

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #13B – Sonam Bhuti
December 26, 2013

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #13B
2. Interviewee: Sonam Bhuti
3. Age: 90
4. Date of Birth: 1923
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Khelkhar
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: December 26, 2013
10. Place of Interview: Lugsam Community Hall, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 05 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Sonam Bhuti was born in Khelkhar village near Gyangtse. A very holy pilgrim site of Guru Padmasambhava called Khelkhar Daduk exists nearby and she gives a vivid description of the rock caves inside which a miraculous spray of water appears after prayer rituals.

Sonam Bhuti left home for an arranged marriage at the age of 19. She describes the clandestine manner in which she was taken to the bridegroom's house in Phari. Her in-laws were a wealthy taxpaying family, who owned a large house, a store and land. They traveled to Kolkata in India to purchase goods for the shop and Sonam Bhuti helped manage a very prosperous business.

Sonam Bhuti saw how the Chinese initially treated the Tibetans with false generosity and then began political education programs and deceived the poor by awarding titles and money. She recounts the *thamzing* 'struggle sessions,' imprisonment, hard labor, political indoctrination imposed by the Chinese, which resulted in animosity and division in the Tibetan society.

Sonam Bhuti's family was closely watched which made escaping very difficult. She describes in detail how her family fled while the whole town of Phari was watching a theatrical performance. She had no regrets leaving behind all her wealth and possessions in order to escape from "hell."

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, customs/traditions, trade, taxes, pilgrimage, life under Chinese rule, escape experiences.

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Interview #13B

Interviewee: Sonam Bhuti

Age: 90, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: December 26, 2013

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:15

Interviewee #13B: Sonam Bhuti.

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

#13B: Yes.

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

#13B: Okay and thank you. [I] thank you, too.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#13B: Okay.

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

00:02:15

#13B: I have a brother in Lhasa whose children are Chinese officials in Lhasa, but they were born after I escaped. So there may not be [any problem].

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

#13B: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ can you please tell me your age now and where you were born?

#13B: [I] am 90 years old, 90 years. The birthplace is called Gyangtse Khelkhar. [Khelkhar] is the name of a village close to Gyangtse. It is called Gyangtse Khelkhar. The name of the region is Kabshi. My family name is Kabshi Phunkhang.

Q: Yes?

#13B: Kabshi Phunkhang. The family name is Kabshi Phunkhang.

Q: How many people were in your family, *ama-la*?

00:03:53

#13B: [Speaks before question is translated] Father's name was Tseten Lhundup.

Q: How many people were in your family when you were little?

#13B: I was the only one [child] at home. After I married and left home, mother had given birth to a son. Otherwise, I was the only child.

Q: How was your marriage decided? How was your partner chosen?

#13B: Marriages in our custom is arranged in secrecy and there is no falling in love with each other. Parents sent [me] there [to bridegroom's house] clandestinely. [We] had a relative in Phari whose family name is Dhindhue. My father's younger sister was married into this family. [The parents] sent me to her.

Q: What happened after [you] were sent to Phari?

00:05:42

#13B: I was never told [about the impending wedding] when sent to Phari. During summertime in Phari there was a horse racing show. [I] was told that I should go to watch such a show. Then adorned with jewelry and fine clothes, [I] was taken to that family's home into which [I] was to be married. [Laughs] They had made grand traditional preparations. The real wedding, the grand one took place a year later.

Q: How old were you when you were taken to that first ceremony?

#14B: Nineteen years old.

Q: How did you feel when they said, "You're going to get married today"?

#13B: Yes, [I] was to be married, but I did not have any wish to marry in that family and thought I should run away. [Laughs]

Q: What didn't you like about that family?

#13B: [Speaks before question is translated] There was a very old lady that did divinations.

Q: In that family?

00:07:47

#13B: No, a neighbor. I was not sure whether to pick a fight and leave or run away. So [I] asked the old lady, “Is it better for me to pick a fight and leave or run away?” The old lady said, “You will never be able to get away. Do not go. Remain here for you will never succeed in getting away because of karma.” [Laughs]

Q: And then what happened?

#13B: My husband was very smart having taken responsibility of [his] parents and family at the age of 16. [He] was very smart and into business. There were five groups [of people] in this place called Phari. Five groups and our group that consisted of two groups was called Khambo, and then another named Bhoecha consisted of two groups and there was one group called Bhayray. There were five groups in Phari.

The five groups comprised of taxpayers that served the Tibetan Government and who possessed agricultural lands and houses. We possessed lands and were very well off. However, the government taxes were not very high. Two government Kungo ‘Your Presence’ [title of address for government officials] from the east and west districts used to come there. They required [people] to do the daily cleaning, and in those days there was no electricity and [tap] water. So, it was the duty of the taxpayers to fetch water and firewood [for the officials].

00:10:18

The taxpayers must also serve the *atung* ‘postmen’ that came to deliver letters dispatched by the government. That was not on a daily basis. Whenever [government officials] arrived, the taxpayers on a day-to-day rotation...There was a wooden board called *changpang* of this size [indicates around 3 feet]. On this was written the designated family’s duty to serve on a particular day when [an official] visited. If [any official] arrived on your day of duty, you served [him] by fetching water and firewood and if nobody came that was fine, it was your gain. Besides this, there were not any difficult taxes. [The tax payers] owned very fine agricultural lands.

We possessed a shop, a very large shop. The merchandise for the shop came from Kolkata [India]. [We] went there twice [a year]. There was a fair called Thalung Tsongdue in summer when all [merchants] gathered. [We] went once during this time and another during wintertime close to Losar ‘Tibetan New Year’ to purchase goods in Kolkata. [We] went twice in a year to India.

Q: How did you like married life? Did you adjust to it or was it difficult?

#13B: Yes?

Q: How was it to live as a daughter-in-law of the family?

00:13:56

#13B: Earlier when I arrived the shop was not that large. It was a small shop and at times the wares were displayed outside. The shop saw good fortune after I came and then it became a large shop. There were different kinds of goods in the shop like gold, turquoise, coral, pearl and fabrics. Besides, there were medicines too. Medicines for fever and different kinds of medicines that helped during illness were found in the store. There were fabrics, glass panes for construction of houses and different kinds of nails.

Q: Nails?

#13B: Yes.

Q: Did you help to run this store and also did you go on the journeys to get the goods and who did you go with?

#13B: I did not go to purchase goods. However, once His Holiness the Dalai Lama went on a pilgrimage to India. I went there when His Holiness went on the pilgrimage along with my husband and others. His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave teachings in Bodh Gaya. Both His Holiness and the Panchen Lama were together then. The Panchen Rinpoche and His Holiness went on a pilgrimage together. We received His Holiness' teachings and embarked on a pilgrimage to Nepal and other places. On the way back [we] purchased goods in Kolkata and returned to Phari. After returning to Phari...earlier to that His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave the Kalachakra empowerment in Lhasa.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: Have you been to India to purchase goods?

00:16:52

#13B: [I] had been once. That is the time His Holiness the Dalai Lama went [to India]. It was also a pilgrimage and [I] had visited once. Otherwise, I did not normally go.

Q: You mentioned going on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya and Nepal. Can you please repeat those?

#13B: Yes, [we] went on a pilgrimage to Nepal.

At the time His Holiness the Dalai Lama embarked on the pilgrimage, there was a Chinese leader called Chang [Zhou?] Enlai. He always accompanied His Holiness without fail then.

Q: Where was the Chinese deployed?

#13B: His Holiness the Dalai Lama embarked on the pilgrimage. He [Chang Enlai] was sent along without fail. Perhaps [he] was a spy to observe what was happening. The leader was called Chang Enlai.

Q: Chang Enlai?

#13B: Chang Enlai was deployed wherever His Holiness went during the time of [His Holiness'] trip to Bodh Gaya.

He must have been a spy.

Q: *Ama-la*, can you tell us what you remember about seeing His Holiness? How did he look or what age was he and were you close enough to see him?

00:19:12

#13B: I do not know how old His Holiness was. [He] was young then.

Q: When you had a busy life with your husband, how was it to be married to someone that you met and married very abruptly? How did the marriage work out?

#13B: At that time I had no plans of living in the husband's home and contemplated running away or something. As mentioned earlier I sought divination from an old lady, "Is it better for me to run away or pick a fight?" The old lady said, "You should never leave. You must remain in the family for destiny will not let [you] leave." Then [I] did my best and stayed. Later the family prospered. [We] progressed, managed the store and it was a success.

00:20:42

Actually Phari is a very good place. It is very good. The wealthy managed shops and the poor worked in the fields. Those without lands, they did...[not discernible]. It was a meeting point for business people where Indians, Tibetans, Bhutanese and everybody collected. There were no vehicles and men could make a living as coolies storing and taking out goods from warehouses on horses and mules for wealthy merchants. Women could work in trades like spinning wool and weaving. Then some people collected things from the mountains, different types of vegetables. One could gather those to sell and it was very easy to lead a life and a very happy one.

Q: It sounds like you liked Phari very much.

#13B: Phari is a happy place, incredibly happy. One got up in the morning, cleaned and dusted, made ritual offerings, then some went to the temples and others circumambulated. One practiced the dharma and it was a very happy time. You were not in a hurry nor were there fear. It was an incredibly happy [place].

Q: Was Phari a big contrast to where you grew up? When you were a little girl, what were your family's circumstances like?

00:24:05

#13B: Khelkhar is a small place. My birthplace is a small village. One cultivated lands and grew grains, peas and mustard for oil. Various types [of crops] grew in the small village. Then there were *dzomo* 'female animal bred from a yak and a cow,' cows, yaks, sheep and *dri* 'female yaks.' All were present. The yaks and sheep grazed on the mountains while

dzomo and cows were raised at home. [They] were raised at home and milked. During the day the women did weaving and spinning wool like in a factory. It was a very happy place.

There is one monastery, which is located a mountain pass away from our village. The name of the monastery is Gaden Datsang. Gaden Datsang is located in Tsechen. For reading prayers at home we invited [monks] from there. Lay people practiced the dharma at a monastery called Nyungnay Lhakang, a monastery called Nyungnay Lhakang. Here lay people observed *nyungnay* ‘silent meditation’ and other dharma practices on auspicious days. Lay people could freely and happily practice religion in the past.

00:25:44

There is a very holy pilgrim site in our village, a pilgrim site of Guru Padmasambhava. It is said that Guru Padmasambhava sat in retreat for three years at this site. From the outside one can see just a small wall but once inside, it is a large cave with images carved on the rocks. There are butter lamps that are made of huge rocks, carved on rocks. The father of His Holiness the Dalai Lama has visited this pilgrim spot. [I] think our small village is very holy. His Holiness’ father too came on a pilgrimage.

Q: Had you gone into that holy site and seen the things on the wall?

#13B: Yes. We went there every year on the 4th day of the 6th Tibetan lunar month. Once you have entered the gate, there is not any water. Once you have entered the gate, there is not any water. Then as you proceeded there is something like an assembly hall, similar to a large assembly hall here. Once you are in here, on the other side is a not too deep well in a rock of this width [interpreter interprets as ‘the chair over there’] to get water. There is only a little quantity of water in it.

And then the caretaker offers a *jakim* ‘ritual to invoke the protective deity by making offerings of black tea, milk or home-brewed beer’ and moves the incense stick like this [moves right hand left to right and back]. After that was done, water instantly sprang forth from above. After the incense offering and *jakim*, water droplets formed instantly on the rocks like mist in the cave. It happened like this after the *jakim* and incense offering. And then the way to the pilgrim site is a long ladder. The ladder has 18 steps.

Q: Eighteen ladders?

00:29:48

#13B: Eighteen steps, if you count the steps there are 18 numbers. Then above that is a flat platform big enough to hold two people. From here one must climb up using a rope. Up above is a piece of rock that holds the rope. The rope is tied to the rock, which one held on to climb. The caretaker directs...and then there is a narrow space, which is hollow and totally in darkness in which one could fall through. It is called Elephant Belly or some such thing. Perhaps it means that the rock resembles an elephant’s belly, the one on which we slid down. After one reached the top, there is [this rock] on which one slid down. [The caretaker] mentioned that it is called Elephant Belly. It is a rock that resembles an elephant’s belly. One took a slide on this and the caretaker caught you there. If one is not caught, one could slide further but it is too dark to see.

Q: And what was down there when you got to the bottom?

#13B: It was very scary. It was very scary but there is more that is scarier! Then [the caretaker] chanted prayers and made offerings of incense. When we initially arrived there was no water. When the caretaker made incense offerings...the rock looks like this [joins palms upright] from the outside like a vulture's beak. From the outside one would never guess that there could be water present. The peak of the cave [holds joined palms upright], the peak of the cave is like a vulture's beak.

Q: Vulture's...?

00:33:24

#13B: Vulture's beak. It is mentioned in the scriptures that Guru Padmasambhava spent three years here. [I] was told that this is mentioned in the scriptures.

When we arrived, once again there was no water but the caretaker made incense offerings and *jakim* and water flowed from the dry rocks above like glass beads. Then we applied the water to our heads. Then there is another [section] that is said to assess the magnitude of sins. There is a rock on this side [raises right palm] and a rock on the other side [raises left palm parallel to right palm]. One had to walk for around 30 minutes in between [the rocks] where the magnitude of one's sins is assessed. It was necessary to walk sideways. Some could get through easily. Actually it must depend upon the slenderness of the body. However, it was said that it was more difficult for great sinners. Some got through easily and others could not and screamed. [Laughs] They had to move like this [indicates sidling] and screamed in fear.

Q: And then what happened?

#13B: Then there is [another section] where you can listen. Again it is a rock and the spot where one listens is like a drum and a little bit dented and the rock seemed thinner. One listens but I did not hear anything. It is said that one can hear the sound of what one's future is going to be. I did not hear anything. When a certain lama came there and listened, [he] heard the sound of a child's cry. [He] heard that and later the lama became a layperson. [Laughs] It is said like that. I did not hear anything.

Q: So that's basically the story of that cave. Do you know if that cave still exists today?

00:37:42

#13B: It does. It does. It has always there. It cannot be demolished. It is impossible to demolish it. Otherwise, all monasteries were demolished in the past but this cannot be. Except for one part that is a wall, the rest are all caves. Well, but [I] do not know about cannons. What do you call those things that destroy? That might not have happened. Not many Chinese came to this village, as it is a small village.

Q: Remind me what was the name of the cave again, of that site?

#13B: It is called Daduk, Khelkhar Daduk.

Q: You said that your family was very successful...

#13B: [Interrupts] There's even a song. [Recites]

<i>Nesang Khelkhar Daduk</i>	Oh, holy site of Khelkhar Daduk
<i>Jel dhoe lola yo kyang</i>	How I long to come on a pilgrimage
<i>Nesang Khelkhar Daduk</i>	Oh, holy site of Khelkhar Daduk
<i>Jel dhoe lola yo kyang</i>	How I long to come on a pilgrimage
<i>Shorthak Pemay kenza</i>	Yet, the steep steps along the way, I fear
<i>Yan-gna dakla zani</i>	Will surely plunge me off the cliff

It means one is fearful. [Laughs]

Q: Do you know to sing the song?

#13B: Yes?

Q: Do [you] know how to sing the song?

#13B: Yes?

Q: Do you know how to sing the song?

#13B: [I] cannot sing the tune but those are the words.

Q: *Ama-la*, do you remember that song and could you sing it for us?

00:39:53

#13B: [My] voice is not good enough. [Laughs] Are the words not enough?

Q: I guess it is. You said your husband's work was very successful. Can you describe what your house was like that you lived in in Phari and did you have children? Let's hear about the house first and then tell me about your children, if you had some.

#13B: The house is at the back with the store in front. The store is located in front and the house at the back. There was a storeroom between the shop [and the house] to store goods, various kind of goods. On one side [of the house] is the prayer room. There was the prayer room at one side and we had a caretaker that took care of the daily water offerings and such; he was a monk. Then there was a room located in the center that did not have windows except at the top. And next to it is an area where [we] kept the monks' teakettles and such. Next to it is the shop, a door led to the shop. The store door has three different doors, one made of wooden panels, another of glass and one [ordinary] door that can be closed [locked].

Q: Wooden panels?

#13B: There was a frame to set the wooden panels. We in Tibet created it like a stupid man trying to be smart. The main frame was made of metal. There were no shutters like here. The main metal frame on top and bottom held the wooden panels. The glass door is the first door. In the second one, each wooden panel can slide in and several panels [form the door] that cannot be opened [the usual way]. There was a base where a set of panels of this size [gestures off camera] can fit in.

Q: Were the three doors together?

00:42:14

#13B: [The three doors] were together. First is the door consisting of a set of wooden panels, next is the glass door and then another door on the outside.

There was a gate and a large courtyard where visitors can tether horses and mules, and where we kept our *dzomo* and cows. We owned an estate in Khambu that lay beyond a mountain pass. [My] husband's younger sibling and his wife lived in Khambu. There were yaks, *dri*, farmlands and many things.

The crops in the fields...There is no even ground in the place called Khambu. There are junipers and different kinds of trees. Then there are hot springs. There are different kinds of hot springs for treatment of different illnesses. [The hot springs] had names like Tsakha Zing, Bhetha Zing, Chagoie Zing, Sega Zing and many other *zing* 'pools.' Whatever illness one suffered from, it was not necessary to consult a doctor. One bathed in the water and was cured. If one met an accident and fractured the hands or legs, there is one particular hot spring. Its name is Chagoie Zing. It used to be said in the past a *chagoie* 'vulture' broke its wings and was cured after bathing in the water. That is an old story.

Q: Now *ama-la*, in your marriage did you have any children and how many did you have? Can you tell us what happened to them?

00:46:22

#13B: [I] had eight children. They [interview team] will be surprised to hear about eight children. [Laughs] Eight children!

[I] had eight children, four sons and four daughters. Two sons and a daughter expired. Those that survive are an elder daughter and Tsedhor-*la* who served the [Tibetan] government and retired. [He] lives in Dekyiling after retirement. He and his wife both served the government and have retired. Both live in Dekyiling. The Home Department has requested and these days Tsedhor-*la* does a little bit of work.

Q: Did the women in Phari try to have as many children as they could? Was that typical?

#13B: Many births used to happen because there was no practice of birth control. Some gave birth to 12-13 [children]. After we came here [in exile] Apo Palden's daughter had 10 children. The couple migrated to the United States. Later the father and the 10 children joined [them], and [the Americans] were shocked. [Laughs] After 10 children, the father

was very worried. [He] always sighed, after having 10 children. It was too many, poor thing.

Q: When did this very nice life in Phari begin to change? What happened? Did it begin to change?

00:49:42

#13B: And then the Chinese arrived.

Initially the blue Chinese appeared. There was one Chinese among the blue that knew to speak Tibetan. These Chinese came riding horses. Their dress was blue. The horse drivers wore army uniforms and carried guns. They stayed in the homes of three wealthy families called Sandhotsang, Pondhatsang and Reting. They stayed in these houses and pitched many tents in the courtyard, perhaps in readiness for those that were to come later. [They] pitched numerous tents in the courtyard. Those that drove horses, what we would call *telpa* in Tibetan carried guns. [They] carried guns and entered the home of a rich family in Phari called Norbu Khangsar without seeking permission. [They] entered the home and stood on the top [of the house] armed with guns. While the rest [of the Chinese troops] slept at night, at least two men stood guard in the night in rotation.

And then the Chinese in blue said that the older people...they [the Chinese] gave some sort of salary. Perhaps it was the plan to give propaganda lessons to the elders and [the Chinese] gave a salary. The propaganda lesson was to transform the minds of the people. [The Chinese] formed a Youth Association and a Women's Association. [They] formed a Youth and a Women's Association. [The Chinese] insisted, "A Youth Association and a Women's Association must be formed. That will be very good." They paid *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins' to the Tibetans, the prominent ones. They, in turn told the people, "[You] must join the Youth Association. [You] must join the Women's Association. That will be very good." Hence, the Youth and Women's Associations were formed.

Q: What was your thoughts and feelings when this happened, *ama-la*?

00:54:10

#13B: I never had any wish to join the Youth or Women's Associations, never had any wish. [I] sent my daughter to school where they [the Chinese] influenced [her] into joining the Youth Association.

Q: To join?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: School to study.

Q: Under the Chinese?

#13B: There was a school called Surkhang School. Surkhang School was established by a *chanzo* 'business manager' of the aristocrat family Surkhang in Phari. A son and a daughter [of mine] attended the Surkhang School. One [of my children] was small. [I] had only three children then; two were born in India.

Q: It wasn't a Chinese school?

#13B: No, Surkhang is a private school attended by the rich. There were two schools. One was a school for the poor, which His Holiness the Dalai Lama took care of. In Phari a tax called *gathang* was collected on all horses and mules that came from outside. Earlier it used to be three *ngulsang* 'currency unit' and then rose to five *ngulsang*. His Holiness said that these taxes need not be remitted to him but a school for the poor should be established and the [tax] proceeds used to cover its expenses. So a school for the poor was established. There were two types of schools.

Q: Chinese soldiers came. Did anything change in your life and in your husband's business?

00:57:15

#13B: After the Chinese soldiers came...Initially it was the Chinese in blue that said, "Youth and Women's Associations must be formed. After its formation, [you] must undergo education." Teachers were appointed to teach. They were paid *dhayen* and appointed as teachers. They were paid salaries. We had to study for around three hours [a day]. During this time a little bit of Tibetan was taught and the rest was about the progress of the Chinese and such. It was always like this. They [the Chinese] have a song:

<i>Gungten tang sang</i>	The Communist Party is good
<i>Guntentang miming uti sangpo yin</i>	The Communist Party is a good leader of the people
<i>Lokchoepa tsami tang</i>	Destroy the counter revolutionaries
<i>Gyalong miming thuntin chen</i>	People of the country unite
<i>Chitsok ringluk balab thonbur che</i>	Socialism will bring immense progress for all

[They] taught such a song. This was written down and given to the teachers who taught us. [We] were taught such songs and march-past, swinging feet and hands similar to the military. [Laughs] That is the education, always about Socialism and their development.

Q: Did you see anything happening to any of the other families in Phari because of the Chinese arrival and taking over?

00:59:57

#13B: The wealthy people...In Tibet in the past we used to work according to the seasons like autumn, summer and then the work gets completed. They [the Chinese] unendingly intoned, "One must practice *thon kye, do chung*." That means to "increase production and limit expenses," meaning that one should not eat much. [Laughs] That was the education. And then "You should not remain idle but make an effort to earn. [You] must create farmlands." We had enough and there was not any need for more. They talked like starving people, "One should not remain content; must earn and make progress." [The Chinese] deployed [Tibetans] to create farmlands and construct roads.

Q: What happened to your family?

#13B: Yes?

Q: What happened to your family?

#13B: [My] husband, both were to undergo political education. Regarding the political education, they [the Chinese] very cleverly said...prior to that they said, "Come for a meeting regarding political education." [They] told [people] to attend a meeting regarding political education. Instead of political education, their plan was to imprison. All the prominent people were to take the political education and were called for a meeting one night. "[You] must take political education." They [the Chinese] had already prepared a list and announced that such and such person must take political education within [the jail] and they were to tell the family members to bring the beddings.

01:02:40

"These men are to study outside [the jail]." All those within and outside [the jail] had been issued with books. "However, the matter is the same. If those inside study well, [they] can be released. If those outside do not study well, [they] will be imprisoned. The [study] matter is the same." My children's father was among the outside group, with more freedom. [They] were to study outside.

Q: Why were people imprisoned?

#13B: [They] were imprisoned on the pretext of receiving political education. They were called for a meeting and then imprisoned. They were told to attend a meeting and once there, were told to stay back for education that was actually a prison; only a nice title called Political Education was given. [They] were imprisoned. One group was imprisoned and the other sent back but both were to take the same education. Each one was given a book to study.

My family members...in the morning [we] normally pray and read the scriptures. In one day six different groups of interrogators came. If you were reading a scripture when the interrogators arrived, the scripture must be hidden beneath the pillow behind you and you pretended to read the book they [the Chinese] had given. [Laughs]

Q: [Your] husband was allowed to return home?

#13B: Yes?

Q: [Your] husband was allowed to return home?

01:05:17

#13B: Yes, [he] came home. [He] did a lot of work in the settlement here [Bylakuppe]. [He] acted as a leader during the establishment of the settlement.

Q: Here?

#13B: Here. During the visits of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, [he] received His Holiness and was responsible for all the shopping. That was because he had had relations with

Indians in the past and knew the language. [He] knew a little bit of English and Hindi. Hence, the influential people of this region held him in high esteem. The police and everyone held him in esteem.

Q: Here in Bylakuppe?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Bylakuppe.

Q: When you said your husband was sent back home, had he been arrested by the Chinese and on what grounds?

#13B: There was not [any reason]. It was the prominent people. All the prominent people were called to a meeting. The *ngadak* ‘leaders,’ *ngatsab* ‘deputy to *ngadak*,’ *chukdak* ‘wealthy,’ *telpa* ‘taxpayers,’ all these were called to the meeting. Their names were listed and the messengers referred to the list and called [them] to a meeting.

Q: Was your husband ever arrested?

01:08:16

#13B: [He] was not imprisoned. There were two husbands. The older one’s name was Desang and the younger one,; the paternal uncle, was called Tsering Wangyal. He was very enthusiastic and smart. The people of Phari were called for a meeting and asked, “Do [you] have any suggestions regarding subjecting [this family] to *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions’?” The people of Phari replied, “[We] have no suggestions, *thamzing*, opposition or anything against them. They used to give us food supplies irrespective of whether the poor people of Phari had money or not. [They] take care of the people. [We] have no *thamzing* or suggestions.” So [the husbands] could not be put in jail. However, [they] were given books to study outside [the jail]. [They] could not be imprisoned because of the people’s support.

Q: These two husbands were your two husbands?

#13B: Yes. The latter was the friend of the one I was initially married to. We needed manpower. There was a sibling [of husband] but [he] was living in Shigatse. [He] was in Shigatse and [we] needed help. His [first husband’s] mother requested the friend to live [with us]. [My] husband’s mother requested, “Please unite with my daughter-in-law. We need manpower. You are my son’s friend and must extend help. Please live together.” The mother said.

Q: If you married the friend of the man you married, did you live as husband and wife and have children by him or was he just a partner in the business?

01:11:52

#13B: [We] were together. [The husband’s friend] was like a member of the family.

Q: Did your family stay safe under Chinese occupation or did something happen to them?

#13B: There was no stability. Oh, the Chinese...After His Holiness the Dalai Lama left, [the Chinese] exhibited currency notes to the people and said, "This money is totally useless. Wiping the bottom [with it] would be a sin. So bring the money and we will exchange them for Chinese currencies."

Q: What were the implications of that for your family and all the people of Phari?

#13B: "Bring all the money and [we] will replace them." [The Chinese] took the money, gave a receipt on a small piece of white paper and said, "Bring this receipt later and [we] will pay." [They] never gave any exchange for all [the money] that were collected. "This is not valid. Only Chinese currency is." Everything was collected.

Q: Did you ever get the money back from that white piece of paper?

01:14:35

#13B: [The Chinese] never did [give]. They lied saying [they] would with the paper but never gave any money after collecting everything. Irrespective of the economic status of the families, everything was collected. There was an old lady. Though she did not have much money she died that very day, the old lady. Poor thing. The old lady was named Phurbu Chokey.

Q: So what did your family do? They no longer had any money. What happened next?

#13B: [Speaks before question is interpreted] Then one day [the Chinese] said, "You are not allowed to keep any guns at home. Bring all the guns and we will issue permits for the guns. [You] are not allowed to keep guns without license." We owned only one gun with a protective cord given by a lama attached to it. Believing it to be true, [we] gave it [protective cord] also along with [the gun]. After all the guns were collected, once again they said that they would issue [permits] later and gave a piece of white paper. [Laughs] All the guns were taken away. All the guns were confiscated.

Q: And once again did you fail to get your guns back?

01:16:51

#13B: [We] never did. It was a lie and the guns were gone for good. [They] had said a permit would be issued and the guns should be given and that without a license [a gun] was not allowed. There were some Tibetan merchants that usually came [home]. At that time they had escaped leaving [their] guns in our custody. These visitors were from Lithang and Chating. Most of them were monks that drove horses and mules and fled to India. [They] left the guns for safekeeping.

[We] did not surrender their guns because it was not [our] business to get permits for these. Because of the cold, the flooring in the house was of wooden panels. [We] extracted the nails on the panels, laid all the guns left in our custody and hid them. [We] gave away those that belonged to us hoping for a permit. We gave [the guns] immediately without even removing the protective cords given by lamas hoping for a permit [laughs] but there were none issued.

Q: Did you see any other treatment by the Chinese of people in the city of Phari? Was anything happening besides taking away the guns? Anything happening to the people?

#13B: The prominent people were put in prison. The prominent people were put in prison. Then the rich families' agricultural lands, *dzomo* and all animals were listed and taken away. All these were taken away on the grounds that they would be distributed to the people. Agricultural implements, farmlands, animals everything was confiscated. All us rich families' [possessions] were confiscated and distributed to the people.

Q: Did your family receive any of the distribution?

01:20:37

#13B: All our [possessions] were divided. However, the house was not yet given away because we had four permanent servants living at home, two manservants and two maids. We did not tax people for labor. They were four paid servants, two manservants and two maids. [The Chinese said,] "The house must be divided and given to them, the manservants and maids." However, they [the servants] cried saying, "We do not want the house. The employers and we employees have lived together and eaten together. We will not leave nor [do we] desire the house."

Q: Did the Chinese listen to them?

#13B: Then the manservants and maids were given the title of "Activists"—"Activists." They were the ones to conduct *thamzing*.

Q: Were [they] servants of other people? Not your servants?

#13B: My maid who did the household duties was called away for a few days. She was asked for suggestions but did not provide any and kept crying. So the leader, the woman that was appointed the leader of the Women's Association, she was the wife of a blacksmith, a low caste and also our neighbor, said, "Tsamchoe-*la*, you do not have to attend from today." Then she did not have to go. Otherwise, she was to be trained to conduct *thamzing* and the title was Activist.

Q: Were you or your family ever subjected to a struggle session?

01:23:57

#13B: Never, [the Chinese] could not because the people raised their voice, "Never mind subjecting them to *thamzing*, there is no cause for any opposition. [They] have always helped the people. [We] receive provisions from their shop even without money. [We] do not have any grounds." Hence, we did not undergo anything like that.

The others have suffered so much like imprisonment, being brought out and subjected to *thamzing*. The Chinese claim, "We did not conduct *thamzing*." The Chinese trained them, those that were given the title of Activists to carry out. They were instructed, "You must do this and this to your employers." They gave the training. The Tibetans were trained by the

Chinese to do it. Presently [the Chinese] claim, “The Tibetans demolished the monasteries. The Tibetans did everything. We did not.” It was them that trained and issued instructions. Otherwise, how would Tibetans do it? They gave the training and issued instructions.

Q: When the Chinese came and took guns and did the distribution of money, what year was that? How old were you about?

#13B: That was in '59 itself. We stayed back for 10 months after His Holiness the Dalai Lama left and then fled. Since His Holiness' departure, [we] were not a year but 10 months [in Phari] and then fled.

Q: Why do you think you and your husband and everybody gave up their guns and their money in a sense so easily to the Chinese? Why didn't you say, “No, that's my money, my guns, you can't have it”?

01:26:56

#13B: [Speaks before question is interpreted] In Phari crops do not grow and there are no grains [grown there] for consumption. *Jangpa*—very nutritious for horses and mules—is the only plant [that grows in Phari] while food grains came from different places like Tsang, Thoe, Bhutan and India. [People] came to sell every kind of food items and it was very good. You were free to purchase what you liked. Then the Chinese ordered that one was not allowed to make individual purchases and that all provisions were to be delivered at the Chinese shop from where it would be sold. People were not allowed to make individual purchases and they [the Chinese] had planned it right from the beginning.

We, who belonged to the class of *ngadak*, *ngatsab*, *chugdak* and *telpa*, were the worst category according to the Chinese. When we went to buy *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ [the Chinese storekeeper] said, “Today [you] can have it because it is the first time. From next time, your class will not get any *tsampa*. [You] will not be sold any.”

The poor could obtain *tsampa* and any food items from the store but we, the well-off, were not going to be sold even *tsampa* or any provisions. “Your class will not get any.” [We] were not sold anything. It was like that. Though [we] were not imprisoned because of the people's support, yet they [the Chinese] imposed restrictions by not selling provisions to us.

Q: So when the Chinese wanted to take your guns and your money, why do you think your husbands gave it so willingly or gave it so easily?

01:30:03

#13B: [The Chinese] said that the money would be replaced and that [Tibetan money] could not be used. [The Chinese] said, “Tibetan currency cannot be used except Chinese money. [Tibetan currency] must be handed over.” So [we] immediately handed over the money. [Laughs]

Q: *Ama-la*, were there Tibetans that supported the Chinese as well as Tibetans like yourself who did not?

#13B: Yes, yes, there were different kinds. The general public had been bribed with money. [They] were happy, unaware of what was going to happen later. The poor were very happy.

Q: Did they in any way participate and help the Chinese make things difficult for the Tibetans?

#13B: [Speaks before question is interpreted] The poor have come here. The poor that worked for the Chinese and assaulted the wealthy people there have come here in exile. When they [the Chinese] issued orders, perhaps [the poor] had no other way but to follow orders. Initially, they gave salaries and gave orders and [the poor] were forced to do so. Later [they] came here.

Q: At that time, *ama-la*, right before 1989...59 you were about 26 years old. Did you have any children? How many were with you and how old were they?

#13B: I would have been 30. I was 35 when [I] fled.

Q: Did you have any children with you?

01:33:14

#13B: From the children born in Tibet...one expired...two expired. Two expired and [I] brought three along. After coming here [I] had two children. One passed away and one survives who is a monk presently.

Q: Is it seven or eight children?

#13B: It is eight.

Q: Five children were born in Tibet and [you] brought three along. Two expired...

#13B: One expired there and one expired here.

Q: How many children did [you] have in India?

#13B: Two. Two sons. The younger one expired and the older one is a monk.

Q: Did your husband and you have any fears about staying in Tibet? When did you decide to leave?

#13B: Despite making numerous plans [we] failed to flee. They [the Chinese] had bribed people close to us to keep guard during the day. During daytime people close to us who had been bribed were deployed to stay in the shop. They kept watch as [we] moved things around in the shop, suspecting [we] might be packing. In the night a man was deployed in front of the shop. He too was a friend and armed with a gun. Another was positioned near the gate. There were guards both day and night. [We] could not exit.

Q: Was the idea of leaving on your mind?

01:35:55

#13B: Yes, it was. They [the Chinese] had already introduced reforms and then a celebration was held. Right from morning my husband and older daughter whose name is Tashi Paljor...Husband was part of the Tsukyi Theatrical Performance and daughter belonged to the Youth Theatrical Performance. Being part of the Theatrical Performance they were both dressed in fine clothes in the morning. The Theatrical Performance was to perform that evening and [they] were dressed in fine clothes. The people came marching from the end of Phari [to reach the venue].

There were two parade groups, one consisting of the poor and the other the well-off. There were two parade groups and then there were cymbals from the monastery, cymbals that are used during rituals and drums. These were being used as musical instruments for the march past. They had taken the monasteries' [ritual instruments] and were beating the drums and the cymbals. There were two separate parade groups.

01:37:09

I was late. [I] was delayed having had to lock the house. [I] thought joining any one of the parade groups would be okay. [I] joined one and the one appointed as *turin* 'leader' by them [the Chinese] armed with a stick...[he] used to work for us in the past and was very good. [We] had taken good care of him. The Chinese had bribed [him] and now he was a changed man. [He] carried a stick of this length [gestures off camera]. [I] joined one of the parade groups and was caught by the neck with the words, "This is not your group." [The *turin*] caught [my] neck along with the *chupa* 'traditional dress' and said, "This is it." [He] led me there [to the other group]. We were the taxpayers and the wealthy that formed one parade group and there was another one.

01:37:55

I had an employee, an old lady who was normally extremely afraid of the Chinese. Once when she was on a prayer circuit and passed the Chinese military base and saw something. She exclaimed, "Alas, *acha-la* 'respectful term for older sister,' what shall [we] do? They—meaning the men of the wealthy families—are moving up and down there. That must be what is known as education." [Laughs] [She] did not know that they were doing exercises! She was scared even to see them exercising! [She] spoke in a whisper when [she] got home. [I] did not say anything then.

And then she was in the other parade group. I said, "Acha Phenthok-*la*." "Yes?" [she] replied. "This is what is called education," [I] said. [Places finger on lips] "Keep quiet." She was so scared. Poor thing. There were two parade groups and [everybody] marched like soldiers. The words of the song were, "The Communist Party is good. The Communist Party is good." The song went like that.

Q: So how if you are being watched all the time, how did you manage to make plans to escape?

01:40:59

#13B: In order to plan an escape, [we] could not [forward] any of the possessions. Sending from the store was not possible because there were the spies. Though there was the wish to

dispatch some possessions but [we] could not. [We] left the night of the... There was the celebration after the completion of Reformation when a parade took place in the morning and a performance in the evening at a huge storage house of a family called Gapshi in Phari. Everyone attended the show. However, a *turin* stayed back to watch us. The *turin* was [the wife of] the blacksmith that had been appointed as *turin*. It seems she volunteered, “I will keep guard tonight.” The regular ones went to the show and she accepted, “I will watch them.” She was usually amicable. I deceitfully told her, “Acha Momo—her name was Momo—Acha Momo, people come and knock on the door and gate but when [I] open the door, there is not anyone. So if there is a knock tonight, [I] will not open the door.”

[I] tied up the gate. [We] had a dog upstairs for whom [I] took a leg of yak meat. There was a big door at the back of the house and [I] took a leg of meat for the dog there. Then [I] took a tin full of small pieces of meat there and let loose the dog upstairs. [I] tied the main gate but did not lock it from outside. After the tying the gate... The one that kept watch on us stayed on the first floor and nearby was a stair. [I] got down from it and left. The children’s father and older daughter had gone to perform. Then the three of us... I had a relative whose daughter’s friend is a nomad. The nomad friend sent her son to show us the way. [I] had a little child, a daughter, who he carried on the back and led the way. It had been requested to send [him] to help and he came. Husband and daughter were away performing.

01:43:38

And then my relative’s daughter... There were empty shops that used to be managed by Indians earlier. There was one called Dhonkhang Lhakang, a two-story building with a store on the ground floor. It was an Indian store but the Chinese had expelled the Indians. So it was empty. They [husband and daughter] were performing at the venue. The [nomad] friend’s son, who had been requested [to help carry my little daughter], came to take the child.

She, the one who was keeping guard, said, “Are you not going for the show?” I said, “[We] are going for the show after closing the door. We are all going to watch the show.” By “all” [I] meant me and the two children, Tsedhor-*la* and a younger one, while both of them [husband and older daughter] were at the show. Then we reached the empty store. [I] sent my relative to call husband and daughter. [The relative] is very talkative and cannot keep secrets. So [I] did not tell [her the plan]. She did not know we were leaving. When [I] sent [her] to call them, we were hiding in the dark. [I] felt my face turning red.

Q: And then what happened?

01:47:14

#13B: [I] sent for [husband and daughter]. And daughter had said—she had not been told because [she] would reveal it to others—“Father, let’s go with the lantern.” People walk in a group carrying lanterns and [she] wanted to go with them. “No, no, aunt has asked us to come, so let us go to aunt’s house at Gapshi.” “No, let us go [with the people].” “We have to go there else [they] will get angry because [they] have cooked and invited us. Let us go there.” [He] insisted that [they] go to Gapshi and have dinner. Daughter refused to eat saying, “I do not want to eat.” So [father] nudged and whispered, “If [you] do not eat, aunt

will be angry. Eat.” So [she] ate a little bit. Otherwise, [she] just refused to eat. [She] did not know anything about the journey.

Then after everyone had left, [my] husband and daughter came where [we] were hiding in the dark. [Daughter?] was very gloomy. Then [I] told the nomad boy that was to carry [my] little daughter and lead the way, “Please take us first to Tselung [looks up] where there is a cavern—there is a cavern called Tselung where a very holy *geshe* ‘monk with Buddhist philosophy degree’ remains in meditation—and after that you can choose any route that you wish.” The boy took us there. There was a big road this side [points to right] but it seems Chinese soldiers were patrolling the area. Then there is another called Tsemola here [points to left] but again Chinese guards were present. So we took the trail called Tselungla after covering a pass from the cavern.

01:49:08

Snow was melting and it was slippery on the ice. Even to this day Tsedhor-*la* has a scar on the nose. It did not heal and remained. [He] slipped on the ice and got hurt. And then we reached the top of the mountain pass at 3 o’clock. [We] had left from there at 11 o’clock. Is not our Phari so nice? Starting out at 11 o’clock [we] reached the Bhutanese pass at 3 o’clock. Then [I] prayed, “Please, may all the people of Tibet be delivered from problems.”

The person that had kept guard over us was called Reting Dungyi-*la*. Teting Dungyi-*la* and then there was a schoolteacher called Chonphel. [I] prayed, “May these two not succeed in escaping. May they be left under the Chinese. They actively worked for the Chinese and finally, may they be left under the Chinese.” [I] am right because both of them did not make it. They were very active and volunteered for the Chinese and caused a lot of suffering.

Q: What did it feel like when you reached Bhutan with your husband and your family?

#13B: After crossing over the mountain pass there were two Bhutanese check posts. The one located at an altitude was called Gyesa and the bigger army camp at the lower region with more troops was called...the upper one was called Gyesa and the lower one...[I] have forgotten the name. There were two. When [we] reached the larger camp with more troops, the Bhutanese soldiers were silly in saying, “He is wearing Chinese shoes. He must be a Chinese spy. *Thethadang*.” *Thethadang* means to beat with sticks, to assault. [The soldiers] remarked like that.

Q: Who was wearing the shoes?

01:53:09

#13B: Bhutanese troops that were doing the check...the smaller check post was called Gyesa and, yes, the lower one was called Cheka. They did not say anything at Gyesa and allowed [us] to pass. However, when [we] reached the lower post [the soldiers] said, “He is wearing Chinese shoes.”

Q: Who was wearing the shoes?

#13B: [My] usband. “[He] is wearing Chinese shoes, wearing Chinese shoes. *Thethadang.*” This meant that [he] should be beaten. I cried, “We are not Chinese spies. Unable to endure the Chinese oppression, we have escaped. If you beat us without any reason, we will take this message to the King of Bhutan. Besides our root lama, His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives in India. [We] will relay the message that the Bhutanese have caused us such suffering. You will also suffer the same fate as us [from] the Chinese in the future.”

01:55:09

And then I suffered a torn calf muscle. From Phari the climb up the pass was not very high but now it was downward. It was very steep down from the top of the pass. Because of moving down the steep mountain [I] suffered a torn calf muscle. Such that just prior to reaching the place called Paro, [I] had to be led by the hands. [I] could not walk because of the pain in the calf.

Q: And then what happened?

#13B: Then [we] reached the place called Paro. When [we] reached Paro, [I] could no longer walk. Then [we] sought permission to halt for a week. There were many people [my] husband knew. Many Bhutanese merchants used to come [to Phari]. They helped seek permission for [us] to remain in Paro for a week. During this period the calf muscle healed a little bit. People [my] husband knew like the maternal uncle of the King of Bhutan and many prominent ones visited [us]. And then the one that wanted to beat [my husband] also arrived. [Laughs] There was the one that threatened to beat with a stick. He also arrived with those...

Q: The *turin*?

01:57:06

#13B: The person at the check post who threatened to beat with a stick. He came with the King of Bhutan’s maternal uncle and the prince and many others that came to visit us. Perhaps he was apprehensive that [we] might report him. He later came bearing a basket of rice, a chunk of pork and some Bhutanese *chang* ‘home-brewed beer.’ [He] said, “*Khentso semnay magyab. Semnay magyab.*” Perhaps in our language it meant, “Do not be angry.” [He] said, “*Semnay magyab. Atsi chik norsung. Semnay magyab.*” It meant, “I made a little mistake. [I] am sorry.”

Q: Did that make up for what he had done?

#13B: Yes, that was erased. He meant to say sorry and said, “*Semnay magyab. Atsi chik norsung.*”

Q: *Ama-la*, that was quite an escape story and we know the story continues on but we also know we’ve been talking a long time. So I would like to wrap up our story by asking just a few final questions.

#13B: Okay.

Q: When you left your home in Phari, it sounds like you didn't bring many goods with you and in fact, it sounds like you lost your business, your belongings, your livelihood and I wonder how did that leave you feeling about the Chinese at that time and do you still feel that same way now?

02:00:21

#13B: When we fled I felt, "It matters not if [we] have nothing. As long as we can flee from here, it matters not if [we] have nothing." After the journey there was a Bhutanese merchant we knew who used to come to Phari. He said in Bhutanese language, "[I] thought you were not going to come. [You] have left the store and everything, and now [you] are here." [I] replied, "It does not matter if [we] have nothing because we have escaped from hell."

Q: How do you feel about the Chinese given what they did to you and your family?

#13B: Having inflicted so much suffering, why would one like the Chinese? There is no freedom to practice religion for both monks and lay people. What is worse than that? Presently I tell the children the story of the Chinese, the story about how happy [we] were in the past, the suffering caused by the Chinese and everything.

Q: What is your hope for the future of Tibet, *ama-la*?

02:02:45

#13B: Our hope is at an end. Presently, due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama everything is good. The Indian Government has been incredibly kind to us. Should His Holiness the Dalai Lama pass away, [I] am worried as to what will happen to us. [I] am greatly worried that we might be handed over to the Chinese. When I say so to the children, [they] reply, "Nothing like that will be done. There are people around the world that are watching. Grandmother, do not worry. Nothing like that will take place."

Q: *Ama-la*, what was it like today to come here and share your story about Tibet with us? How did that...how was that for you?

#13B: [I] think this is very good. [I] am grateful and would like to say thank you. Yes, [I] am very happy that you are helping us and conducting the interviews. Thank you very much.

Q: I want to just restate my question. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#13B: Yes?

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

#13B: There will be no [problem]. [I] have only one sibling who is old. The younger ones were born after I left and though [they are] Chinese officials, nothing will be known.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#13B: Thank you. I thank you, too.

END OF INTERVIEW