

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #48M – Dukha
April 5, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #48M
2. Interviewee: Dukha
3. Age: 84
4. Date of Birth: 1926
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Shungru
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 5, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp Number 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 39 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dukha hails from Shungru village which consists of about 50 families. They were nomads and reared sheep and yaks. He talks about the system of *khathak* in which 10 families were entrusted with 200 animals each by the government. Certain families faced hardship due to their inability to pay taxes in the form of butter and cheese meant for the Monlam Prayer Festival in Lhasa. Besides dairying, the people of Dukha's village also gathered salt and exchanged it for grains.

Dukha gives details of the working of the justice system in his village: the powers and responsibilities of the district administrator and the types of punishment awarded to offenders. Another unique custom he recounts is that of not allowing animals and women to enter pilgrimage places in his village.

Dukha remembers that the Chinese first appeared in 1945-46, but they were killed in a nearby region and it is believed this kept the Chinese from returning until they once again appeared in 1959. He narrates how the influential people of his region were killed or imprisoned. After escaping he worked on a road crew for two years and arrived in Dharamsala in 1961. He describes the conditions when he first arrived in Mundgod.

Topics Discussed:

Nomadic life, trade, taxes, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #48M

Interviewee: Dukha

Age: 84, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 5, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:19

Interviewee #48M: Dukha.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans, so that we can share them with younger generation of Tibetans and also with Chinese people, so that we can document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#48M: That is right.

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

00:01:19

#48M: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#48M: [Nods]

Q: And if you want to take a break at any time, please just let us know.

00:01:36

#48M: Okay.

Q: If you don't want to answer something just say "I'd rather not answer that."

#48M: Okay.

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

00:02:01

#48M: No.

Q: We very much appreciate your agreeing to share your story with us. Thank you very much.

#48M: [Nods]

[Camera adjustment]

Q: Can you tell us what it was like to be...to have the life of a nomad in Tibet?

00:02:15

#48M: Nomads did not own farm lands. We did not have farm lands. Nomads [reared] sheep and yaks and prepared butter and cheese and sold them. That's what [we] did.

Q: What is an early memory of your childhood?

#48M: In Tibet the men used to engage in salt trade. [We] went to the salt pans in the north to get salt and exchanged it for grains. [We] also bartered wool, cheese, butter and sheep for grains. We received either grains or money. There was wool, butter, cheese, meat and salt to sell. That's how we earned a livelihood.

Q: How often did you move? Did you live in a tent and how often did you move?

00:04:56

#48M: [It was] a tent. It was a *ba*, a tent. The tent was made of yak hair. It was like that.

Q: And how often did you move your tent?

#48M: There were different locations for the summer, winter, and spring. While we lived in the tent during winter, the butter and cheese were stored inside the proper house. There was a house where one lived during springtime. The animals were led to wherever the grass was good. There were different locations where we moved in the winter and summer. The butter and cheese were stored at the main house. There were no thieves and the things were left there.

Q: Because there would be somebody guarding it?

00:06:23

#48M: There were no thieves.

Q: Was there someone guarding it?

#48M: There was someone who was deputed by the government that arrived from Lhasa and he appointed a family [to guard it]. It was only one family that lived there while the rest did not. Only one family lived there [to guard] the store house, which was huge and where the butter and cheese meant for the Monlam 'Prayer Festival' was stored. Only one family was appointed [to take care of it].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Were they members of his family or somebody else?

Q: Did you have to offer your butter and cheese to the great monasteries?

00:07:16

#48M: The share of butter and cheese of the government was sent to Lhasa for the Monlam. We stored our personal share in the house.

Q: Did you do that annually?

#48M: Yes, annually. It was done annually.

Q: The Monlam is an annual prayer festival in Lhasa. So the supplies that they had to store for the Monlam, was this like some sort of a government tax? Was it considered like an annual tax?

00:08:09

#48M: The [supplies] that were dispatched to Lhasa were [the produce] from the government animals. Ten families were entrusted with 200 animals each. There were ten such families and two families who raised yaks. We could not utilize the butter and cheese from these [animals]. It must be dispatched for the Monlam.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So this was like an order from the government?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, it's an order and those animals they have were given by the monastery.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, the animals were given by the monastery, but the cheese and the milk that they got from the animals, then they had to give back to the monastery?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: A limited amount and not totally.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I see. I see.

Q: Did you consider this a fair system?

#48M: It was a very difficult task. One had to collect butter and cheese and deliver them once every ten days to the government house that I told you about earlier. It [the government representative] received 7-8 half a yak skin full or a *thang* everyday. A *thang* is half a yak skin full. A *thang* is 40 kilograms. Measurements like *gyachu* and *thang*...80 kilograms is half a yak skin. Daily the government received 5-6 such [measurements].

These were stored there and were dispatched to Lhasa for the three great monasteries of Gaden, Drepung and Sera during the Monlam. The monasteries had their own animals for that purpose. We did not have to provide [the produce] from our personal animals which we could consume ourselves. They need not be sent there.

Q: Were you happy with this arrangement?

00:11:38

#48M: There were difficulties. Orders were strict at that time and if one did not remit tax to the government, there were difficulties like, “You will be lashed or you cannot consume the butter and cheese.” There was a great deal of problems.

Q: So it created some hardship for your family to fulfill these orders?

#48M: There were some families who were not able to fulfill it, though it did not happen to me. It happened to some families. It was not that one could not remit the butter and cheese [tax], but was unable to account for the animals. If one lost an animal, one had to make it up. So if the family was a rich one, it was fine but if they were not, it was difficult to make a substitution. Though I did not face such problems, it happened to some other families in Tibet.

Q: So even if an animal dies, you have to replace the animal?

00:13:46

#48M: If you explained that an animal died, it was fine if you could show its horn, but if one got lost, you must replace it. You should possess the horn with the stamp of the government. If you presented it and the meat, they took custody of it. If we lost an animal, there was nothing but to provide a substitute.

Q: What kind of punishment would you receive if you weren't able to fulfill these orders from the government?

#48M: One must provide a replacement.

Q: If one could not provide a replacement?

00:14:56

#48M: It was imperative to give a substitute. One must endeavor and provide a replacement. Laws were very strict then. One would be told, “You must pay or you will be lashed.” There was nothing to do but provide a substitute.

Q: And if it was not possible? What kind of punishment might somebody receive?

#48M: If one could not pay, all his animals were confiscated by the government. They were driven away with not a single animal left at his door.

Q: If the people had a problem with some of these arrangements, some of these orders, was there anywhere that you could go to complain?

00:16:18

#48M: There were none [to complain]. There were none as laws were extremely strict.

Q: Maybe a district official or someone?

#48M: There were not. It happened only to a few families while some families were very rich. Besides the government's *kati nagthong* '10,000 sheep and 1,000 yaks,' some families owned 200-300 or 500-600 animals. They were extremely wealthy and their animals were their own; whether they died or were consumed, it was their own. However, the government owned ones were not like that.

I told you that there were 10 families who were entrusted with 200 animals each by the government. There were two *khathak* 'animal caretakers' with a flock of 200 *khapa* 'animals' and one of them was my family and I was the caretaker. I used to go to trade for the government by exchanging salt for grains. One did that for a period of one year. It was on rotation system. If it was my turn to shepherd the flock this year, I was responsible for trade the following year. Then it was the turn of my colleague. I did not face any problems during my period of holding these responsibilities. I was able to give a proper account. My family was well-off then.

Q: What was the relationship like with your family, for example, and your local monastery, the monks of the local monastery? Would you describe it as a good relationship?

00:18:06

#48M: Yes?

Q: What was the relationship between your family and the monastery?

#48M: With the monastery?

Q: Yes, the monastery.

#48M: There was a monastery called Ganjo Gonpa, a branch of the Drepung Loselling Monastery. The Loselling branch monastery did not own many animals. There was the Khechok Rinpoche who'd passed away and an incarnation. We had no problems with them. The horn-stamped [animals] belonged to the great monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden. Sera [had] 5,500 [monks]; Drepung 7,700 and Gaden 3,300. The cattle belonged to Gaden, Sera and Drepung Monasteries.

Q: So you didn't have much dealings with monks directly?

00:19:20

#48M: Yes?

Q: Did you have any special dealings with monks of Sera, Gaden and such?

#48M: No, there were not any then. One must go to Lhasa as they did not come [to the village]. They lived in Lhasa. Drepung, Gaden [are in Lhasa] and the Monlam was held at a particular place. At that time the butter and cheese were dispatched there. [They] did not come to our place.

A representative called *chakna* arrived from Lhasa once every six years to take a count. He came once in six years and counted the animals. He stayed for the term and then another person arrived from Lhasa after six years. He appointed a person of our village as overseer—I told you about the district administrator who was an uncle of mine. We have been district administrators for five generations. He was responsible for checking the quality of the butter and cheese. [The products] had to be clean since they were meant for the three great monasteries. A lot of rebuke ensued if otherwise.

Q: Did you have to dispatch once every six years?

00:20:23

#48M: No, it was dispatched annually but the official arrived once every six years. The accounting was done once in six years.

Q: Did a person arrive there and stay for six years?

#48M: He took count in six years and then left.

Q: So was that his local monastery, Namla Gonpa? Did they stay at Namla Gonpa?

00:21:17

#48M: [He] lived in Lhasa.

Q: For the six years...

#48M: He lived in Lhasa during the six years. The main place of residence was Lhasa. He left from there during summertime, in the 4th [Tibetan lunar] month and lived [in the village] during the 5th and 6th months. He returned to Lhasa in the 10th month. He collected the butter and cheese and told the transporters “You should take them [to Lhasa]” and returned to Lhasa. If I was the person responsible, I would have taken charge of the government animals and counted them during the term of six years. After I had completed the term, I would report to the government that I had completed the six-year term and request them to send another *chakna*.

Q: How far is your village from Lhasa? How many hours travel?

00:22:10

#48M: It was very far. If one left in the 10th month, he reached there only in the 11th month.

Q: Did it take about a month’s time?

#48M: It took about a month.

Q: On horseback or walking?

00:22:16

#48M: On horseback. We did not go by any other means except on horseback.

Q: Are you from the Changthang [Northern plateau]?

#48M: The place where we lived was Shungru.

Q: Where is Shungru located?

#48M: It is in the upper region.

Q: Is it in Ngari?

00:22:34

#48M: It is located below Ngari and a little further away from Zongkha and Kyirong. It's a little further away from Zongkha, [the village of] Phu Yonten who now lives in Dharamsala. It is at a distance of 7-8...[not discernible].

Q: On which side of Ngari is it located?

#48M: Ngari is at a distance of a month's journey. We'd have to travel a month to go to the snowy mountains of Ngari and the place called Porang. It was very far away. I have been twice to the snowy mountains.

Q: How close was it to the Changthang?

00:23:17

#48M: Changthang is a month's journey.

Q: Which is the biggest town [near your village]?

#48M: Bawa was the biggest town. Thoe Bawa was the biggest town. [The residents] originated from Lithang. They arrived from Lithang and settled there. That's how Bawa was established. You know the place called Lithang?

Q: Was Lithang and Shungru close by?

00:23:43

#48M: Yes, they were next to each other. Just like Camp Number 5 and Camp Number 3 here [in Mundgod].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: That's east of Lhasa?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: East of Lhasa—Bawa, near Bawa.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, that's west of Lhasa.

#48M: Bawa was a big town. There were about 200 families.

Q: You mean in your village?

00:24:15

#48M: In the place called Bawa that I told you about. It's just like Camp Number 5 and us. There were 56 families in Shungru.

Q: Tell us more about what it was like being...the life as a nomad? You seem to know a lot about the whole social life in the nomad and economy, so can you tell us more about that?

#48M: Our livelihood?

Q: Yes.

00:24:58

#48M: Our livelihood was milking the animals and preparing butter and cheese. And we exchanged the butter, cheese and meat for grains. Then there was the *dhoepo tsarab* in which case they came to deliver the grains to us. The reason they came to deliver the grains to us was...there were government storehouses and I told you about the *chakna* who arrived [from Lhasa]. There were storehouses belonging to the great monasteries—storehouses for grains, salt and rice. They filled the storehouses. We who took care of their animals were provided wages from the storehouses. We were given a *de* 'a measurement' of *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' daily. We were given 30 *de* of *tsampa* for 30 days.

Q: [Did you receive this] when you went to trade?

#48M: Yes, during trade as well as for taking care of the animals. One had to shepherd the flock and that was the wage. There was only one *de* [of *tsampa*] per day.

Q: Did the monastery provide you with it?

00:25:58

#48M: Yes.

Q: Was your family working directly for the monastery then?

#48M: We did not have to work for the monastery.

Q: Did you trade for the monastery or pay taxes?

00:26:34

#48M: Whether you called it tax or whatever for the monastery, the butter and cheese was dispatched there.

Q: But just now you said that for trading [for the monastery] you received wheat...

#48M: It was only a *de* of *tsampa*.

Q: Have you done that kind of work?

00:26:46

#48M: Yes, I served as a shepherd for the government and there was only a *de of tsampa* per day as wage.

Q: From the monastery?

#48M: Yes, that was the only wage.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: One bowl of wheat?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: One bowl of wheat.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: In return for what?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Looking after the sheep and goat and animals.

Q: But you also had your own animals, yes?

00:27:24

#48M: Yes, we owned cattle. I had enough animals to survive on. Since that was a form of government tax, it was necessary to tend its animals. If the government said, “You must shepherd the flock,” you could not say, “I will not do it.” You must tend the animals. I looked after my animals as well as the government’s animals. If there were 200 sheep [belonging to the monastery/government], one must hand it over to another person the following year.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So it wasn’t the same families every year?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not same.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It was ten different families.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Ten different families.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I see.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Every ten different family has to look after ten herds of 200 yaks/200 sheep. It will rotate every year. So part time they do business or look after their own animals.]

Q: What about the monks at Namla Gonpa? How many monks were there?

#48M: There were around 60 monks at Namla Gonpa. And at the Ganjo Gonpa, which is a branch of the Drepung Monastery there were around 60 monks. Namla Gonpa is a branch

of a Sakya Monastery and Ganjo Gonpa is a branch of the Drepung Monastery. They were separate.

Q: Did you used to go to the monastery?

00:29:31

#48M: Oh yes, many times because I lived there when I was young; innumerable times.

Q: Tell us about when you went and what happened when you went?

#48M: One visited the monastery with butter and cheese. The cheese was distributed among [the monks of] the monastery and the butter were used for lighting butter lamps. In Tibet we lit lamps using butter as we did not have electrical lights.

Q: Was that the only reason you ever went to the monastery was to give things to the monastery?

00:30:41

#48M: One could make an offering and request the monastery to read prayers or ask five, 10 or 15 monks to chant prayers at home.

Q: Can you describe a time that the monks came to your home or to somebody you knew? The monks came to your home and they came to you, what did they do?

#48M: There were the abbot and storekeeper in the monastery whom we requested to send a certain number of monks home to read prayers; just like Drepung [Monastery] sends monks these days. Presently we make monetary offerings to the monastery to read certain prayers like *shernay* and *namgyal tsechok* and the monastery [monks] chants them. It was similar to that. It was the same in those days.

Q: When would the monks come to the house? What kind of special occasion would that be?

00:32:36

#48M: Around four monks arrived home if it was a prayer like *gyapshi*. The *Namgyal thongchoe* prayer required 10 monks. We follow the same number these days. *Namgyal thongchoe* is a vast prayer and needs 10 monks [to read it]. To read a prayer like *Dolma yundhor*, one made the correct monetary offering to the monastery.

Q: How were decisions made in the village? Who held the positions to make decisions in the village?

#48M: The legal decisions were made by the District Administrator. If one did not obey the District Administrator, he could be whipped; he could be given 500 lashes. [Laughs] Really. Rules were very strict in Tibet.

Q: Was there somebody in the village itself like if you had a problem; was there somebody in the village who you could go to talk to?

00:34:20

#48M: The District Administrator made the decision. The *chakna* was deputed there and told, “You have to make every decision, whether good or bad.” Therefore he [was authorized to] make the decisions. If a person stole or lied, he would be whipped. One would be given about 500 lashes. Except for lashings, law did not allow for monetary bribes. Rules were very stringent in my region.

Q: Where did the district administrator live?

#48M: The district administrator lived right there. I told you that [my family] served as district administrator for five generations. I was the 5th generation. The generation earlier to me was Namdol and his father, the district administrator passed away after coming here around the age of 76. And his father expired around the age of 86 and his father too died around the age of 86. [We] were district administrators for five generations.

Q: *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ did you serve as district administrator?

00:35:46

#48M: I did not serve as district administrator.

Q: Was your father one?

#48M: It was my uncle, my mother’s relative. Four generations served as district administrators.

Q: So it’s a hereditary position. It came through the lineage of the family.

00:36:25

#48M: The appointment was made by the government. It was the government that advised the person to serve as one.

Q: For five generations [your family] served and were all your uncles appointed by the government?

#48M: Yes, I am the 5th generation and four generations have served. I told you earlier that [we] served for four generations.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Was that in his village?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, in the village

Q: Was that in your village? Was he the District Administrator in your village?

00:37:10

#48M: Yes. Just like Camp Number 3 [Mundgod] has one leader here, likewise was the district administrator.

Q: Were there 56 families then?

#48M: Yes, and one district administrator. The highest authority was called district administrator and below him were the *genpo* ‘village leader’ and *chupon* ‘leader of 10’ just like they are appointed here. There were two people appointed as *genpo* and such. Here we have a leader and two or three *chupon*; it was similar to that.

Q: So if somebody was accused of stealing for example, was there some kind of hearing given to that person; hearing meaning a kind of trial where the person could defend himself and say “No, I did not steal” and somebody makes a case that they did steal?

00:38:22

#48M: If somebody filed a case and if one had committed the theft, he would know that he could not win the case.

Q: Was there an opportunity in general for such a case?

#48M: Someone might file a case saying that he had not committed the theft. Suppose he was accused when he had not stolen, he could file a case, but if it was proved that he had stolen, there was no base for a case. [Laughs]

Q: No, if somebody is accused of stealing...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: For example, he is accused of stealing, if all has witnessed how can he go to trail? If he was not seen or witnessed by anyone, just saying that he has [committed] theft; he has the right to challenge or right to this one.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He has a right to...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right to express or right to this one.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Right.

Q: And this would happen under the District Commissioner?

00:39:18

#48M: Yes, that is right. [For example] if somebody accused me of stealing and I asserted that I had not stolen, then the decision would be taken by the district administrator.

Q: Did you ever see a case like this?

#48M: Many cases came up before the district administrator. If any charges occurred in the Bawa region, they brought it to Shungru. The people of Horpa and Nagchu also brought their cases to our district administrator. That was because [the district administrator] was competent. Only a capable person was appointed as a district

administrator. A person who could pronounce the [right] judgment was appointed as district administrator and not someone who could not.

Q: What kind of crime existed in your area?

00:40:35

#48M: There were some cases pertaining to theft and some cases pertaining to grassland disputes, when animals of Bawa fed on grass in the Shungru region. [People] made charges that “My grass has been eaten by his [animals]. I have no grass for my animals.” Another was on account of trading. There was the place called Tharap, which was the government trading center and the [people of] Bawa were not allowed to trade there. That was because they [those that traded at Tharap] were serving the three great monasteries and it was a form of reward. Since they were government representatives and had to be approached for grains...[not discernible]; [they] did not allow others to trade. The Bawa traders were allowed only after the Shungru traders had completed their transactions. Shungru had very stringent rules.

[For example] if someone from a place like Hunsur or Kollegal [towns in Karnataka, India] wish to come to Shungru, he had to make an appeal to Shungru [officials] that he was coming the next day. [He] had to bring a *khata* ‘ceremonial scarf’ and—not much money was required—three *sho* ‘currency unit’ and a *khata*. Without the *khata* he would not be allowed in the area the next morning. He would be troubled saying, “The *kati nagthong* of the government are herded here. What would you do if they became ill with disease [brought from outside]?”

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It’s interesting that’s how he would answer that question, was there much crime. So he seems to think that crime is done by outsiders, maybe. Maybe we can try and ask the question in a different way. So in his village, was there ever any murder, theft? What other crimes are there, you know? These kinds of serious injury, like these kinds of crimes, you know?

00:43:28

#48M: Other than those [crimes], there was one family I told you about whom we used to address as *ashang* ‘maternal uncle,’ whose children survive today. The maternal uncle died after coming here around the age of 76. In Bawa and our area, individuals held grasslands. The regions of Bawa and ours lay side by side [joins index fingers]. If grass from one area was eaten by the other and if disputes arose on account of that, that maternal uncle went to Lhasa to settle the case. He left in the 10th month and returned in the 4th month. He went to Lhasa to settle the case and returned a year later. Only a capable person could be appointed as the district administrator. Only an exceptionally capable person could be appointed.

Q: Can you describe your village a little bit? What did it look like?

#48M: I will relate how it was formed, which is like a tale and how the *kati nagthong* of the great monasteries came to be there. When I was a child, I asked my maternal grandfather how the *kati nagthong* came about and he said that long time ago there was a wealthy

family in our village. They possessed immense wealth, but could not manage servants and did not have children. [They were] barren. [The man of the family thought], “I cannot manage my wealth. If I offer my wealth to the government, the government will take possession of it.” So he went to Lhasa and requested the Tibetan Government, “Please accept my wealth. I am wealthy but do not have any offspring. We, the aged are not able to take care of the wealth. If I offer it to the government, you will take care of it.” And so it was offered to the government. The man who made this offering was known by the name Chukpo Penam Yolha. He made an offering of *kati nagthong*.

Q: How long ago was that? How far back in history?

00:48:32

#48M: That was many years ago. I told you that Penam Yolha made the donation keeping just enough wealth to sustain the aged couple and the one who distributed the *kati nagthong*—after he donated it to the government, the Tibetan government opined that it was better to make the donation to the monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden and sent a representative of the government [to the village]. The Tibetan government acknowledged that the offering of *kati nagthong* was good, but someone had to take charge [of the animals].

My mother’s maternal uncle’s grandfather was called Dharlo and his grandfather’s name was Topgyal, whose great, great grandfather was a person called Takcho Nyima. Chukpo Penam Yolha made the donation of *kati nagthong* and he [the ancestor Takcho Nyima] offered to make the distribution [of animals]. He requested the government, “Please give me [the *kati nagthong*] and I will stock the butter. The representative of Sera, Drepung and Gaden can come and collect the butter and cheese.” So Takcho Nyima—whom I have never seen—made the distribution [among the villagers]. I was told that [story] by my grandfather.

He made the distribution and the government assented. The government stamped the animals on their horns which was called *go ratam*. A mark called *gyab shungtsak* was made [on the backs of the animals]. These [markings] were called *gyab shungtsak, go ratam*. There is only one monk named Gen Atse in Gaden Monastery here who has knowledge about this. There is no one else who can relate it. Gen Atse who is around 86 years old is the sole person.

He asked me whether I belonged to that group [who took care of the *kati nagthong*]. I replied, “Yes, I was among them. We were the ones who were responsible for establishing the source [of butter and cheese] for Sera, Drepung and Gaden Monasteries.” So after the distribution [of the animals], it became a source for Sera, Drepung and Gaden. Three hundred yaks were loaded with butter and cheese for the Monlam Prayer Festival.

Q: What time in history or how many generations back was *the kati nagthong* established?

00:50:40

#48M: [I think] it was established many generations back. I have a feeling it might have occurred during the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. I enquired from my grandfather who

passed away at around the age of 86, “A terrible battle must have taken place in our village since tens of thousands of monasteries are destroyed. How did the destruction occur?” He answered that it happened during the time of Chukpo Penam Yolha.

Chukpo Penam Yolha rode on a black horse and carried a spear with a black flag on it. He went to the hilltop called Kom and lay in wait, bearing the flag. The army appeared just like the Chinese did. He knew the Chinese language and was not harmed. Other than that, the monasteries were destroyed and burned. Not just men, even the children were not spared in the village. When that [battle] took place, it was Chukpo Penam Yolha who planned the strategy.

Q: Had he been to China?

#48M: He’d been to China and knew the Chinese language. He was a person who had been to China.

Q: There were some pilgrimage sites in your village?

00:53:10

#48M: There were many monasteries, like [not discernible], Sakya Gonpa, Namlha Gonpa and a pilgrim site called Guru Sangpo.

Q: Have you been on a pilgrimage?

#48M: I have not been to Guru Sangpo. However, one with the birth sign of dragon must visit a pilgrim place called Sheruk Dukda where I have been. One with the birth sign of horse must pay a visit to Mount Kailash and those having the birth signs of tiger and ox can visit Nepal where there are many pilgrim sites. [A person with the] birth sign of monkey should visit Lake Rewalsar [Himachal Pradesh, India].

Q: You went to Mount Kailash.

00:54:20

#48M: I have been twice to Mount Kailash and twice to Sheruk Dukda. There was another [pilgrim] place called Taru Namna Karpo. That was located quite close by and we could reach it in a day. Taru Namna Karpo was a very holy pilgrim site. [I heard] it still exists. [I heard] it’s not been destroyed until now. I met someone from my village last year.

Q: I have a note here about some pilgrimage sites near Shungru, which is his village which says women pilgrims require a special permit.

#48M: Women were not allowed to go on pilgrimage in my village. The reason [women] were not allowed was because we tended the government’s *kati nagthong*, so fearing that the animals would catch diseases, yaks and women were not freely allowed in. I told you about the *khata* and the three *sho*; these must be offered and permission sought to visit the pilgrim sites the next morning. Without that, one was not allowed to enter.

Q: If there were women?

00:55:31

#48M: Yes.

Q: If there were no women?

#48M: If there were no women, the men were free to go.

Q: Because they thought women carried disease?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Hmm...

Q: What kind of disease?

00:56:26

#48M: It was not any disease, but women were considered to be lower in birth in the early days, which was why they were not allowed. The reason they were not permitted was because [Shungru village] happened to be the government's *kati nagthong* representative and that was a huge responsibility.

If [people] brought along yak, they were not allowed in because the animals [of the government/monasteries] could catch a disease. Even here animals are afflicted with a disease of the mouth and if such animals were brought from outside, many animals could die and that was a great responsibility.

Q: Okay, but you said only the women needed the permit. So if the men were with the animals, there was no problem?

#48M: No permission was required; [the men] were free to go anywhere. This applied only to Shungru as such [rules] did not exist in other regions where I have visited. Our village cared for the government's *kati nagthong* due to which [the rule applied].

Q: Why [the rule] on account of the *kati nagthong*?

00:57:45

#48M: If an illness befell the *kati nagthong* animals, for every animal that died, one must provide a replacement. So it was a difficult thing in case many animals died due to an illness and one had to give replacements. If one did not possess enough animals to make replacements, it was a difficult situation. That was how the government functioned.

Q: If women wanted to go on pilgrimage, any pilgrimage to cross to another village—if the women had animals with them, they needed a special permit, correct?

#48M: In such a case [a person without animals] could go directly. If one drove animals, the animals could bring a disease. And if the illness spread, all the animals belonging to the government could die. We could not take the risk of their dying.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Do you understand the connect between the women and the permits? Does it have anything to do with women or just to do with animals?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Only related with animals, not with women.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Nothing to do with women?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Nothing to do with women.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, so this is incorrect information. Okay, so men also needed this permit if they bring animals?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, yeah.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It's nothing to do with women.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Nothing to do with women.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, that makes more sense.

Q: When the Chinese first came to your village, how did they come? How did they arrive?

01:00:10

#48M: It was long ago that the Chinese arrived. I do not remember much but around 18 horsemen appeared. It used to be mentioned that the Chinese were going to arrive. At that time my late maternal uncle was stationed as *rigyab* 'assistant leader' in Gerze and Gerze regions. He was also appointed as *rangro* 'leader' in Nagchu. Gerze and Gerge could not remit their taxes simply like us. Their [taxes] had to go to the government like ours. It was not simple and the leader of Gerze had to travel to the government [in Lhasa]. They paid taxes directly to the government.

Saka District, Nagchu and Sherong submitted their [taxes] to the government; however Gerze and Gerge were obliged to go to pay directly to the government. Normally I would not know about it, but the *rigyab* was a high official and my late maternal uncle was once appointed to that post. And during his sojourns to Lhasa, he learned that it was a certainty that the Chinese would appear. He said that it was just a matter of time before the Chinese appeared and that the district administrators would be the first ones to be arrested.

Late maternal uncle said, "It is being said that the Chinese will be coming soon." The following year the people of Bawa said, "The Chinese are coming on a tour." When that was mentioned, I was at my late uncle's home, "If I went I might be caught immediately since I am the district administrator. In case they do arrive, they will come through Bawa region. When that happens, you should go."

That day late maternal uncle went to a government house. [I think] it was around this time of the evening that [I heard] that the Chinese had arrived; that 18 horsemen had arrived.

They had arrived at the Bawa border which was very close—just like Camp Number 5 here—and had called for the district administrator. Then the mother of my late uncle the district administrator, who lived in House Number 12 [in Mundgod] and died after reaching here, told me, “Now you have to go as your uncle directed you earlier. Find out exactly what is happening. Take a horse and go.”

01:02:34

I went and saw that 18 horsemen had arrived. The 18 horsemen had arrived in the Bawa region. All the horses were black with yellow mouths and the men looked similar. The 18 men were aged about 36. The [people of] Bawa had assembled. I joined them and asked what we could do to them [the Chinese]. They said, “[We] should not do anything. We are on the same side. They have come on a tour and to make an assessment. We must finish them off. We must end them. None of us should acknowledge them today.” So nobody acknowledged them.

They cooked their food and ate. Each one served himself and ate. Then it became dark and the people of Bawa said, “You must stay back today. You are [the representative of] Shungru and you must stay back. You must stay back to observe what they [the Chinese] do. A Bawa man will also stay with you and two of you must watch over them.”

The Chinese did not say anything. We watched them. Their horses were tied with long ropes, as long as from here to that monastery—I realize now that they were nylon ropes. The ropes were then tied here [indicates wrist]. When the horses moved around to eat grass, if they [the Chinese] had fallen asleep, it tugged at them so that the horse could neither bolt nor get lost. Then dawn broke and they readied to leave after taking food.

Q: Were they in civilian dress?

#48M: They were in army uniform. Every one wore army uniform. They carried guns and were dressed in army uniform.

Q: What color uniform?

01:06:34

#48M: It was yellow. Everything was yellow. Their caps were yellow and all their clothes were yellow.

Q: And then?

#48M: And then they left...[not discernible]. Then maternal uncle and the others arrived. They and the people of Bawa remarked, “We must not let them go. They will arrive at the border of the region of Hor. We must kill them.” That very morning there was shooting. They clashed at Jema Yungdung and the 18 horsemen were killed. Jema Yungdung is close to Mount Kailash.

Q: Jema Yungdung?

#48M: Yes, Jema Yungdung. [I heard] that they were killed at Jema Yungdung. Some of them had medals on their caps and [I believe] they were leaders in the army. [We] heard they'd left; it was said that they had left through Bawa and crossed the Tawu mountain pass and by the time they reached Zongkha, there were none left. Everyone was finished, killed.

Q: Were you one of the people who did this?

01:08:17:

#48M: No, I did not go. They were killed away from our place. They were killed near the region of Bawa and I did not go there.

Q: Do you know how the Chinese were killed? Is it by guns or by swords?

#48M: They were killed using guns.

Q: Not with swords or stones?

01:09:00

#48M: No, [they were] killed with guns. Guns were very popular with us. There were no families that did not own two or three guns.

Q: Do you remember when you heard about this? Do you remember when you heard about this incident?

#48M: [I] heard that they were killed and that there were only two survivors who returned through our village and they were killed, too. The two had been injured.

Q: Who told you about it?

01:09:40

#48M: I was there in the region of Bawa, which is like Camp Number 5 here and they told me, "Last night two or three men [Chinese] returned and they were killed." They were all killed in the region of Bawa.

Q: The Bawa administrator is not his relative?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They are not related. They [the villages] are located each other [side by side].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But it's not one of his relatives?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not a relative. It's in another ...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Another area.

Q: When you heard about this, what was your feeling about it? What did you think about it?

01:10:32

#48M: Our district administrator said that all the Chinese had been killed. That had been said so by the Bawas and that no Chinese would come there. So until 1959 no Chinese appeared. It might have been '46 when the Chinese arrived and until '59 Chinese did not appear in our village. They'd learned about the killings. Knowing that, they felt that the people of the region were fierce and might attack and thus did not come. However, the Chinese had already occupied the regions extending from Thoe, Porang and Mount Kailash to Lhasa and we were enclosed between [these regions] and occupied in '59.

Q: So this incident occurred in the '40s or early '50s?

#48M: It might have been '45 or '46 as for many years no [Chinese] appeared. It was calm for many years. It was said that they were in the lower regions but no one came. [I] think it was '43 or '44. The Chinese appeared in '59 and then we were closed in.

Q: This incident, this particular incident of the killing of the 18...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was '47 to '46.

Q: '46 to '47?

01:12:28

#48M: It might be. I guess it could be around that time. Things were calm for a few years. For a few years there were no talks about Chinese and it was calm. I was 32 years old in '59 and then the Chinese appeared. They came from Thoe and met up with those from the lower regions. Shots were fired and many people were taken to prison. All the wealthier ones were taken to prison.

Q: You were a young man when this happened; you were 20 years old. So what did you think about this? Did you think this was a good thing?

#48M: I might have been 21 or 22 years old.

Q: You were a young man then and what special feelings did you have?

01:13:20

#48M: [I heard] that the Chinese were killed and that many more would appear. I wondered if they would appear, as it used to be said that if one Chinese was killed, many hundreds would arrive and that it was a matter of time before we would be taken over. And in '59 they actually occupied. When the occupation took place in '59, all the influential people had already been killed. All the influential people in the Bawa region had been killed. Many people had been killed. All the wealthier ones were taken away to prison.

Only one or two returned much later while the rest did not. One does not know where they died or were killed. All the wealthy people of our village were taken away. There would be

rich people, right? All the rich people were taken to Lhasa. No one knows where they were taken from Lhasa or killed. Many people did not return—50-60 of them did not return.

Q: So there were no repercussions actually from this incident?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Nothing like that.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...until 1959.

Q: What was your experience in 1959? What happened? In 1959 what happened?

#48M: After those Chinese had been killed, it was said that [more] Chinese would appear. It was said that Bawa and Shungru would be invaded by the army and oppressed. That year I went to live at Dhoporong which is a border region. So, when the Chinese appeared on the 4th day of the 4th month, I immediately crossed over the mountain pass. I could go across at once because I was at the base of the mountain pass. I had stayed there with the intention to escape. The district administrator had escaped earlier. Staying close to the mountain pass, which was like the distance from here to that monastery, I could escape immediately when I heard that the Chinese had appeared.

01:15:29

[I] heard that that morning the Chinese killed and took away many people. Many yaks had been shot dead. There were instances of women and old people riding on yaks to get away, but could not as the yaks got entangled in the ropes. I fled immediately from Dhoporong. However, I had nothing with me when I escaped. Some of our people carried mugs, some their blankets while others had nothing with them. I reached here as a pauper after a lot of struggle. Everyone was a pauper.

Q: You brought nothing at all out of Tibet?

#48M: I drove five or six yaks and that was it. Most of the people who reached here had nothing with them.

Q: Did you get to carry any household items?

01:17:48

#48M: [I] did not bring any household items, nothing. I was married at the age of 21 and mine was a new family then. I did not have any household items to bring except a few animals and the animals died in the snow during the journey. It started to snow on our escape journey and they died. When we reached here, everyone was a pauper. [We] begged to feed [ourselves].

Q: You're so knowledgeable and your memory is so good. It's really a pleasure talking to you.

#48M: That is because when I was a child, I made enquiries from the older people. As I told you earlier, I enquired about Chukpo Penam Yulha and how the government came to own the animals. It was because I asked the old people that I am able to relate it now.

Otherwise, there are no longer people alive who can talk about it. There cannot be anyone who has this knowledge.

Q: Really, so you've shared your story before with young Tibetans?

01:19:56

#48M: Many have approached me to ask such [stories]. All the older people have passed away and many like Pema Tsering come to ask me such experiences. Many of our people come to ask how Tibet was lost and such stories.

Q: That's great. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us that you haven't covered so far?

#48M: There is nothing much left to say except that since I am an older person, people come to ask me and I tell them [my story]. After we reached here my wife passed away. I had an only son who passed away. I am 84 years old and my relative [brother?] is 78 years old. We are only two people in the family.

Q: Do you live alone?

01:21:34

#48M: [I have] no one except him.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So he lives with his brother?

Interpreter to interviewer]: Staying with his brother; together.

#48M: [I] have no wife. She passed away after three years of illness. [I] had only one son who too passed away. He is 78 years old and I am 84. We are the only ones and I do the cooking. We have no one else.

Q: Now that the older generation is passing away, do you have any special guidance or advice for the younger generation of Tibetans?

01:22:19

#48M: As an older person I will advise them, "You have to [learn] about Tibet since you have not seen Tibet. We, the old people will die. So you should contact those who know." Pema Tsering and a few people have interviewed me and written them down. A few people of my region have approached me. They asked me about the location of my village to prepare a map and I told them that Bawa and Shungru were on the same map [area]. Other than that I do not have much to say as I am 84 years old now. Therefore, if people come and ask me, I tell them.

I tell people who are close to me, "I have grown old. You have not seen Tibet. I am 84 years old and was 32 when the Chinese appeared. The Chinese caused much suffering to us at that time. We were 56 families of whom they wiped out all but 16 or 17 families." We are only 16 or 17 Shungru families in Camp Number 3. There are two Bawa families. There are

none except the two. The majority have been annihilated in Tibet by the Chinese. Now there are no old people left to be seen.

Q: There is one question I wanted to ask you earlier. Did you ever go to Lhasa?

#48M: I have not been to Lhasa. My maternal uncle has been to Lhasa but not me.

We arrived in '61 in Dharamsala [Himachal Pradesh] where His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives. We worked at road construction in Dharamsala. And then [I] lived in Lahul Spiti [Himachal Pradesh] for seven years. For seven years we constructed roads. [The wage] was three and half rupees. Then in '45 [?] His Holiness told us that we must move to the settlement and we arrived to the settlement.

01:25:18

The whole area was a jungle when we arrived. There were a few people in Camp Number 1 and nowhere else. And in three days, His Holiness the Dalai Lama arrived. The Dalai Lama said, "Do not move anywhere else. Gradually you will progress in the settlement. The weather is hot and you have been working as coolies for seven years. You have followed whatever I told you to do or not to do. Now you have arrived here. So, do not run away anywhere else. Stay put and things will get better later." When His Holiness said thus we were seven men then. There were seven men who were my age. Thus we lived here. Now all the older people have passed away. I am the only one with the longest life. As I told you, there is a lone person in Gaden Monastery named *gen* Atse. He is among the first who arrived at the monastery. He was among the first 160 monks that arrived here.

Q: Where did you go to construct road after Dharamsala?

#48M: There is the palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama called Thekchen Choeling.

Q: Were you one year in Dharamsala? Where did you go after that?

01:26:34

#48M: [We] lived two years in Dharamsala. From Dharamsala we came to the settlement.

Q: For seven years?

#48M: Those seven years were earlier to that time. We went there [for road construction] in '61 and arrived here in '45 [?].

Q: What do you mean by '45?

#48M: [We] have lived here for 45 years. It's been 45 years since the settlement was established here.

Q: Its 50 years since the establishment of the settlement.

01:27:00

#48M: Its 50 years? It cannot be 50 years. It might have been 45, 46 or 47 years. We arrived in Dharamsala in '61 and worked as coolies for seven years. We lived as coolies for seven years in Dharamsala and another place. [We were] two years in Dharamsala and [five in another place] and arrived at the settlement after seven years.

Q: It must have been very, very difficult.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: During that time, climate was very hot and everyone was facing problem with diseases. Climate problem.

Q: We are going to go back a little bit. So first of all you mentioned salt. Did you actually go to get salt?

#48M: It was a long distance, about a month's journey for the salt.

Q: Yes?

#48M: One had to travel a month with sheep to get salt. One drove the sheep.

Q: Where was the place?

01:28:55

#48M: It was at Dapyi, far away in the Changthang [Northern plateau]. The name of the salt pan was Dapyi. One got the salt from there and took it to Dhoporong to barter for grains. [We] gave them salt and took grains in return.

Q: Where did you go with the salt?

#48M: Yes?

Q: Where did you go to sell the salt?

01:29:11

#48M: [We] went to Dhoporong to sell salt.

Q: Where is Dhoporong?

#48M: There was a place called Tharap, Dhopo Tharap. There were tribesmen and it lay in the direction of Nepal. It came under Nepal.

Q: How long did it take to go to the Changthang to get salt?

01:29:28

#48M: It took a month.

Q: So you did this?

#48M: I traded salt. I did a lot of salt trade. I went to trade salt seven times a year.

Q: In a year?

01:29:53

#48M: Yes, [I] traded seven times a year.

Q: Can you describe that what it was like? It sounds like a very difficult journey.

#48M: It was not in villages [that we stayed in]. We carried white cloth tents with us and made camps along the way.

Q: How many people did you go with?

01:30:22

#48M: Four people went [in a group]. It was imperative to have four people. One man was responsible for 25 yaks and two for 50 yaks. In the case of sheep, it was 150 sheep for one man. So that's how we went, four in a group.

When we reached the salt pans of Changthang, no payment was required to be made for the salt. Each one filled his bags. One did not have to depend on anyone at the salt pans. The entire region was salt [stretches both hands out to indicate the extent of salt]. One hammered the salt, made piles and filled the sheep bags.

Q: Did you have to hammer the salt?

#48M: Yes, the salt had to be hammered, without which they were crystallized like sugar candies. One must hammer. One kept hammering the whole day and made a pile of it in the evening. Then one assessed [the heap] to check if it was enough to fill 100 or 200 sheep bags. It took about three days to [gather enough salt for] 100-200 sheep [bags]. In the morning one filled the sheep bags, tied the mouths [of the bags] and loaded them on the sheep.

There were two bags for each sheep [places two fingers of right hand over either side of index finger of left hand to indicate that the bags sat on either side of the sheep]. They were loaded in that way. It took 15 days for one part of the journey and the entire journey entailed a month. That was how it was done.

Q: Did you lose a few animals on the way to freezing?

01:32:43

#48M: Though it did not happen to me, such problems happened to many people. It happened to many. Due to the grace of God I did not face such difficulties. There were many cases of yaks dying due to snowfall and not being able to return. I did not face such problems.

Q: Did you experience any injuries to your body on this trip?

#48M: There would be no problems if you had cuts [on the body]. If one already had any cuts, the saline water--the Indians call salt as *namak*—entering it [saline water] would burn you a lot but it helped. [I] wonder why. If one developed cuts at the salt pans and if there were hairs growing around it, salt stuck to them. Then when you washed it in clean water along the way, it helped. I wonder if it was some sort of blessing, but it helped. One did not develop sores.

The salt pans are treasures. It is said that the Chinese are mining much of the treasures [of the land]. The salt pans of the north are real treasures. It used to be said in the old tales that they are treasures. They are natural treasures.

Q: It's [the salt] gone?

01:35:28

#48M: It's there. It's said that the Chinese come to collect salt in vehicles. It's taken in vehicles. We used animals, which is a sin, but otherwise the salt is a treasure. There were monasteries at the salt pans. [We] performed prayers to the deities when [we] reached there.

Dapyi apa gyapo
Dapyi ama gyalmo
Saru gungthang mongmo
Tsamso therma chu nyi
So so so so

[*Tribute to Dapyi's father king*
Tribute to Dapyi's mother queen
Land so overpriced and valuable
Made precious when mixed with water
So so so so]

That's how the deities were worshipped.

Q: So your feeling was that the salt did not belong to you. It belonged to the Gods.

#48M: It was given by the Gods. It was a natural treasure. I do not know what they say in English, but in Tibetan we would say that it is given by the Gods. Nowadays we hear that many treasures have been unearthed in Tibet and such are the treasures. There was a lake at the site where the salt formed. In the center of the lake dwelled the deities and the *naga* 'Gods of the netherworld.' There was a...[not discernible], otherwise people would fall sick and die from drinking such saline water. And nobody died.

Q: What is your understanding of the condition of the salt beds now, these days?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: What?

Q: Because you said that it was gone. So how do you know that the salt has gone?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was said that it was taken by the Chinese through the trucks.

01:37:52

#48M: It was taken in trucks not by sheep. The sheep and yaks do not have work any longer. The yaks and sheep have no work. It is transported in vehicles.

Q: Would there still be salt left?

#48M: Yes, salt is still there. [I] heard that salt is still there. [I] would not know how much quantity is left compared to the old days.

Q: Okay, thank you very, very much. It was really interesting.

01:38:33

#48M: [Smiles] I have spoken so much today.

Q: I just want to ask you one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet and China, would it be a problem for you?

#48M: What problem would I have? There will be no problem for me. What problem is there? The Chinese will not arrest me. What problem would I have? There is no problem. There need not be any such doubts.

Q: And is it okay to use your real name?

01:39:16

#48M: Yes, that's okay. You can use it. I am old and if this will be of help for the Tibetan government, that is fine. That would be the best for me.

Q: Thank you. It is a privilege for us to hear it.

END OF INTERVIEW