

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #41 – Jamyang Samten
July 1, 2007

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #41
2. Interviewee: Jamyang Samten
3. Age: 80
4. Date of Birth: 1927
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Sarzo Gyalsa
7. Province: Dhoday (Amdo)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1957
9. Date of Interview: July 1, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Interviewee's residence, Near Old camp number 1, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 38 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Jeff Lodas
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Jamyang Samten was born in a small village called Sarzo Gyalsa. Until the Chinese arrived in their village, he and his family led a contented life farming and tending their animals. Once the Chinese arrived, Jamyang Samten and others like him became paupers while the Chinese turned those who previously had been poor and beggars into the new village leaders.

Jamyang Samten and some of his friends rebelled and attempted unsuccessfully to remove the Chinese from their region. As a result of this incident, they were sent to perform hard labor. Jamyang Samten provides a vivid picture of the difficulties he faced in the labor camp, including "question-answer" sessions in which each worker would be forced to reveal faults of the others.

After his release from prison camp, fearing future arrests, Jamyang Samten and four of his friends fled to Lhasa. They visited holy places in Lhasa and received blessings from His Holiness the Panchen Lama. Jamyang Samten and his friends then escaped to Kalimpong, India in 1959, where they soon received news that Lhasa had been taken over by the Chinese. Jamyang Samten misses his country and his wife and family he left behind; his one wish is to die in Tibet.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, wildlife, invasion by Chinese army, life under Chinese rule, resistance fighters, forced labor, Chinese oppression, escape experiences.

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Interviewee: Jamyang Samten

Age: 80, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: July 1, 2007

Question: I would like to begin by asking you—please tell us your name.

Interviewee #41: Jamyang Samten.

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

#41: Certainly, you can. I am very happy. You are working so hard in order to use this interview.

Q: Jamyang Samtenla, can you please tell us where you were born?

#41: The place is called Sarzo Gyalsa.

Q: Was it a village or a city?

#41: It was a small village. It was like an extension of a city.

Q: About how many families lived in the village?

#41: There were about eight families.

Q: How long a day's walk to the biggest city?

#41: If you started early in the morning, you reached the city by evening.

Q: If you went walking?

#41: Either you walked or we rode horses as we did not have good roads. The journey took from morning until evening.

Q: And what was that town?

#41: That was called Zinga Gyalsa.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do?

#41: My parents worked in the fields. My father was killed by the Chinese.

Q: We are talking about when you were a young child.

#41: When we were young, we had no education.

Q: What were your parents doing?

#41: They worked in the fields their whole lives.

Q: Can you tell me what kind of things did your family grow? What did they produce?

#41: They grew peas, wheat, barley, corn, potatoes, and others. The soil was very fertile.

Q: How many people were there in your family helping to do this?

#41: There were my father, mother, two brothers, and two sisters. My father later died. We were many in the family.

Q: When you think back to your childhood, do you have any special memories that you keep remembering of something you liked or found very pleasant?

#41: When we were about 8 or 9, we played and had our parents with us. Those were happy days.

Q: What kind of things were you playing?

#41: That was child's play; what's the use of talking about it? When we grew older, we danced, sang, and did many different things. It was our country and we were happy. We drank *chang* 'home-brewed beer' and alcohol, and were naughty.

Q: Where did you get the drink?

#41: The parents brewed the alcohol. Rice *chang* was made in pots. It was *chang* and alcohol when you worked and it was *chang* and alcohol when you had fun, irrespective of your age. We really enjoyed ourselves in our country.

Q: At what age did your parents let you start drinking?

#41: When you were about 9 or 10—old enough to hold the nose ropes of the animals who ploughed the fields—you were given alcohol. You were given it right from morning. You could drink it in the afternoon. *Chang* and alcohol were in plenty. You didn't have to buy it as it was brewed by your own hands.

Q: *Chang* was made from which grain?

#41: It was made from barley.

Q: You said you used to sing and dance when you were done working. Do you remember any of those songs?

#41: I miss them but since we came here, not many people sing and dance. So you forget them.

Q: When you were working on the farm, can you tell us the kind of chores and jobs and work that you did with your hands?

#41: First you had to plough the land with the *dzo* ‘animal bred between yak and cow.’ When we were young, we had to go with the parents. We had to do the hoeing, harvesting with sickle, and carrying the crops on the back and bringing them home. I have done a lot of hard work.

Q: And did the girls do the same things? You had two boys and two girls in the family.

#41: It was the girls who did the work. The girls did the cooking. The boys were naughty.

[Discontinuity in interview]

[Interviewee’s statement is missing due to poor sound quality. The following is taken from the translation.]

#41: I used to go with the other boys. We would take hunting dogs with us to the jungles. There we would put up tents. First we sent the dogs out into the jungle and they would drive the animals toward us and we shot them. Some of the animals were deer—musk deer and bears. I have never shot tigers or leopards.

Q: How big were the bears?

#41: They were not big. The bears would come into the fields to eat the crops. Then they were killed.

Q: What did they do with the meat?

#41: We ate the meat. The bear was skinned and we used the skin as floor covering.

Q: What kind of meat did you find the most delicious?

#41: The venison was the most delicious.

Q: In your family home, what kind of home did you have? What was your house like?

#41: The house was built of stones. It was just stones as we did not have cement. Our parents had built it out of stones. There were some houses which had three floors.

Q: How many floors did your house have?

#41: It was three-storied.

Q: In your family, what was the relationship between your brothers and sisters? Did they get along very nicely or did they have fights or did they have fun?

#41: We were very close. Then my older sister and brother were given away in marriage.

Q: And you were the youngest son?

#41: I was the youngest child in the family.

Q: What happened to the sister who didn't get married?

#41: She was at home then. She was young.

Q: Can you tell us about your father and mother; what kind of people they were?

#41: My parents were close. In this world among all married couples, sometimes there are arguments and sometimes there is love. That is because there are times when they argue due to work. Sometimes there is happiness. That is how life goes. It is difficult to say.

Q: So your older brother and sister, they got married and they left home and then you were living at home. When did things begin to happen, a change in your village? Was there any change around the Chinese coming in?

#41: I will tell you how the Chinese came. First to come were a few soldiers. They helped us when we were working in our fields. They said that we were not to be scared. They had their guns with them and deceived us by helping in the fields. Such things happened. Then gradually, the leader of the Chinese came and lived in our town. He had a few soldiers to protect him. They started in this way.

Q: Which year was it?

#41: I don't know the year. At that time I was young and I have no recollection.

Q: Who did they bring with them? Just the men or did they bring families?

#41: There were no families. They were only men. They did not bring any women with them.

Q: Did they build their own house or did they take somebody's house?

#41: They lived in empty houses and did not build houses at that time.

Q: In whose house did they stay?

#41: There were empty houses at Sarzo Gyalsa and they lived there.

Q: What language were they speaking?

#41: Of course, they spoke in Chinese. They were Chinese. There were no interpreters.

Q: So how did you communicate?

#41: We understood Chinese. There were some who were very good in Chinese and they translated. There were interpreters.

Q: In your village?

#41: Not only our village. They were there everywhere. Just as you are doing, they questioned people everywhere. It was not just in our village.

Q: You don't remember the year but can you remember how old you were, like were you 11 or 14 or about what age?

#41: I think I was around 28. I was quite wayward then.

Q: Were you still living at home with your family?

#41: Yes.

Q: Had you married?

#41: Yes, I was married.

Q: When did you get married; at what age?

#41: It was around that time. My parents brought home the bride.

Q: Did you have any feelings and thoughts about the Chinese at that time?

#41: At that time, there was absolutely no fear. We were being deceived in a most gentle way. "We are here to help you. You need have no fear. We are friends." In this way they stayed in the village. Then slowly their number increased. Then they questioned each family and learned all about it. The questions they asked were, "How many acres of land do you own? How much is the yield of peas? How much is the yield of barley in a year? How much is the yield of wheat?" The parents had to answer these questions. It was their

plan to tax us after coming to know about the size of our lands and the yield. They imposed separate taxes on peas, wheat, and barley and we were to give them to their leader. That was how they started.

Q: You were taxed by which government?

#41: They were the Chinese, the Chinese of the present. Who else?

Q: Did they have power to tax you?

#41: Let alone Tibet, they are occupying the whole world! How can you say they have no power?

Q: But at that time, you were already paying taxes to the Tibetan government.

#41: We were not paying taxes to the Tibetan government as we were so far away. There was no way of paying taxes to the Tibetan government.

Q: How did your family react to having pay taxes?

#41: We were forced to pay. So taxes were paid to them for about three years. They were paid annually.

Q: Do you have any recollection of what percentage of grain or how much taxes you had to pay?

#41: I don't know. I have forgotten it now. Our parents were doing it and we did not worry then.

Q: Did paying the taxes create any financial hardship for the family?

#41: The hardships were just starting. We paid the taxes and then slowly they collected all the guns that the families owned. They said, "There is no need for guns. There are no thieves and no robbers. You have no need for guns, so you must hand them over to the government." So they were handed over to the office at the village.

Q: Did people give up their guns or did they try to hide them?

#41: There was no way you could hide them! You won't succeed as they already had the counts. We gave them all up. When we gave them the guns, they were distributed among the poor of the village. They collected from us and divided them among the poor.

Q: How did the poor families react?

#41: Then they started to restrict all the people. The people were told to gather for a meeting and interrogated. "What did you tell your father last night? What did you tell your mother? What did your mother say? What did your father say?" People were

required to answer these questions. They started these things and we could not say anything to them. They would say, "Think over these things. Tomorrow if you do not give the answers, we will take you to court." They troubled us in this way.

Q: What kind of answers do you think they were looking for?

#41: We had to tell them that he said this and he said that. They would say that we were not to listen to the thieves and robbers and those who had escaped from the village. They suspected as to what people were saying and in the night they would listen to some device. We didn't have any answers and we faced a lot of difficulties. During the meeting, each family was to stand up and say what each member had said. After that was done, they started the liberation. All our possessions, lands, animals, houses—everything we owned, including the straw and hay, ropes and sickles (we had already given up our guns)—were brought out in the open and the servants and maids of the rich people waited for the distribution nearby in tents. They began the distribution.

Q: Then?

#41: I have still more to say. Then they divided the possessions, and the servants and the maids danced for a few days. They drank *chang* and alcohol. We people had to sit silently on one side. We were not allowed to speak. There were soldiers guarding us. On the other side, all the poor were drinking *chang*, drinking alcohol and dancing. On the day of the distribution, those who wanted lands were given lands and those who wanted a house were given a house. For example, if one wanted my house, it was given to the poor person and I had no house. I would be given a house on the worst land way up on the mountain, where it was isolated with just a family here and a family there. One would be given a house and land there. The servants and maids were distributed with everything.

Q: The people who lived high in the mountains, were they farmers or were they herders?

#41: They were also farmers. The lands and houses were exchanged.

Q: And where was your family in this?

#41: We were there and had to move far away to the upper regions. Our house was given to the poor.

Q: Where were you and what were you doing at this time?

#41: I had to attend the meetings that they called everyday. We had to attend the meetings each and every day. At the meetings, all those people who were intelligent and capable, they had to stand up in front of the public. They had to stand up when their names were called out and the soldiers tied their hands behind their back. Then the soldiers took them away without any mention of the reasons. They were taken away—no one knew whether they were to be imprisoned or killed. Every day someone was taken away.

Q: What happened to you?

#41: I will tell you about that later. Before the distribution of the possessions, they had arrested and taken away all the leaders. The leaders were called *tezu* in our village. Only later the liberation began. Those who wanted horses were given horses with saddles and all the finery. The servants received these along with a *khata* 'ceremonial scarf.' All the public raised their hands and clapped.

Q: You were in these meetings?

#41: Of course, I had to be. I was forced to attend. We had to be very discreet in speaking among ourselves, lest the poor heard it and gave us away. Then we discussed among our group of people that we must rebel against them for they would never leave us otherwise. But we had no guns. So we discussed and seized those guns that were given to the poor Tibetans and then we rebelled. There was a monastery called Dhartsang Gonpa, which we were allowed to view only once annually. They had a stock of guns, spears, and sticks, which we divided. There were many monks, too. So we rebelled.

Q: Continue please.

#41: There were their [Chinese] leaders and soldiers in our region. We captured some and some escaped towards the towns. We were able to rid the region of the Chinese. Then in two or three days, the [Chinese] army arrived. We were guarding the Dhartsang Gonpa. It was surrounded by monks and lay people alike; there were no women.

At the break of dawn, they [the Chinese] started firing. Our monastery was located on the ledge of a hill. If you went further, there were forests, and still further away were the pastures. On the other side were mountain passes and from there, at the break of dawn, the smoke was touching the clouds. They were shooting and some were digging fox holes at the edge of the forest where the pasture land began. The whole area was surrounded by the soldiers [Chinese]. They fired artillery shells. They were shooting so much that the ground was being cut open. They fired continuously and the bullets fell like rains. Not to mention humans, the birds couldn't find places to perch! About eight Tibetans died here. Some were injured and those who couldn't walk were captured by the Chinese.

We managed to escape. We reached our village in the night, and the next morning all of us scattered into the hills. The soldiers came to our village and our parents came to look for us. The soldiers had told them that they would be fine except for those who had rebelled. The villagers were left in peace. Our parents told us that all was fine and we returned home. Then we had to attend the meetings and once again it [the village] was full of Chinese soldiers. During the meetings, they would say, "You people have ancient thoughts. Above the neck you are Khungten [Communist Chinese] and below the neck, you are Kuomintang [previous Chinese government.] You cannot be trusted. Who were those who were involved in the fight?"

Then everything was revealed; there was no other way. We were my older brother, I, two of my neighbor's sons, and others. We accepted that we had gone to fight, but that we had not killed anyone as we had no weapons. We told them that some people fired guns at us and when the bullets were exhausted, they struck out with swords and eight young men died. We also told them that the soldiers surrounded us from behind and we couldn't escape and the eight men died there. Such things happened.

Q: And then what happened?

#41: During the meeting they said, "You are blameless. Your mistake is not grave. Think it over and you will realize that you cannot face up to the Chinese. However, you are young." At a distance of a day's journey was a place called Chortse Gyalsa and next to that was Sumo Gyalsa. They said that we were to go there to construct roads. They said, "The penalty you are receiving is very lenient. Otherwise some of you should be taken to court and some of you should be killed." So we were sent to work there.

Q: Where was that?

#41: It was at Sumong. They were building roads from Sumong through the nomadic region. It was a river valley with rocks on both sides and forests. Some had to blast the rocks and some had to cut the woods. I was a young child and since I was not able to either blast rocks or cut trees, I dug the earth. I dug the earth to make roads.

When the dawn broke, we had to be at work. We woke up at 4 o'clock and washed ourselves in the river. They gave us very thin rice gruel. There was hardly any rice in it; it was mostly water. We would be given a mug full of that. After that we had to report to work when the day began. It was not just us—there were hundreds of workers.

Everyone had to work in a row and there were soldiers guarding us. An area was measured and allotted to each worker to see how much each one worked. We worked with hoes. No one was allowed to talk. We would work like that until 12 noon. At noon lunch was brought. It was corn flour, packed in sacks and stacked one on top of the other and totally rotten. It was smelly and had turned blue. This was steam cooked, stirred, and then put in bags. Groups of eight people sat together to eat. In our region we had turnips which were grated and dried. In it was added salt and a generous helping of chili powder. This was put in a pail, which looked like a smaller version of the one we used to feed the cows. This was set in the center [of the group.] It was extremely difficult to eat the corn flour due to its bitter taste. But if you didn't eat it, you were hungry. We tried and tried to eat it and then we had indigestion from the chili and the corn flour. So in this way our lunch ended.

There was no break. We had to resume work. Then, at 5 o'clock in the evening, we were let off. When we reached home, we were given a mug full of rice gruel. However, we could drink as much hot water as we wished. There was plenty of firewood and we were free to drink hot water. Other than that we had hardly anything to eat and drink. That's how it was.

There was one day off each week. We would then wash our clothes. Besides that, after we came home and drank the rice gruel, we made some hot water and drank it. At around 11 o'clock, they would blow a whistle. Everyone had to attend the meeting. All the workers had to be there. Each one had to say how the other worked. The other person had to reveal my faults and I had to reveal his mistakes. This question-answer session was very difficult. I didn't find the work as hard as finding answers to the questions. There was so much pressure that we had lice and nits crawling on our clothes. We suffered so much during the question-answer sessions at that time. I used to be very anxious in the night because we would be told that we had to think over at night and had to have an answer the next day. I found this more difficult, as we could adjust to the hard work.

Q: What kind of things did you have to report?

#41: We had to say that this person did not work well, that he was talking, or that he spoke to me or that he spoke to another person. We were not allowed to talk. We had to report about the faults of the other.

Q: What would happen if you didn't report?

#41: If you didn't have anything to say that day, they would give you time to think it over at night and report the next day. It happened this way all the time. When we broke off for the day in the evening, I would get worried about what answers to give for the questions that they would ask.

Q: What did you do in the end?

#41: We had one day off each week. Then the food was not the usual one. It was a mixture of rice and grease and considered very special. This was brought in bags. With the grated turnips, each person was given two small pieces of pork. On this day, we were free. There was no question-answer session. We bathed with cold water but we did not have a change of clothes. Our parents were not allowed to bring us anything and we were not allowed to go home. We were not allowed any messages. In this condition, I worked there for six months.

Q: Then?

#41: Then after six months, they released us, saying, "You have worked very well." There were four of us. They gave each of us a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste, a cake of soap, and a towel. That was our salary. They said, "Go back to your village. Our leader is there. You cannot rebel like before. You have to listen to whatever our leader says. If he asks you to work in the fields, you have to do that. You should do whatever he says and then you will be fine." Then we were sent back to our village.

A week after we were home, there were the meetings again. They were arresting someone every time. I thought desperately about the future because we were certain to be captured one day. We discussed among ourselves and then spoke to our mother secretly. We told her

that we should escape somewhere for we were sure to be captured someday. Our mother said, "If you can go somewhere where you cannot be seen and cannot be heard, please go. You are certain to be arrested by the Chinese."

We had poorer relatives who lived far away. We had hidden meat, butter and other things with them. So we both carried some *tsampa*, butter, meat, and about 600 *dhayen* 'silver coins' and set off at night without telling anybody. We had to come through the nomad regions. There were Chinese soldiers guarding by the bridge near the river and rocks. We traveled at night and when we came near the Chinese post, we swam across and where there were no Chinese, we walked on the path. When day dawned, we hid among the trees and bushes. In this way, we reached Golok.

In Golok, we became relaxed because the Chinese had not yet brought about change. The Chinese were deceiving the people then, appointing leaders but leaving them in peace. We approached the Golok leader and with folded hands told him that we were going to Lhasa on pilgrimage. We couldn't tell him that we had escaped from the Chinese lest they arrest us. We told him, 'We are on our way to Lhasa for pilgrimage. We have a relative living there who went earlier on pilgrimage. We are people of Golok. Please issue us a written permit.' We had to lie that we were Goloks in order to receive a permit.

With the letter we went ahead towards Golok Gyumda near Yellow River. Here the Chinese were holding meetings. The leader who gave us the letter was with us. From here we went to Siling and spent about three days. The vehicles going from Siling to Lhasa went in groups of three or four for fear of bandits on the way. We spent three days in Siling. The main Chinese leader in Siling called Tashi Tushi was a person from Golok. A long time ago, when the Chinese once came there, he was taken to China and educated there. The Chinese had appointed him the leader in Siling. We showed him the letter stating that we were people of Golok. He said that we would not be allowed to carry *dhayen* beyond Kormo, so Tashi Tushi gave us a letter. Then we could pass through Kormo and Nachukha, and reach Lhasa.

Q: You and your brother were the ones who escaped?

#41: Yes.

Q: Then you went to Lhasa from Golok?

#41: We went from Golok and to Siling. And then from Siling to a place called Kormo and then towards Lhasa. At that time there was no proper road. The trucks just drove on the pastures. There were no buses. We had to travel day and night. There was ice on the way and we had to push and pull the vehicles. Driving over the pastures was very shaky and there were times when we almost fell over. We traveled day and night to Lhasa.

Q: How many days did it take?

#41: It might have taken about three days and nights. It took almost that many days and nights.

Q: From Siling to Lhasa?

#41: We left Siling in the evening. We traveled that night and the next day, and the following day we reached Lhasa.

Q: Why were they really going to Lhasa?

#41: We were escaping. We lied and came to Lhasa because of that. Otherwise, there was no reason. We escaped. There was nothing in Lhasa that we would get for free. We were escaping. It was fear for our lives that we left our parents, wives, and relatives and escaped.

Q: When you were in the labor camp, was your wife still in the village?

#41: She was at home. We also had a child and it died a few days after birth.

Q: Before you escaped the road camp, what did it feel like to work under those conditions?

#41: From neck upwards, we had to say that the Chinese were good. But from neck downwards, we felt the Chinese were bad and we continuously controlled ourselves. We couldn't say so. There was no one to talk to. Because of the terrible pain, we had to leave behind our parents and wives and decided to escape. Who doesn't want his parents and wives! It was due to fear, for if we had returned, we'd have been killed. That was why we fled.

Q: What were your feelings towards the Chinese?

#41: They were making us angry. We fled so that they couldn't arrest us. They had a meeting [in the village] and said, "They have gone to Lhasa for pilgrimage. They will both return soon after a few months. All you people, if you have relatives and friends in Lhasa, you must ask them to say that these two must return. There is no where else to go for them. They would have to return." They [the Chinese] were interrogating my mother: "Where are the children? What happened to them?" She was subjected to a lot of suffering. That was how they did it.

[Interviewer to Interpreter]: The Chinese told his family, not that he was at the labor camp but that he'd gone on a pilgrimage?

[Interpreter to Interviewer]: They had returned home after they were released from the labor camp.

[Interviewer to Interpreter]: And then they escaped to go on this pilgrimage. Did the Chinese think that they had gone on a pilgrimage?

[Interpreter to interviewer: Yeah.]

Q: And then what happened?

#41: We stayed a few days in Lhasa. We visited all the holy places. Then we went to Shigatse and stayed a week there. We saw His Holiness, the previous Panchen Rinpoche, there. Then we went to Phari in a rickety Tibetan truck. We were one night in Phari. There were traders who traded between Phari and Kalimpong [in India.] We hired mules and crossed over the mountain pass into Kalimpong.

Q: Can he tell us about the Panchen Lama that he saw?

#41: I don't know which year it was, but we got to see him. It was the previous incarnation. The present incarnation that lives in China was born later. He is a small child now. I saw the previous incarnation. Other than that I do not have any story to relate.

Q: What was the feeling in Lhasa? Was there a Chinese presence? Were things peaceful? Were people getting nervous?

#41: At that time it was peaceful. However, it was full of Chinese soldiers. People didn't know. There were people belonging to different parts of the world, including Chinese. It was very peaceful. There was no talk of a fight. People were living peacefully.

Q: The year that you left Tibet was approximately which year?

#41: I think it was 1959. A few months after we reached Kalimpong, we heard that Lhasa was lost. After the fall of Lhasa, people began to escape—while we were in Kalimpong. I think the year was '59.

Q: It would have been about 1958. First of all, how did it feel leaving Tibet?

#41: I was extremely sad. It was the fear for our lives. Even now my heart does not feel at ease. I miss my country. I miss my wife. I miss my siblings. But we are helpless. Except for the last few years, earlier we couldn't communicate through letters. If we wrote to them, the Chinese would inflict suffering on them saying that your children were in Lhasa. That was the way of the Chinese.

Q: So did you ever go back to Tibet since then?

#41: No, never. I was not able to go.

Q: Did your wife ever come here?

#41: No, never. It is not possible because my region is so far away. It isn't like central Tibet, where people could bring their wives.

Q: Is there anything else you want to tell us about the journey when you came to Kalimpong? What happens then?

#41: When we reached Kalimpong, we had to do some work because we needed to eat. It was not our country. We ran a restaurant with another person from our village who had settled there long ago. We were there for about three years running the restaurant.

Q: When you were growing up, were there spiritual practices that you did in your family?

#41: The people in our village committed sins but they were also very religious. There were Nyingma and Gelug sects, but we did not have Sakya in our village.

Q: How did your Buddhist teachings of compassion—how did that affect how you felt about the Chinese?

#41: The Chinese did not like our religion, which was why they destroyed the monasteries. We did not like that but if we did not escape, we could not face their might. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that our religion may be completely destroyed. He visits many countries of the world so that the Buddhist dharma might be saved.

Q: How do you think we can preserve the dharma?

#41: We are lay people. We have spent our entire life earning a livelihood and cannot explain about the dharma. So I do not have anything to say. Since coming to this land, we practice all the different Buddhist sects like, Sakya, Kagyu, Sera Mey, and Jey. I invite the monks home to read the scriptures, and at times make offerings at the monasteries. I always feel that we need our religion.

Other than that I do not have the knowledge to explain about religion. I have not studied it. As a child, I used to graze the animals. When I grew up, I was naughty. I have never studied. I am a fool, like an animal. One should know the core about religion and then talk about it. We do not understand it because we have no knowledge. For one, you need brains. If one were a monk, one would practice right from the beginning. Once he has mastered it, he can talk about anything—what is sin, what is religion. We cannot talk about it. One should talk honestly. One shouldn't speak about what one doesn't know.

Q: What advice or message would you like to give the next generation of Tibetan children?

#41: The parents must say to the children, just like His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, “We lost our country because we had no education.” Every child must study for progress and to get back their land. The parents should not make them work but study. Earlier our economic status was not what it is now. The parents serve the choicest of food to the children and dress them in their best with the hope that the children will study hard. But these days there are some educated [people] who are not like you [to interpreter.] You were among those who got the opportunity to study, so when you have education you are like

this. If you were to return to our country, you wouldn't have to work hard and carry things on the back like we did. You could sit and write. In our case, while in our village we were laborers, and in exile we are laborers. With the kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we got lands and built houses. It is due to his grace. We must work hard because we need to eat and drink. The children these days need good clothes and good shoes. These are the results of our hard work, which they are able to use. This is how we are living in a foreign land.

Q: If it was possible to return to Tibet, what would you do?

#41: If I do not die—I am 80 years old now—I pray everyday while I make my offerings of butter lamps that I should not die. I pray that that I should be able to go back to my village. I pray that I should not die here, but that I should die in my own village. Other than that there is nothing to do. Even if a person's own land was like hell, for him it is a happy place. This is a foreign land but with the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we have everything. However I am not happy within my heart. My heart is in my village. My physical body is working hard here. Over the years, my grief for the death of my mother and relatives in my village has lessened. I have made offerings at the monasteries and lit butter lamps in their memory. Other than that, there is nothing else to do. I miss my country. There is no one who does not miss his country.

Q: Ngawa is known for people resisting the Chinese. So I was wondering what you think about the people of Ngawa?

#41: Ngawa is my region. All those who resisted the Chinese were caught and destroyed. There were eight of whom died then. The others were also interrogated like us and in the end they too were forced to reveal that they fired their guns and all that. At that time they had to suffer a lot while we could make our escape. Some of them were taken away and some were killed. That's how it was. Ngawa is just across a mountain pass. That is my village called Sarzul Gyalsa and the Dhartsang Gonpa.

Q: In Tibet you used to go hunting when you were young but you did not kill tigers or leopards. Recently His Holiness has said that people should not use animal fur on their clothes.

#41: That is extremely good. To use the fur that is obtained from killing the animals is very sinful. The Chinese are killing not just humans, but all the animals too. The wild animals in India are so carefree. Whether they live in the forests or on the pasture lands, there is no one to harm them. Since there is no one killing them, they multiply so much, whether they be tigers or leopards or whichever animal. You can see on the television how much they develop. In our region, we could not kill the tigers and leopards because we feared them. We killed the smaller animals and ate their meat. This country is very good. Now I am old and I fear death. So I recite my prayers and regret the sins that I have committed earlier. When we were younger we did not know about sin. That is how life has been.

[Interpreter explains to the interviewee about signing the release form. The form is signed and gifts are presented to the interviewee.]

#41: It is not right for me to accept gifts from them [interviewer]. However, I like this as it is a religious picture.

[Interviewer to Interpreter]: Please tell him that his stories and the teachings of the dharma are the greatest gifts he can give to us.

#41: Those are truly the words of a great person. Those are the words of an educated person. Much more than presents of gold and silver, you have listened to these stories.

END OF INTERVIEW