

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #4N – Dhonyoe
April 8, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #4N
2. Interviewee: Dhonyoe
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1940
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lhoka
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1965
9. Date of Interview: April 8, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 40 min
12. Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway
13. Interpreter: Palden Tsering
14. Videographer: Henry Tenenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dhonyoe was born in Lhoka in 1940. His father was a shepherd, owning a large flock and Dhonyoe helped him herd sheep on the mountains. He explains the duties of a taxpayer and the system of the *wulak*, which is tax in the form of performing labor. Under that system all the villagers performed work on the estate of the village leaders and helped with communal projects.

Dhonyoe shares his experience as a Chinese road builder, for which he dug earth and rocks, cut wood and constructed bridges. He describes the process of forcefully recruiting men of various villages and monks from the monasteries to work as road crew. He fled from the work site and returned to his family home. There he learned that the family's huge supply of grain had been taken by the poor villagers under the orders of the occupying Chinese forces. Dhonyoe recounts how the Chinese drove the poor people to destroy monasteries and holy images, throw out scriptures and taunted the believers of the Buddhist dharma.

Dhonyoe was a witness to several *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' conducted on the influential people of his village. These leaders were often taken away after *thamzing* to die of starvation in prisons. After a friend's father was subjected to *thamzing*, a group of Dhonyoe's friends invited him to flee to India with them. Dhonyoe visited relatives in Tibet in 1989 and was told about the Cultural Revolution and how many people had starved to death during that time.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, taxes, life under Chinese rule, forced labor, *thamzing*, destruction of monasteries, escape experiences.

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Interview #4N

Interviewee: Dhonyoe

Age: 75, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway

Interview Date: April 8, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:09

Interviewee #4N: Name?

Q: Yes.

#4N: It is Dhonyoe.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, but also the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, the true culture and the true beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this your interview?

#4N: How?

Q: There's this organization called Tibet Oral Project...

#4N: I see.

Q: Can they use your interview and photographs?

#4N: Yes, I have nothing to hide. There is nothing new [I] have fabricated; what it is, it is. Not just me, everyone like me and also the Tibetan Government have undergone the same difficulties. There is nothing I personally have made-up. It is the same for every one of us. Everyone knows it.

Q: Thank you.

#4N: [Nods]

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. If at any time during the interview you want to take a break or stop for any reason, please let us know.

00:02:37

#4N: Okay. Personally I do not have any reason to be cautious. [I] have nothing like that.

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

#4N: Personally [I] will have no problems.

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

#4N: Yes, thank you.

Q: Dhonyoe, how old are you?

#4N: I was born in 1940 and am 75 now.

Q: Where were you from in Tibet?

#4N: I am from Lhoka and the district is Lhunze Zong.

Q: Lhunze Zong.

#4N: Lhunze Zong. [To interpreter] You might know Nyen Lhunze Zong.

Q: What was your father's name?

00:04:18

#4N: Father's name was Kunsang.

Q: And your mother's name?

#4N: It was Pema.

Q: What did your father do for a living?

#4N: My father was a shepherd. He had many sheep and earned a living as a shepherd.

Q: What did your mother do?

#4N: Mother...[we] were taxpayers having land, animals and many such things.

Q: When did you leave Tibet?

#4N: In the year 1965.

Q: So you were about 25 when you left Tibet?

#4N: Yes, around that. [I] was 25.

Q: So what did you do when you were living in Tibet?

#4N: When Tibet was independent, when our Tibetan Government was in existence, I grew up as a child and there were many kinds of work like farm work, nomadic work, performing *wulak* ‘labor tax’; there were many such work.

Q: And then after the Chinese came?

#4N: After the Chinese came children of my age and monks of the monasteries and nuns... all the monasteries were closed and all of us were sent to build roads.

Q: How old were you then?

00:07:21

#4N: [I] was around 18 or 19 then, a child of around 19.

Q: Can you tell us about that experience of being... Were you taken away from your village and what was it like to be building the roads? What were you doing?

#4N: Yes?

Q: [You] mentioned that after the Chinese arrived, you—people of your age and people from the monasteries—were taken to build roads.

#4N: That is right.

Q: What was the experience like then?

#4N: I was like a child and we did whatever they ordered. Whatever task it may be like digging the earth, digging out rocks, building bridges, cutting woods, destroying roads near monasteries, these were the experiences or the tasks [I] did. [I] did whatever they ordered.

Q: “They” meaning the Chinese?

#4N: The Chinese. We were under the Chinese.

Q: Were you able to live at home when you were doing this roadwork?

00:09:13

#4N: [I] did not get the chance. From the time we started, we spent around a year just building roads. Later everybody...I was like a child and left for home. You left according to your desire for they did not send you home.

Q: So did you just sort of escape from the road building?

#4N: It was not like permission was granted; it was like running away, escaping.

Q: Did you do this on your own or did you do with some friends?

#4N: Initially I was alone, but many people fled after me. A large number escaped.

Q: So when you were building the roads what were your living conditions like?

[Interpreter interprets as: When you were building roads what was the condition of your family, like economic condition?]

#4N: After we left to build roads...My home where I was born, long ago it was quite a rich family having plenty to eat. Therefore, when I came back [I] was told about such incidents having taken place. All the poor and the impoverished came under Chinese influence because they [Chinese] stated that they would provide food and did not allow [the poor] to venture out. They [the Chinese] told them [poor] that they would provide food.

They [the poor] did not have food and told the Chinese, “We need to be provided with food for we have nothing to eat.” [I] was told that is what was said. So what the Chinese replied was, “Presently you must take what the wealthy people in your village own and consume that since the Communist Chinese are here. You will be distributed what [the wealthy families] possess. You have to say which families own provisions.” My family was supposed to be wealthy in those days. Hence, they [poor] informed [the Chinese] that this family had possessions.

00:12:30

So the Communist Chinese came and our wealth...all the poor barged together into our home, it was said. I was not there but the relatives said so. [The poor] remarked, “The Communist Chinese have given us, the poor all the food.” [They] demanded the keys, took the keys, opened the house and from the house...Our family did not have any gold and silver but a huge amount of grains; grain houses of the size of this room packed with grains. They [the Chinese] gave away all of that to the poor, it was said. Everything was rendered empty.

Q: So did you actually see the Chinese come and take, you know and bring the poorer Tibetans to take the grain?

#4N: [I] could not have seen it because I was living at the road construction site, which is at a distance. So on coming back [I] was told that such incidents took place.

Q: How did your family cope with this loss of food and taking of all the, you know the goods?

#4N: The house was rendered empty.

Q: The house was rendered empty.

#4N: Yes.

Q: How did your parents feel about it then?

00:15:44

#4N: My mother had passed away when I was little. Mother's siblings, [my] maternal uncle and aunt, they lived in the house. They handed over the keys to the poor and to those that came there. So they took away every food that was there, rendering the house empty.

Q: Were people living there still?

#4N: There are.

Q: There now?

#4N: Maternal aunt and the elders are dead, but the children from my other mother are living in the home.

Q: Your siblings are still...your brothers and sisters are still living in Tibet?

#4N: Older one is dead but younger...we are only two from the same father and mother. Mother passed away when [we] were little. However, there are children from older father and children from older mother. There are many.

[Interpreter interprets as: ...my bigger father and my bigger mother, they have like lots of kids.]

Q: Bigger father and mother are aunts and uncles?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes. His father [mother] died, so he married another woman.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, I see. So his father married. Okay.

Q: Were these family...Was your father and his second wife and their children living in this house?

00:18:30

#4N: They are. There are many members living in separate houses. Earlier ours was just one or two families. Once when I went to see the relatives, went for a visit, there were around 15 families then.

Q: Fifteen families?

#4N: Fifteen families. There are many.

Q: So to go back to the roadwork that you did, were you forced to do the roadwork building? Were you paid for the work?

#4N: Actually they took us from home by force, all the people that were fit to work. However, they did provide food and money in the form of *motse* 'Chinese paper money'

daily. It was not like there was no wage at all, and food like rice...There was a huge quantity of *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ then. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] had prepared and stocked *tsampa* in granaries, which was given to us, the road crew on a monthly basis.

Q: So the people, who worked on the roads, were they people from all different social classes or did they target, for instance wealthy people?

00:21:05

#4N: [Speaks before translation is complete] There were large numbers of people in groups of a hundred.

Q: Was the majority from poor families or were they wealthy people forced to work?

#4N: The majority belonged to various monasteries that had been shut. Then there were those capable of doing work in the age group of 18, 19, 20 to 30-year olds who had been given orders to leave. It was according to orders for these men.

Q: And people from all different social classes were called to work?

#4N: The wealthy, the poor...Yes, it was the wealthy, poor, everyone. It was all men that were fit to work.

Q: Were you paid for the work you did?

#4N: What?

Q: Was money paid for the roadwork?

#4N: They paid a wage in the form of *motse*. It was not like there was no wage. There was.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Chinese money.

Q: What did you do with that Chinese money?

00:23:18

#4N: One must purchase *tsampa* every month and perhaps there was some left. [The money] got over in that way.

One must buy tea, salt and everything.

Q: Just one last question about the roadwork. When the Chinese came into town and they wanted people to build the roads, how did they get the young men to then go onto the road crew? Did they call everyone? For instance, did they call everyone into the central area and so you, you, you? How did they do it?

#4N: At that time we were under the control of the Chinese who had carved the region into *shang* ‘villages’ and from *shang* [they] formed a *tson* and then from *tson*, a *tsuk*. Three divisions had been formed. So there were different leaders who had lists of men that were fit to work and one was ordered to go according to their register, and had to leave.

Q: So did they come to your home and take you or...?

00:25:53

#4N: That was not the case. There were different villages with their respective leaders who received orders [from the Chinese] and in turn ordered us that such and such person had to go.

Q: So was it an oral order or did it come on a piece of paper?

#4N: The administration like village leaders received orders that they issued to the village representatives.

Q: Did the order come in writing or orally?

#4N: Perhaps they held meetings, the village leaders like *shangtang* ‘village administrators’ and such. Written orders...they did the work. There were leaders like *shangtang*, *tsuktang* and *uyon* ‘committee members.’ The poor and the vagrants had been appointed leaders of the people. [The Chinese] issued orders to them.

Q: The Tibetan leader, the village leader?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The village leaders, which were all appointed by the Chinese.

Q: Thank you. Did you endure any hardships while you were doing this work?

00:27:53

#4N: [I] was a child and played along with the others and did not face any hardships.

Q: Earlier you mentioned the death of your mother when you were very little. Can you tell us what you remember of your mother’s death?

#4N: When mother passed away we were an older sister and I, but [I] have no memories of mother’s passing away.

Q: No memories since [you] were very little.

#4N: It seems I was just about crawling then. The older sister was walking a little but has no memories. [We] lost mother at such a time.

Q: How was it for you growing up without a mother?

#4N: After mother passed away the daughter was left at mother's home and I, as a son was brought up in father's home. Father's younger sibling took a wife who had a child and I was breastfed alongside. This is what [I] was told when [I] grew older. So [I] have no memories of having had problems or of having been happy.

Q: What kind of person was your father? Describe your father to us.

00:30:24

#4N: My father was a person who grew up in a village. So [he] was not one with a bad personality. Owning a large number of sheep [he] was up in the morning to herd the sheep. Then came down in the evening, went to sleep and then to herd the next morning. There were around a thousand sheep. [He] did not quarrel with other people, instead was cordial to everyone. Father led his life in a peaceful manner.

Q: Thank you. You mentioned that you would like to talk about the imposition of the labor tax. I think you already mentioned this to Palden [interpreter], but could you tell me about the labor tax, imposition of labor tax?

#4N: Yes?

Q: You mentioned the labor tax earlier. Can [you] please elaborate on that?

#4N: There is nothing elaborate about it. Generally, the family was a taxpayer. That is about it.

Q: What is the meaning of *wulak*?

#4N: *Wulak* is just *wulak* in Tibetan. The meaning of *wulak*...it is a Tibetan word. Everywhere [in Tibet] it is called as *telgyu wulak* 'performance of labor tax.' *Tel* is the obligation and *wulak* is what you...For instance in our camp, when a camp is established, one must attend to certain work in the camp like one is called to perform some work in the camp or at the office and such. It is similar to that. That is *wulak*.

Q: *Wulak* is government work?

00:34:41

#4N: Every region has a leader and [*wulak*] is working for them. Like there are different estates and many such in a district in the old society. There are leaders at various stages and performing labor for one of them is called *wulak*.

Q: I apologize because I don't know what *wulak* is and if you could tell us as much as you can about it for people who don't know about that custom.

#4N: The meaning of *wulak* is just as I told you. Someone that works...Take our [refugee] camp for instance, the camp asks us to come to work. It is like being asked to work. When we were independent...under the exile government there are leaders in respective regions. Those that did such work [in Tibet] enjoyed many rights like owning lands, animals and

grazing areas in the mountains. They have been awarded many ownership rights. Because of these, one is obliged to labor like hoeing the fields, which must be done by the people for the leader would not do such labor. He is someone that looks after the region. It is like that.

Q: So in general *wulak* is someone that works for the government?

#4N: Someone that labors...It is something like working for the government. When one is called to work by one's respective region, [he/she] must oblige. That is considered *wulak*. It is called *telgyu wulak*.

Q: So you experienced this? You actually did labor; you actually had to do some of this *wulak*?

00:37:45

#4N: It was not me alone but the whole village. Such a rule existed.

Q: So the *wulak* that you did was this for your community or was it for a wealthy landowner or monastery? Who were you doing it for?

#4N: It was not a monastery as such. Basically it is for the village for the leader in order to lead the village. So work connected to that is like for the village.

Q: What kinds of work would you do?

#4N: Various estates owned lands. When there are lands, during autumn there is work connected to autumn and during spring there is work connected to spring. There is work to be done every day. During summer one must channel water, stem the flow and dig canals to water the fields. There are many kinds of work depending upon the seasons.

Q: So in spring what kinds of work would you do?

00:40:10

#4N: Take spring for instance, farmers sowed the fields. Irrigating the fields was not simple; canals must be created through which water is fed. There were many families that shared a canal and each family channeled water on a certain day. It was divided like that. Then there was springtime work like plowing the fields and re-plowing, three or four times and then sowing the seeds. Manure must be applied without which crops do not grow. There were many such tasks.

Q: So was this like one farmer...you know, farmers coming to help each other, like collaborative work?

#4N: *Wulak* is for the whole village. If a canal had to be constructed, the canal was not for one field but the entire area was being irrigated. The *wulak* was for that purpose.

Q: This is very interesting and I'm just trying to get my head around it to understand how it happened.

#4N: [Smiles]

Q: My aunts and uncles were all farmers and some times of the year they'd go and help each other with the harvest. So one uncle would go and help another uncle or a neighbor and then later that neighbor...but they were all working on their own land. There was no communal land. Was the communal land in your village shared by the whole community?

00:43:49

#4N: Just now we were talking about the canals. That was not just for the private [land owners] but the whole region for when water flowed from the source, private [land owners] needed it and you needed it. All those families [whose fields] shared this canal; everybody in the village needed the water for irrigation. Without water one cannot cultivate in springtime. Therefore, it was for the village; private [land owners] came under this...shared the canal, the taxpayers and everybody else; all shared the water.

Q: Thank you. You mentioned here that the...His Holiness the Dalai Lama spent a night at Dinlay Gonpa during his escape from Tibet. Did you meet the Dalai Lama? Did you see the Dalai Lama?

#4N: I did not have the time to see [His Holiness] because it was springtime then and [I] was in the mountains herding sheep. Those present in the village saw [His Holiness], but the likes of me were not even at home but were shepherding sheep in the grazing area. So [I] did not see [His Holiness].

Q: What do you remember of that time when the Dalai Lama passed near to your village?

00:46:30

#4N: I was young and did not have much feeling. Later when I grew older...even though it was springtime I went to the nomadic site to gather dung to be used as firewood during summer. You would know dung, right? We were having food then. I was a child but older men, women and some nomads there were having a conversation.

The women remarked, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama has gone aboard. Alas, what could be the reason?" They voiced their anxiety. A leader among the nomads said, "He will not face any problems. He is the universal emperor of all." I did not understand then but just heard the conversation. Later when [I] grew older [I] found this conversation strange. I can recall something like this.

Q: How old were you when His Holiness left?

#4N: It was '59, right? [I] was around 19 in '59.

Q: When did the Chinese first come to your village?

#4N: The first time...when Tibet was lost, their [Chinese] soldiers came through Tsethang to Lhoka. They occupied the whole country.

Q: Can you please repeat that? When did they first come?

#4N: What?

Q: When did the Chinese first come...

00:49:45

#4N: The first time...

Q: ...to your village?

#4N: The first...[we] lost the war. After the war was lost they occupied.

[Interpreter interprets as: It was like Tibet already lost war with China. So it was all occupied by that time.]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: By what time?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: When Tibet was occupied it was ultimately his village was also occupied by that time.

Q: So you were born in 1940 and the Chinese came in 1949, '50?

#4N: When [the Chinese] first invaded, they did so through Kham. I was a child and have not much to say. However, everybody knew about it. I would not know much as a child. They took control of our village after His Holiness the Dalai Lama went abroad. I do not know when they began to come from the east. It is sometime in the 1950s that [the Chinese] attacked Kham. The people of Kham talk about it.

Q: In what ways did the Chinese occupation affect your life?

00:52:15

#4N: Initially, the Chinese took control and sent us to construct roads. I built roads as a child and then returned home from the construction site. I was a friend to sons of wealthy families. There were a few of them and the *choethok* 'escape' to India along with them has been a very good thing that happened in [my] life. It was thanks to them for otherwise I am a very stupid man that knows nothing. We were like-minded and made plans and one day took flight. I have not erred in taking this decision and feel that it was the friends that guided me here. [I] feel like that now.

Q: What's coming on *choethok*? Is it receiving teachings?

#4N: What?

Q: What's *choethok*?

#4N: *Choethok* means to come to exile. It is called *choethok* in Tibetan.

Q: Can you tell us about when you fled Tibet? What made you decide to leave and how did you go about leaving?

00:54:49

#4C: The main reason for making the decision was that my friends' fathers were subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' and in addition to their houses being confiscated, the family members were in prison. The children were wise and educated. So they made the decision and being friends, they trusted me and told me. However, secrecy had to be maintained as it was a danger to one's life but they trusted me. That was the main reason for going to a foreign land. Moreover, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was living in a foreign land and [we] followed him. They guided [me]. Had they not led, personally I am not capable of this. [I] did not have much knowledge but they sort of guided [me].

Q: Can you tell us about your journey from your village to India, any hardships and anything special you remember about it?

#4N: During the journey we traveled in the night. The region of Nyen is close to Tsona. [We] hid during the day and in the night they guided [me] from hill to hill. The hardship was incredible. If today passed by, [we] wondered about tomorrow. When the sun rose today, [we] wondered about tomorrow, and as the sun set [we] wondered what to do. As the sun set in the evening, we wondered what would happen until tomorrow. It was extremely difficult. It was not just me but everyone in the group that journeyed with such anxiety, hiding in the hills during the day and traveling the night from hill to hill. However, by the grace of God [we] managed to reach the destination.

Q: How did you know which direction to go?

00:59:13

#4N: That my group members...they were intelligent and knew which direction to take and go over which hill. They were guiding [me].

Q: You mean the friends?

#4N: Yes, the friends.

Q: How long did your journey take you?

#4N: It might have taken around 10 days. [I] am not sure but it took around 10 days and then [we] reached the Indian border one morning.

Q: Did you ever encounter the Chinese or anybody who would try to stop you?

#4N: [We] did not. They were guiding us through hills where there were no people.

Q: So you didn't see any other Tibetan people going into exile?

01:00:43

#4N: During the day when [we] hid in the hills [we] could see people walking.

Q: [You] couldn't see at night.

#4N: One could not see at night.

Q: So when you reached India did you...did you meet the Dalai Lama?

#4N: Later [I] saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala.

Q: Could you tell us about that experience, please?

#4N: [I] saw [His Holiness] later.

Q: When?

#4N: [I] did not see [His Holiness] immediately upon reaching [India].

Q: Few months or few years later?

#4N: After a year or two.

Q: What impact did that have on you meeting him?

01:02:21

#4N: We were many people waiting to see [His Holiness]. I thought in my mind, "I am getting the chance to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama today. Whatever I do, [I] shall not tell lies, falsehood or be insolent." [I] took a pledge that whatever [I] did [I] would always be honest. With that vow in my mind [I] went to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: I know that the Dalai Lama is a very special person for Tibetans. Why is he special to you?

#4N: For me personally, because of the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama [I] have been saved until now. Basically, the world believes [in him] and that is it. I believe not just me but a whole lot of people are saved because of His Holiness.

Q: When you fled Tibet with your friends, what did you take with you?

#4N: [I] did not bring any articles but a little bit of *tsampa* and some food items. In Tibet we have things like butter and cheese, some of which [I] carried on the back. No other things. As for clothes [I] was wearing them and shoes. We did not possess anything of value. So [I] carried nothing.

Q: Did you run out of anything before you got to India? Did you run out of anything before you got to...?

01:06:16

#4N: [I] did not run out of *tsampa*. [I] drank water and ate *tsampa* along the way. We have the practice of drinking *chamdu*, [adding *tsampa*] to water and drinking it. [We] were young and felt fine. There was no making fire and cooking anything but just drinking water along with *tsampa*.

Q: Did you ever see any of the monasteries being destroyed?

#4N: [I] did. All those that carried out the destruction were our people. A large number of *kusungthukten* ‘sacred objects symbolic of enlightened body, speech and mind’ were destroyed and dharma books like the Kagyur and Tengyur were thrown out. It was no’t just me but everybody witnessed it clearly.

Q: When you saw it, how did you feel? What did you do?

#4N: I was young, playful and did not take much notice, but of course the older people did. Children were just children. When [I] think about it now I feel, “Alas, such things happened.” At that time [I] was more into playing and running around.

Q: Who did the destruction of the monasteries?

01:09:22

#4N: Those that destroyed the monasteries were those that were their...[They] were called the poor class by the Chinese. We were in the wealthy class like the taxpayers and as such had been rendered powerless. The leaders and the influential in the village had been imprisoned, killed and such. The poor class, they...The main motivating factor... Take a vehicle for instance, the driver drives the vehicle; likewise, it was the Chinese and those that did the work were our...

Q: ...the poor?

#4N: It was the poor. They had been motivated. They were given money and authority and felt great. Such things had never happened to them earlier and [they] had become great. They were the key people that implemented it. However, the Chinese were the instigators and they [the poor] did not do it voluntarily.

Q: What did the destruction involve? What was done to the monasteries?

#4N: How monasteries were destroyed?

Q: Yes.

01:11:39

#4N: It was not just one or two monasteries that were destroyed but there were monasteries in every region. Initially, those that used to attend prayer assemblies in the monasteries were ousted and the monasteries closed. Later what happened was that they [Chinese] formed many movements like...[not discernible]. There were many discussions

on religion, *kusungthukten* and such. “If you wish to practice the dharma, [we] will keep you locked up in a room for a week. If the gods feed you during this period, you can continue to practice. Otherwise, where is God?” They call themselves Communist Chinese. The Communist Chinese claim to be believers of the doctrine of *ngotsomawa* ‘materialism’ and not *semtsomawa* ‘idealism.’ [To interpreter] Do you understand *ngotsomawa* and *semtsomawa*?

Q: *Ngotso* means reality?

#4N: Reality like science. *Semtsomawa* is like seeking refuge and praying to the deities and lamas through the mind. This is called *semtsomawa*. They claim not to believe in *semtsomawa* and that they were *ngotsomawa*, “We do not believe in religion and God.” Hence, the *kusungthukten* were removed. As for the monasteries, some became their military bases, some were demolished and some turned into meeting halls for the people. Such things were carried out.

It was not just one or two monasteries. There were [monasteries] in every part of the country. Take Nepal for instance, we have many monasteries; likewise there were many and all those were closed saying, “You are carrying out blind faith. What is the use of burning butter?” [The Chinese] meant the lighting of butter lamps. “What do you get by burning *tsampa*? If there is a God, take refuge and if you get fed, we will accept that there is God. Otherwise, where is God? Bring it.” There was a lot of talk.

A meeting was held every day. Their leaders came and gave lectures to the people. There was a meeting every day which one had to attend. Everybody was obliged to sit there and listen until they finished talking. Such things took place.

Q: So the monasteries weren’t physically destroyed?

01:16:13

#4N: [Some monasteries] were turned into military bases, people’s meeting halls and grain storage [*dukhang*].

Q: Guesthouse [*donkhang*]?

#4N: Grains, storage for grains like a warehouse. All the *kusungthukten* and such were destroyed.

Q: So the Tibetan, the poor or the brainwashed Tibetan, what did they physically do in the destruction of the monasteries?

#4N: They were like the tools.

Q: They were the tools and the vehicle drivers were the Chinese...

#4N: The drivers were steering the vehicles.

Q: The question is: what did the common Tibetans that took orders from the Chinese do?

#4N: There were different types even among the common [people]. Some did according to their [Chinese] bidding but liked us. There were some that [just followed] what they [Chinese] said. There is the saying *pango...* [not discernible] *mig mathong*. There were many such also. There were many different types. There were some good ones too. There were some very poor that turned out well on being appointed leaders.

Q: How did they destroy the monasteries?

01:18:56

#4N: There was not any need to fire shots at the monastery. The doors and windows could be broken and the wooden parts of the monasteries pulled down. Those that destroyed did such acts while their [Chinese] soldiers kept watch. The monasteries' essence and activities were gone. It was like any other family in the village.

Q: I apologize for my Tibetan pronunciation but do you know the term *thamzing*?

#4N: *Chamzik*?

Q: When Tibetans were humiliated publicly by the Chinese?

#4N: *Thamzing*!

Q: *Thamzing*.

#4N: *Thamzing*!

Q: Did you ever see *thamzing*?

#4N: [I] witnessed some minor ones, which happened many times. Every wealthy person in the village was subjected to *thamzing*. Some were killed. There would be different leaders and all the senior ones were subjected to *thamzing* and killed. [I] did witness a few minor *thamzing*. Everyone saw it as it was done in front of the people, the one called *thamzing*.

Q: You said earlier that you have seen both large and small *thamzing*. Could you tell us about them, please?

01:21:36

#4N: *Thamzing* is like this. The father of the boy that guided me during the escape was detained [by the Chinese] for being subjected to *thamzing*. This was in my village but in every other village there were *thamzing* and many prisoners, not just one or two but hundreds and thousands. One was subjected to *thamzing* there and then taken to Tsethang and Samye and starved to death. How many would have been killed elsewhere! It is countless.

Many have been killed through starvation. Those that were formerly influential in the village or wealthy from their parents' time, all of them were killed. Every member of a family was not taken away but the head like the father was. Then in the monasteries there were the disciplinarians and chant leaders who were taken away to Tsethang and... Those from our village were taken to Tsethang and Samye and killed through starvation. It was not one or two people. One cannot make a count. [They] were killed like that...and subjected to *thamzing*.

Q: Were any of your family...you mentioned your friend's father. Did you actually see that?

#4N: I saw the *thamzing* that took place during the day. People were called to gather and he was beaten. He was taken to their [Chinese] office, which we call as *dzong* and forced to work. He was a very capable person. Otherwise, most in his group were sent to Tsethang and killed through starvation.

Q: I thought that *thamzing* also involved humiliating people?

01:25:35

#4N: It is not humiliation but much deeper. The person being subjected to *thamzing* is an influential person of the village and the one that does it is someone who they [Chinese] had motivated and trained. "He must be subjected to *thamzing*. He must be beaten." [The prisoner's] hands were tied at the back and brought before the people. Then all the people were forced to hit him in a row. Some did not...you had to get up when your turn came and then beat [him]. The core of the matter was that he happened to be the influential person in the village. They [Chinese] called them *gyumay delrim* 'poor class.' [To interpreter] You know *gyumay delrim*?

Q: *Gyumay delrim*.

#4N: *Gyumay delrim* means the needy. We would call them needy here. *Gyumay delrim* means one that does not have wealth and *delrim* is the class. The *gyumay delrim* had been given powers and they were the leaders of the village. Even if they did not wish to, they had to. Otherwise, like a monkey acting in a drama, they [Chinese] were holding a stick at the back. Likewise, they had to do it. Therefore, the man that was tied there was beaten. Their soldiers came and tied up the man and placed [him] in the center of the people. There were some bad people that accepted. Anyway, regardless of whether one wished to or not when your turn came, you had to do it. Then there was flinging earth and rocks, kicking, pulling hair, pulling ears.

There was one called Kyesurla who had a ponytail. One woman pulled the ponytail. He had [long] hair. [She] pulled it and held it in her hand. Then there was the monastery called Dinlay Gonpa where His Holiness the Dalai Lama stayed. Its lama was a great *duthop* 'hermit with special powers' who was subjected to *thamzing*. It was [his] destiny that he could not leave because he should have when His Holiness the Dalai Lama did. There were many *ladang* 'grand lama's residences' and [he] could not leave and fell into Chinese hands and was subjected to *thamzing*. Some women from the Yapa community rode on the *rinpoche*'s 'reincarnated lama' head saying, "If you are a lama show miracles." Thus [he]

suffered greatly. It was not just in our village but was happening all over Tibet. Such difficulties occurred.

Q: Thank you.

#4N: [Joins palms]

Q: A long time ago you mentioned *Chushi Gangdrug* and *Chushi Gangdrug* being near your village. Were you ever tempted to join *Chushi Gangdrug*?

01:31:26

#4N: The *Chushi Gangdrug* was present but I did not have the thought of joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*. There was a large number of *Chushi Gangdrug* [men] in our region.

Q: Why was that?

#4N: I had family members and we owned a large number of animals, which one must take care of. One must take care of one's possessions. So [I] did not have any thought of joining.

Q: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us about your life in Tibet?

#4N: It is like a story. I left in the year '65 and reached India. Later [I] went to see the relatives and through conversations with them learnt that a great number of people died from starvation when the Cultural Revolution was launched. When [I] asked about it, except for the great suffering that they talked about, there was nothing good they had to describe. Until then they had great hope from those [Tibetans] living abroad. I learnt this from [my] conversation with them.

Q: When did the meeting take place?

#4N: It was around 1989 when [I] went to meet the relatives.

Q: What have you done to support your family in Tibet if you've been able to do anything?

01:35:07

#4N: [I] did not have anything to take because it was difficult to pay my passage and the journey is long. I wished to meet...meet [the relatives] before [I] died. They sent letters through others that had visited saying, "Come to see us." So [I] had a strong desire to meet which is why [I] went. However, [I] did not have anything to take.

Q: I didn't realize that Tibetans could go back in Tibet if they had fled. So how did you manage to do that? Did you do it with a visa or just went over the border like you did the last time?

#4N: I acquired a document in India from the Chinese office in Delhi to travel. [I] got the document from there. At that time there was a flow of travelers moving back and forth unlike the present situation. One did not have to make any payment and they gave

permission to visit relatives. It was then that [I] went. They asked me to come in a month and then [I] received permission to travel.

Q: So you must have enjoyed seeing your family?

01:37:43

#4N: They were incredibly happy and so was I. We had grown up together. They said, “We listened to the radio news over Voice of America hoping to hear your name but it never happened.”

Q: The radio?

#4N: What?

Q: [You] mean the radio? The Voice of America?

#4N: When [I] went to visit, there were those that were my childhood friends. They were very happy. “[We] listened to the news hoping your name would be mentioned but the name was never mentioned. It is great to see you before we die.” I was very happy and so were they.

Q: How long did you stay in Tibet that time?

#4N: [I] stayed around a month.

Q: Well, thank you very much. This has been a pleasure to talk with you.

#4N: Thank you.

Q: I need to ask you...I just need to ask you again, sorry. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for you?

01:39:41

#4N: I will not face any problems but do not know if they will face any.

Q: Would you like...Can we use your real name for the project or would you prefer that we use a pseudonym?

#4N: It is fine to use the real name. There is no need for any change. I have not spoken about things that did not take place. You asked about the happenings and I recounted the truth. Other than that there is not anything [I spoke about] that did not happen. That is it.

Q: Good. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW