

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #75 – Gadak
July 7, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #75
2. Interviewee: Gadak
3. Age: 72
4. Date of Birth: 1935
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Zachem
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1969
9. Date of Interview: July 7, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 25, New Camp No. 3, Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 3 hr 57 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Gadak tells how Bon, the earliest religion of Tibet, originated and how Bon and Buddhism complement each other. Gadak, who belonged to a wealthy nomadic family, describes how the Chinese disturbed the nomads' harmonious coexistence with nature by extracting minerals from Tibetan land and by harvesting medicinal plants from the soil.

Determined to fight against the Chinese occupation, Gadak helped form a resistance group, which received air-dropped weapons from the United States. After 22 days of intense fighting, he and his only remaining companion surrendered to the Chinese. They were imprisoned and forced to perform hard labor. Many of the prisoners died from unsanitary conditions or went insane and were shot by the guards. Gadak was eventually released and sent back to his village.

Gadak witnessed the Cultural Revolution in 1965-66 in Tibet, when the Chinese destroyed Buddhist monasteries and subjected Tibetans to *thamzin* 'struggle sessions.' Gadak fled in 1966, but when he reached Bhutan, the Indian Intelligence agencies suspected he was a spy for China.

Topics Discussed:

Nomadic life, Bon, first appearance of Chinese, resistance fighters, life under Chinese rule, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, imprisonment, forced labor, brutality, *thamzin*, escape experiences.

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Age: 72, Sex: Male

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Interview Date: July 7, 2007

[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #75, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Question: First of all we'd like to ask if we have permission to use his story for the Tibet Oral History Project.

Interviewee #75: [Nods]

Q: Could we have his full name?

#75: Gyumar Gadak. Gyumar is the name of one's "skeleton" [father's genes]. In our village we have the custom of adding the name of the "skeleton" to the person's name. Gyumar is the "skeleton" name and Gadak is my name.

Q: Is Gyumar like the family name?

#75: No, no. In our village we use the "skeleton" name, but the people of Utsang do not have that custom. If one adds the "skeleton" name [to one's name], for hundreds of generations there is no change in the "skeleton" name. That is called the name of the "skeleton."

There are many different "skeleton" names. For example, I am a Gyumar. If there is a "skeleton" name called Gyumar in another village, I will consider him my relative. This [genealogy] is inherited from the father and not the mother. To give an explanation: when a child is born of two parents, the child's skeleton is inherited from his father and the blood and flesh from his mother.

Q: That's very interesting. We have never heard that before.

#75: This is a fact associated with—take for example the lineage of lamas. The Sakya Ghongma's [the supreme head of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism] lineage is passed from the father to the son and not from the mother. In Tibet there are many lamas whose heredity is passed on through lineage like the Sakya Ghongma.

In the case of a *tulku* ‘reincarnated lama,’ his next reincarnation takes birth [after his death]. However, the Sakya Ghongmas continue through lineage. The evidence of lineage is that if one was not the son of Sakya Ghongma, he could not be enthroned as the next Sakya Ghongma when his father passed away. That is how the lineage is continued, whether one was a lama or a leader. For example, long ago the kings and lamas continued [their reigns] through lineage, while it was different for the *tulku*. The ordinary people also continued in this way.

Q: If this interview were shown in China or Tibet, would that be a problem for him and his family?

#75: No, there will be no problems. My relatives in Tibet will not face problems if I say something. My sibling is old or perhaps he is dead. There will be no problems. They [interviewer and videographer] are doing this work to help the Tibetan cause. If I, or my relatives in Tibet, face any problems it is our own cause. There is no regret even if we face any problems.

Q: So first of all I'd like to ask him about his village where he grew up in Tibet. Can he tell us something about his village?

#75: Before the arrival of the Chinese, the district where I lived was called Barchay District. There were sixteen divisions in Barchay District. Each division consisted of 100 to 120 families or 60 to 70 families. It [the place where I lived] was called Hor Barchay Zong, Hor was the name of the village.

My village came into being a long, long time ago, during the time of my early ancestors, perhaps about a thousand years back. It is said that seven people called Hor Achay Thowa Chapdhun arrived at the place. There is a legend during the time of King Gesar called the Hor and Ling. They [the Hors] originally came from Mongolia; the Mongolian country that enjoys independence and made the long-life offering to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness calls it the Chenpo Hor's country. It is said that seven people arrived from that distant country. From the seven, two were lineage lamas, four were *lonpoe* ‘ministerial’ lineage; at that time people descended through lineages. There was one with *Ponpoe* ‘king’ or Hor Shenpa lineage. They hunted various animals and finally settled at Hor Barchay. That happened about 1,000 years ago. If not 1,000, it's certain that at least 700 to 800 years have passed since then.

Q: There were two lamas then?

#75: Yes, there were two lamas with the lineage of Sirshoe and Patsong. The king came from the lineage of Shenpa. The king had four ministers of the ministerial lineage, namely Lhargye, Tsongtsa, Gyumar—of which I am a descendent—and Tsakha, so there were seven men in that way. They multiplied and presently the 16 divisions have around 20,000 to 30,000 people. That was how it was in the village at the time the Chinese arrived.

Q: Were all these communities followers of the Bon?

#75: Yes, about 90 percent of the people were followers of the Bon.

Q: Did they have any stories about how human beings or Tibetans came into existence from the beginning of time? Do they have anything like creation stories about how the world came into existence, how human beings came into existence? Are there any stories like that in the Bonpo tradition?

#75: We tell the same stories [as the Tibetans] that the ancestor mother was a monkey and the father *Damse*. That was the general story. I do not know what the Bonpo tradition exactly says about the creation of human beings. I do not know much about the religion of Bon, but it is said that the Tibetan religion originated from the Bon.

A story goes that at that time there were human beings in Tibet, but they were like demons who knew no religion. So the Tibetan religion began in the land of the demons and it vanquished all the demons. The religion at that time had to be harsh. If not, the demons who did not know religion, could not be subdued. The Bon religion came into being and vanquished all the demons.

Subsequently, I think it was the Nyingma sect that first flourished in Tibet—the term Nyingma means old. Then came the Kagyu sect and so on and so forth. I am just relating it in short. The religion of Hor and Ling that I spoke about earlier came from Mongolia, the country, which enjoys independence and made the “long life offering” to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is called Achay Chenpo Hor's country. My ancestors came from Hor Borshoe and they were Bonpos [followers of the Bon religion]. Since then many religions flourished [in Tibet] and the practice of Bon diminished, but not in my village. Even now there are many Bon monasteries in my village.

Q: Can he tell us something about his life growing up in his family? What was his life like?

#75: I have a few more things to say [about the earlier topic]. It is true about the devils that lived in early Tibet when there was no religion. One can see it to this day. In the region of Kongpo one can see very tall houses built by the monsters. They are about two to three stories high with just a tiny opening at the base through which a person could hardly enter. To this day there are many such structures built of stones. There is a hill in Kongpo called Bonri, a Bonpo Ngari, which is very holy to the Bonpos. The Bonpos believe it to be very holy.

It is true that in the olden days there were devils and monsters considering that those houses can be seen to this day in Kongpo. I have been there as a nine-year-old child. I was told that those were the houses of the demons. Humans cannot enter them. The Bon religion flourished as it possessed the power to subdue the demons. Much, much later when the Kagyu and Nyingma sects flourished, it [Bon] became one with them. Except for the different names, all religions became Buddhists. The Bon religion is now a pure Buddhist sect. That was how it happened.

Q: In which part of Kongpo are they [the structures built by the demons]?

#75: If one went from Kongpo Gyamda, there wasn't a place where you didn't find such structures. They are everywhere.

Q: Were they built of stones?

#75: The houses were circular and built of stones. There were eight to nine grooves running down on the walls and the top of the house reached two to three stories high. At the bottom was a small opening through which a man might bend and enter. At the very top of some of the tall and circular houses was a window. The houses were not meant for human habitation. They were large and many in number. They were all built with stones and called *Dhuekar Shongpo Guti*, the house of *dhue* 'devil.' That was a long, long time ago before the Bon religion came into existence. The devils were said to have lived in them. The houses can be seen to this day.

Q: Did he hear these stories of these other kinds of creatures when he was growing up as a child? Who told him these stories?

#75: My grandfather told me. He had many such stories to relate. Some old people have a lot of old stories to tell about how the world came into being. I told you about the seven people who came and how the Borshoe Tsedup came into being. My grandfather was in his 70's when I was about 10 years old. He had many such stories to tell, my father's father. His name was Gyumar Soegyal. He was a very old man. He would tell stories about long, long ago.

Q: Can he tell us more about his grandfather? What kind of person was he?

#75: My grandfather's name was Soegyal. In looks he was like me. He was a little bald and carried a walking stick. His head looked like his head [pointing to the videographer]. [Smiles]

Q: What other stories did he tell him? We'd love to hear some.

#75: He had many strange stories to tell. It will be difficult to understand if I relate them. In jest he'd say, "If a young man is not brave, he is like the fox which flees on seeing any human or animal. If a girl does not have a mother, she is like a container without a handle, which you cannot hold. If a son does not have a father, he is like the empty sky because he has no one to talk to and discuss anything. If a lama does not have religion, he is like a piece of flesh covered with a cloth. If a monk does not conduct prayers well, he is like a rat which collects everything and saves them in a hole similar to a monk who accepts offerings made by the families to recite prayers [and does not perform it well]." He had a lot to say.

Actually, what the old people of the olden days spoke was almost like a prophecy because there is a saying in Tibetan which goes, "The Chinese are let down by their suspicions and the Tibetans are let down by their hopes." That period has arrived now. We live in hope,

hoping that there will be a positive outcome from the discussions between Tibet and China. The Chinese suspect a disastrous outcome if His Holiness the Dalai Lama returned to Tibet leading to protests and the demand for independence. They are ever suspicious. These sayings were there even before I was born; perhaps hundreds of years back. That saying has come true now. Likewise, there are many different sayings. Gradually these are coming true.

Q: What else did he learn that was distinctive about being a Bonpo?

#75: There is nothing much distinctive. In the early days the Bonpo religion had the power to curse. However, once it merged with Buddhism, casting curses on others was considered harming them, so the scriptures that concerned casting curses were burned. Now-a-days the custom of casting curses on others is absent in Bonpo religion.

Instead of the *mani* [prayer Buddhists recite], the Bonpos recite the *mati*, which goes, “*Om mati miyu sane dhue.*” That is the initial prayer for the well-being of all the sentient beings, not just human beings, but including insects and those living in the waters. It believes that every being in the realm is equal. That is how it is. Bonpos call the four sects [of Buddhism] as Bhendhe. Actually, these were the two religions of olden Tibet. If one were to study the Bon religion deeply, one will find different sects like Sarma, Nyingma, Shakya and Gelug. These were similar [to Buddhism]. However, such things [studying Bon in detail] are not available in India and so they are considered as one religion.

Q: [The scriptures were] burned out by whom?

#75: It happened a long time ago, about 700 years back during the time of Nyamin Sherap Gyaltzen. He was the second Bon Buddha. There were other Buddhas and Nyamin Sherap Gyaltzen was the second Buddha. During his time and Shen Nyima Gyaltzen of the Shen Dhardheling Monastery whose lineage is the present Sakya Ghongma Rinpoche, the scriptures containing the curses were destroyed.

Earlier, in order to subdue the ghosts and demons, they [the Bon practitioners] had to bring about hail storms, floods and various other disasters. At times they had to cause mountain-slides and the demons were totally vanquished. Then Buddhism began and it continues with the four sects in Tibet. During the time of Bon, they [the followers of Bon] worshipped the protective deity called Sipa Gyalmo, while the Bhendhes worshipped the protective deity Palden Lhamo. They [the deities] are the same. The Bonpos worshipped [goddess] Zama while the Bhendhes [goddess] Dolma. Earlier the Bonpos had a name for all the deities and later when the Bhendhes flourished, they gave a different name [to the deities]. That was how it was.

Q: Did he believe that his grandfather had any of this knowledge and abilities?

#75: No, nothing. He didn't even know the Tibetan script well. However, he had very many stories to tell, just as I told you earlier. He could give a colorful description [of life] from the time a child was born—like how he plays as a child and sits on his mother's lap. How

when he grows older, he has all the teeth in his mouth and walks sprightly. Then, the description when a person grows old; how as a 60-year-old man he can hardly get up, sit down or hear. He tells such varied stories, but all these cannot be recorded.

Q: Were there different kinds of ceremonies and rituals that Bonpo monks did that were different to the Sakya, Gelug, Nyingma or Kagyu?

#75: They are very similar. There are no Bonpos here [in Bylakuppe] except myself. The lamas tell us that there is no difference and that one should not discriminate whether one follows Bon or Bhendhe religions. We have to treat them as one.

Take me for example; in the evenings I recite *Dolma* and *Barchae Lamsel* [prayers] along with her [my wife] who is a Bhendhe. In the morning, I read my Bon scriptures. I perform prayers of both. I have pictures of both the deities Palden Lhamo and Sipa Gyalmo in my house. [To wife] Please bring the pictures here. I will show it to them and they can see whether they are the same or not.

Q: Which religion is Bhendhe? Is it a part of Bon?

#75: No, no. Kagyu, Nyingma, Gelug [and Sakya] collective is known as Bhendhe. [Pictures are brought out and shown to the camera.] This is Palden Lhamo and this is Sipa Gyalmo. They are the one and the same.

Q: It is the same, but drawn differently. Is she on a horse?

#75: Do you see Sipa's mule? Palden Lhamo has a red mule and also a black mule. In the same way, Sipa Gyalmo has a red mule or a black mule. Sipa Gyalmo and Palden Lhamo are one and the same. You can see for yourself that they are the same, except for the size of the picture. They have two different names.

Q: So Palden Lhamo is considered a very, very ancient deity even before Buddhism came to Tibet?

#75: Yes, it's very, very old. Sipa Gyalmo is actually the queen of three epochs. An epoch consisted of tens of thousands of years. Just as the scientists tell us these days that if we do not conserve our environment, the world may come under flood. In the same way when there were no human beings on this earth, which was filled with water, that was one epoch. Then another epoch consisting of tens of thousands of years went by and again one more epoch throughout which lived the Sipa Gyalmo. Therefore, she was known as *Sisum Gyalmo* [queen of three epochs].

An epoch does not mean a few thousand years; it consists of tens of thousands of years. In the present world, whether the United States, India or Tibet they are only 10,000 to 20,000 years since their inception. Gradually this era will become null. All the snow-covered mountains will melt and this era will come to an end. Then from the ocean a rock will emerge with beings and then another epoch will begin. So even through three such epochs,

she [Sipa Gyalmo] lived. Therefore she is known as *Sipa Sum kyi Gyalmo* or *Sisum Gyalmo* ‘the queen of three epochs.’

Q: Is it *Sisum Gyalmo* or *Sipa*...?

#75: She is known as *Sipa Gyalmo* as well as *Sisum Gyalmo*. The name *Sisum Gyalmo* came to be because she lived even after three epochs had passed by. The world is estimated to be a certain tens of thousands of years old. Another era had gone by before it. And still another before that. Smart scientists have been able to give an estimation. The scientists these days tell us that if we do not conserve our environment, all the snow-covered mountains will melt and submerge the world. It has been said that the world can be flooded and become an ocean. A rock will form in the ocean and then soil. Different kinds of living things and forest will appear on it. In this way another era will begin, but nobody knows how many tens of thousands of years it will survive. So for three such epochs, she lived.

Q: Can he tell us a little bit about his personal life in his family growing up in his village? What was it like?

#75: Mine was a nomadic family. We did not have any farmland. We had yaks, sheep, goats and horses. To put it simply, my parents had five sons and five daughters. We were ten siblings. Later one daughter died and another was given away in marriage. Before the arrival of the Chinese we were a rich family with many animals. Perhaps we owned around 700 to 800 animals. I was about 9 years old when the Chinese first began to invade Tibet. I was on a trip to Kongpo where I saw the *Dhuekar Shongpo Guti*, which I told you about earlier.

The Chinese gradually pushed into Tibet when I was about 17 or 18 years old. I went to Lhasa at that time and saw that the Chinese had arrived there. Lhasa was a large city. They did not consider us as enemies then. The Chinese soldiers had fun walking on stilts. I think there were about 400 to 500 Chinese soldiers in Lhasa then. I might have been 16 or 17 years old. It was after *Losar* ‘Tibetan New Year’ and we learned that one could see His Holiness the Dalai Lama on auspicious days. People cannot see His Holiness on all days. I went to the Potala Palace to see His Holiness one day. There is just a year's difference between us and His Holiness was a young monk. I was about 17 and His Holiness 18 years old.

[Tape change]

I wish to explain because when Tibet first came into being and the Buddhist religion flourished there, the Buddhist dharma had many “don’ts”, things that were not allowed. When I reflect on it these days, since the time Tibet came into being and the dharma flourished, no one in the world, but the Tibetan people conserved their environment. There is something called *yartsa gunbu* ‘grass in summer and worm in winter’ or scientifically called *cordyceps sinensis*, which grew in our region and is said to be very nutritious. I heard that now-a-days a *gyama* [similar to a kilogram] of it costs 30,000 *yuan*. If you go by that calculation, each [piece of *yartsa gunbu*] costs about 300 to 400 Indian *rupees*!

In the olden days it was forbidden to pick them in Tibet. The reason given was that if one harvested it, the earth's fertility would diminish. People knew that it was nutritious and helpful in treating diseases, but picking it would mean loss of the earth's fertility. The Tibetan government forbid it and the people too did not harvest it. Even at that time Tibet's Buddhist dharma taught that the spirits of nature would get jealous or that the earth's fertility would diminish. There was another plant called *zayum*, which is a very expensive medicine. One was forbidden to pluck that also. It was said that if one plucked it, the spirits that lived in the forests and hills would not like it and might send thunderbolts, landslides or floods. However, when the Chinese arrived, all these were harvested.

Q: What is the name of the one that was forbidden to pluck?

#75: It is called *yartsa gunbu*. Now-a-days people call it *bu* 'worm.' The Tibetan government forbade people from picking it. The reason was that the fertility of the soil would diminish, so environmental protection was being practiced even then. The *zayum* is used in medicines and it is forbidden to pluck it. Plucking it would make the spirits jealous and cause thunderbolts, hailstorms and others. The Chinese use it in their medicines. When the Chinese came, they harvested these. They are not found in any other country in the world except Tibet.

[Interviewee shows a *yartsa gunbu*] One of my siblings in my village sent it for me. This is very helpful if one suffers from backache or leg pain. It used to be said that the nutritious value of one *yartsa gunbu* was equal to that of the meat of a whole sheep. Eating one *yartsa gunbu* had the same benefit for one's body as eating the meat of a whole sheep. Such a nutritious one was forbidden to pluck because of the loss of the land's fertility. When the Buddhist dharma said that one shouldn't do this or that, it was conserving the environment even then.

[Holding up a *yartsa gunbu*] It resembles a worm, but there is no breath in it. I heard that a thousand of these weigh one Chinese *gyama*. One Chinese *gyama* of these used to cost 20,000 *yuan* last year and this year they cost 30,000 *yuan*.

Q: Does he feel that the Chinese have really disturbed the Bonpo deities and the environment?

#75: It was not just that alone, they [the Chinese] have also mined *sitsa*, *muzi*, lead, gold, silver, copper and others [English translations for *sitsa* and *muzi* are unknown; they were powdered with coal to make firecrackers and gunpowder.] It was not that the Tibetans did not know about the presence of these minerals. They [the minerals] were there even then. There were innumerable stones of lead. People did not exploit them because we would lose the fertility of the soil. We were protecting the environment even then. We were not ignorant [about the existence of the natural resources]. One could melt the stones to get iron or lead. It was not that the Tibetans were ignorant. These days the Chinese are mining them. Tibetans did not mine their natural resources because the Buddhist dharma taught environmental protection even then.

However, the term was not “environmental protection.” People practice environmental protection as the spirits and guardians of nature would not like it if the earth was dug up to mine the minerals. Their dislike would bring on thunderbolts, hail storms, floods and landslides, so they were forbidden. Although the term was not “environmental protection,” since the inception of Buddhism environmental protection was practiced in Tibet.

Q: How do Bonpo people feel about mining and what that does to the environment and to the deities and how does that affect things? How do they feel about mining?

#75: Actually they [the Chinese] should not be allowed to mine, but who can face them and tell them not to do it? They mine and do what they like and we are helpless.

Q: How did it affect the deities?

#75: The deities were definitely disturbed. That did have an affect on the Chinese. Many Chinese died and strange things happened on their journey through Longnay Pass. It is about five days horse ride from Lhasa towards Nagchu District.

Q: Did many Chinese die?

#75: Yes, many Chinese died.

Q: How?

#75: Many Chinese died suddenly on that mountain pass. Some suffered fits and some became speechless; many of them died. They fired many shells at the snow-covered mountain called Longnay *Lakha* ‘Pass’ and many died and then everything became quiet after that.

Q: When he said he went to Lhasa when he was 17 and saw hundreds of Chinese there, just tell us what happened then?

#75: I do not know what the Tibetan government and they [the Chinese] were discussing among themselves. I stayed for about a month in Lhasa and I saw them [the Chinese soldiers] parading up and down in the square of Lhasa. They also marched to the ground called Dapshi Thang. They playfully fired their guns on the mud heaps. Then later around 1951 to 1952, they called the highest Chief of our village and other Chiefs from various villages for a meeting. There they spoke about how China and Tibet were the same and how they would bring development in Tibet. They took the Chiefs for an observation tour to China. Tibet did not have vehicles or machinery at that time, so they were taken to observe them and then they returned.

Perhaps it was 1952 to 1953 when they [the Chinese] said they would take Tibetan children to school. There were 100 to 130 families in each division [of our district] and they selected two boys [from each division]. From our district about 36 boys were taken [to China]. Then they put people in power and gave them names like *u-yon*. To those people they [the

Chinese] gave many white *dhayen* ‘silver coins’ to deceive them. They continued in this deceitful way until 1959.

It must have been around that time that the 17-Point Agreement was signed, though I did not know it then. The supreme leaders of the Tibetans, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the minister Kalon Rinchi were present. However, they were not consulted before the Agreement was reached. I do not know when it took place, but they [the leaders of Tibet] were forced to sign the 17-Point Agreement.

Q: Were the parents very concerned about the welfare of these kids [who were taken to China for education]?

#75: They were concerned, but there was no other way than to send them. The parents were worried and in some villages, some people were paid by the village to send their children. [Laughs] In some cases poor families were paid five yaks per child by the village community to send [their children to the Chinese school]. While in some cases, people did send their children.

Q: What happened to these children? Did he ever see them again?

#75: They were given an education. The Chinese did say that they were taking the children to send them to school, but we did not believe them. People wanted to send their children to school but they suspected the Chinese’ motive, which was why people didn’t want to send their children then.

Q: How was his life personally affected by the Chinese?

#75: Once the Chinese arrived, the Chinese law could not be put into effect in our village and neither did anyone abide by the Tibetan law. By 1955 to 1956, the District Administrator and other Tibetan leaders gradually left. In that period, the Chinese could not administer their law and the Tibetan law became void. For a year or two the region became very chaotic.

Then in 1956-'57 many Chinese soldiers arrived through the district. Nearby our region was a place called Sokdhe. It was a small region with only four divisions while our region consisted of 16 divisions. Sokdhe’s origin is very similar to ours as their ancestors also came from Mongolia. When they were guarding the Tawula Pass, several Chinese were killed in a fight. That happened around '57.

Then the Chinese took away a few prominent people of our village and offered them many white *dhayen* in order to deceive them. They [the Chinese] convinced them that they would bring progress to the community and that China and Tibet were one historically. They were indoctrinated. Thus a year or two passed by. Then in 1957 to 1958 many people from Amdo and Golok passed through saying that they were unable to live under the Chinese. One day in '59 we heard that Lhasa was lost and that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left for India. In the summer of 1959—it was around this time, between June and July—

Chinese soldiers arrived and ordered that we surrender all our weapons—the guns, swords and various other arms that we had bought ourselves. They ordered that we could not keep any weapons.

Q: Did the Bonpos go to war in 1967 to 1968? [miss-stated by interpreter: should be 1957 to 1958]

#75: No, no. They were on their escape to India unable to bear the sufferings perpetuated by the Chinese. They were fleeing through our village. We were still in our village then. They were all Tibetans from Nangchen, Dege, Golok and others.

Q: Were they all fleeing?

#75: There were many who were escaping in groups of 100, 200 or 30 to 40. They said that the Chinese took away everything they possessed as well as their weapons. Some did not surrender their weapons and fled. However, only 10 to 20 percent of the people succeeded in their attempt to escape while the rest lived under the Chinese.

Q: Was he fighting at that time? Did he have weapons that he had to surrender?

#75: Yes, I had weapons. I have something more to say about that period. My family did not live there [in the village]. They had already left for Thoe in 1956. They were living in Thoe Thargo. I was about 21 or 22 years old then when I went there, and then I returned to my village alone. I was living in my village while my parents and siblings lived in Thoe Thargo. I only had my uncles and other relatives in the village and not my parents and siblings. I was a single person with two horses and a gun.

The Chinese then took away the weapons in the month of June 1959. The people of Sokdhe did not surrender their weapons, but rebelled against the Chinese. My region of Barchay District gave up their arms to the Chinese. I was a single man with a horse and a gun and so I went to join the people of Sokdhe. Sokdhe is about as far as Hunsur from here [25 miles]. The Chief of Sokdhe was a friend of mine since long. I did not surrender my weapon to the Chinese and left for Sokdhe.

We started resisting the Chinese starting from July 1959. At times about a hundred Chinese and at other times about 200 of them came to Sokdhe. "Give up your arms and surrender. The Dalai Lama has fled to India. The sky is Communist China and the earth is Communist China. There is no way out for you. Surrender to us," they wrote to us. The leader or sort of commander of Sokdhe was Chief Norbu Tsering who wrote back, "We will never surrender. We will die on our land if we have to. If you can die in someone else's land, we can definitely die on ours. We will never surrender." When a hundred of them [Chinese soldiers] arrived, we'd fight for half a day. We'd kill around ten of them and we'd lose two or three of our men. We could then get hold of several of their weapons. We lived in this way from July until the end of February [of the following year].

Then we heard that there were many guerrillas of the *Chushi Gangdrug* Resistance Force at Chara Penpa. We were at Jang Dhanshung then. Except in those two areas, there were no rebellions [against the Chinese] in Tibet. The Chinese had taken away the weapons everywhere else. We heard that arms supplies had reached Chara Penpa, which were sent by the Americans. When we heard that, about six or seven of us held a meeting, "Let's some of us go to Chara Penpa and request that the Americans help us with weapons." We discussed and made preparations to leave in two to three days.

During this time, those at Chara Penpa had received the weapons from the Americans, fought the Chinese and managed to cause considerable harm. Seven men connected with the arms drop by the Americans arrived in Sokdhe—having heard that resistance fight against the Chinese was going on at Sokdhe—just as we were to leave for Chara Penpa in two or three days. They asked, "Can you fight the Chinese? How will you fight them?" "We do not have weapons", we replied. We possessed old weapons and had exhausted all the bullets. We could not find bullets anywhere. We continued our resistance for six to seven months by killing 20 to 30 Chinese and using the 20 to 30 weapons we found on them [the dead].

By then we were a large number of fighters because many Tibetans joined us. Batches of 20 to 30 people from Nangchen, Dege and other escapees joined us at Sokdhe. When we took a count, there were about 3,000 fighters! And their parents, siblings and family members lived all across the region. The number of people was incredible. We made a request to them [the seven people from Chara Penpa] for weapons. They said, "We will help you [in acquiring weapons]. However, this place is not suitable."

At that time we were in the place called Thimurup, and this was not a suitable place because we were close to the regions like Zama Ade, Nagchu and Borshoe who had surrendered to the Chinese. They [the seven men from Chara Penpa] said, "You have to stay away from them. Otherwise, there is a danger of the weapons falling into Chinese hands when they are dropped from the sky." So we moved to Jang [northern desert area] where weapons were airdropped by the Americans. I think it was in the month of March when the Americans dropped innumerable arms. There were mortars and shells of this size [gestures], machine guns with a hundred bullets. If one pressed the trigger all the bullets fired within five minutes "rat-a-tat-tat-tat" and you could aim from here to Bettadapur [25 miles away]. Then there were *rangbar aphe* 'guns,' *gyeshong* 'American rifles,' *paling* 'Japanese pistols' and binoculars. Each of us was given a photograph of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on which was written that 13 countries supported us. We received such weapons.

Q: Was there an American among the seven people [from Chara Penpa]?

#75: Yes, there was a person who did not know our language. The Tibetans who came were among those who had received training in the United States and were airdropped at Chara Penpa.

Q: Was there an American among them?

#75: I did not see them, but people said there were one or two Americans.

Q: Did he ever see any of these drops occurring?

#75: Yes, I saw them. They occurred at night. There were no woods at that place which was like a desert, so the dung of yak was placed on a diagram and set on fire. This could be seen from a distant and the airplane flew overhead in the night—we could not see the airplane except its flickering red lights—and then it became quiet. We were told the next day that weapons had been dropped. We found boxes of this size [gestures] each packed with six guns. Two such boxes were tied to one parachute to drop them down. When we loaded them on the yaks, it amounted to eighty yak loads. Weapons were dropped three times at Marpo Dhathong in this way.

Q: What was the shape of the diagram that they made out of the burning dung?

#75: The diagram looked like a letter. Perhaps it was in English and indicated that that was the place to drop [the weapons]. When it [the dung] was set on fire, it looked bright in the night and could be seen from the air at a great distance. The weapons were dropped around that area in the night about 11 or 12 o'clock. The letter was not Tibetan, perhaps it was English.

Q: Did he participate in this? How did he witness this? What was his involvement? Did he just hear about it or engage in it?

#75: I saw it and the next day we went to collect the weapons and the parachutes. We transported the arms to the army camp. I was there.

Q: Did they actually join *Chushi Gangdrug* at that time or did they just get the weapons and go off on their own?

#75: The *Chushi Gangdrug* helped us acquire the arms. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was based in Chara Penpa and if one had to travel there from our region, it would take over a month by horse ride. It was very far away. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was in Chara Penpa, which is in Sowa District while we were in the desert region. Last year one of my sons went to the United States and he asked me the story. He said there is a book in the United States, which mentions that the Americans' last help for Tibet was the arms drop to the *Chushi Gangdrug*. That is not right. After airdropping arms to the *Chushi Gangdrug*, they made the final arms drop to the area where we were. At that time we did not know the Western calendar, but I would think the time of the arms drop corresponds to the month of March.

Q: What happened when he went back to his village with the weapons? Tell us what happened.

#75: We took the arms to the base camp. The weapons were dropped a little away from the base camp, a distance from here to Periyapatna [around 10 miles]. We brought back the weapons and distributed them among the men. Weapons were dropped three times by

airplanes. After all the nearly 3,000 fighters received a weapon each, there were still some left.

The Chinese told us, "Do not yearn for death. Do not go with the Dalai reactionaries. You will die if you follow the expansionist United States of America. Surrender to us. If you follow the Dalai reactionaries, the imperialists Americans and the Hindu reactionaries, there is no way out for you but death. Surrender [to us]." We wrote back, "We will not surrender. If you can die in another's land, we can die in our own land. Come here and we will fight."

For over a month we trained to use the weapons. There were grenades about the size of this cup here. We were taught how to throw the grenades. Then once again we received a letter from the Chinese, "Surrender. You wish for death. The sky is Communist China and the land is Communist China. You have nowhere to go. If you do not surrender, we will not be like what we were. Earlier, only a 100 or 200 of us came to you. Now we are ready with 70,000 men." We sent back a letter saying, "We will not surrender. We have no regrets if we die. We are dying in our own country and we have no regrets."

Before a month passed by, seven airplanes arrived. The 3,000 fighters were camped in a large ground about the size from here to Kushalnagar [around four miles]. We had set up the parachutes like tents with 10 people to a tent. The seven airplanes hovered over us and fired at us. They shot and destroyed, shot and destroyed starting at around 8:30 and continued until about 10 o'clock. Everybody ran helter-skelter.

At that time we were undergoing training in the event of firing from the sky or grenade blasts. We were to lie flat on the ground during such times because after they were thrown on the ground, at the time of explosion the grenades flew up a foot and a half high and then exploded. The explosive materials did not explode up or down but sideways. If a person was standing it exploded about this high [gestures around knees]. We were taught such lessons.

I was near my tent with my companions when the seven airplanes hovered over us. I could see them drop [the grenades] on my tent and just as I was taught, I dove on the ground. The ground was very rough. I heard the sound of a swish and an explosion. I could feel the heat on my back. I thought my spine was broken. I did not dare get up but reached behind my back. When I checked my hand there was no blood. My clothes were torn, but there was no blood. I got up, took my gun and grenade and found some horses running about. I rode on one and sprinted up the Marpo Mountain. All the 3,000 men were running east, west and in every direction. Perhaps some were killed, maybe 20 or 30. The rest were running east and west. From the top of the mountain I looked through my binoculars and saw that there were Chinese soldiers swarming in the east, in the west and everywhere. It was definitely true that there were 70,000 of them. I think perhaps it was around the 28th or 29th of March. I am not exactly sure but I think it was at the end of March or the beginning of April.

Q: Who taught them to use the weapons?

#75: Those were the Tibetans who came from the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I heard that later nine more men arrived who were airdropped but I did not see them. We were taught how to hurl grenades and how to lie flat on the ground in the event of firing from the skies. However, we knew how to fire guns because we were used to that. The Chinese airplanes are white and very large. They have red letters written below. They swoop down, drop a few bombs and climb up high into the sky. Then they repeat it. We had been told that we would receive arms to destroy airplanes in a few days but that was too late.

Q: Then?

#75: That day I went atop the Marpo Mountain. About a hundred fighters gathered at the mountaintop. Some [fighters] had fled towards the east and some towards the west. Take this place for example, some fled towards Bettadapura, some fled towards Periyapatna and everywhere in the hilly forests. Then when night fell I could see red lights in every direction as the Chinese soldiers used a light signal to indicate where they were. No place could be seen without the light signal; naturally, since they were 70,000 in number.

Then we went to a place called Zikanang where we encountered around 200 Chinese soldiers. We clashed for quite a while. From the 70 odd men we were, we lost about 23; some were killed and some were not. I think about 60 to 70 Chinese were killed. We fought there until it became dark and then the Chinese went back. They had not been able to take away all their dead. Our bullets were almost exhausted and so we went down and collected the Chinese weapons and bullets. At that time the Chief of Sokdhe, called Norbu Tsering, was with me. So were Wobji Thongsam and Moga Damdul, Achung Garab and many other prominent people of Sokdhe. We were about 43 people and we passed through Ziganang.

In the morning we reached a hillock with valleys on both sides. Near the hillock was a river running by. Chinese soldiers arrived from the other side; first came three contingents of Chinese soldiers and later several more. Each contingent consisted of around a hundred soldiers. We could easily drop down grenades on them as they were at a lower area. Their grenades could not reach us as we were on a higher slope. However, it was difficult to shoot at them but hurling grenades was simple. The 40 men had three hand grenades each. We used the 120 hand grenades there. Towards evening around 4 o'clock, they [the Chinese soldiers] could no longer endure and left. Then we went down to have a look and saw many dead and injured. Some of them were groaning, but we could not understand Chinese. Most of them were very young men in the age group of 18, 19 or 20. They wore cotton pants. We took away their weapons. Eleven of our men were killed. Five were not dead, but they could not walk. We could do nothing but leave them there, so taking the weapons, we went away.

That was the third day. We did not fight on the fourth day. On the fifth day we went to Dhamjong through Zalung where we encountered a Chinese army. We battled for quite a while and killed five or six Chinese. On our side, one man was hit by a bullet in the hand and another was killed. Then the battle ended. So in this way we continued to fight for around 11 days. No other [Tibetan] who has reached India has suffered like I have. I have

undergone so much. Many of my colleagues could not be harmed by bullets. For about two to three days they were not touched by the bullets and it so happens that after some days, they get injured. Perhaps there is a certain time limit [for the protection]. I have many such stories to relate.

Q: Did they fight for 11 days?

#75: We fought for 11 days. I had a companion named Wobji Thongsam...

Q: When he said that they [the Chinese soldiers] were about 18 and groaning, did he say if he felt bad for them?

#75: They were lying there unable to die and we just left them there. We did not have weapons, so we took as many arms and bullets as possible. Then it became dark and we went away.

Q: Then on the 11th day...

#75: Wobji was hit by many bullets before that, but none penetrated him. On the evening of the 11th day he told me, "I have been hit by three bullets here and it is burning me." He didn't make any such complaints earlier though he had been hit many times. When I looked I saw a reddish colored boil. That night we stayed there and the next morning we passed through Dukchuena and encountered some Chinese. We were fighting the Chinese side by side. At one point he [Wobji] said, "I am injured." I looked and saw that he had been hit on the arm and it was severed. He had been hit many times earlier, but no bullets penetrated him. Perhaps there was a time limit. He said, "One should be able to die. There is no hope now." He threw away his gun and drew his sword. At a distance from here to the turning in the road there [30 to 40 meters]; with this [left] hand severed, he charged with his sword. There was firing from the other side and just before he could reach there, he fell down; he was killed.

Then it was on the 15th day that *Sokdhe Pon* 'Chief' was injured here [gestures, but not in frame of camera]. We were desperate and running in every direction when the Chinese captured *Sokdhe Pon* and took him away on a white horse. He was Norbu Tsering, our highest commander. He was wearing a yellow brocade dress at that time. Then we rested for about seven days in the hills and it was the 22nd day. I had seven companions with me. I did not know them—most of us did not know each other as we were from different regions.

In the morning we encountered a group of Chinese soldiers. We were in a sort of narrow space and battled the Chinese. One by one four of my companions were killed. Next to me was a young man. He had three bullets and I had two left. There were no more bullets and about 200 Chinese were approaching us. Wobji was dead, and just like him I felt there was no hope now. I turned to my companion and said, "Except for the two of us, everyone's dead. There is no hope for us, so it is better to charge." Among the Chinese soldiers were many Tibetans. They made them [the Tibetans] yell at us, "Surrender. Surrender. There is the leniency policy." I told my companion, "There is no hope for us. It's better to die. So

let's charge." He replied, "No, no. Don't charge. Hold my hand. Don't charge. They are asking us to surrender. If we surrender, they are saying that there will be leniency. That is better for us. Don't charge." He told them [the Chinese], "We wish to surrender." They said, "If you wish to surrender, leave your guns and come." So we left our guns there. The Chinese soldiers captured us and took us with them.

Q: What happened then?

#75: Then they took us to Wonchenda, which is a desert region. [We saw] three to four tents were set up. In the open field about 200 men huddled in a circle and they were guarded by 15 to 30 armed Chinese soldiers. We were taken to the Chinese leader. He had a Tibetan interpreter, a young man who spoke in the Amdo dialect. He said, "It has been 22 days since the battle at Marpo Dharthong. During this time how many Chinese did you kill? What did you do? You have to confess everything. If you confess truthfully, you will receive leniency. If you do not, there is nothing but death for you." I thought that if I told him about the war and everything, he would not listen. After my companion was interrogated, he was taken away to the circle of men. Then he questioned me. I replied, "I do not know how to use a gun properly. At times I did fire, but I do not know if I killed any Chinese." The interpreter said, "No that is wrong. I know you." I had on a red fur dress, which was torn at the back during the grenade attack. There were many bullet holes in the dress. The bullets did not penetrate me because I had no wounds in my flesh. He said, "How many Chinese soldiers did you kill during the last 22 days. You must have killed at least a hundred Chinese. You are not speaking the truth. Take him away."

I was taken to a rock-strewn area nearby a stream and made to squat with my arms at my side. One soldier stood on this side with his gun pointed at me, and another on the other side. They said, "Don't move." It was around 4 o'clock. I couldn't hold that position in the night and fell this side and that side and my whole body became numb. They pulled me up when I fell and said some gibberish in the Chinese language. I was in that position until 4 o'clock the next day. I didn't defecate, but I had no choice but to urinate in my pants. I think it was around the same time the next day that I was told to stand up. However, I could not do so and fell on my side. I lay down for sometime and then I could slowly stand up. I went there [to the leader] and he said, "If you are honest, there is leniency and if not, you will face violence. You are not being truthful. Speak truthfully." So I said, "I might have killed." "How many?" he asked. "About 40," I replied. After I said that they led me to the group of people.

Q: Were you put in some sort of a prison?

#75: No, I was not put in a prison as there was no house in the desert region. It was an open ground with a few tents for them [the Chinese] to live in. All the people [prisoners] were made to sit on the ground and Chinese soldiers armed with guns guarded us day and night. After three days, the soldiers herded us like sheep and goats towards Sowa District. We were kept for two days at Sowa District and provided a rice meal. From there we were taken to Nagchu in vehicles. By then it was around the end of May.

I was imprisoned at Nagchu. About a hundred people were imprisoned in a room of this size [interview room]. There was no space to sit or sleep at night. Everyone had to stand, one against the other day and night. At around 10 in the morning, we were allowed out to answer nature's call in a pit dug nearby. We were provided with a ball of boiled rice and a mug of hot water. In the evening at 5, we were once again allowed to answer nature's call in the pit. A ball of boiled rice and hot water followed as dinner. Eighty to 90 people were cramped in such a small room and there was no space to sit and sleep at night. Everyone stood cramped against each other. Some sick people who became weak were trampled to death. I was in that situation for three months.

While in the prison, there were some people who were sick and suffered from diarrhea. In the morning at 10 we were allowed to answer nature's call. From then until 5 in the evening and during the night, if one felt the urge he had to let go in the cell. So the entire room's floor was filled with urine and feces. Even if you didn't do it, others' [waste matter] stuck to you. We were thus living with excrement. I lived in this way for three months. During the three months, there were some people who turned insane. Some cried out for their mother while others their wives' names. Some cried, "Bring me milk. Bring me curd." They tried to go out and the Chinese soldiers guarding the door shot them dead. Many were killed in that way.

Once in a week we were told to come out into the open yard. The Chinese leader arrived with his interpreter and said, "You people who are followers of the Dalai bandit clique, the imperialist Americans and the Hindu reactionaries. You have been saved by the wonderful policy of Communist China. Otherwise you should be shot dead." He lectured us in this fashion. I told you about the pit where the prisoners answered nature's call.

Once in a week they [the Chinese] brought 15 to 20 small buckets and gave one to each person. We had to fill them with the excrement using our hands and empty the buckets in the stream running nearby. When the pit filled up, they either called 10 or 15 people, gave them each a bucket. We filled the buckets using our hands. After emptying the buckets in the stream, they did not allow us to wash our hands properly. They would shout "Go, go" and chase us away. We were kept in this situation for three months. Daily six, eight or nine men died in the night. The next morning we were required to take the bodies away, dig a pit and bury them. Four men had to carry one body. After three months, perhaps in the month of August or mid-September they [the Chinese] segregated all the old, the sick and the weak and left them at Nagchu. Then they said that all the healthy and the young had to go to the north to gather *tsala karmo* 'borax.' They took us across the pass to the north.

Q: Did they kill the weak?

#75: They didn't kill them, but left them at Nagchu. Many gradually died there; some died from sickness, some because there was not enough to eat and others from diarrhea. Daily seven to eight people died. If one became insane and tried to venture out [of the cell], he was shot dead. However, terrible the situation inside, those with their sanity intact would endure it and not go out because there were guards watching the door.

Q: A Chinese commander arrived every week to lecture them?

#75: No, he was not an army commander. Perhaps he was a Chinese administrator at the District Office of Nagchu. He lectured us saying, "You with the Dalai bandit clique, Hindu reactionaries and bearing the arms of the imperialist Americans. You oppose the glorious policies of Mao Tsetung." He spoke so on and so forth. That was not all. He also spoke against—I do not know the name [of the country]—he did not mention it as Korea, but it was some name and that country was their enemy.

Then we able-bodied men were taken over the pass to the north to collect borax. We were put into nine trucks with perhaps 70 to 80 people in each truck and taken to Ban-go Tsala. These days the story goes about how so many Tibetan prisoners died at the area of Tsala Karpo. The natives of that region have given it the name "Human Corpse Area." We were taken there, but we found we were not the only ones. There were those being brought from Lhasa, from Thoe and from everywhere. Perhaps there were over 2,000 people brought there to gather borax. Pits were dug all around a large area of the size of this village. There was no fencing as the area was a desert region. Tents were put up in this area with 20 people to a tent. Kitchens were set up to feed 200, 300 or 400 people. In this way six divisions were formed. Each division consisted of 200 to 300 men. To find borax we had to dig deep in the grounds near the waters. That was during autumn and we went further and further away [digging for borax]. Innumerable men died.

People were exhausted and we had very little to eat. We ate *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' made from black beans and donkey's meat. We also ate the meat of yaks, which perished from starvation. We never got to eat good meat. Many times we were fed with donkey's meat. We had no choice but to eat them. We made *thukpa* 'noodle soup' from black beans. I lived in that region for around two years. So many people died there and on some days, 18 to 19 people died in a single day! The bodies were taken away and buried. However, the ground froze in winter and so a little dust was covered on the bodies. Later when we looked around, there were human corpses everywhere as no animal ate them in winter. I think most of the people died there; perhaps more than a thousand. Daily 18 to 19 died.

[Discontinuity in tape]

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He said he was hoping to share this with somebody.

Q: Tell him we are really happy he has the opportunity and for us to be able to record this for history. It is very important what he is saying and it's the most interesting story.

#75: I am very happy.

Q: He was about two years there?

#75: Yes, I was there for about two years. There were prisoners from everywhere, from Thoe, from Mey, from Lhasa and from everywhere. Finally in the year 1962 I was taken to

Nagchu. I was kept in Nagchu for a month and then taken to Barchay District, the district of my village. I was jailed in the Barchay District prison with about 37 other Barchay prisoners; there were none from outside the region. They [the prisoners] were the earlier leaders, lamas and other prominent people. I was kept there until 1964. We did not have much work and had space to sleep at night. Daily they provided us with a mug full of *tsampa* and black tea. Since there was no work, it was better [than the Nagchu prison].

I think it was around March of 1964 that I was asked to appear before the Barchay District Administrator. He said, "From tomorrow you are free. However, you are a very serious criminal. You have been freed under the generous policy of Mao Tse Tung's Communist Government. When you return to your earlier village, you will find that things have changed. There are leaders appointed by the Communist government and you have to obey them. If you whole-heartedly do whatever they tell you to do under the leadership of Mao Tse Tung, you will remain free. However, if you go against that, you will be back in the prison." He thus advised me and I was set free.

I walked a little distance and sat down. I did not feel comfortable. For three years I was used to being guarded by gun-carrying soldiers and I looked around uneasily. Then I continued on to my village. I did not have my parents or siblings living there as they had left for Thoe Thargo since long. I lived in the village. Those that were beggars, servants, thieves and the worst social elements in the earlier days were appointed as leaders. Most of the lamas, leaders and people of such origins were there in the Barchay Prison. Some of those left in the village were not allowed to talk to anyone. They were forbidden from mixing with the general people or talking to them. I was also not allowed to mix or talk to other people. I was naturally categorized in that class, so that's how I lived there.

Q: He can continue.

#75: I did not have my parents and siblings except some distant relatives in the village. When I arrived there I had to report my arrival to those poor people who they [the Chinese] had appointed as leaders. They said I could live anywhere I liked. After about a month I was called to attend a meeting. There were about 30 people who were categorized like me. A distant uncle of mine was also there. A picture of Mao Tse Tung was hung on the wall [of the meeting hall]. Those leaders that were appointed by the Chinese were present there. They spoke about how good the Communist Chinese government was, how the people of Tibet were suppressed by the lamas and leaders in the earlier days, how we were the people who followed them, how we should change our minds and believe in Mao Tse Tung and oppose the Dalai Lama and embrace the path of Communism. They said if we still clung on to the old beliefs, we would still suffer more.

Some of those beggars [turned leaders] pulled our hair and ears, hit us on our backs and slapped our cheeks. They subjected us to *thamzin* 'struggle session.' The Chinese leaders had instructed them to do so and they had no choice but to follow them. They were all Tibetans who did that, people of my village. Then the Cultural Revolution began in the year 1966. Once the Cultural Revolution started, religious texts were burned, icons were thrown out [of the monasteries] and people were banned from wearing jewelry. Men and

women in Tibet did not cut their hair in the old days. Now they were made to cut their hair about this length [gestures at ear level].

Q: Did the Cultural Revolution take place in 1968?

#75: No, no. It happened between 1965 and 1966. It was during the Cultural Revolution that religion was destroyed. Holy icons and monasteries were destroyed. Earlier when they [the Chinese] were fighting us, all their weapons came from Russia. In 1965 China and Russia separated. Earlier they used to say "Hindu reactionaries, imperialist Americans and Dalai bandit clique," but from then on they also bad-mouthed Stalin as they had separated. The earlier red colored 25 and 5 currency notes were those of Stalin's. They collected all those notes back in the year 1965 when Russia and China went their separate ways.

Then in 1966 there was the Cultural Revolution. In our village they called a meeting once every one or two months. They threatened us and subjected us to *thamzin*. That happened six or seven times in a year. Then at the end of 1964, there were the protests against the government by the Communists. Those Tibetans that did not like them [the Chinese] had high hopes that that might be the help arriving to rebel against the Chinese as it had been around eight to nine years since His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left the country. I did not obey when the Chinese told me to attend a meeting. The Chinese used to say, "There is no religion. It is a lie. This icon cannot save you. That is the evidence of religion's presence. Throw down the icon tonight and if it can get up by itself tomorrow, then it might be able to save you. Look," they said and threw down an icon. "Come and see tomorrow morning if it is up. When they cannot get up by themselves, how can they save you? That is how the Dalai Lama and his clique deceived you people."

Q: What happened to his local monastery and the monks there?

#75: That was the Lukhuk Gonpa. The whole building was dismantled. The icons were kicked out and destroyed. There was no ours [monastery] or yours [monastery]. It [the destruction of monasteries] happened throughout in the whole of Tibet in 1966.

Q: Why didn't he try to escape?

#75: At that time there was no danger to my life. Even if one wanted to escape, it was not that simple. Chinese had occupied the whole of Tibet and there were Chinese soldiers in all the bigger towns. There was no possibility of an escape unless one was really desperate and his life in danger, so I lived that way being subjected to the *thamzin*.

Then Communism spread in various parts of Tibet like Ju Nyenmo, Naksho Beri and Chungpo Thenchen. A protest group called *genlok* arose in 1967. It made small protests against the Communist government. In fact the protests were happening all over China and that was the Gang of Four led by Liu Shao as I heard people say. Their policy was contradicting that of Mao Tse Tung. The rebellion happened not only in Tibet, but all over China. We believed and hoped that help was coming to us since it had been eight to nine years that His Holiness the Dalai Lama left for India. That was what those of us who did

not like the Chinese hoped for whereas those people who liked the Chinese welcomed the communist party.

I did not attend the meetings twice. When I failed to appear, they said, "He is a very lawless person. Earlier he was a criminal who has killed many soldiers of the Liberation Army. Presently he does not obey the orders of the Chinese government, capture him and bring him here." There were many young Tibetans about my age, around 25, 26, 27 or 28, among those appointed as leaders by the Chinese and some of them were my friends. My friends came and secretly told me about what was said. They said I was to be captured and taken to prison. When the officer had said that, the chief leader of our village who was called Shontang Nyiphuk had replied, "He is a very unruly man. I am not sure if we can capture him. He has become a very unruly man now-a-days." "If you cannot catch him, kill him. You are hundreds of men and how can you not kill one man?" That was the order given to kill me. Among the Tibetan officers, many were my childhood friends and they came and secretly told me the things that were said [about me]. I thought I must now flee.

I heard that *genlok* 'protests' had begun at Sokdhe. The people of Sokdhe destroyed the Chinese shop in their village, looted and divided the goods. Long back some people had hidden American weapons in the rocky mountains and those were dug up and they rebelled against the Chinese. I reached there as this was going on and I asked them, "What is the source and what have you heard that you are rebelling against the Chinese? Can you defeat them?" They replied, "What source do we need? His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been gone since eight to nine years and it is our hope that [some help] is coming from there." People of Tibet are really silly. Then I went back home. Sonam [one of the interviewees] would have spoken about it yesterday. Were you the one who interviewed him? He lives a little further away.

A *genlok* arose in Chungpo Thenchén and five or six men escaped the Chinese over the mountain pass. Just before they reached Barchay District, they encountered two Chinese army leaders. Each of them was armed with two rifles and a pistol. At that time there was no road for the vehicles to pass through and they [the Chinese army officers] were on horseback. They [the Tibetan men] killed them and took away their arms. However, they did not know their way and arrived in our village. I wanted to escape, but I had not been able to find any companions. I met them when they came there. So I joined them in their escape.

They did not know the region as they had never been there. During my journey to Lhasa when I was 16 or 17, I had traveled up to Shigatse. I had heard that once you were in Shigatse, you could reach the Bhutanese border, the Indian border or the Himalayas in five days' walk. I told the men that I knew the route and that I had been there [to Shigatse]. That was the first time we were meeting each other. If one walked to their village from my village, it was more than two months' journey. That day they arrived [in my village] on their escape journey and I was looking for companions to make my escape, and we met. When I told them I knew the way, they asked me to join them. So I came along with them.

Q: Did some people of Sokdhe fight the Chinese and were fleeing?

#75: No, they were not from Sokdhe. They were right from Nangchen.

[Tape change. Discontinuity in interview]

#75: Quite a lot of Chinese and Tibetans arrived in Sokdhe. We clashed for about an hour in the evening and then we fled because we did not have many arms. They [the Chinese] too went back. Then two men of Sokdhe and a person from Amdo called Lobsang joined us. We were about 12 men then. We escaped through Naksho Beru and requested for some holy pills from the lama at Beru Shabdung. We related to him about the protests against the Chinese and the lama said, "I wish to go with you, but I cannot as I have trouble with my legs." Then we passed through Nagchu District and during one night we became separated from the two men of Sokdhe and Amdo Lobsang. We did not meet them again. I later heard that Amdo Lobsang was killed, but I do not know if the other two were killed or what happened to the men of Sokdhe.

Q: Did they fight in Nagchu?

#75: No, we did not fight in Nagchu. We could not fight much at Sokdhe because we did not have many arms. We only had the ones, which the men got from the Chinese [officers] they killed. They were a *rongpa* and two pistols. We reached Naksho Beru on our escape journey. There the lama Chugyay said, "I wish to go with you, but I have trouble with my legs and cannot go. I pray that you have success." We requested for a divination [about the success of our escape] and he said it was good. Then we crossed a mountain pass and reached Nagchu in two or three days. When we reached Nagchu, we were riding our horses in the night and became separated from Amdo Lobsang and the two men of Sokdhe who were with us. We never met again.

Q: Then what happened?

#75: Now we were nine people, eight men from Nangchen and I. The names of the people from Nangchen were Lama Karma Tenzin, Gayi, Adhor and Karma both of whom are here [in Bylakuppe]. We came through Thopgya Gola [a mountain pass], but could not cross the huge river. I knew the boatman from my earlier trip and asked him to take us across. We paid him quite a lot of Chinese currency. He took us across. We dare not take the main road, so we came through between the hills of Gyangtse and Tashi Lhunpo. I did not know the route beyond this point, as I hadn't been there. I had traveled up to that point during my previous journey. Before we climbed the Thopgya Gola, in the place called Tawo Sokpo we met a man. He wanted to join us. He was Sonam who was interviewed a few days back. He is a Tsangpa [a person from the Tsang region]. He joined us and now we were ten people.

It seems the Chinese had pursued us day and night saying that bandits had escaped. We did not know the route and we let our horses lose in the forests. Each of us carried a small bundle. We hid during the day and walked at night. When we looked towards the south, it was filled with snow-capped mountains. I had earlier heard that the border between Tibet

and India was the Himalaya ranges. I thought we had come to the right place. We proceeded in that direction.

Q: From Nagchu they reached the river and crossed it in a boat. Did they then reach Gyangtse?

#75: That was behind Gyangtse. We dare not go to Gyangtse town because there was a Chinese army camp. We took the route to the east of Tashi Lhunpo and came through two hills. There were many rocky mountains and we hid among them. Then we continued our journey hiding among the hills and crossed a bridge one night. Then we climbed up a mountain top. We made some black tea. Except for a little butter we had no *tsampa* or anything left to eat. All our food was finished. We only had a small bundle of clothes. At about sunrise we were walking across a high rocky mountain.

Down in the valley—we did not know the area because we had never been there—were some houses and people walking around. It was at a great distance. Around 9 o'clock in the morning we reached this point [gestures] on the rocky mountain. Everyone had had no food to eat and we had been terribly cold in the night. I think it was around the beginning of October. Everyone, the nine of us, put down our bundles and fell asleep.

I might have slept for about five minutes when I suddenly woke up. I was very exhausted. I felt sheer panic in my heart that something was not right. I looked about. Two Chinese emerged a little distance away. They [my companions] were all sleeping close by. I said, "The Chinese are here." And they [the Chinese] started to shoot at us. We had a rifle and two pistols. One of the pistols was in the hand of the lama and the other with Gayi. We had acquired a rifle from a soldier we had killed during a fight at Sowa District, which was in the hand of Atsue. There was some exchange of fire. They were shooting from there and we were here [gestures] and there was no way of escape. They were just several meters away.

I felt things were not going to be good and I said, "Let's draw our swords and charge. Even if a few of us are killed, the rest might get to go to India to talk to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Hundreds of [Chinese] soldiers may arrive and we would never have the chance to escape. Let's draw our swords and charge." "Yes," said everyone. The two monks were on that side, three of the men were on the other side and Atsue, Sonam and I were in the center. We had on fur coats at that time. We took them off, wore our pants and tied them at the waist as we prepared to run. Everyone was armed with swords. "Charge," we said and rushed.

The lama's companion, a young man who was also a lama lay bleeding from a wound here [gestures near heart]. We couldn't stop to help him and pretending not to see him we charged ahead. Atsue, Sonam and I charged on one man and the others on the other. He [the Chinese soldier] was shooting at us, but did not hit us. We stabbed him to death and took away his gun. Karma, Adhoe and Gayi killed the other one. After killing them we rushed to our companion who was injured. He could not get up. He was hit here [gesturing near heart] and was bleeding from his mouth. Just then we saw that five Chinese soldiers were looking at the two bodies of those that we had killed. We sprinted from there up the mountain. They fired at us but none hit us. They took away the injured one [our

companion]. He was later treated and taken to his village. He was interrogated, but he did not speak the truth and instead revolted against them [the Chinese]. Finally he was taken to Chamdo and killed.

Q: Was he a lama?

#75: Yes, they said he was a lama. He was very young, about 19 years old.

Q: Then where did they go?

#75: Then we were able to escape successfully. We crossed over a very steep snowy mountain pass for a day and a night and arrived in Bhutan.

Q: What happened when they reached Bhutan?

#75: When we reached Bhutan, the Bhutanese interrogated us. We related our entire story to them, but they did not believe us. They insinuated that we were Chinese spies. After three or four days, a helicopter came there from India. A very smart looking Indian army officer with long moustaches said to be a Criminal Investigation Department Chief arrived with a Tibetan interpreter. I was the first person to be interrogated. He asked me the "how's" and the "why's." I told them how I had participated in the wars, about the arms drop by the Americans, how we fought with those weapons and killed the Chinese and about my miserable time in the prisons.

I told him the full story. I spoke for about three to four hours. Finally he said, "You are lying. Since 1959 to this day only a few people from Lhasa and the border areas have managed to escape. No one else has been able to escape. You are saying that you live two to three months' distance from Lhasa. Tibet is teeming with Chinese soldiers, how would you be able to escape? You are lying. Your intention is not to see the Dalai Lama. You are a spy sent to kill the Dalai Lama. If you do not speak the truth, forget seeing the Dalai Lama, we will kill you."

Q: What did they say they would do?

#75: I told them that I wanted to see the Dalai Lama and inform him about the misery of the last nine years. They said, "That is not true. You are a spy sent by the Chinese. In the past the Chinese have sent many spies to kill the Dalai Lama. When people living closer like Lhasa are not able to escape, how can you who lived two to three months further away manage to escape the Chinese troops? Can you fly through the air? Can you come under the ground?" I tried to clarify by relating the story about receiving the American weapons and about fighting the battles.

Then they brought out a big book. I think it contained the pictures of every weapon of the world. He said, "Show me which are the weapons dropped by the Americans." The pictures were clear and I turned the pages, pointed to the pictures and said, "This is a machine gun, this is a mortar, this is a pistol, this is *amtu gyeshong* 'American rifle;' I told

him everything. He kept staring at my face and said, "No, you are not speaking the truth. Stand up, look into my eyes and speak."

Then I said, "I thought if I could escape from the Chinese I would get the opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India. I hoped that I would receive some help from India and the United States. The reason [I hoped they would help] was that they [the Chinese] always intoned "the Hindu reactionaries, imperialists Americans and the Dalai bandit clique." When they said such things, they [the Chinese] are the enemies of all of us, not just the Tibetans. I came with the hope that I would find help. You are saying you want to kill me and that I am sent to kill the Dalai Lama. You are saying that you won't allow me to see the Dalai Lama. You can kill me. However after you kill me; you have to inform the Dalai Lama all that I have been telling you from afternoon until now, which is late night. I do not have anything more to say." I was furious. Then he told me to sit down. He lit a cigarette and offered me one. He called for tea and gave me some. Then he said, "You can now speak gently." I replied, "I have nothing gentle to say. I do not have anything more to say. I have suffered terribly. [Gets emotional.] I have nothing more to say." I was livid with anger. Then he said, "You can request the Indian government and you will surely receive help from the Americans and others. You can go."

I suffered so much to come to India for the cause of the people of Tibet and not for any personal motive. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama lived in the Potala Palace, people were not allowed to set eyes on him. When he had to flee, what is my life? I wanted to inform His Holiness about the miseries of the Tibetans, which was the main reason that I suffered to come to India. These days they [the Chinese] are trying to deceive the Americans, doing business and various dealings. Their aim is definitely to conquer the United States of America, which is the most powerful nation in the world. Though I cannot predict the time; it may be in fifty or a hundred years. They did the same with us. They always intoned, "The imperialist Americans, Hindu reactionaries and Dalai bandit clique. They will all be under our control irrespective of time." That is why I hoped I could reach Indian soil—it mattered not where I died.

Starting from 1959 until 1980, during those twenty years how many Tibetans died in prisons, how many died from starvation, how many died from *thamzin*, how many were killed. It is a matter of several tens of thousands of thousands. Monks, leaders and prominent people, hundreds were killed in each district. Look at Sokdhe these days. If earlier there were a hundred people over the age of 60, now there are only two or three. The rest have all been killed.

I went to Tibet three years back although I could not go to my village. When I asked what happened to so and so, the reply was, "He died as a result of *thamzin* or he was killed or he died in prison." Such were the cases. The Chief of Sokdhe's hand was severed [during a battle] and he was captured and taken away. Since he was taken away that day until the 1980's when the first delegation of Mr. Juchen Thupten and others [from India] visited Tibet, he was still in prison. He had boiled and eaten even the leather soles of his footwear. He was freed only when he was on the verge of death, around the delegation's visit. He died

in a few days after being set free. They [the Chinese] knew that he was dying. That was what happened to the Chief of Sokdhe.

Q: Was it during the second delegation?

#75: No, it was during the first delegation. Deng Xiao Ping was in power then. He started the contacts between Tibetans and Chinese. I am not sure of the year, but it must be around 1981 or 1982.

Q: He was released then?

#75: He was released later than that. He did not live long after his release. He died soon.

Q: When did you go back to Tibet?

#75: I went back in 2002 or 2003.

Q: Was he questioned at all when he went back?

#75: No, they did not question me.

Q: Did he get to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

#75: I never believed one hundred percent that I would reach India. If I could reach it, I thought I would request His Holiness and the Indian government for help like the arms that the Americans provided us. With such help I hoped I could go back and fight the Chinese. The Indian government interrogated me for about six months in Delhi and then said I should go to the settlement in Mysore [Bylakuppe]. I told them, "No, I am not going to any settlement. I want to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Whatever he tells me to do, I will do that."

Then we were sent to see His Holiness. I informed the whole story to His Holiness and he said, "At the moment we cannot go to war. It is also against the law of the world. For the moment you should go to the Mysore settlement. It is a large and a good settlement. We shall see what the Tibetan government has to do." I had to go to the settlement because that was the advice of His Holiness. That is why I came here even though I never wished to live in India and make an enjoyable life here. How the Tibetans [in Tibet] are suffering and how many of them are dying!

Q: How did he endure his time in prison in Tibet? How did he get through the time?

#75: According to the Tibetan belief, it is our karma from our previous life. If one has done something bad in the previous life, one will have nothing but a bad karma in the next birth. That is taught in our dharma. However, if one has done well in the previous life, the results will be there in the next life. When so many people became insane and died, I thought to myself, "I don't mind if I die. But I will not turn insane and die." I prayed to the

triple gods and concentrated in my mind and did not dwell on insane thoughts. I was scared and I prayed that I must not go mad. I told myself, "I will not turn insane." I concentrated on such thoughts. It was thanks to that that I did not become crazy while so many died due to insanity. Hundreds died from insanity. So many people died in the war, but I didn't. So many people died in the prisons, but I didn't. These days when I can't fall asleep in the night I reflect, "So many people died while I didn't. Perhaps I have done something good in my previous birth." That's what I believe in and the blessings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I have accumulated good virtues in my past life to earn this merit.

Q: If the young Tibetans in exile today would listen to people like him, what advice would he give to them?

#75: I would tell the young generation that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is leading us the way in resolving the issue between Tibet and China. However, I do not believe totally that it can be resolved. How much have the Chinese deceived us in the past? What the Chinese believe is that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is 73 years old now. They will continue to gradually deceive us in this way until he [His Holiness] is the Buddha, but he is in human form. Though he is the Buddha, his body is that of a human. It is made of flesh and blood. That of flesh and blood, all living beings have a certain time.

In England and such countries they take great care of their health and hygiene and it is said that some people live for 110 years and some 105 years. Among the Tibetans there is no one who has lived beyond 101 or 102 years. If one lives more than 90 years, he cannot look after himself and needs care from others. He is of no help to his family. So though he is the Buddha, the human form is the same.

That is what they [the Chinese] are waiting for. If the day comes when His Holiness the Dalai Lama no longer lives, they [the Chinese] think that no one else will raise his voice for the cause of Tibet. They are waiting for that. That is a great mistake on their part. If the day comes when His Holiness no longer lives, even if half of the six million Tibetans die, they will let us die. They will not let us go [give us freedom] easily. That is why the younger generation should be motivated.

If His Holiness can find a solution during his life time to unite the Tibetan refugee community in India and abroad with them [those in Tibet], that is a great job. If he cannot do that, they [the Chinese] will never let us [give us freedom] easily. Irrespective of time, they will have to abide by the law of the world. Under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the entire Tibetan population is awaiting what the resolution would be. Otherwise, at least 75 percent of the people will be willing to die for one's country. That is for our own country.

His Holiness has said something very good, "If we are given the right to govern ourselves, we Tibetans will live under the People's Republic of China." To state a fact, for more than a thousand years Tibet was a truly independent country. We are different racially with a different language and script, and different traditions. People of the world can see and understand that. Look at the Chinese. We have a different language and script. We are

racially different. Our food habits are different. Everything is different. Then how can we be of the same country?

Take for example, India has so many states, they have slightly different languages, but if you look at their faces, they are racially the same. There is a story that from the time of Tibet's King Nyatri Tsenpo and down to King Trisong Deutsen, they occupied large territories of China. In those days China might have occupied Tibet's territory and vice versa. They do not have any evidence. Therefore the younger generation should be willing to sacrifice their lives, if it comes to that for the independence of Tibet. They must never give up that [independence of Tibet]. That is my opinion.

Q: Thank you very much for this interview. Tell him that we will do our best to get this out for people to see and to learn from. Thank him so much for sharing his experiences so vividly and such an incredible recollection.

#75: [Nods]

Q: I am just curious if he would be able to from memory... would he be able to draw that symbol that they made out of the dung that they set fire to as a symbol for the CIA planes? Would he be able to draw it if I give him a pen?

#75: **The place was called Marpo Dharthang. There was a river running close by and a mountain a little further away. I do not know how to draw the symbol because that was a letter. I cannot remember that at all. They might have written in English that that was the place to drop the weapons. It was the Secret Office of the United States government. Gyalo Thondup went there and contacts were made. The weapons were dropped by the office of the CIA.**

Q: Tell him I have read some books by former CIA officers about this story. There are people in America reading these books.

#75: **Yes, I heard that. It was mentioned in it that the last help for Tibet was [the arms drop] at Chara Penpa. It was not Chara Penpa. Weapons were dropped for us after Chara Penpa was destroyed. It was at Taju Chujue.**

Q: A lot of the CIA people that were helping the Tibetans wanted to do more, wanted to keep fighting, wanted Tibet to become free, but the government policy did not allow them to. But the men on the ground working with the Tibetans had great feelings for the Tibetans. They wanted to do more, but the government policy would not allow them to do more. They wanted the government to continue helping the Tibetan fighters. It was the government policy.

#75: **Later the Tibetans called Wangchen and Rari Yeshi had come here [to India]. They were among the men who arrived at our place [where we were fighting the Chinese] and asked the Americans to drop arms there. After I came [to India] I saw Wangchen in the Indian army. The other person was Rari Yeshi. They [the CIA] had to stop helping us. The last area where they gave help in Tibet was in our region. Then we were routed by the**

Chinese and they could not extend help. Once we were routed, there were no other Tibetan groups [resisting the Chinese] in Tibet.

Q: In my country we don't have the chance to meet many heroes, but I feel like today we met a great hero. And I predict that someday maybe not in this lifetime, someday Tibet will be free and in Lhasa there will be some kind of monument for people like him.

#75: [Nods]

Q: We are very moved by his story. We have a gift from the project for him.

#75: Thank you.

[Interpreter explains the signing of the release form. Interviewee signs the form.]

Q: I think we brought out many sad memories for him. That makes us feel bad, but we think it is very helpful for the cause of Tibet that people find out these stories.

#75: I wish to thank you. I am a Tibetan and you [interviewer and videographer] are Americans. You are working hard for the cause of Tibet and I have to thank you. I have not been able to tell my story until now. I told the Indian government that they [the Chinese] intone "Imperialist Americans and Hindu reactionaries." I struggled to come here with the hope that I would receive some help. I did not come here to have an enjoyable time. The Indian Secret office in Delhi said that they would give us help, but none came through. They said they would announce our story to the world and they might have, but I did not hear anything.

Q: Tell him what he did today was still fighting for Tibet because today he did with words instead of bullets.

#75: [Nods]

END OF INTERVIEW