

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #42N – Sonam Dorjee
April 15, 2015

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #42N
2. Interviewee: Sonam Dorjee
3. Age: 76
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Gapa
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 15, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Jampaling Tibetan Refugee Settlement, Dulegaunda, Tanahun, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 29 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Palden Tsering
14. Videographer: Dhiraj Kafle
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Sonam Dorjee was born in Gapa in Kham Province to a nomadic family. As a child he did not have any special chores and spent his time playing. At the age of 18 Sonam Dorjee went along with his uncles on a business trip to Lhasa. He shares his joy at seeing the famous Jowo statue and his first glimpse of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He liked Lhasa so much that he had no interest in returning to his hometown.

Sonam Dorjee decided to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] at the age of 18 years old. He knew that Amdo and Kham were under attack by the Chinese and he wanted to defend his country. He talks about the resistant force's encounters with the Chinese army and the glaring difference in number of troops, arms and ammunition. Despite relentless Chinese firing, he believes his life was spared due to a protective amulet and the grace of God.

Sonam Dorjee recounts the role of the *Chushi Gangdrug* in escorting the Dalai Lama on his escape to India. He was assigned to help the 10,000 Tibetans escaping through Lhoka. They faced immense hardships during the journey being pursued by Chinese soldiers and traveling through dangerous snow-covered terrain. Sonam Dorjee rejoined the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Mustang from 1963-74 observing spies that tried to infiltrate.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, first appearance of Chinese, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, Dalai Lama's escape, escape experiences, guerrillas in Mustang.

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Interview #42N

Interviewee: Sonam Dorjee

Age: 76, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 15, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:12

Interviewee #42N: Sonam Dorjee.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so 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?

#42N: I am not in a position to object. Actually right from Tibet I am not one who has much knowledge about history. [I] was young then and then came to India. [I] do not know much. However, [I] will talk about what I know.

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

#42N: Thank you for following the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

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.

#42N: Okay.

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

00:02:49

#42N: I will face no problem for I am here, but wonder what will happen to my relatives. Anyway, it cannot be helped even if something happens. It should actually cause pain in the hearts of the Chinese for they will realize [their crimes]. I am not able to make a correct assessment today but it cannot be helped. While some are burning themselves for the cause of Tibet, it is not right for some to say, "Oh, something will happen to the relatives by my speaking here." Ask whatever [you] want to and I will answer.

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

#42N: Thank you.

Q: *Popo-la* ‘respectful term for grandfather,’ how old are you?

#42N: I am 76 years old.

Q: And where were you born?

#42N: The birthplace is Gapa in Dhotoe.

Q: When you were growing up as a little boy how many people were in your family about?

00:04:53

#42N: As far as I can remember there were Father, Mother and Grandfather while Grandmother had passed away. Then there were my mother’s two siblings who were monks, and my four elder and younger siblings. They were there.

Q: Had the parents passed away when [you] were little?

#42N: Mother was there.

Q: Had grandfather and grandmother passed away?

#42N: Grandfather was there while grandmother had passed away.

Q: What kind of work did your family do for a living?

#42N: The livelihood of the monks was being monks and living in the monastery. The rest engaged in nomadic activities, nomads.

Q: Were you...did you have...can you tell me how many animals your family had just approximately?

00:06:34

#42N: We did not count each and every animal back home. [Laughs] Yes, there were *dri* ‘female yaks,’ yaks and sheep while goats were few in number. There were many but [I] do not know the figure. When the adults did not count, how would we?

Q: When you were a child, what kind of jobs did you have? What kind of work did you have to do as a boy?

#42N: [I] had not done much work as a child. It was just playing and such. [I] did not do much. Then [I] came to Lhasa at the age of 18. Otherwise, I have not done any work as such.

Q: Why did you come to Lhasa, *popo-la*?

#42N: Most people visited Lhasa. My maternal uncles used to go on business trips. So [I] tagged along with the aim to see the Jowo ‘statue of Buddha Sakyamuni’ and then it was like a person was old enough to get married. It was like that. Actually it was a business trip.

Q: On a business trip?

#42N: Yes.

Q: *Popo-la*, what was your first...when you saw Lhasa for the first time, what did you think of this place?

00:09:06

#42N: Seeing Lhasa brought on a very strange feeling. Before reaching Lhasa...my hometown had good grasslands and it was a very happy place. However, the region just before reaching Lhasa was bare and depressing. Once one reached Lhasa, the mind became light and I never thought about returning to the hometown. There was His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Jowo and perhaps it was their benevolence that while in Lhasa I never thought about going back to the hometown. The nearby regions were bare and bleak but one was very happy living in Lhasa. It was all in the mind.

Q: And what happened, *popo-la*? Did you stay in Lhasa then?

#42N: [I] could not go back to the hometown.

Q: Did [you] remain in Lhasa?

#42N: [I] stayed in Lhasa and then sold all our yaks. After the sale, [I] planned to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] in Lhoka and never returned to the hometown.

Q: Many people did not see Lhasa when you saw Lhasa. So can you tell us what was surprising? What did you see that you were fascinated by, felt like you were in a dream? Tell us, give us a picture of what you saw when you were a young man at 18?

00:11:42

#42N: There was not anything special that one saw in Lhasa or where one could go when we arrived there. However, generally one felt happy as soon as one saw Lhasa. Otherwise, [I] did not notice anything as such.

Q: Were there any things you saw with your eyes that sort of surprised you that you'd never seen before?

#42N: Things [I] had never seen before were seeing the image of the Jowo in the temple and the Chenrezig ‘Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the patron saint of Tibet [the deity whom each Dalai Lama manifests in human form],’ which were new. Other than that there were nothing new. The images in the other temples of Lhasa were present in the temple of the hometown. It was the Jowo and His Holiness the Dalai Lama that one could see.

Q: Did you see the Dalai Lama on that first visit?

#42N: Yes.

Q: Saw with [your] eyes?

00:13:40

#42N: [I] saw [His Holiness] in the Norbulingka. [I] wonder which day it was but there was a day in a month when one could see [him]. [I] cannot recall which.

Q: Can you tell us what did he look like at that time?

#42N: What His Holiness is like...what to say...You have a strong belief, which some say is love and compassion but whatever it is, when you saw His Holiness you felt something here [indicates throat] and tears come out. It is hard to explain whether it is your joy or sadness but tears come naturally.

Q: You also...you are arriving in Lhasa, it's about 1957 if you are about 18 years old. So do you see any sign of Chinese in Lhasa at that time?

00:15:35

#42N: Of course, [I] have seen Chinese. Our not going back in particular...most of our companions returned to the hometown, but our not going back was because there was not any purpose going back as there was fighting in Kham and Amdo. That was not all; Lhasa was filled with Chinese. A great many Chinese were in Lhasa.

Q: So *popo-la*, before you left, were you engaged in any fights with the Chinese yourself?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Before he arrived in Lhasa?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah, before he came to Lhasa.

#42N: There did not take place any fight in my hometown when I left. However, there were skirmishes happening in the Amdo area.

Q: What kind of feelings did you have when you saw the Chinese? What did you think in your mind and in your heart?

#42N: I was aged around 8, 9 or 10, perhaps 9 when the Chinese first appeared in our hometown. At that time they were submissive and loving and all kinds of things. There was a song that was sung in Lhasa then, "Beneficial like parents are the Communist Chinese, like rains fall Chinese silver coins." [The Chinese] gave presents to the young ones and were so good.

Q: The Chinese?

#42N: Yes, [they] were misleading—were misleading.

Q: What about the second and third time when you saw them?

00:18:21

#42N: Later, they counted the number of monks on the pretext of making offerings because they could not do so otherwise. [The Chinese used to say,] “What is the use of making offerings of butter lamps to deities? [You] are making offerings of food. If they can eat they should be able to get up in the morning, that is if they can consume [the food offering]. Otherwise, it is useless to make offerings.” Then all the families came to a realization, “They are the enemies of the dharma.” Then everybody became unhappy.

Q: What did you think the real motive was, *pa-la*?

#42N: Initially [the Chinese] treated well, but later remarked that performing rituals was bad and a waste. They said such things. When such things were being said, the people realized from the bottom of their heart, “Oh, they are destroyers of the dharma.” Then of course, the elders became suspicious.

Q: Were there any...so when you were in Lhasa and you were 17-18 years old, 18...what happened when you were there? You mentioned earlier that you joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*. So what happened in Lhasa that made you join the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

00:20:56

#42N: When the *Chushi Gangdrug* was being established, I was young, an 18 year old. A leader was appointed in each group who discussed among themselves, “Let’s plan about going to Lhoka but what is to be done before that?” Most of them were traders. So [they] constructed a Golden Throne for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Golden Throne is presently there in the Norbulingka. They [interviewing team] might have visited there. That was constructed by the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: The Golden Throne?

#42N: Yes. Then messages moved back and forth. It was no use going back [home] and Lhasa was being swamped with Chinese. So [people] started out for Lhoka.

Q: What...did you join the *Chushi Gangdrug*? What place did you go and what did you do?

#42N: Yes, [I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*].

Q: Where did [you] go?

00:22:36

#42N: After His Holiness the Dalai Lama left, we followed him into India and reached Assam through Mon Tawang.

Q: Were you safe guarding His Holiness?

#42N: Yes, safe guarding in the sense, other men accompanied His Holiness, while we remained at Lhoka. Then His Holiness said, “Do not fight. Do not let there be loss of lives. If there are people on flight, help them. Otherwise, do not fight.”

Q: Don't fight?

#42N: Yes. At that time His Holiness was already in Indian Territory. So we followed.

Q: You know, you said you were a young man, 18 years old and now you have news that these Chinese are coming with guns and they're trying to hurt people. How did you feel? Were you scared?

00:24:11

#42N: Now there was no thought of returning to the hometown and not having foresight, [I] thought it would be fine in Lhasa and was not scared. However, [I] wished to fight and went to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*. All the traders rebelled.

Q: Were there people from your area who also joined with you and went and were at Lhoka? Other people from your town and village?

#42N: [Speaks before question is translated] I was 19 years old when [I] left for to Lhoka.

Q: Were there people from your hometown then?

#42N: There were.

Q: People from your village, okay. *Popo-la*, did you have guns or ammunition when you were in Lhoka?

#42N: There were guns but ammunition were fewer in number. Later the United States provided [rifles] called Palmolive that used the same bullets as machine guns. Then there was more supply of ammunition.

Q: Did you go to Lhoka after Norbulingka was attacked by the Chinese or were you in Lhasa when the Chinese attacked Norbulingka? Were you in Lhasa when the Chinese attacked Norbulingka?

00:26:43

#42N: I was in Lhoka. At that time it seems some of the leaders of the *Chushi Gangdrug* had gone until Norbulingka. Then five of the best men were picked from each group that traveled to the Tsangpo River.

Q: River?

#42N: Yes, the river of Lhasa. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's escape was planned by stationing soldiers along the route to create safe passage. Five of the best men were picked from each group to go up to the river.

Q: Were you preparing for...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He's in Lhoka.

Q: You were in Lhoka. And so if you're preparing for...do you leave Lhoka and kind of go along the route? Is that what you do or you just stay in Lhoka and prepare? I don't know if I follow.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I'll retranslate what he said.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Please.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: When Lhasa was under attack I was at Lhoka but there's another *Chushi Gangdrug* who are like stationed in different areas of the like regions of Lhasa. And in Tsangpo there were again like a group of five or six army men who were like best among best who were like preparing for the safe exit of Dalai Lama from Potala Palace till like, you know, to the route of the escape. So like on the way they were preparing, like safeguarding, patrolling.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, on the way.

Q: *Popo-la*, you stayed in Lhoka then helping the people, is that correct?

00:28:45

#42N: When His Holiness the Dalai Lama left?

Q: At that time of [His Holiness'] departure.

#42N: [I] was in Lhoka at the time His Holiness the Dalai Lama left.

Q: What were [you] doing in Lhoka then, fighting or helping people?

#42N: The route of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was taken care of by them and [we] were to stop the Chinese in case [they] appeared in and around Lhoka. [We] were keeping guard while His Holiness' route was being cleared.

Q: If you were counter attacking, did everybody have a gun and how much ammunition did you have?

#42N: There were guns. They [the Chinese] had better guns while ours were of poor quality. [We] did carry guns.

Q: Do you remember shooting at any Chinese horses coming?

#42N: One did not have ample stock to fire extensively. Ammunition was scarce. One had to shoot carefully. People used to say then; the older men said, “Shoot when there are two or three men together. Otherwise, it is a waste of ammunition.”

Q: Were you scared? This is unusual for you’re a nomad. You take care of beautiful animals and now you’re shooting Chinese. Are you worried about getting shot or shooting anybody?

00:31:10

#42N: There was not much fear as such but [I] was a bit hesitant. In the beginning [I] thought, “If only I could encounter a Chinese soon, I will kill him.” Later when the encounters grew and [we] were deprived of sleep and food [I] thought, “Oh, it would be better not to have an encounter.” It became irritating.

Q: When numbers grew?

#42N: Yes. After His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left and we were moving out, Lhoka was overrun by Chinese. At that time those that came from the direction of the north commented that there was not any Chinese to be seen for [the Chinese] had converged upon Lhoka. For us it was like [we] would wish for some hot tea to drink, and make preparations but when it started to boil, shots would ring out, *rat, tat, tat*. The Chinese prevented [us] from drinking tea, eating food and sleeping. The Chinese were like prison [guards].

Q: If more and more came, how many men...about are in Lhoka? How many *Chushi Gangdrug* or other soldiers fighting, about how many?

00:33:13

#42N: When His Holiness the Dalai Lama reached Mon Tawang in Indian Territory, the escort party returned and said, “You should not defend the area for it is a loss of lives. Do not fight. Come away. If there are people fleeing, provide whatever help is possible. Else, you should come away. Do not sacrifice lives.”

Q: How many soldiers were there in Lhoka then? How many soldiers were there in Lhoka after His Holiness the Dalai Lama left for India?

#42N: Who? The Chinese or Tibetans?

Q: Tibetans.

#42N: The Tibetan Government soldiers had become scattered. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was there. Some of the Tibetan Government soldiers were moving together but [the army] had dispersed. The men of *Chushi Gangdrug* were sort of together. Some of the Tibetan government soldiers had managed to escape while some were left behind.

Q: Were they going out to...had they been killed or were they going out to protect people?

#42N: [Speaks before translation is complete] There were a few soldiers from the Drapchi Division [of the Tibetan Government army] and a few from the Kusung Division. [They] were there but were few in numbers.

Q: Killed?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The majority, they were killed. Yeah.

00:35:26

#42N: Then [the Tibetan Government soldiers] escaped along with us.

Q: *Popo-la*, how long were you in Lhoka, do you think? A couple of days, a couple of weeks, how long was the battle going on?

#42N: Initially when [I] went to Lhoka at 18...[I] wonder which month it was. Perhaps it was June because [we] went to Lhoka in the 3rd Tibetan lunar month. Later, [I] came to India in [my] 20th year. One year?

Q: Two years. That means [you] were there for two years.

#42N: It can be said as two years but it was not completely two years.

Q: Did you wear any protective amulets to protect you from the shooting?

#42N: That was there. If not for it we would not be in existence.

Q: Not protective amulets. Were there metal things to wear?

#42N: No, no. There were no metals to wear.

Q: What were [you] wearing?

#42N: One was wearing a protective amulet. When shots were being fired, at times when one was close to the Chinese a whizzing could be heard in the ears. The protective amulets and God saved [us]. Otherwise, none of us would be in existence.

Q: Okay. And then did many...you said two years and not many left. Do you have any idea, *popo-la*, how many? Are we saying 100 soldiers left or 50 or 1,000? How many are left in Lhoka after two years?

00:38:22

#42N: Quite a number managed to come [to exile]. From the Tibetan Government army, quite a number from the Drapchi and the Kusung escaped but [I] did not see others because there were many people. There were many people escaping and [I] did not notice much. Quite a number from the *Chushi Gangdrug* managed to flee.

Q: That's not the question. A large number of soldiers died fighting the Chinese. Many Tibetan soldiers may have been killed; soldiers from the *Chushi Gangdrug*...

#42N: Yes, there were some Tibetan soldiers that were killed.

Q: Did the majority of soldiers manage to survive then?

#42N: Considering the way the Chinese fired, none of us should have been alive. However, God saved [us]. Otherwise, considering the way the Chinese fired and the magnitude of the Chinese army, really not one of us should have been alive. But not many got killed. At the beginning of the *Chushi Gangdrug*, around 30-40 men got killed at Dromo where the Chinese lay in ambush. Else, there were not many casualties.

Q: Thirty to 40 were the Chinese or Tibetans?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Tibetans only; *Chushi Gangdrug* army, only one occasion.

Q: Did many people come into Lhoka who were not soldiers? Just coming for protection or because they were traveling, did many people come?

00:41:15

#42N: Not soldiers? Even the *Chushi Gangdrug* [men] were not soldiers in the beginning. They were traders.

Q: That's right, but were there people that were not *Chushi Gangdrug* or Drapchi soldiers?

#42N: Yes, there were many monks, majority from Gaden, Sera and Drepung [Monasteries].

Q: What about women and children? Did mothers come and bring their families for protection in Lhoka?

#42N: To join the army?

Q: To the army at the time of the attacks.

#42N: As I mentioned earlier when the attacks were going on, His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "You need not protect the area but come away. Help those civilians that are fleeing." A great many civilians had come. Over 80,000 converged at Missamari.

Q: So the passage wasn't through Lhoka. There were other routes that you...?

#42N: Mon Tawang [is the route to India].

Q: Is the way to Mon Tawang through Lhoka or is there another route?

00:43:12

#42N: The route is through Lhoka. [The mountain pass] called Mangola is snow covered. There was no route when we came. [We] cut away ice with knives to create a path for men and horses.

Q: I'm just trying to understand, are there people coming through Lhoka to go...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: There are. So what happens when the...when you do leave? When do you leave Lhoka and where do you go? Why do you leave and where do you go?

#42N: [I] reached Missamari in the 4th Tibetan lunar month corresponding to the beginning of the month of May or so. [I] reached Missamari in the 4th Tibetan lunar month.

Q: And why did you leave?

#42N: Yes?

Q: Why did you leave?

00:45:23

#42N: The reason for leaving was that the Chinese were shooting and pursuing continuously as far away as on the other side of Mangola. We trekked through a valley that was covered in thick snow. God saved us for a plane flew and there was nowhere to run, either this side or that side in the snow. And then a mist appeared in the region completely covering us. Else it would have been easy for them to shoot from above. A mist appeared in the valley such that [those in the plane] could not see us nor could we see the plane. One could hear the whirr but [those in the plane] could not see us. Otherwise, it would have been easy to shoot from above. When God saves, [he] does in such ways.

Q: When you reached the valley. What was the valley, Mangola valley?

#42N: Yes, on the other side of Mangola.

Q: Is it inside Tibet, Mangola?

#42N: Well, inside Tibet...[we] came upon some Indian sentries a little further away. Then one reached Mangola. [I] do not know if it is Tibetan Territory or Indian Territory. A plane flew when [we] reached the snow-covered valley. [I] do not know if it was the Indian border or Indian Territory. [I] am not sure.

Q: Who were the people who went with you from Lhoka, you know, to the Indian border? Who were the people?

00:47:40

#42N: Actually [all the escapees] were moving together. There were around 30-odd that hailed from my hometown. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [men] were clearing the area, being pursued by the Chinese and putting up resistance at the same time. There were people from all the three provinces escaping. One cannot pinpoint who and who were there.

Q: Did you come away putting up resistance and take flight?

#42: One [person I] knew for certain who was there was Andrug Jindha [Gonpo Tashi].

Q: Was it hundreds or thousands of people?

#42N: Over 10,000 people reached Missamari through Mangola, having come through Mangola only. There were civilians, soldiers and a variety of combination; there were the old and the young.

Q: More than 10,000 people?

#42N: More than 10,000 arrived at one go.

Q: About 10,000 people?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: More than 10,000.

Q: More than 10,000. And what was the terrain like? Can you describe it for people who have no idea of what that journey was like?

00:49:23

#42N: First of all, the worst was having to create a path by cutting through snow with knives. And then at the time of coming down towards Mon Tawang, the trail was so bad that it was near impossible. Some of the trails were bad and some broken. There were many bridges across rivers and one was broken. So [we] drove the horses into the river and the men took a detour of the bridge and came over a cliff. Only this part of the fingers [indicates tips of fingers] and the toes could get a hold on the rocks. One dare not look down due to the sheer height. So [we] moved looking up at the sky and managed to go across.

Q: Had the bridges been damaged then?

#42N: Only one bridge was damaged. Some people remarked that the Mon Tawang [people] had done it but it cannot be because they have great faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It cannot be so. The bridge could have suffered damage naturally. Actually there were many bridges here and there. [We] underwent great hardship due to the damaged bridge. Those that came later had it easier as the bridge was repaired.

Q: If the bridge was destroyed...

00:51:32

#42N: [Interrupts] Generally roads in Mon Tawang are bad. Logs were laid across like this [gestures off camera] on which even horses and mules had to cross. A large number of horses and mules fell off. A large number fell off. Wooden logs were laid across like this [gestures off camera] and it was very difficult for the horses and mules to walk over them.

Q: Was that a bridge?

#42N: Yes. The bridges of Mon Tawang are made of logs with...[not discernible] on top upon which men and horses and mules had to go across. Many horses and mules fell off. Roads were incredibly bad.

Q: What about the people?

#42N: [I] did not hear about people falling over. Who knows one or two may have because the region was thronging with people. [I] have no knowledge whether [people] fell over or not.

Q: You had very, very hard mountain passes to climb. I'm just interested, how many days to get from Lhoka to the border? First of all, how many days and then did you have very high mountain passes to climb? Was there snow or rain? What season?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: During the journey?

Interviewer to interpreter: Yeah.

00:53:40

#42N: [Interrupts interpreter] [I] cannot recall the number of days. These days one can maintain a diary but being an uneducated man, one did not have that sense. [I] have no idea how many days it took and when it was that [I] reached.

Q: Did [you] have to climb many snow covered mountain passes during the journey?

#42N: The worst snow-covered mountain was the Mangola.

Q: Was that a pass?

#42N: That was at the border.

Q: Is Mangola located in a snow-covered region?

#42N: Yes, there are snow-covered mountains. The land of Tibet is surrounded by snow-covered mountains. So one had to cross such snow-covered mountains where there are no roads.

Q: Oh, that's Mangola.

#42N: Yes.

Q: Did you see...were there many times that the Chinese came with airplanes or were they ever following you on foot with guns? Were you being pursued?

#42N: Oh my, in swarms. I mentioned that it was said there were no Chinese in the north. When [the Chinese] learned that there were Khampa [in Lhoka, they] swooped on them. The Chinese came in swarms such that the color of the region was transformed.

Q: Were [the Chinese] coming on foot with guns?

00:55:38

#42N: Yes, yes. We hardly got to drink tea or eat food on the way from Lhoka. After abandoning Lhoka [we] were being pursued and there was no time to make tea or eat or sleep. While [we] rested for a while in the night, they beamed something like flares. [The Chinese] beamed something that lit up everything. During the day [we] would hope, "There cannot be Chinese here. [We] may get time to make some tea," but as the tea boiled shots rang out, *rat, tat, tat*. Lhoka was overrun with Chinese then.

Q: Were the Chinese in pursuit when [you] were on the run?

#42N: Yes, [I] mean during the escape.

Q: Were the Chinese in pursuit?

#42N: [The Chinese] were right behind us all the way. Not just that, three of us were nearly caught near the border. [Laughs] Riding the horse meant falling off since [we] had not had sleep for many days. Leading the horse meant tripping and falling. Poor things, the horses were exhausted. The horses stood still out of exhaustion. I had two companions who said, "It does not make any difference falling off a cliff or being killed by Chinese. How about us resting for a while?" "Yes," it was agreed. I was overjoyed for [I] could no longer make much effort.

00:57:27

Wrapping the reins of the horses to [our] hands, the three of us sat back to back and fell asleep instantly. The one called Phigya exclaimed, "Wake up, wake up. It is daylight." [I] stood up. [We] had been sitting in a niche and as [I] stood up saw that the Chinese were up there. "Run, run, run." Initially [the Chinese] did not fire. "Jump on the horse, jump on the horse." The other two claimed to be very daring men. "Jump on the horse, jump on the horse." I got on the horse while they both shot off. As we rode off, some of them [Chinese] were moving this side and some that side in an effort to capture us. Then [the Chinese] began to shoot such that the three of us could not see each other in the dust. [We] could neither shoot [back] at the men nor horses.

[The Chinese] pursued as [we] fled across the valley. Seeing us there [the Chinese] might have thought that there would be more soldiers around. Then [they] stopped the chase and we continued. After a while [we] were nearly at the border. All the [rest of the] companions

were about to move ahead. They had had time to drink tea that day. Then [the group] spotted the three of us. Some of them that had made tea were from our hometown and exclaimed, “[What you have done] is credulous! What if [you] had been killed? What if [you] had been captured? Have [you] not heard that [the Chinese] drill nails into the hands? How could you have been so credulous?” [We] were scolded thus. Whatever it was, there was tea ready when we got there. That was the only day [we] got some tea close to the border.

Q: And then [you] reached the border?

#42N: Yes. [We] starting off after drinking the tea and reached the border in the evening. It should be called border because there were some Indian policemen there. That is an indication that it was a border point. It was in the snow on the other side of the Mangola where the Chinese troops were moving.

Q: *Popo-la*, were there any people you can remember by name who were very brave and may have been killed during that fight in Lhoka? Were any friends of yours or someone that you admired who didn't survive?

01:02:12

#42N: Soldiers [I] knew that died...[I] cannot recall the names.

Q: Were there brave ones that died fighting?

#42N: There were. When [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] was first established in Lhoka, [men] went from Nyenmo to Gaden Chokhor to fetch weapons. At Nyenmo some people said, “Do not move forward for many Chinese have appeared.” Believing [they] were lying, [the men] continued and came upon two women that claimed, “There is not even one Chinese present.” The Chinese lay in wait and during the ambush [I] recall that 13 men from Chating, three from Gapa, in all 35 men died. Such an encounter took place there. The highest casualty happened there.

Q: The question is, were there brave soldiers that were your friends that died...?

#42N: If [you] want to know about courage, Andrug Jindha Gonpo Tashi is the one. [He] did not stay behind saying, “I am the leader.” He led from the front and did not say, “I am the leader. You go ahead.” When he led from the front, the men had to obviously follow bravely.

Q: You were just mentioning Gonpo Tashi. Do you remember...did you ever meet him up close or have a chance to talk to him?

01:05:05

#42N: Who is Andrug Gonpo Tashi? He is the one that gathered soldiers and formed the *Chushi Gangdrug*. He became the General of all the [men of the] three provinces that joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Of course, one would have seen him.

Q: The question is, have you had the chance to meet him?

#42N: [I] have. There was no problem meeting him. It was like you and I meeting because [he] was not one that claimed, “I am a great man. I am wealthy.” It was like meeting one of us.

Q: So did you ever meet him?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, yeah, personally he has met him. That is like how he considers himself. He doesn't consider himself as a great leader but he's always amongst us like a normal...

Q: What was he like? What was his personality like?

#42N: Just like a common man—[his] personality was calm and gentle.

Q: So to go back to your story, *popo-la*, you escaped from Tibet and you go over the Mangola pass. What happens next?

#42N: After reaching Missamari those of us in the younger group was to attend a school in Missamari. All the older ones were sent to Sikkim.

Q: The older ones?

#42N: Yes.

Q: And then?

01:07:12

#42N: There was not any proper school as such and then those of us younger ones were sent to school in Balingpong.

Q: Balingpong?

#42N: Yes, [I] stayed there for quite a while but there was not any school or any teaching. Perhaps that was my destiny. They [group of older men] had left for Mustang from Sikkim in the year '60. [I] think it was in '62 or '63 that I moved to Mustang. While those of my age went to join the 22nd Establishment of the Indian Army, I went up [to Mustang].

Q: Were the others sent to the 22?

#42N: After I reached here all of my colleagues were sent to the 22.

Q: So you went to Mustang in 1953?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: '63.

Q: In 1963. What did you do when you got there?

01:09:19

#42N: What happened next? [Smiles] After that the Nepalese drove [us] here.

Q: That's the story?

#42N: That is the story in brief. [We] were driven out in 1974.

Q: But before we close it down and hear that part, what happened when you...did you join the army there in Mustang? Did you join the military?

#42N: [I] joined the army.

Q: So when you join the *Chushi Gangdrug*...what kind of activities did you engage in as part of the army in Mustang? What did you do?

01:10:48

#42N: I did not get to go to the north then. At that time we had another enemy called the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission of Taiwan. They used to send many spies there. And I stayed back at the border to scout around for such people that appeared. I did not get to go to the north.

Q: North?

#42N: [I] did not get to go to the north where the Chinese were. Otherwise, the army at Mustang was to go where the Chinese were to...

Q: To fight?

#42N: Fight in the sense...it is called guerrilla warfare. I did not get to go there to actually fight the Chinese.

Q: [You] mentioned something about spies, what was that?

#42N: There were Chinese spies and spies from Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission of Taiwan that created friction among the Tibetans. They came there. Many spies came where we were. There were those [of us] that observed where they went and where they stayed. I was among them and did not go to fight the Chinese after coming to Mustang.

Q: Spies came there then?

#42N: Spies came.

Q: From Taiwan and such?

#42N: Yes.

Q: So what did you do with your time? First of all, how long did you stay in Mustang? How many years?

01:12:54

#42N: [I] stayed there from '63 to '74.

Q: Ooh, that's a long time. It's almost 20 years.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Eleven years.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: You said '53 to '7...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: '63 to '74.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I'm sorry. '63 to '74, almost 11 years.

Q: So what kind of activities did you do in the army during those years?

#42N: Whatever it was one did, one had to train in guerrilla warfare. All the soldiers had to do the training.

Q: Training?

#42N: Yes, one must train in guerrilla warfare; every soldier must undertake training. In general one did the same training. I did not go where the Chinese were but scouted for spies and such that entered through the other side. [I] was responsible for that and did not go to [fight] the Chinese.

Q: And did you have...did you have enough food to eat and shelter because that's a very wild place in some ways?

01:14:53

#42N: It was much better when I reached there. There had been great hardship in '60, '61 and '62. Food supplies could not be sent there and one did not have money to buy nor were there plenty available to buy. [The men] had suffered a great deal. When I reached things were available.

Q: Since people were there such a long time, you know like 11 years, did the soldiers marry local people and have families while they were living there?

#42N: [Interrupts] The other soldiers stayed for 15 years or 14 years.

Q: Did they marry in Mustang and have families during those long years?

#42N: Most part of the long period was spent living atop the mountains. However, each person has a different thought. Some did get married and live with [local] women. There were many. I am sort of a restrictive person and believed that being a soldier there was no purpose in settling down. [I] never had any thought of marrying. By marrying one is sure to beget children and for this one should either be rich or young. [I] was not young or rich. Having children is not simple for one must rear them. So in that way I remained single.

Q: I have heard that there were part of the army that there was a certain section that did intelligent work, intelligence work to observe if any spies were coming in. Do you know anything about those operations?

01:18:39

#42N: There is not anything to say in particular. Intelligence office...there was a Department of Intelligence but it was not part of that. It was [my] general duty to make observations. Mine was the Information Department that was responsible for both internal and external affairs, responsible for internal and external affairs. It was not exactly an intelligence office. I was assigned a certain responsibility in the department.

Q: Were you one of the people who were involved in intelligence work?

#42N: That is as I mentioned earlier. Each group had a special intelligence office. I was not part of that. There was a special Information Department that was responsible for both internal and external affairs. I was a part of this and not the special intelligence office. It is sort of strange.

[Someone off camera: It's called Information Center. He collected all information.]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What did he say? What did *popo-la* say?

Q: Did you come across any efforts from people from the outside to come in, the Chinese or Japanese or anything like that who were spying on Tibetans?

01:21:28

#42N: [Spies] like that did come—did come. If they seemed so it must be observed where they are going and what they are doing. Spies must follow them. If they had bad intentions, [they] would not be allowed further but sent back.

Q: So is there anything else that you can tell us about your stay at that time of your life in Mustang?

#42N: [I] do not have anything to say in particular. [I] cannot remember. If there are questions, [I] may be able to answer but cannot remember anything in particular.

Q: Well, maybe we can conclude by...if I can ask you what do you hope will happen to Tibet? What is your hope and your dream for Tibet?

#42N: It is strange because the world talks about human rights and freedom. Tibet can be perhaps considered the worst in this world, but it is sad that there is no one that strongly supports it. If one should enjoy human rights, what is happening in Tibet these days? If two people are talking, they are said to be revolting against the Communist Party and are captured. Once a person is arrested there is no knowing where [he/she] is taken. When such is the lack of freedom, it is sad that none of the democratic governments are giving support.

Q: The question is what will happen to Tibet in the future?

01:24:29

#42N: For the future my hope is that if all the democratic governments of the world would consider the welfare of the Tibetans and lend support, Tibetans can be saved from dying. That is what I think.

Q: If everyone lends support...

#42N: Yes, if [everyone] lends support. If not those left behind in Tibet will come to an end from either imprisonment, death from beatings and death from being shot, and the rest unable to endure the suffering, burn themselves to death. It is certain that [the population] will come to an end. If democratic countries lend good support it is like saving the Tibetans that are on the verge of death.

I would like to request you to save [Tibet]. There is nothing to ask for but to save [Tibet]. The talk is always about human rights but there is none worse than the Chinese on the issue of human rights. Yet [the world] is happily flattering them. It may not be possible but this question needs to be posed.

Q: That is a hope that we share with you, *popo-la*. Thank you very, very much for this and I do because just in conclusion I always like to ask this question again. So if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

01:27:27

#42N: If it is beneficial it should be shown irrespective of any problem. People are burning themselves to death, so problem should not be a consideration. If it is of no benefit, then that is it. If it is of benefit it should be shown.

Q: We hope to make it very beneficial. Did you want to say something?

#42N: No. I will not say more.

Q: *Popo-la*, what was it like to tell your story today? Do you think that's important to tell the story of Tibet through the people like yourself?

#42N: An educated person does not have much to do with the activities of an uneducated person. However, to make a request with folded hands [joins palms] wherever you go,

please help and support the Tibetans. That is my request. What is the situation of human rights in Tibet? Please lend support on this issue.

Q: *Popo-la*, we definitely will continue our support and thank you for sharing your story with us.

#42N: [Joins palms] Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW