

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #66M – Kyizom
April 5, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #66M
2. Interviewee: Kyizom
3. Age: 74
4. Date of Birth: 1936
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Tsang Nyero
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 5, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp No. 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 40 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Kyizom hailed from the village of Tsang Samtenling near Gyangtse. Her family farmed as well as engaged in raising animals. During summertime they lived in a huge tent made from the hair of yak and grazed their animals in the grasslands. They returned home in time for the harvest each year. As a child, Kyizom along with her large dog, helped herd the yaks and sheep.

Kyizom recalls that when the Chinese first appeared in her village, the children were terrified and distrusted them. The Chinese wearing blue or yellow uniforms lured the villagers with gifts, but gradually changed their attitude and then started oppressing the Tibetan people. Kyizom and her family were forced to move to the ground floor of her house and Chinese officials occupied the second floor. The Chinese distributed all her family's animals to village beggars.

Kyizom witnessed the *thamzing* 'struggle session' of her father and aunt, who was the *umze* 'chant leader' of the local nunnery. Kyizom vividly describes the horrible way they were humiliated in front of the whole village. Both her father and aunt were subjected to *thamzing* two more times and then imprisoned where they eventually died, most likely from starvation. Kyizom feared for her safety and fled to India through Bhutan with many others from her village. The normal 2-day journey took 15 days in order to hide from the Chinese.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, herding, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, imprisonment, forced labor, *thamzing*, oppression under Chinese, escape experiences.

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Interview #66M

Interviewee: Kyizom

Age: 74, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 5, 2010

Question: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ please tell us your name.

00:00:16

Interviewee #66M: Kyizom. Should I tell you the names of my father and mother?

Q: No. Please tell us what we ask.

#66M: Okay.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans to share with the new generation of Tibetans and also to show to Chinese people to understand the true experiences of the Tibetans in Tibet.

00:01:17

#66M: Okay.

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

#66M: Sure.

Q: Thank you very much.

#66M: [Nods]

Q: If you want to stop or take a break at anytime, just let us know.

00:01:45

#66M: Okay, but I do not need to rest.

Q: If there’s a question you don’t want to answer, just say “I don’t want to answer that”.

#66M: Okay.

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

00:02:14

#66M: There will be no problem. If this were shown to the world, it will make our story known.

Q: We are also very happy and very honored to record your story.

#66M: Yes, and I am also extremely happy.

Q: When you think about Tibet, what do you think about?

00:02:54

#66M: [I] was born in Tibet and left Tibet to come here. Are [you] asking about [my] livelihood [in Tibet]?

[Question is repeated.]

#66M: Of course, one would remember. One remembers Tibet and one's relatives there. One remembers everything.

Q: What did your family do in Tibet?

00:03:37

#66M: The livelihood was farming and cattle rearing.

Q: Where you lived, did you live in a village? Did you live in a house in a village?

#66M: We lived in a house, not a tent. It was a large house and we owned a large number of yaks and sheep. The house had a ground floor and a first floor.

Q: How many floors did it have?

00:04:10

#66M: The house had two floors.

Q: How many rooms did it have?

#66M: Perhaps there were five or six rooms. We required rooms for the servants and the family to live. There were five or six rooms. There were rooms on the ground floor as well as upstairs.

Q: How many people lived with you in your house?

00:04:28

#66M: We were 12 members in the family. There were my grandmother, my mother, my aunt who was captured by the Chinese, my father, grandfather and others. We were altogether 12 members. I was 20 years old when I left [Tibet].

Q: Where were you in your family? Were you one of the younger members, the middle, the older?

#66M: I was among the youngest. Mother had two children after me.

Q: How many children did your mother have?

00:05:27

#66M: My mother had only three children of whom one died in Bhutan and the other in Orissa [India]. I am the only one who survived.

Q: *Ama-la*, I am going to be asking you about your early life in Tibet, very early life in Tibet.

#66M: Okay. Long time ago [I] was a child and it was a very happy period. [We] used to work in the fields and milk the sheep and *dri* ‘female yak.’ [We] owned *dri*, yaks, sheep and farmlands. [We] led a happy life as *samadok* ‘farmers and herders.’ That was before the Chinese invasion.

Q: What did you like to do when you were a child?

00:06:49

#66M: [I] herded the yaks and sheep and worked in the fields when [I] was young. That was the nomadic lifestyle. [I] was very happy. There were no trees like these, but there were pasturelands and flowers. I used to graze the sheep there.

Q: It was very beautiful. So did you like being outside a lot, in the countryside? Did you like to be outside?

#66M: [I] had to go outside to herd the sheep. There were pastures. In my region of Tsang in Tibet, there were no forests. There were absolutely no forests and [I] went to graze the sheep.

Q: Did you ever live in tents part of the time? You said part of your family is *dokpa* ‘nomad.’ So did you ever travel with...

00:08:20

#66M: [Interrupts] One released [the cattle] in the morning and brought them back home in the evening. One took along a dog and herded a large number of sheep. There were three herders.

[Question is repeated.]

#66M: We did not live in tents. We had huge enclosures [for the cattle] and then took them to graze in the fields. There were those that worked in the fields and those that herded the sheep. But whatever it was [that we did], we lived in houses and not in tents. In case we left [home] for many days at a stretch, we had to live in tents. [We] lived in tents and churned milk.

Q: Have you lived in a tent?

00:08:58

#66M: Yes, [I] did. The tent was made from the hair of yaks. It was set up using poles. Ours was one that was called *kashi dhungye*, meaning [a tent with] four pillars and eight beams. The tent was a huge structure in black. The tent was made using *tsipa* [gestures to her hair]; the entire tent was made from yak hair.

Q: So when did you stay in the tent, during the summer months?

#66M: [We] stayed there in the summer. [We] left for a long distance during summer and returned during winter and lived in the house. [We] went to the hills in summer.

Q: In the summer months when you lived in the tent, did you move the tent or did it stay in one place?

00:10:54

#66M: It was not moved. It remained in one place. One day [we] grazed the animals this side [gestures] and the next day, that side and so on. [We] returned in the evening. It was the same case with the yaks. We milked the sheep and stayed there. The *ba* ‘tent’ stood there for five to six months. Then [we] returned home and that was the time for harvest. [We] returned home when it was time to harvest.

Q: So you’ve given us a general idea of your day. Can you describe in more detail like a typical day, like when you were staying in the tent? And from the moment you got up in the morning, what was your day like? What did you do and what were your chores the whole day? What was like the usual day for you?

#66M: [I] went to herd the goats and sheep from morning until the evening. [I] went along with the goats and sheep. There was only one animal which preyed on them. In my region, there were not insects or anything else that bothered you. The pasturelands were bright with flowers. [We] were very happy until the Chinese arrived. In the morning when [I] left with the sheep, [I] took my dog along. We were three people. We herded the sheep and the yaks. We were very happy. There were no forests like these here or tigers or lions or snakes or anything else [that attacked you].

Q: How big was the dog? Can you show us?

00:13:05

#66M: The dog was very large [raises hand high up]. It was the same size as me. I was about this size [raises hand again] then. It was the same size as me and had a loud bark. Its bark did not sound like “bow-wow” but went “bung, bung, bung.” The dog cannot get free because it was tied with a chain here [moves hands around waist]. Tibet was an extremely happy place but when the Chinese arrived, how can there be happiness? They beat, killed and oppressed and there was no happiness.

Q: Do you remember the name of your dog?

#66M: The dog's name was Dhomnak 'Black Bear' or Dhomtuk 'Baby Bear.' It was black and huge with a white spot over the heart. It was called Dhomtuk. There was more than one dog. We had many dogs, but only one that accompanied me. The rest were tied on this side and that side [of the tent]. There were many dogs. There was Dhomnak and Tagtuk 'Baby Tiger.'

Q: So you would go with the sheep during the day?

00:14:35

#66M: I always went with the sheep. [We] were three people who herded the sheep. There were two people who grazed the yaks. [We] gathered together, gave water [to the cattle] and sat happily in the pasturelands.

Q: What did you do when you were looking after the sheep most of the time?

#66M: [We] found spare time during which we spun wool, from whence cloth is woven. [We] spun the wool and made balls of string [gestures spinning and making a ball of string]. All these [points to dress, blouse] had to be woven. You could not buy anything but made them yourself. Wool, yaks' hair and goats' hair were the [raw materials] available.

Q: Did you ever have any problems with the wolves?

00:16:11

#66M: There were wolves, but for that [I] took the dog along. There were wolves but no jackals. The wolves are huge and resemble leopards. However, unlike leopards, they do not attack humans but only animals.

Q: Did they attack the sheep?

#66M: They attacked the sheep. If not a sheep, they stole a lamb each day. However, [we] did not mind them eating a lamb. [We] ignored it.

Q: Daily?

00:17:00

#66M: They ate that way. The [huge flock of] sheep filled an entire pasture and moved about in a white mass.

Q: Did you ever experience any moments that you felt that you were in danger?

#66M: When it was difficult to prevent them [the wolves], we let go of one [sheep]. Two or three of them dragged one and ate it and went away satiated. Other than that, they did not pounce on humans or eat them. If I was left alone on the mountain today, there would be no danger to me. Until the Chinese arrived, there was no one that attacked us. I could lie [the night] on the mountain slope and nothing would happen to me. The wolves never ate humans, except sheep and other animals.

Q: When did you first become aware of the Chinese presence?

00:18:45

#66M: [I] might have been about 15 years old when the Chinese arrived. They came and they left and this happened several times. They gave away money, paid a visit to someone's house and this continued over a period of three years.

Then they oppressed the people for two years. [They] ate our sheep, claiming that they were paying us, brought down the yaks from the mountains and distributed them among the poor. They snatched from us and gave to the poor. They claimed that we had oppressed them and did not do any work. They [the animals] were given to the poor and we were beaten. Our sheep and yaks were divided among the poor and then we became poor.

Many of my village people live in Camp Number 9 [Mundgod]. We belonged to the same village [in Tibet]. I am from Tsang; I am a Tsangpa 'person from Tsang.' I come from Gyantse near Tsang Tashi Lhunpo [Monastery]. Earlier [we] were so happy. The Chinese oppressed us for two whole years. [They] forced us to construct roads on the mountains. When one touched the snow with the hands, they stuck to the ice, which when pulled apart started bleeding, but one was helpless. [We] were being oppressed.

Q: Can you describe exactly in more detail how that happened? What was your first experience of Chinese people, your first personal experience?

#66M: There was dread right from the beginning when they arrived in our village. When they first appeared in our village, even the little children were terrified. Everyone believed that they were no good. Initially they gave away money, but we did not feel any joy; instead there was panic in my body. [I] felt panic from the moment they appeared.

Q: So you did not really trust them. Is that right?

00:21:46

#66M: As soon as [I] set eyes on them, [I] thought they were no good and did not trust them. [I] dreaded them from the time [I] first saw them because I had relatives of whom two were monks and one a nun and I feared they would be killed. They were giving away *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins,' but [I] did not feel any happiness. [I] felt no joy [at the Chinese giving away money] even when [I] was young.

Q: The Chinese that you met first of all, what were they wearing?

#66M: All their clothes were yellow. They were yellow, like the ones worn these days.

Q: Were they in uniform?

00:22:41

#66M: They were all dressed in clothes like the soldiers wear. All of them were dressed in this [yellow] or in blue; the blue that school children wear [in India]. Some of them were in

full blue and some in full yellow dresses. The women wore it and so did the men. They were in soldiers' attire in either yellow or blue.

Q: When you said you didn't really trust them and you had a feeling that something maybe bad was going to happen, was it something about their manner that made you think this? What made you think that there was something bad going to happen because the Chinese were there?

#66M: [I] saw that their actions were bad. There were never any pigs in our village and they brought in pigs; they shot at the birds in the sky with arrows or guns and killed them. There was a small type of pigs, the Chinese variety, which they killed and gave us the meat. [I] did not see them as good [people] as soon as [I] set my eyes on them. They shot at the birds in the sky with arrows or guns and when a bird fell down, they removed its feathers and took it with them.

That was what one felt on setting eyes on them. They asked us to sell them the meat of our sheep and yaks. That was when they appeared initially and they were very gentle. They gave money to the children. Besides eating the birds of the sky and the tiny pigs that they brought with them, they did not seize our sheep. When they appeared a second time, the village was filled with them. Then that was the end.

Q: How did that change when the Chinese military arrived? How did things change?

00:26:13

#66M: The change that came about was that all the flocks of sheep we owned were distributed to the poor people; all the yaks we owned were distributed to the poor people. We were left with just a few. That was one of the difficulties we suffered when the high ranking [Chinese] official arrived.

Q: Do you remember Chinese soldiers coming to your house?

#66M: My family was moved from the upper floor to the ground floor of our home and the Chinese officials lived on the upper floor. More than witnessing [the events], my properties were distributed. It was not just my properties alone, but that of all the other families who now live in Camp Number 9. They [the Chinese] lived on the upper floor and we were sent to the ground floor. There were many poor people around, who were given 10, 15, 20 or 30 sheep, two or three yaks and one or two *dri* each. Our parents were there at that time and we were left with a small number [of animals]. We had to live on the ground floor of our house while the Chinese lived on the upper floor.

Q: How did the other people in your village treat your family? Did their attitude change?

00:29:07

#66M: All my neighbors who enjoyed the same economic status as my family became poor. However, all those poor people who used to beg, holding a stick in their hands, were given our wealth. Then the beatings began. They arrested my father and the *umze* 'chant leader' of the monastery. By then the poor had already been distributed our wealth. After the distribution, our village leader, the fathers of the families and the nuns in the monastery

were arrested. I relate this to you because my aunt who was arrested told me about it. [I] tell you this with sadness.

Q: So your mother and father were taken into custody by the Chinese army, is that right?

#66M: My mother was with me and I was able to bring her here. However, my father was captured by the Chinese. My aunt, my mother's twin sister, who was an *umze* in the nunnery, was arrested too. So my aunt and father were arrested. He was given the responsibility of grazing sheep under the *u-yon* and *tsodang*, the poor people who were put in authority [by the Chinese]. My father looked after the sheep and my aunt was subjected to opposition. My aunt was the *umze* in the nunnery.

Q: Your mother was not arrested by the Chinese?

00:31:17

#66M: No, my mother was not arrested. Father and Aunt were captured and after having arrested two members of a family, they did not take anyone else into custody. They arrested two people from my family; they'd have captured one from my neighbor and another from the next neighbor. They might either take the father or mother of a family into custody. If a father was absent, the mother was arrested.

Q: Do you remember when your father was taken into custody? Where you there? Did you see it?

#66M: [I] saw it. [I] saw my father being subjected to the struggle session. His shoes were hung over his neck and tied together. In those days, there were no shoes [like the ones here] and they were called *zompa* 'wool boots' in Tibet. These days the *lhamo* 'opera' artistes wear *zompa*. After you put on the boots, a string was used to tie it. His *zompa* were tied together and hung over the neck.

[Gets up from chair] My father's hands were tied [puts hands behind] and [he was] made to bend [bends forward] and told, "You have made them [the poor] suffer and oppressed them. Bend down." And [he] bent like this [bends lower]. "Bend still lower." And he bent so much [bends almost to the ground]. That was how it happened when my father was arrested. It happened not to me [my family] alone, but all the villagers who now live in Camp Number 9.

Now when my aunt was arrested, again her shoes were hung over her neck and being a nun, [she] did not have any hair. So, [her] ears were pulled until they became red [gestures pulling ears]. Her hands were tied [holds hands behind back] and she was told, "You have oppressed the people. You have practiced the dharma." There were 60 nuns in the monastery. My aunt was the *umze*. [She] was told, "You have oppressed the people. You prevented them [the nuns] from working by teaching them the dharma. Bend down. You oppressed the people." My aunt was subjected to struggle sessions three times: once in my village, another time in another village and once more in another village. After the third time, [she] was sent to Samye and we never saw her again.

Q: How did you learn about the struggle sessions of your father and your aunt? Who told you?

00:35:12

#66M: It happened right in front of me. [For example] I was sitting here and the high ranking official was sitting there. And all the people had gathered there. The poor people carried out the *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions.’ I saw the *thamzing* happen with my own eyes. I saw their hands tied with my own eyes. I saw their boots hung over their heads with my own eyes. [Begins crying] I saw their ears being pulled with my own eyes.

Q: Sorry, I did not ask the question well. I meant...

[Videographer requests a short break]

Q: What I was trying to say was, did somebody come to your house and tell you that you should go and see this?

#66M: During a *thamzing*, the public was told to gather. Just like we assemble for a meeting in that big hall [in Mundgod]—in Tibet, we had huge open grounds where grains used to be harvested. So the people were told to attend a meeting and sat in rows, while they [the prisoners] were beaten. They were accused of having oppressed this and that person.

They were then beaten and their hair pulled, if they had hair on their head. The nuns did not have hair and their ears were pulled [shows both ears being pulled away from head] and blood trickled down [finger traces blood trickling down the neck from behind ear]. Everybody, the entire village had to come and watch the *thamzing* intently.

Q: What would happen if you said “I don't want to go”? What would have happened to you?

00:37:23

#66M: Then they will beat [us]! They will demand to know, “What is the reason in not attending the *thamzing*? What are you contemplating? What are your thoughts?” We cannot say, “I do not want to go.” One cannot refuse to go even if your father was being killed. [I] would have to go even if my aunt was being killed there. [I] would have to go even if my mother was being killed. Not just I, but it applied to the whole village. The name of my village was Tsang Samtenling and my family name is Nyero Samtenling.

Q: Did your mother try to explain to you what was happening? Why this was happening?

#66M: [She] did not explain to me, but I could see it happen in front of my eyes. My mother is dead. It's been four years since she passed away. [She] did not have to explain to me, as I had to watch [the proceedings] intently with my eyes. If one did not attend the session, one would be asked, “What is your opinion? Tell us the reason. What are you contemplating?”

Even if you saw your family member being killed, you had to sit there intently. If you shed tears, you'd be chided for crying. When my aunt was being subjected to *thamzing*, she was

bleeding, but I had to sit there, watching her fixedly. If I did not, they might poke me with a gun and demand a reason for not watching.

Q: You must have had lots of questions in your mind though, about why is this happening. What kind of questions were going through your mind?

00:40:55

#66M: When I saw my relative and my father being almost killed, I wished I could die myself, but [we] were not permitted to die. We were not permitted to say that we did not want to go to [watch the *thamzing*] because we were forced under gunpoint. “What is the reason for your not watching? What gave you that courage?”--they would demand to know if someone did not go to witness the *thamzing*.

All the members in a family had to attend. Everybody must come and watch their relative or father. An important person or the father of a family would be tied [puts hands behind back and bends forward] there right in front of you. He cannot cry aloud but tears would stream down his face. Crying aloud would bring on questions like, “Why are you crying? What is the reason? Do you still want to oppress people?”

Q: What happened to your father after that?

#66M: After the first *thamzing* session in our village, he was imprisoned for a week during which period we were not allowed to see him. The Chinese jailed him. Then he was brought out and subjected to *thamzing* once again. Then he was imprisoned again. He would be asked to give his suggestions [confessions], but what opinions [confessions] could he give? The wealth we possessed was taken away and he [my father] had not committed any murder. “What can you do now?” they demanded.

So he was subjected three times [to *thamzing*] and after the fourth session, he was...The second *thamzing* was carried out in my village. The third *thamzing* session was done in a place called Dakue, a two-day journey by yak. There were no vehicles in Tibet. [He] was taken by yak for two days and then interned at Dakue. We went to meet him at the prison in Dakue.

Q: Your father was *thamzinged* four times. What happened after that?

00:44:46

#66M: The fourth *thamzing* was carried out in Samye, a distance of 18 days on horseback. [We] went to meet him in Samye, but [he] was nowhere to be seen. [He] was killed.

Q: What kind of person was your father? What kind of personality was he?

#66M: [My father] was not a leader but we owned sheep and yaks. Ours was not the only wealthy family but there were others, too. Take Mundgod for example: there are many families with fathers who may possess yaks and sheep. [The Chinese] claimed that [the animals] were acquired through oppressing the [poor] people and our wealth by forcing the poor to work for us.

Q: Your father, was he a very outspoken person? Was he a quite person? Was he quick to anger? What kind of person was he? I know he was rich, but I am asking about his character?

00:47:01

#66M: [He] did not speak much. [We] owned a large number of animals and farmland. Moreover, my aunt was the *umze* of the nunnery and [she] taught the dharma to over 60 nuns. Aunt was subjected to more suffering than my father. Aunt's ears were pulled and she was soaked in blood. Then [she] was taken to Samye, where the Chinese had separate rooms for men and women prisoners.

Aunt suffered incredibly. When she was being taken away, her [points to clothes] were soaked in blood. And then she was taken to Samye. Many people know of Samye. [She] was sent to this place called Samye. It is located at a distance of 18 days' journey by horse from my village.

Q: Was it because your aunt was a strong person? Did she not cooperate with the Chinese authorities? Is this why she had such a difficult time?

#66M: [She] was the *umze* in the nunnery and taught the dharma. She was accused, "You have oppressed them [the nuns]. You have not allowed them to work. Dharma should not be taught. One must work and spend one's life. By teaching them the dharma, you have oppressed them."

Q: Do you remember the last time you saw your father?

00:49:55

#66M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] Aunt was about 39 years old then and father was older.

[Question is repeated.]

#66M: The last time was when [he] was sent to Samye. Then [he] was never seen. When...[?] went to take food at Samye, he was nowhere to be seen. Someone whispered from a window [of the jail] that they were not being given any food. There is a thing called saddle, which is used on a horse. [Father] cut bits of leather from it [the saddle] and ate it for about ten days and then [he] died from starvation. That's what I heard, for he was never seen again.

Q: Did your father see you when you saw him? Did he see you in the crowd?

00:51:50

#66M: [He] could see everybody. [He] stood there bending. [He] could see all the people. While he stood bending, his hands were tied like this [puts hands behind back] and the footwear was hung over his neck. One could see his family members right in front of him [demonstrates bending forward]. One could see his wife, children, parents, everybody. One could see that and at the same time would be hit by the Chinese with a rifle saying, "*Tsulo*,

tsulo.” It [the gathering of people] was just like when a meeting is called here [in Mundgod]. One could see one’s parents right in front but was helpless.

Q: Was he able to communicate to you? Was he able to say anything to you? Did you say anything to him?

#66M: One was not allowed to speak. One was not allowed to speak. [The prisoners] were gone immediately [after the *thamzing*]. One was not allowed to speak. One could not take them food.

Q: What happened to you after this?

00:53:35

#66M: After [father’s *thamzing*] was over, fearing that I too would be killed, [I] fled over the mountain pass. Crossing over the pass, I had no possessions, no sheep and no yaks. Normally it took only two days to cross the mountain pass. However, dreading that the Chinese would kill [us], it took 15 days. I was not alone. There was a multitude of our people. We struggled for 15 days. We scooped muddy water [with our hands] and drank.

Humans are really tough because one did not die. Normally one could cross the mountain pass into Bhutan in two days. When I made the escape, it took 15 days. I brought along my mother and paternal uncle, who now lives in Orissa [India]. Mother has expired. Many from my village [in Tibet] are living here, but some of them do not want to relate [their experiences], as it makes them sick. All my co-villagers live in Camp Number 9.

There is a person called Pashi Chungda-*la* whose brothers were captured and killed like this [shows action of shooting with gun]. One could not speak a word. One could not scream, “Mother! Father!” You sat like this [demonstrates sitting motionless]. You shed tears [moves fingers to show tears streaming down cheeks] without making a sound. Otherwise, you got killed immediately.

Q: Where did you reach after 15 days?

#66M: It took us [15 days] over the mountain. During the daytime [we] hid among the rocks. There was a multitude of people. [We] fled during the night. The [brightness of the] moon was like that of the 13th day of a lunar month. It took us 15 days. I was not alone but with many people, some of whom are here [in Mundgod]. However, they say that relating their stories will cause them to faint and fall ill. I have my maternal uncle who refuses to talk as he will become sick. I share my story because of the suffering of my aunt. I speak remembering the immense misery of my aunt.

Q: Why were they trying to get to the mountain?

00:56:54

#66M: We journeyed through grassy mountains to cross the pass into Bhutan. Some Bhutanese whom we knew gave us food. We reached Laya in Bhutan.

Q: So you reached Bhutan with your mother and who else was with you?

#66M: Oh my, the region was filled with the escapees. There were four members from one family, five from another and six from the next. People emerged [out of their homes] in the night, leaving behind their cows, yaks and all household belongings. Only by leaving them could one escape successfully. [We] had nothing with us. [We] fled empty handed. [We] feared being killed the next day or the following day. They were not to be seen. My father and aunt were not to be seen. We thought we would also be killed like them and fled. There were many people.

Q: What belongings did you have with you?

00:58:47

#66M: If one carried [demonstrates load on back] household items, they would make a sound. We did not carry any household items. The sheep cannot carry them and it was not possible to drive the yaks. [We] owned some *dhayen* from selling meat to the Chinese earlier. [I] brought them in my *amba* ‘pocket of traditional dress,’ which the Bhutanese did not accept. That was it. [We] had nothing with us. As nomads [we] did not own anything except yaks, sheep and farmlands, so there was no silver or gold to take with us. [We] came as we were.

Q: You said earlier that you were quite a wealthy nomad family and did have some things, which the Chinese took them away to be distributed. What household belonging did you have?

#66M: There were many idols in the monastery. The monastery known as Samtenling and the nunnery called Lara Samkyi were filled with icons. Which can one take? Which can one manage to carry? One feared being killed and wished to follow where His Holiness the Dalai Lama was. At that time His Holiness was in Dharamsala. The Buddha [Dalai Lama] was already in Dharamsala. One had the ardent desire of going wherever His Holiness was. Once one crossed over the mountain pass into Bhutan, there was no one who would kill [us].

One could not carry the icons nor our yaks and sheep. The temple was filled with icons. My aunt was killed and her nunnery was filled with statues, just like the ones you can see here in the monasteries. The ones in Tibet were more valuable than these icons, as they were covered in gold. One could not carry them nor did one think of taking them.

If only [we] could escape with our lives, we might manage to find some food in Bhutan. We walked on with the thought of being killed by the Chinese. Some lagged behind, unable to carry children. Some could not carry their aged [family members]. That would happen, would it not? So people helped carry them. It was like that.

Q: Did you face any difficulties on your escape journey?

01:02:45

#66M: Naturally there were difficulties when one did not have any food to eat and only the clothes one wore on the bodies. Naturally one faced difficulties. Despite these difficulties, we hoped to see His Holiness. We hoped that once we reached the country of Bhutan, we would somehow survive, as people were being killed and beaten [back in the village].

I have many relatives in Camp Number 9 and they said talking about their experiences made them faint. So they did not share their stories. My relatives like Pashi Chungda-*la* and Jinpe Lhakpa Tsering lost their parents and talking about them makes them ill and they faint. So they did not share [their stories]. I related [my experience] because of my aunt's immense suffering. If they [relatives] talked about their experiences, they would fall ill and might die. [Begins crying]

Q: We think it's really important that people hear your kinds of stories because people need to know the truth about Tibet. So we know it's really difficult, you've had a very tough life, but it is really important that you are doing this. We are sad to hear the problems you have faced, but we are happy we can share this story with other people.

#66M: I have many aunts in Camp Numbers 1 and 9. Talking about our experiences make them faint. Pashi Chungda-*la*, Lobsang-*la*, Jinpe Lhakpa Tsering and many others in Camp Number 9 would fall down and almost die if their stories were recounted. The person called Pashi Lobsang-*la* was the *genpo* 'leader' of our village. His maternal uncle was killed, his father was killed and his mother was killed right in front of his eyes. Bringing up the story makes [him] fall, so [he] refused to talk. I relate my story because of the misery of my aunt. I do not think I will faint, so I recounted my story.

[To the interpreter] You might know them: Pashi Lobsang-*la* and Jinpe Lhakpa Tsering, who live in Camp Number 9. Recounting these stories makes them faint, which is why they did not share [their experiences]. They are my maternal uncles.

Q: *Ama-la*, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions regarding the struggle session, I am very sorry to go back to the subject. Do you remember what the Chinese were saying during these struggle sessions; what they were saying to your aunt, for example?

01:07:14

#66M: They accused her, "You have oppressed. You have oppressed by not allowing the nuns to work. You have oppressed them by teaching them to write. That is your fault." She replied, "I am sorry, it was my fault. I am sorry." "Keep that in your mind and ask for forgiveness," she was told. She requested for forgiveness, "I am sorry. I have been at fault. I have been at fault." Other than that, she dare not say anything.

Upon the third *thamzing* session, her ears came off. When your ears are no longer there, you would bleed. Then she was taken to Samye, a distance of 18 days by horse. Since then she was not to be seen. Lobsang-*la*'s older brother, who like my aunt was taken to Samye, was never seen again. [They] were taken to the place called Samye, which was at a distance of 18 days by horse. Lobsang-*la* lives in Camp Number 9 now. [He] was a *genpo* while in Tibet.

Q: Did your aunt say anything during these struggle sessions? Did she respond?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: To whom?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: To anybody. Did she say anything to the Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: To the Chinese she accepted that “I accept that this is my fault.”

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, she said that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah. “I accept my fault and I’ll not continue this one further and sorry for that.”

[Interviewer to interpreter]: She said she was sorry for this?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: If aunty doesn’t say, she will be treated more badly and she was forced to say it.

Q: What happened to your aunty? Do you know?

#66M: Since then [she] was not to be seen. I could not go to meet her, but my mother went and she said that she could not see her. That was after she was taken away to Samye. Once when...[?] went to see her exactly after half a month, she said, “I have eaten parts of my footwear [out of hunger]. If possible, you should run away. If you cannot, you should jump in the waters.” There is a lake called Yamdok Yuntso in my village. “Commit suicide by jumping in it rather than undergoing the suffering.” [She] advised that if we could not flee, we should jump into the Yamdok Yuntso Lake.

Q: Did your aunt give that advice?

01:10:27

#66M: Aunt shouted that [advice] through a window. She said, “I am [forced into] eating bits of *thado* ‘bag made of leather.’ Instead of surviving under such conditions, you should jump into the Yamdok Yuntso Lake.” She said that through a crack in the window. From that time, [we] could not take food to her nor was she ever seen again. How could [we] travel 18 days by horse [to meet her]?

Q: I just want to ask you about the nomads. Do you think the nomads had, maybe a little bit of a different experience or a different attitude towards the Chinese than maybe some other Tibetans?

#66M: They [the Chinese] categorized [the people]. The highest in status were the *sadak* ‘land owners,’ which included the *genpo* and the district administrator. They were the *ngadak* ‘leaders,’ the highest in status. The *genpo* and the leaders of the village were grouped among the *sadak*. Next was the category of *ngadak*, which was a little lower. Those were two of the categories.

[Note: Interviewee is confused between *ngadak*, those holding leadership posts and *sadak*, the land owners.]

Q: What is the second category, the farmers? The first was the *ngadak* category.

01:13:05

#66M: The *sadak* category was the highest, which included the village leaders and the district administrators. Those were the *sadak* and the *ngadak* groups. The next category was the medium farmers, who reared yaks and sheep, and then the poorest who were distributed with everything that the *sadak* and the *ngadak* owned.

Q: That is the attitude of the Chinese to the Tibetans. My question actually was the attitude of the Tibetans to the Chinese. Did the *dokpas* ‘nomads’ have a different attitude towards the Chinese than other Tibetans? Do you understand my question? There are many different kinds of Tibetans. There are the *dokpas*, the *shingpas* ‘farmers,’ the aristocrats. Did the *dokpas* have a slightly different feeling towards the Chinese or different experience than other Tibetans?

#66M: The nomads owned yaks, sheep and pasturelands. Their yaks grazed high [in the mountains] and then, there were the sheep a little lower, next to them grazed the *dri* and then the *dzo* ‘animal bred from a yak and a cow.’ Possessing these [animals] landed us in the *ngadak* category, which the Chinese hated the most.

Then there were the poor, whom [we] were said to have oppressed during the period we earned our wealth. We were accused of making the poor work for us and not allowing them to grow rich; collecting wealth for ourselves and making them work for us, while in reality we did our own work. That was what they [the Chinese] did. Our servants—we did have servants in Tibet—were given the best items in the home. That was how it was.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you ever work on a road construction?

01:16:23

#66M: I worked on the Chinese road construction at Kagongang. We were grouped in one of the categories of *ngadak*, *sadak* or *chukdak* ‘wealthy.’ There was a *tang* called Pedhetang.

Q: *Tang*?

#66M: Tang is a sort of valley where water flows and there is no sunlight. It has a narrow path, a path so narrow that only a yak could pass through and not a horse. [We] had to cut out the snow. Among the three categories of people, the *sadak* were sent to the worst area, where there was never any sunlight. Next the *ngadak* group was sent to a place with a little sunlight. The [people in the third category] *chukdak* group was paid a small wage and provided with a little food. Called *showshi*, they [could rest?] within the time it took to smoke one cigarette. This [break] was not available to [those in the] *sadak*, *ngadak* and *chukdak* [?] categories, who worked in the worse areas.

[We] were engaged in splitting the rocks and after touching the snow, our hands became unstuck from the rocks with a ‘*tsak*’ [sound] and it started bleeding. There was nothing to

do over it. One could not see the other three categories because they worked in the shadows in the difficult areas. The *chukdak* group worked in a locale with little sunlight and could enjoy *showshi* during the time it took to smoke one cigarette.

Q: Did you ever work in road construction?

01:18:30

#66M: Yes, [I] did. [I] went to construct roads.

Q: How long were you there?

#66M: I worked for about one month. [I] left for good after a month. There was a Chinese *shang* [boss]. [I] was young at that time and the young girls used to dance in the evenings and with folded hands requested of him, “I am feeling very sick. I request you to please grant me leave for three or four days.” When the girls requested thus, he permitted us leave for three days.

Some of my family members were gone and some remained [at home]. Then my mother and I left—all the villages had names—and the earlier groups had left messages that they would be in such and such village. The rivers and the villages had names and we were told where they would be for the night and we should join them. So when the *shang* granted me leave for three days, I fled.

Q: You worked on the road construction after your father and aunt was *thamzinged*? This was when already you were planning to leave?

01:20:40

#66M: [They] were dead; [they] were dead. The road construction began after [they] were dead. [They] were dead; [they] were dead. [They] were dead; there was nothing of them to be seen: no soil, no stone. There was nothing to be seen of them; no blood and still we had to construct roads. [The Chinese] demanded to know, “If you do not work, what aims do you have?” “[I] have no aims. [My] only aim is the Chinese Communist Government.” I plead that, other than the Chinese Communist Government I do not have any other aims. If we replied in this way, they [the Chinese] did not beat us too much; otherwise, they will beat us and imprison us again.

“[I] have no other thoughts; no thoughts about parents; no thoughts about children. [I] solely think about the Chinese Communist Government.” Saying such would bring us relief from the beatings and we could enjoy a little freedom. [We] would be treated equally with the other people and could also eat like them. [We] had nothing and moreover, had to serve the Chinese. If we said that we had thoughts only for the Chinese Communist Government, they refrained from beating us; there were the young men and women. They [father and aunt] were killed and done with. Only the pain remained in our hearts.

Q: So was it you and your mother working on the road crew?

#66M: Mother was not able to work on the road crew. [She] cooked a little food and sat like this [sits motionless]. [She] sat thus, pondering. And did not bother to recite her *mani* ‘mantra of Avalokiteshvara’ or practice the dharma. She sat pondering all the time. When asked what she was thinking, she replied, “[I] do not think of anything but the Chinese Communist Government.”

Mother was sick and [I] was full of anxiety. If mother jumped into the lake, what would happen to the five or six children and family members? The lake is called Yamdok Yuntso. If my mother jumped in the Yamdok Yuntso, I, my siblings, my grandmother, all of us would have to jump too. Six more people would have to jump in the lake. Mother just sat like this. [Sits motionless]

Q: How old were you when you were working on the road construction?

01:24:41

#66M: I was 15 when the Chinese first appeared. [Counts on fingers] I might have been 17 or 18 at the time of working in the road crew. [I] only worked for one month at the road construction. If not the road construction, we would have jumped into the Yamdok Yuntso Lake. If I jumped, my other siblings who could not fend for themselves would have to jump, too. So my mother sat like this, while I and my maternal uncle went to work on the road crew. When the Chinese ordered us, we had to work. “What are you thinking about? What is your livelihood?” The *shang* came and asked such questions of [us].

Q: Who was the main person who decided to escape? Was it you or your mother? Did you encourage your mother to escape? Or did she kind of make the plans and then followed her?

#66M: We had many relatives and they led us along with them. All the many relatives are now in Camp Number 9. Though they are in Camp Number 9, if they recounted their stories, they will collapse, like my uncle Lobsang-*la*. Uncle Lhakpa Tsering will also faint and he told me, “If you can, tell your story. But if I were to recount my story, I would die the next day.” Their brothers were highly influential people and were grouped in the *ngadak* and *sadak* categories. They were imprisoned at Samye and died there. Their mother also was jailed in Samye.

I have a maternal uncle in Camp Number 9 called Lobsang-*la*. He told me, “You can relate your experiences, but if I were to do so, I will become blind and drop down. I cannot recount [my story].” I have a maternal uncle and an aunt in Camp Number 1 of Tibetan Settlement in Bylakuppe [Karnataka, India]. I came along with them [from Tibet]. I and my mother were incapable of fending for ourselves. All the influential people had been captured and only the incompetent ones who could not fend for themselves were left. [I] was filled with anxiety.

Q: Can you share a very special memory you have of Tibet, a very special memory, a good memory?

01:28:57

#66M: The good thing was that I could reach India—when I could reach Bhutan—when I reached India and got the opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Then [I] felt happy. Initially [we] went to Dharamsala and saw His Holiness. When we reached Bhutan, which is just a mountain pass away, many Bhutanese gave us food making [me] happy, but the pain is always there [in me].

Q: Thank you so much, *Ama-la*. I'm sorry we kept you so long. I just want to ask you a couple of more questions at the end. I have to ask you again. If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for you?

#66M: No, there will be no problem. I have relatives left behind in Tibet and I have relatives in India. I had two maternal uncles in Shigatse [Tibet] who were monks and they are not to be seen. Of course, aunt was killed. If my relatives hear [this story], they will know that I have reached here. When I lived in Tibet, my family was known as Nyero Samtenling. If someone hears my name, [I] might get to meet my relatives and well-wishers. They will feel, "Oh, she has reached there."

Q: So no problem to use your real name?

01:31:09

#66M: At present [I] have no problems. I have no problems at all. I have a monk [son] and a daughter. My daughter has three children. I have a monk [son] and a daughter, who were born in India. I had four children, but two of them died and two survived. [I] have no problems now. My present problems are my weak eyesight and my broken leg. However, [I] have enough to eat and there is no one who will kill me or beat me. So [I] am happy.

There is the opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama many times. One has the chance to recite the *mani* and practice the dharma, if I knew how [to read the scriptures]. However, [I] am not literate. Other than that, [I] have no problems whatsoever.

Q: Your son is a monk at which monastery?

#66M: [He is] in Gaden Monastery [Mundgod].

Q: Which part of Gaden?

01:32:07

#66M: Gaden Shartse division.

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: *Ama-la*, your family is from north of Lhasa?

#66M: I am a Tsangpa from Nyero Thoe in Tsang called Nyero Samtenling. My region is Tsang, under Gyantse District.

Q: In which direction of Lhasa is it?

01:32:43

#66M: If Lhasa is this side [points to the left], Gyantse is that side [points to the right] towards the direction of Shigatse. [Speaks in Hindi] Gyantse is a little further away from Shigatse.

Q: Thank you so much.

#66M: [Acknowledges with joined hands]

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: Did your kids ever ask you about your experiences in Tibet? Have they ever questioned you about it?

01:33:10

#66M: They do ask me and I tell, “We had yaks and sheep in Tibet. Tibet was a happy place. If we regain our independence and His Holiness the Dalai Lama sat on the golden throne and if I am not dead, I will show you everything. You do not know anything now.”

The children [of today] will not listen and [I] have only one daughter. [I] do not know what [my] daughter's children think. I have many monk relatives who live in Gaden Shartse and Gaden Jangtse. [I] am their aunt and I tell them sometimes, “There are such monasteries in Tibet. Our [local] monastery is [affiliated to] Gaden Shartse in Lhasa. Many of our monks lived at a place called Shigatse. You have two uncles who are very close relatives.” They are Pashi Lobsang-*la* who lives in Camp Number 9 and a person called Nyero Janyel in Bylakuppe [India].

Even now, none of my relatives are without a monk in their family. [I] visit the monks, though I have nothing to offer them; I tell them locations [of monasteries] in Tibet. I recount my experience to the monks, but I do not talk about it to other people, who might think something else. Except recounting a little to my daughter, [I] do not talk about it even to my grandchildren.

Q: Actually, I've heard people say like that because I feel completely differently to the people you are talking about. I think it is so important because this is all that Tibetans have. They don't have video. They don't have photographs. They don't have any other evidence of what happened. Your memory is the evidence—people like you. So it is so important to share these stories. And I think there needs to be a change of mentality about this, really.

01:36:26

#66M: [I] talk about my village. I have many relatives. My maternal uncles are influential people and if they recounted, [the children] might listen. I am now old, blind and have a broken leg and if [I] keep on and on, nobody will like it. However, if I recounted to the monks, they will appreciate their aunt.

Dharma people and ordinary people are not similar. The ordinary people will comment, “What is this old haggard with ‘green brains’ [one without education] talking about that we should listen to her? What is she talking about when she can hardly walk herself? She is blind and has to walk with the help of a cane.” If I told my daughter, she will ask me to keep quiet. If my relatives who are influential and working in the government were to share their stories, [the youngsters] might listen. Nobody will listen if I spoke. I am on the verge of death now.

Q: But they are only going to be sharing a certain kind of experience. They are educated people, they are richer people; they are going to express the experience of the aristocracy. Whereas you need to have people who express the experiences of all different kinds of strata of society in Tibet. This is very important, not just the aristocracy.

01:38:15

#66M: If the maternal and paternal uncles spoke about the surroundings, what our village was like and how our homes were—they being influential people, they will be heard. I cannot walk and am [almost] blind, so except for the monk, no one will listen to me. However, [I] know they [the experiences] must be told.

Q: There are lots of people who are interested. The Chinese have launched a huge propaganda campaign about what life was like in Tibet before the *gyami* ‘Chinese’ came, yes? And they are always saying how the lamas were mistreating the poor people, so it is so important to hear from the ordinary people because the Chinese people will never believe what the aristocracy says. But they will believe people like you more likely. One of the points of this project is for the ordinary Chinese people to see these stories. And then they might question in their mind, maybe we were wrong; maybe we made a mistake.

#66M: [Nods] That is right.

Q: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW