty.

Q: There was no rain?

#45: There was no rain and it was windy. There was dust and the place looked so very ugly. There were dust storms and it was so bad, just before the war began.

Q: So there was lightning?

#45: It was the second month of the lunar calendar, there was no rain as such and no lightning. In general the place looked dusty and awful.

Q: So, like windy? What does he mean by...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Windy and dusty.

Q: And what time of day did this happen? In the morning? In the evening? Late at night? What time, does he remember?

#45: The weather was like this throughout the day until the war began.

Q: It took a long time for the ceremony?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Until the war began.

Q: What time of day did the ceremony happen? Did he participate in it?

#45: It was during the daytime.

Q: It was quite short, took a short time?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean the duration of the ceremony?

Q: His, just his ceremony; I am only interested in his, not everybody else's.

#45: It didn't take a long time, it was short. It took only about 10 to 15 minutes. The *geshe* came and explained us the reasons for returning the vows; what happened if we did and the consequences if we didn't. We prostrated three times before returning the vows and three times after returning the vows.

Q: Did any of the monks in his group change their minds? Or did they all continue?

#45: At that time? Our minds?

Q: Did any monk have a change of mind?

#45: [Laughs] There was nothing but the thought of fighting the Chinese. All the monks present there had their minds on fighting the Chinese and nothing else.

Q: Did he have any reluctance at all during the ceremony? Did he have any question in his mind or doubt or he really had conviction, about giving up his robes and not being a monk anymore? Was there a feeling of sadness at all or regret?

#45: At that time, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left...

[Question is repeated.]

#45: In my mind at that time, looking at what the Chinese were doing, there was no regret; nothing at all. We had already heard the stories about how the Chinese cruelly dealt with the people in Kham. They were deceiving the people. I had no doubts in my mind. I was quite young at that time—in 1959, I was 34 years old, healthy and able-bodied, ready to go anywhere, anytime.

Q: What kind of gun was given?

#45: The gun given by the government?

Q: Yes.

#45: It was English made. There were two types [of guns]; long-barrel rifles and short-barrel rifles. We were provided with the long-barrel rifles which were considered very fine. Each monk was given an English made long-barrel rifle.

Q: Long-barrel rifles?

#45: The English short-barrel rifle had a shorter barrel, but both the guns took the same number of bullets.

Q: The guns were not made in Tibet?

#45: Those were made in England and purchased by the Tibetan government.

Q: Did he know how to use it already or did he have to be shown by somebody?

#45: At that time the army was based in Norbulingka and they taught the monks how to load the guns and shoot. Of course, in the monastery we did not handle such things. During

the time Tibet was independent, the wealthy families owned guns. I had seen people handle guns when I was a monk.

Q: So there was like a group lesson for everybody?

#45: Yes, in groups. The monks of Gaden Monastery all grouped together and a soldier came and demonstrated how to use the gun. After he'd taught us, he checked to see how each of us handled the gun.

Q: Can Lobsang-*la* describe how he personally saw and witnessed and experienced from that point over the next few days? From that moment of the ceremony, what he personally witnessed and saw and experienced, from that point over the next few days?

#45: I don't have much to say on this because then it didn't take long—just three or four days before the war began. A huge Chinese army camp was situated at Nordhoe Linka just below Norbulingka. The Chinese had prepared for war and Lhasa was full of Chinese troops. What happened at Norbulingka was that the Chinese did not shoot with guns but instead they fired artillery shells. Shells were fired from Nordhoe Linka and Dip, near the river outside of Lhasa. It was only shells that rained on Norbulingka. There were no Chinese with guns to be seen at Norbulingka; it was only artillery shells that they fired.

Q: This was three or four days after he was trained to use the guns that the war started?

#45: Yes.

Q: He doesn't have anything to say about his personal experience during this time?

#45: No, I don't have anything to say. My companions and I talked about the war and of being careful. There was nothing else that came to my mind.

Q: The shelling of the Norbulingka?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Can he talk about his experience at that time? What happened to him and what did he do?

#45: When the Norbulingka was shelled, I saw one or two dead. The monks of Sera Monastery were stationed towards the north of Norbulingka. When I escaped, on my way I saw one or two dead.

Q: When he escaped?

#45: Yes, [I escaped] in the night, a day after the war. The war didn't last long; just a day and a night. Shells fell like rains on the Norbulingka and there was nothing for the people to do but flee. There were no Chinese with guns who came face to face with us. Lhasa was full of Chinese. They had their army camps, arms, and ammunitions. They knew that [the

Tibetan] people had gathered at the Norbulingka and that was why they targeted it. Shells were fired on all four sides [of the Norbulingka]. There were no actual Chinese with guns whom we could see.

Q: So where was he while the Norbulingka was being shelled?

#45: When the shells were fired, I was at the Norbulingka during the day. There were trees on all the sides of Norbulingka, so I was running here and there. It was only when it became dark that I made my way towards the north side where there was the *dhamra*. Everybody was making their way through the *dhamra* —monks of Drepung Monastery and others. The *dhamra* was a very difficult area; it was muddy water with plants growing on the surface and if one didn't know his way, he could fall in the water and drown. So only when it grew dark, I fled through the *dhamra*. The monks of Drepung Monastery could lead the way. Once you crossed the *dhamra*, the hills were close by and you could get there.

Q: Is *dhamra* the name of the place?

#45: *Dhamra* was a place which was full of water [a swamp]. It cannot be utilized for cultivation or anything. It was a very large area.

Q: You had to cross the *dhamra*?

#45: You had to walk on the sods that grew on the surface. When you walked on it, it sagged. If you compared the size [of the swamp] to the area measurement here, perhaps it is about 10 or 11 acres. The swamp was very dangerous. I fled through it. Once you crossed the *dhamra*, then you climbed over the hill and then reached Phenpo.

Q: So the idea at that time, it was very clear that they were not going to try to get involved in the fighting. The idea was just to escape?

#45: Yes, we just escaped. We crossed over two or three mountain passes and came into Phenpo. Phenpo is at the north of Lhasa. Phenpo is a large place. We couldn't go to our monastery. When we were in Phenpo, the Chinese were firing [at us] from the airplanes but they didn't hit anyone. My colleague and I, we stayed one night in Phenpo with a family who gave us food.

The next day we started from Phenpo, which is a very big place. We met about 10 to 11 monks of Namgyal Monastery who were on horseback. They asked me where I was going. I had the gun with me, which was given by the government and I replied that I was going to Gaden Monastery. From Phenpo, Gaden Monastery was close by. They told me it was better for me not to go to the Monastery, but to accompany them. There was a huge estate belonging to the Namgyal Monastery in Phenpo. They said, "Let's spend the night there." [at the estate] as it was around 4 o'clock in the evening when I met the monks. My colleague who was lagging behind didn't join us. I was alone and had a horse and went along with the monks.

Around dusk we reached the estate of the Namgyal Monastery. We didn't get to spend the whole night there. At the estate, they told me that Lhasa was lost to the Chinese. The manager of the estate was a monk of the Namgyal Monastery. There were two managers, the outgoing and the incoming one. The outgoing manager had handed charge over to the new manager. They were discussing [between themselves] that eventually everything in the estate was going to fall into the hands of the Chinese and that if not the entire properties, at least a part of it should be divided among the many tenants of the estate.

Q: I'm going to go back a little bit, if he's okay with that—where was he when the Norbulingka was being shelled? Did he just hear it or did he see the Norbulingka being shelled?

#45: When the Norbulingka was being shelled, during the day time I was running here and there among the trees. There were some monks of the Gaden Monastery who had cuts on their foreheads and were bleeding. Perhaps they were hit by shrapnel of the shells. When the shells were fired, they fell on the sides [of Norbulingka] and among our monks, but none was actually hit by the shells. They [the shells] were falling on the sides and we were running here and there. So some monks suffered injuries due to the shrapnel. I was not hit by shrapnel nor did I receive any injuries, due to the protective amulets given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. So I was not hit by shrapnel and nothing happened to me.

Q: Did he actually see the Norbulingka being shelled or was he just hearing it?

#45: At the Norbulingka where the monks of Gaden Monastery were stationed, there was a hill called Chakpori. This was near the Potala Palace. The Tibetan government's Medical Centre was located at the Chakpori monastery [atop the Chakpori hill]. The doctors stayed at the monastery, which was built by the Duthop Thangthong Gyalpo. The Chinese targeted this hill. Tibetan soldiers who were stationed there fired on the Chinese who came there. The Chinese fired shells at the source of the gunfire. I saw with my own eyes [the shelling of the monastery atop the Chakpori]. We were close, except that [the shelling] was on the hill and we were down below on the ground. [I saw] the wooden windows of the Tsuglakhang [the main temple] atop Chakpori being destroyed and falling down.

Q: The Chakpori is close to Norbulingka?

#45: The Chakpori is closer to the Potala Place. Between them [the Chakpori and the Potala Palace] was a *stupa*; they were not far apart.

Q: Norbulingka and Potala Palace are different?

#45: They are different.

Q: The question here is, did he see the Norbulingka being shelled?

#45: The Chinese were firing the shells from Nordhoe Linka and from another place at the other side of the river.

Q: The shells were fired at Chakpori?

#45: Yes, the one I told you I saw being shelled by the Chinese was at the Chakpori. That was the Tibetan government's Medical Centre. The monastery located there [atop Chakpori] was said to have been built by Duthop Thangthong Gyalpo. It [Chakpori] was a rocky hill.

Q: There were actually thousands of people around the Norbulingka. Did he describe that at all or not?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No.

Q: He didn't actually see all those people gathered around the Norbulingka?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He saw the people running here and there, some of them getting hurt and he heard the shelling.

Q: But he wasn't actually there during that time when His Holiness left? He wasn't around the Norbulingka at that time?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: When His Holiness the Dalai Lama left? We have to ask.

Q: Because there was a period of a few days, where there were thousands of people around the Norbulingka. So we are just curious about, before the shelling started; there were thousands of people who surrounded the Norbulingka. Was he among those people? Or when he did the ceremony? Did he leave, disperse before the crowd gathered?

#45: The Women's Association gathered at the Norbulingka Palace. There was a Chinese army camp on the other side of Lhasa, called Maga Sapa 'New Army Camp' in Tibetan, where they [the Chinese] had constructed very large buildings. Initially the Chinese had prepared to invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Maga Sapa. Then what happened was that the people of Lhasa came to Norbulingka to request His Holiness not to go there. The Chinese had also ordered that His Holiness was not to bring security guards with him. If His Holiness had gone that day [to the Chinese army camp], Tibet would have been thrown in complete in darkness.

Q: That was the time when His Holiness was invited and the people requested him not to go and gathered at the Norbulingka? The lama was killed at that time?

#45: Yes, the Khenchung [title for learned person – the lama] was killed at that time. In the morning after the *donjor* 'prayer assembly,' they [the Chinese and the Tibetan Khenchung who was on the Chinese side] might have spoken. Later he [the Khenchung] arrived [at the Norbulingka] on a motorcycle in a laymen's dress with his mouth covered by a cloth. He was one of the main spies for the Chinese.

Q: Where was he going on the motorcycle?

#45: He [the Khenchung] was going into the Norbulingka. People were wondering what it was that was happening. People said that he was the culprit and everyone caught him and stoned him. Finally he was felled with a stone hurled by a woman. He was killed there and his body was dragged around the Barkor [Main Square in Lhasa]. At that time I was at the monastery and I heard that such things took place.

Q: This is all stuff that he heard about. So by the time that he got there for the prayer ceremony to return his vows, all these people had dispersed?

#45: When we reached there, the people were not there. The monks of Sera, Drepung, and Gaden Monasteries came there [to the Norbulingka, but there were not many lay people around—just a few. The Khenchung was one of the main agents for the Chinese and he was killed and his body dragged around the Barkor. These things happened. The reason was that the people of Lhasa had gathered at the Norbulingka—before we had arrived there—to request His Holiness not to go to the Maga Sapa. They [the Tibetan people] also said that the Chinese should not invite His Holiness. The Chinese had evil intentions, ordering His Holiness not to bring bodyguards with him [when he came to their camp]. If His Holiness had gone to Maga Sapa that day, Tibet would have been left in darkness. They [the Chinese] would have immediately taken His Holiness away somewhere.

Q: That was before—that was when he was at Gaden Monastery? When he was at Gaden Monastery, the Lama was killed and all those happenings took place earlier, when you were still at Gaden Monastery?

#45: Yes, [it happened] when I was at Gaden Monastery.

Q: After you had given back your vows and when you were at the Norbulingka, were there people there?

#45: The monks were there but hardly any [lay] people were there.

Q: Were they the monk soldiers or were there other monks also?

#45: There were the monk soldiers and not many lay people.

Q: So the crowd had dispersed by the time he got there. So His Holiness had actually left already but he didn't know. He didn't know that His Holiness had already left?

#45: At that time His Holiness was still there [at the Norbulingka].

Q: When he came as a soldier, His Holiness was there?

#45: When we came to Norbulingka, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was there. When the monks of Sera, Gaden, and Drepung Monasteries arrived at the Norbulingka, His Holiness was there [at the Norbulingka]. We monks and the people who were there were not allowed

inside, unless there was a valid reason. Around four days after we'd arrived there, His Holiness the Dalai Lama left in utter secrecy. The river Tsangpo passed very close to the Norbulingka. In the night His Holiness left secretly on horseback from the side [door] between where the monk guards of Gaden and Drepung Monasteries stood guard. Then he was escorted in a coracle [round boat, across the river] and on horseback from the other side of the river.

Q: These are what he heard. Did he know these happenings at that time? Did he know these things when he was there? Did you know when His Holiness the Dalai Lama left?

#45: It was on the night of the 12th. No one, none of us who were there [at the Norbulingka] knew that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was leaving that night. What they [the officials] told us was this: on the other side of the river bank was a steep hill called Chipkya Karpo—what they told us was that in the night about a hundred soldiers would be going there [Chipkya Karpo] to guard it and that we were not to create any disturbances. That was how secretive it was. And that night when they'd told us that the soldiers were going to go there [to Chipkya Karpo], His Holiness was escorted out.

Q: Chipkyari? Is it a hill?

#45: It was Chipkya Karpo, a very steep hill. They said that about a hundred soldiers were going there in the night to guard it.

Q: That was announced by the Tibetan government?

#45: This was told to us monks who were guarding the sides of the Norbulingka Palace by the Tibetan government. They said that men and horses would leave that night and that we were not to disturb their passage. That night His Holiness had left.

Q: This is what he thought because he did not see it?

#45: No, I did not see it. But later it was said that that was the night His Holiness left. At that time nobody knew anything.

Q: Was he taken by surprise by the intensity of the attack on the Norbulingka?

#45: When the shells were fired, we were there [at the Norbulingka] but His Holiness was already escorted out. That night His Holiness was safely on the other side of the river; the government had already readied the horses there. Noblemen and reliable people in the Norbulingka knew that His Holiness had safely crossed to the other side. That night a gun shot was fired from the other side of the river. It was to signal that His Holiness had reached the other side [of the river]. There were soldiers waiting there. From the place called Dip, there was a road, which was easily accessible for the Chinese. The road His Holiness took was just about three kilometers away from this road. The Chinese didn't know about it. On the other side of the river, our security guards were waiting. The leaders might have earlier decided that they would give a gunshot to signal that His Holiness had

crossed the river safely. That night after His Holiness was escorted, there was the gunshot. At that time we were quite close.

Q: It was supposed to be a secret, so who knew that His Holiness had crossed the river?

#45: There were government officials at the Norbulingka, very reliable people and not agents of the Chinese; they had discussed and agreed that a gunshot would be fired when His Holiness...

Q: He heard about this on reaching India?

#45: We heard this on the way [of our escape journey].

Q: The question is, was he surprised by the might of the Chinese and the intensity of the attack? Those happenings, the gun shot and all, he heard when he was on the road to India?

#45: Yes, we heard about it when we were on our way [to India]. At that time it [His Holiness' escape] was a secret. On our way we met some of the government officials who were at Norbulingka then [who told us about it]. I was with the monks of the Namgyal Monastery, and we traveled through Tsona and then [reached] Mon. Mon was the border area between Tibet and India. Some Indian troops were stationed there, though not many at that time; maybe one or two groups. The monks and I were stopped there for five or six days. The Indians would not let us pass through.

Q: Is it [the river His Holiness crossed in the coracle] the Tsangpo River?

#45: That was Kyichu, the main river of Lhasa. I was winter at that time and the river was shallow. There was no way you could cross it in summer. The water was at its fullest. The time [of the escape] was around winter, so you could even wade through the river.

[Tape is changed and a part of the beginning of the next question is missing.]

Q: ...He never thought that they [the Chinese] would be so powerful?

#45: I thought that I was lucky not to die under them [the Chinese] and apart from that there was nothing going through my mind at that time. I was lucky not to die.

Q: So it was a very, very intense experience.

#45: [Laughs]

Q: So going back, he spent the night at Namgyal with these Namgyal monks, and can he just describe what happened after that, his escape? He was talking about he met some monks from Namgyal on his way out and then they spent the night at Namgyal Monastery and then what happened after that? Can you just ask him was he with any of the monks from Gaden or was he alone?

#45: No, there were no monks from Gaden Monastery with me. I was alone with those monks [of Namgyal Monastery].

Q: Can he tell us what happened after he spent the night at Namgyal? What happened after that?

#45: We didn't get to spend the night. Between Lhasa and Gaden Monastery, there was the main river of Lhasa. On the other side [of the river] is Gaden Monastery. Then word came, maybe from a spy, that Chinese had arrived at Gaden Monastery. So we didn't dare stay there [estate of the Namgyal Monastery in Phenpo] that night. We packed our clothes and blankets and they [the estate] gave us food. The estate provided a horse to carry the load of food for the 10 to 15 monks. That night itself we left. If we crossed the river towards Gaden Monastery, we might meet the Chinese on the road. So we went towards Nyiri and walked the whole night. The next day towards late evening we arrived at a village. A family allowed us to make a fire for some tea. We didn't get to sleep there but after drinking tea, we left once again.

Q: Where did he go after that?

#45: Towards daybreak, we reached Kadhe Monastery. If you went straight from there [Kadhe Monastery], you reached Digung. However we took a deviation at Kadhe and crossed the river—at that time the river was shallow and we were all on horseback. We came to Kadhe and then Nyiri. We couldn't go from the other direction because there was a Chinese motor road and also a Chinese army camp. So we came through Nyiri and Kadhe and came to a place called Sipu—Sipu Khakya Monastery. That night we reached the Sipu Khakya Monastery. Now we had come to the other side of the road, the place called Sipu. A little distance away was the Khakya Monastery, a small monastery. There were Chinese roads here. The monks of Namgyal Monastery and I came to this monastery. We were treated very well that night, as the Namgyal Monastery, being His Holiness' Monastery, was very famous in Tibet.

Q: [He stayed] at Sipu Monastery?

#45: At Sipu Khakya Monastery. When we were at the Khakya Monastery, a Lama of Gaden Monastery's *Shartse* division was there and he had sent a monk student to call me. The Lama had heard that I had come; that a monk from Gaden Monastery had arrived. I went to see him. He was a Lama from Gaden Monastery's *Shartse* Division. Khakya Monastery happened to be his original monastery.

Q: Did he meet the Lama at the Dipu Gonpa? Was it at Dipu that you met the Lama?

#45: No. We came from Kadhe.

Q: From Kadhe to Dipu Gonpa and from Dipu Gonpa to?

#45: No, no. It was Sipu. The name of the village was Sipu. The name of the monastery was Sipu Khakya Monastery. The name of the village was Sipu. So at Khakya Monastery, the Lama called me and asked me what had happened. I told him that I had gone to Norbulingka; that Lhasa was bombarded by the Chinese; and that I escaped through Phenpo. I said that I met the monks of Namgyal Monastery and they asked me to join them and that I had not gone back to Gaden Monastery [from Norbulingka] but came along with the monks of Namgyal Monastery. I told the Lama that it was futile to stay back and that the Chinese were going to destroy everything and that it was better for him to leave.

That night I ate my food there [at the Lama's place] and I think I spent the night at the Lama's room as he said I could go back early the next morning. It was in the monastery. The next day he gave me a lot of *khapse* 'fried dough usually made during the Tibetan New Year' as it was after the New Year. He said he would also be leaving. We were going that morning and the Lama said he was coming later.

Once you crossed the area of Sipu, you were in Lhoka. It was at the time when the *Chushi Gangdrug* Resistance Force and the Chinese were battling at Lhoka.

The rivers from Lhasa, Tsang, and other places joined and formed the Yagyap Tsangpo, a huge river. You couldn't cross it, whether in summer or winter, except in boats. We reached the other side of the river. It was thanks to the monks of Namgyal Monastery, it being so famous, that we could pass through easily. The *Chushi Gangdrug* stopped people on the way and if I were alone, it would have been impossible for me to go forward. It was due to my being with the monks of Namgyal Monastery that I was able to reach India.

Q: He didn't meet the *Chushi Gangdrug*? Did he see them fighting?

#45: We met many guerillas on horseback at Lhoka, who told us that it was useless for us to go to India. However, since I was with the monks of the Namgyal Monastery, I was let through; otherwise they wouldn't have.

Q: Why didn't the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerillas let people through?

#45: They said that whatever good or bad happened [in Tibet] we should all stick together and that the *Chushi Gangdrug* would provide us with food and arms.

Q: And how did he feel about that?

#45: The monks of Namgyal Monastery had guns with them and I too had my gun with me. At Lhoka, there was an estate of Trijang Ladang [a tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama], in which we spent two nights. One of the senior monks went on horseback to the office of the *Chushi Gangdrug* and told them, "In previous times, wherever His Holiness the Dalai Lama went, 20 monks of the Namgyal Monastery accompanied him. Because of the urgency of the present situation, no monks of the Namgyal Monastery could join in the retinue of His Holiness. So please let us go so that we can join His Holiness' entourage." They replied, "We will let you through but not any other people who may be with you. Well, do you have guns?" He replied in the affirmative and then was told to hand over all

the guns to them. So we surrendered all the guns belonging to the monks of Namgyal Monastery and me to the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Two days later we proceeded on our journey. The estate of Trijang Ladang provided us with food to last until we reached India.

Q: Could you please thank Lobsang-*la* so much and ask him if it is possible over the next few days, if he could come again because I know he then entered the Indian Army and there is more to his story. Can you ask him if maybe over the next few days he could come back, just maybe like half an hour just to finish up because there were things we were not able to get to today?

#45: Yes, sure. I will be at the temple of Camp Number 3 and if you don't find me there, my house number is 96.

Q: Do we have his permission to use his story for the Tibet Oral History Project?

#45: Yes, sure. Please do whatever you want with it. I have no problem.

[Gift from the project is handed over and the release form is signed.]

[Second interview begins, but the beginning is missing. The sections below in { } are from the interpreter.]

#45: {...from Kadhe Monastery to Lhoka and then we went to Tsona, which took us five days. From Tsona to Mon and we are already at the Indian border and from there we reached Mon Tawang Monastery.

Q: In India?

#45: Yes.

Q: What part of India?

#45: It's in Arunachal Pradesh. We stayed at Tawang Monastery for five to six days and we were provided food and shelter by the Indian people.} They gave us food rations, tea, wheat flour, and rice on a weekly basis. After the decision to send people [Tibetan refugees] to India from Tawang, the first to go were the [Tibetan] government officials. The government officials were sent to join the entourage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Among the government officials were monks of the Namgyal Monastery; I was with them.

Q: Where was he sent?

#45: From Tawang.

Q: Tawang to where?

#45: Mon Tawang to India.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Tawang is in India.

#45: It is quite a large town. There was an Indian army camp.

Q: Where was he sent from Tawang?

#45: It took us three days on foot before we reached Bomdila. From Bomdila to Missamari was two days' journey. Then we were in Missamari, the place where all the refugees converged. The final place we reached was Missamari from Tibet. At Missamari, the Indian government gave aid. It was the place where all the refugees gathered. Initially, all the Tibetan refugees gathered at Missamari. There was an airport and a railway station close by. We were in India. Missamari is in India, right in the plains of India.

Q: Then I see that he's since got married and had three children. When did he meet his present wife? She is still alive? When did he meet her? Where did he meet his wife?

#45: Yes?

Q: When did he meet his wife? He has three children now?

#45: Here? Here I have three sons.

Q: When did he meet his wife?

#45: I met my wife...Initially when we arrived at Missamari we were sent on road construction.

Q: Where?

#45: First we went as road crew to Bomdila. Then in less than a year we were back [in Missamari] as the contractor did not pay us well. We were about five or six groups with 100 people in each group. The contractor did not pay us well. So the Tibetan government sent a complaint to the Indian government in this regard. All the road crew workers then returned to Missamari, back to Missamari. Then we were once again told to go to Bomdila with an assurance that it was for a different contractor. However those [Tibetans] who had earlier worked in Bomdila refused, saying, "We will not go to work in that place." Then we went to Chamba, which is towards Punjab. I can't remember the names of all those places. It was Chamba.

Q: Chamba?

#45: Yes, to Chamba for road construction—all the monks and soldiers who worked as road crew in Bomdila. There were not many lay people but mostly monks and ex-soldiers. One thousand men were sent to work in Chamba. I was in that group. At that time the [Indian] government did not pay much—around a rupee and a half a day. Later we were

paid two rupees a day for constructing roads at a new location. However, the [Indian] government provided us with food rations, which was cheap and good. Even with two rupees [per day] we had enough to eat at that time.

I might have stayed in Chamba for two or three years. Then Unit 22 of the [Indian] army was established. It was announced to us that whoever wished to could join the army and that we would not have to stay long [in the army]—perhaps six, seven or eight months and then we'd be sent to Tibet [to fight]. So from the 1,000 road workers, except for the laymen, all the monks and ex-soldiers joined the army. It was in the year 1962 that I went into the army. I was in Unit 22 for 14 years. In 1970, during the war against Bangladesh [by India], I went to fight there. Bangladesh was [then] called East Pakistan. I went there for a little over a month.

Q: He was in that war. Wow. So he must have been very disturbed to hear about the destruction of the Gaden Monastery when he heard that news. He was so involved in the reconstruction of the prayer hall; so can you ask his feelings about when he heard about that? Does he remember hearing about the destruction of the Gaden Monastery during the Cultural Revolution? How it made him feel?

#45: I heard it later, after we reached here [India], that the Chinese had destroyed the Gaden Monastery. I was extremely saddened, as that was the main temple of the Je Rinpoche. I had been a monk there since I was very young, received all the offerings, performed various duties, and taken part in the prayer assemblies. I was very sad but there was nothing we could do. It was a very sorry state of affairs that had happened.

I heard that there are some reconstructions being done at Gaden Monastery but it can never reach the previous glory. Earlier there were many holy blessed icons and religious artifacts dating back to thousands of years, which they [the Chinese] have destroyed. The Chinese destroyed the main temple which contained the golden statue of Je Rinpoche. It was depressing news and nothing could be worse than this.

Our country was lost, monasteries and temples destroyed; it was a very sorry state of affairs. At that time, the main reason why the Chinese especially targeted Gaden Monastery was because a huge number of monks from Gaden Monastery had joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* Resistance Force at Lhoka. It was a huge number and there was a separate unit of Gaden Monastery monks at Lhoka. Their [the Chinese] detestation for Gaden Monastery stemmed from this. Sera and Drepung Monasteries fared better [in terms of destruction by the Chinese], as there was no special unit of their monks fighting. The Gaden Monastery monks joined together to form their own unit at Lhoka. That was the reason the Chinese targeted Gaden Monastery.

Q: The monastery that he works at now as a caretaker, what monastery is that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That's not a monastery; it's sort of a temple.

Q: No, I mean what's the name of the monastery? It's here, in Bylakuppe.

#45: It's a temple. Every camp has a temple.

Q: It's a small *gonpa* for the camp. Did he think about going to Gaden [Monastery] in Mundgod [in India]? Did he ever think about going there; Gaden in Mundgod?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean before marriage?

Q: He wasn't a monk. But he never thought about rejoining?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He had given back his vows.

Q: Did he ever kill anybody? I'm wondering if he ever broke those vows. Could you ask him?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He was not a monk. This morning we asked a question and we discussed about returning the vows.

Q: Did he ever kill anybody? Well, he returned his vows, but maybe he didn't break them. Anyway the question is did he kill anybody?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: After returning his vows there's no question of whether he broke the vows but we can ask him this question. Anybody, in the sense, the Chinese?

Q: Well, no actually not just the Chinese; anybody actually.

#45: Well, with the Chinese, I did not have any experience. Though I did fire my gun, I cannot tell you whether that killed anybody.

Q: Did he ever consider becoming a monk again?

#45: No, I do not have any thought of becoming a monk again. I have my wife and children.

Q: No, before he was married, when he'd come from Tibet—did he consider becoming a monk again?

#45: No, I didn't think of becoming a monk again. In the meantime I had done many different things and it was not right to become a monk again. I had given back my vows at Lhasa and since then I did not think of joining monkhood again.

Q: Does he want to talk about how he met his wife? Ask him if he ever got married?

#45: Marriage...we just met. I met my wife in 1972; it was 1973. I was in the army [then] and had come to Bylakuppe on vacation with some friends and we met here.

Q: And he has three children.

#45: Yes, I have three sons.

Q: They are all living, right? What do they do?

#45: The oldest son is a teacher at the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery [in Bylakuppe]. The two younger ones are employed as sales persons at the Fourth Camp Shopping Center.

Q: Is it their own shop or do they work for someone?

#45: There are a whole lot of shops there near Fourth Camp.

Q: Is it his own shop or someone else's shop?

#45: They are employed by someone who manages 10 or 11 shops.

Q: His oldest son is a teacher?

#45: He is a teacher at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. He is a school teacher.

Q: How does he feel about the Chinese now?

#45: Earlier when I was in Unit 22 of the army, we thought about confronting the Chinese while I was in the army for 14 years. However, once you crossed the age of 50 years, you were not allowed to remain in the army. They gave you your retirement money, though it is not much, and sent you home. This was not done upon our request but they [army officials] say that once you have come of retirement age, you cannot continue in the army, and they discharge you. The small retirement amount that is rightfully yours is paid to you.

At that time there was not much money. A sum of 7,000 or 8,000 rupees, including savings and retirement benefits, was considered great. These days the salaries [of the army personnel] are very high; even ordinary soldiers are paid 5,000 to 7,000 rupees [per month]. During our times, even the leaders—the top people—were paid 300 or 200 rupees, and the others 100 rupees [per month], and we ordinary soldiers received just about 150 rupees! The salary was nothing—it was negligible. But at the time there was high value for money and essential commodities were cheap.

Q: Has he ever visited Gaden in Mundgod? Gaden Monastery?

#45: Yes, I went there when His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave the Kalachakra. I went there once and met all the Khangtsen monks. I have been to Mundgod.

Q: He went there once?

#45: Yes.

Q: Oh really, they are still there? Can he just describe what it was like to meet them?

#45: I told them stories about my life in the army and they told me about theirs in Mundgod. And as for the story of Tibet, everybody knew what happened. We talked just about everything, but nothing in particular. There was nothing in particular to talk about as everybody knew the same things. Not many monks of our Khangtsen from Tibet were still alive. Most of them were dead and not many were left. From those [monks] who came from Tibet, hardly five, six or seven were alive then. The younger ones came from different places, like Mon Tawang and Bhutan. I think there are only about 30 or 40 monks in our Khangtsen.

Recently one lady from our camp [Camp Number 3] went to Gaden Monastery to admit her son there and she brought back news. There is one monk I know called Lobsang Dorji in our Khangtsen, who completed his junior *geshe* degree—called Tsorang—but he couldn't do the higher degree known as Lharam. He is now a senior monk, though he was junior to me then, so not many of the older ones live. There is another senior monk called Geshe Dawala, who used to work at the Namgyal Monastery [in Dharamsala] and the Tibetan Library [in Dharamsala]. These days he is the abbot of Namgyal Monastery. He is a very good man.

Q: This is a monk from his Khangtsen in Tibet?

#45: Yes, we were together in Tibet. He is a very simple monk and good at his religious studies. Most of the time he has been working for the Tibetan government's Library and Museum in Dharamsala and also teaching the younger monks of the Namgyal Monastery—not the usual scriptures, but *tseyi* 'philosophical debate.' He taught *tseyi* to the younger monks and presently he is the abbot. Geshe Dawala, he comes from the same place as I in Kongpo.

Q: Geshe Dawala, his name is? These days he is the abbot?

#45: Yes, he is the abbot. I heard it from those who went to Mundgod.

[A short discussion follows among the videographer, interviewer, and interpreter about the question on Chinese not being answered.]

Q: Did he meet any of the people that were part of that, you know, returning the vow ceremony; the 50 monks from Gaden? Did he ever see them in exile or did he never meet any of them again? The 50 volunteers, did he ever meet any of those again?

#45: No, I never met any of them. We were from separate Khangtsen [houses]. I was the only one from Kongpo Khangtsen. In Jangtse Datsang there were 12 Khangtsen. The larger Khangtsen have something called *shedhak* 'a form of tax,' depending on its size. Our and another Khangtsen together had one *shedhak*. Some Khangtsen had one *shedhak* each. The amount of tax differed from Khangtsen to Khangtsen, depending on its size. From my Khangtsen I was the only one to go [to guard the Norbulingka] because we had one only

shedhak, while some bigger Khangtsen, who had a larger share of the tax, sent two or three monks. This was how it happened. The *Shartse* and *Jangtse Datsang* together sent 50 monks, each Datsang sending 25 monks.

Q: I'm going to try that question one more time. How does he feel about the Chinese now?

#45: I didn't have to bear the sufferings caused by the Chinese. I was able to flee immediately. The whole world knows fact that the Chinese are bad. Every country in the world knows that the Chinese are bad. So I don't have anything special to talk about them.

Q: What advice would he give to the next generations of Tibetans?

#45: I tell my children at home, though I cannot tell others' children for they would not listen even if I did because I am not a leader—I tell my children the stories about the bad deeds done by the Chinese and tell them that they should not forget these stories. Other than advising the children, there is nothing else we can do. I tell them about how bad the Chinese have been—the way they deceived the [Tibetan] people in the beginning, the eventual sufferings they caused, and the monasteries that they destroyed.

Actually when we say Chinese, it does not mean all the Chinese; it is the Communist leaders. We have nothing to say about the general Chinese public. They have to listen to what their leaders tell them. It is those bad leaders of the Communist Party who do not accept the issue of Tibetan independence or autonomy. It is those at the top. We have no reason to say that the people of China are bad because inside China, the general public have great hope for democracy. It says in the news that those who seek democracy in China are against the Communists. That is how it is. It is the leaders at the top. It is only the leaders; there is no reason why we should consider all the Chinese as our enemies. They are definitely not our enemies. They do according to what their leaders say.

Q: Advice for the children, the future generation?

#45: My advice to the children is: You should think well. You don't have to say that the general Chinese population is bad. It is those leaders of the Communist Party. They are so powerful that they are insulting His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The main person who libels His Holiness is Jiang Zemin, the previous President. These days there is also a leader of the Tibet Autonomous Region who is a Tibetan—a Tibetan called Jampa Phuntsok. He is a Communist, who imposes restrictions on the Tibetans. This Tibetan is a leader of the Tibet Autonomous Region—Jampa Phuntsok. It is said on the news.

Q: Tell Lobsang-*la* that hopefully this will help to educate younger Tibetans about what already happened in Tibet. Tell him that this will be helpful for that end.

#45: [Laughs]

Q: Please tell him thank you for coming back. I didn't want to leave him at Lhoka and wanted to make sure he got safely into exile.

#45: [Laughs]

Q: Tell him it was a great pleasure to meet him.

#45: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW