

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #49M – Palden Chonphel
April 7, 2010**

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #49M
2. Interviewee: Palden Chonphel
3. Age: 71
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Khalung
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 7, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp No. 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 24 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Palden Chonphel's family consisted of nine members. They were farmers called *samadok*, who cultivated grains as well as reared animals. The family owned about 300 yaks and over 1,000 goats and sheep. Besides these two occupations, his father was engaged in salt trade. He fondly describes how his family and others traveled far north to buy salt and bartered for grains.

Palden Chonphel gives a rendition of songs sung on various occasions such as the milking and harvesting and songs about religion and love. He gives a description of a strange and unique custom followed in his village, which banned the entry of women, monks and yaks in the later half of the day after the crops were sown. It was believed that their entering the village would bring about hailstorms which would destroy the crops. He describes in great detail the *ngagpa* 'shaman' who possesses the power to ward off hailstorms with his magical instrument and mantra.

Palden Chonphel escaped from Tibet in 1959 with almost his entire village after the Chinese began conscripting villagers to construct roads nearby.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, herding, trade, religious festivals, customs/traditions, shamans/healers, forced labor, escape experiences.

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Interview #49M

Interviewee: Palden Chonphel

Age: 71, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 7, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:14

Interviewee #49M: Palden Chonphel.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans to share with the younger generation of Tibetans, with Chinese people and the rest of the world to show the true experience and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#49M: I know I am not a highly capable person, but I volunteered to tell my story because I hope that it will be of help.

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

00:01:46

#49M: Yes, of course, since I have come here [for that purpose].

Q: Thank you very much.

#49M: Okay.

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break or stop at anytime, just let us know.

00:02:17

#49M: Okay.

Q: If there's something you'd rather not answer, that's perfectly fine.

#49M: Okay.

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

00:02:42

#49M: I cannot tell you much about that—what the consequences will be. However, it does not matter. We are doing this for the country and there is no need to hesitate.

Q: Would you personally face any problems?

#49M: I will not face any problems as I am already old. We are just the two of us and what can happen to us?

Q: Thank you. We are very, very honored and we really appreciate you taking the time to share your story with us today.

00:3:19

#49M: Okay.

Q: Could you describe your village in Tibet?

#49M: If I were to tell you about my [livelihood in the] village, we were *samadok* 'farmers and herders,' owning land and also animals like cows, yaks and sheep. The village was a very happy place as we were *samadok*.

Q: Can you describe an early memory that you have from your childhood, maybe one of the earliest things that you remember?

00:04:33

#49M: I was young when I lived there. I might have been about 20 years old when I left my village, which can be considered as quite old. I can recall memories when I was a child. It was considered extremely good if someone cared for animals and the little children grazed the sheep. Later one worked in the fields and gained much experience; nobody could while away their time. I took great care to learn to work whether in the fields or caring for the animals. There were no machines in Tibet and one had to learn to do all the work. So people worked hard.

Q: Did you live in a house or a tent?

#49M: In a house. The *samadok* of my village owned lovely houses and also tents. The members of the richer families had to live at two different sites. However, the poorer families did not own many animals and they could do nothing about it. At times when the flock grew in numbers, the rich families had to put up two tents in different locations, thus the family members were stationed in three different places. It was natural to live at two locations. Those family members that lived at home engaged mostly in agriculture. During winter when there was no field work, they did a lot of spinning and weaving. Cultivation was done during the summer months. The nomads also did a lot of work like grazing the yaks and sheep as well as milking the animals. That was a lot of work; it was incredibly a lot of work. The region was a very happy place. Plenty of water was available for farming.

Q: Which season did the family live in the tent?

00:06:59

#49M: It was throughout the year. There was no month when it came to an end. Not only that, some rich families owned huge tents called *kaduk* 'six pillars' which had six pillars,

four on each side and two in the middle. They owned a smaller one which was used at times when the sheep had to be taken elsewhere to graze. A family member took the smaller tent and a servant with him on such occasions. Besides they [the nomads] went to trade to different places. I was asked to speak more on this subject [during the pre-interview].

Q: How many animals did your family own?

#49M: My family owned about 300 yaks and *dri* 'female yaks.' We also owned over 1,000 goats and sheep.

Q: How many members were in your family?

00:08:23

#49M: I am referring to the time when we made our escape. We were nine family members then.

Q: How is it decided who stayed in the house and who stayed in the tent? How was that decision made? Was it something to do with age?

#49M: The decision was made by the father. Actually at that time my grandparents were alive. So they did a lot of work and were assisted by many servants, without whom it was not possible. As for my father, he went trading which was not a simple thing. If one went to Nyenam, he had to go beyond the mountain pass. It was easier to go to Zongkha. If one went to gather salt, one traveled to the north and then had to go to sell it. All the children looked after the animals; one grazed the yaks, one the sheep and another milked. One could not remain without work. Take the mother for example. She had to work in the fields along with the servants, whether it was channeling water or any kind of field work.

Q: In terms of how well-off people were in your village, would you consider your family quite wealthy or like where would you come in the scheme of things like, very wealthy and very poor? Where did your family come in?

00:10:30

#49M: We were the third [richest] family. Our family consisted of two groups. The first [richest] family was called Lungti Amchay whose son passed away in Japan last year. [To the interpreter] You might know him. Theirs was the richest family. I think the second family, Khatem Barro, lived in Madhya Pradesh [India], but I do not know where they are at present. After these two families, ours was the next one.

Q: Your father was a trader and you said he traded salt and other things, was he gone a lot of the time? Was he absent a lot of the time?

#49M: He went to trade during the trading season. It depended on the time. In summer he went to trade in Zongkha and Nyenam, where you had to cross over a mountain pass. In winter he went to fetch salt from Yanju Tangka and Bhartsaguk.

Q: Where is Yangju Tangka?

00:12:09

#49M: Yangju Tanka is at a distance of three days' journey towards the east. It lies on the north of the river. It is to the east of my village. The salt was not found in Yangju Tanka. Salt was brought from the northern regions on thousands of sheep by the Kyangnang and Baryang to Yangju Tanka. We carried grains from our region and these were bartered [at Yangju Tanka]. The deal was made with the knowledge of the leader and the appropriate taxes paid. The nomad and the farmer could not deal as they wished.

Q: What did you give in return for the salt?

#49M: Grains. Grains and rice paddy were given in exchange. However, we had to get the paddy from Nyenam and Zongkha. That was how trade used to be done in Tibet.

Q: Did you go with your father on these trips to collect the salt?

00:13:58

#49M: I have been once. It was at the time of "the change" [the Chinese invasion] and I think I was about 19 when I went to Bhartsaguk, a salt purchase point. There were two places [Yangju] Tanka and Bhartsaguk where one could get salt in exchange for paddy, wool and grains. We then took the salt and sold at Nyenam and Zongkha. There must be some profit in these deals because that's how we carried on.

Q: What do you remember about that journey that you took with your father when you were 19 to get the salt? Can you describe that journey?

#49M: The journey to Bhartsaguk took about 15 days. In the morning we drank tea, ate our *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and set off after loading the yaks. We did not stop for food during the day but continued with our journey. We camped at around four in the evening and ate our food. The yaks were driven up the hills [for grazing] if the region was considered safe. However, in an unsafe or dangerous area, they were let loose for a short while in the evening and then tethered.

That was how our life was. That was the livelihood for generations, unless a family did not have a child in which case that was the end. Generations carried on with the same work. One got accustomed to it and did not complain, "This is tiring for me." or "I cannot go." or "The trade is not good." After all in the case of trade, at times it is good and at times it is not. One must keep going as it has been for generations, otherwise the family became poor. It was not just me; everybody who was well-off did the same trade. As for those who could not afford, they had to work as servants. That [trade] was the livelihood for the better placed families.

Q: How many people went with you on this journey?

00:18:00

#49M: There were just the two of us. There was a person from another family in the village who drove the yaks. One faced a lot of problems [on that journey].

Q: You went on the trade journey with your father. Who else were with you?

#49M: There was a person from another family with us.

Q: What problems did you face?

00:18:24

#49M: One became accustomed to the problems that abounded in the northern region. But the biggest problem was the danger of meeting thieves and the constant fear during the journey.

Q: Were there thieves?

#49M: At times if you were unfortunate you might meet vagabonds who came from the upper or lower regions or anywhere. Besides that danger, there were no other problems. One completed the trade and carried on.

Q: Can you describe the time when this happened? I mean did this happen to you?

[Interpreter clarifies that it did not happen to the interviewee who was scared of the bandits.]

Q: Were you armed? Did you have weapons?

00:19:37

#49M: We did not take them [weapons] nor did we possess any. Even if we were armed, we would not be able to overcome if we encountered fierce bandits. But there was no chance that such an encounter would take place. It never happened. Had it ever occurred I would have a tale to tell. We journeyed up to Nyenam and Dherkhang but there were never any encounters. We were suspicious of such lurking dangers, though it did not take place.

In general, I think such deals were common in most places in Tibet that a trader carried salt to a particular point and bartered for rice and wool. The nomads acquired all their *tsampa* requirements in this way. Though our region produced much *tsampa*, we had to procure rice and such products from Nyenam and Zongkha in the summer and store them. Then we went to purchase salt. This type of work was called *zolay*. Then one went on the next mission with the capital and that was how one lived. One had to keep continuing.

Q: Do you remember seeing anything particularly special on that journey; something you saw that stood out for you; something that you saw that was special or unusual that you remember particularly?

#49M: There were no machines that one could see [anywhere during the journey]. However, one could observe that there were more people, animals and the [different] situations in the villages. I observed different things on the journey. At times we came across lovely places, good grazing land and nomads on our way to get salt. At other times,

we came across poor families, though everyone in a particular village was not poor. However unlike here [India], there were no machines to be seen in Tibet.

Q: What kind of animals did you see?

00:23:24

#49M: I think we find the same kind of animals everywhere in Tibet. There were the wild asses, gazelle, blue sheep and, of course, you found wolves everywhere. Other than these animals, one did not find any huge wild animals. I have also seen antelopes.

Q: Any other?

#49M: Among smaller animals there were foxes and wolves. Except for wild yak, I have seen all the animals that are found in the region.

Q: When you made camp in the evening and cooked your dinner, what did you do before you went to sleep?

00:24:32

#49M: That [dinner] was the day's meal. Occasionally rice was cooked but mostly we ate *tsampa*. Then there was meat and butter. In the evenings we ate butter and meat and enjoyed ourselves. Then it was time to sleep. There was no time to eat the mid-day meal because we had to herd the huge flock of yaks. One walked the whole day. However once we reached [our destination], we enjoyed ourselves. We drank delicious tea. There was no need to add milk like we do here because our tea was like liquid butter [on account of the butter used in preparing the tea].

Q: What did you talk about? Did your father used to tell you stories?

#49M: It was the Tibetan custom to talk about tales that happened long ago. I did not get much time since when I was younger I used to graze the animals. Normally they [the elders] talked about the happenings of yore.

Q: Do you remember any particular story your father told you?

00:26:30

#49M: I cannot recall such stories because I was young at that time and did not take much notice. He did talk about events that took place in the region long ago, but I cannot recall each one at present. However, I can talk a little about the structure of my village—how we lived and what occurred earlier.

Q: Was there somebody in your family who liked to sing? Was there a singer in your family?

#49M: My father loved to sing very much.

Q: Did you learn the songs from your father that you know?

00:27:36

#49M: I did not particularly learn them from my father as such. I picked them up automatically as my father sang. It was natural and not like these days when one has to be taught. If there was a dance session in the village, everyone came to watch, be they young or old, man or woman, for there was no other form of entertainment. So everyone learned it since we all lived in the same village. Unlike here, where except for the younger generation, the elders come from different regions [of Tibet] with different customs. Everyone learned it that way, though it depended on one's attention and the level of intelligence. It was like that in the village.

Q: Can you describe different kinds of occasions, different kinds of situations where people would sing?

#49M: First there was the song in praise of the lamas. Then there were dances. Whether it was a wedding or a party, people drank *chang* 'home-brewed beer' and tea and enjoyed themselves by dancing in a circle and singing melodious songs. This custom is not continued these days. While harvesting the crops, there was a different song. And there is a song which is sung during churning of the curd. In my village we did not use the big churners, but churners which were carried by men. So, five or six men sang a song on this occasion. There was a song for every occasion. The songs had similar words but different tunes.

Q: Do you have a favorite song?

00:30:22

#49M: Due to advancing age, I have forgotten the songs and also because I do not sing often. I used to love singing. There was no song that I did not like. I find my singing melodious while others might not understand the words and might or might not find it melodious. There were lovely songs in my village.

Q: We would very, very much like to hear you singing a song. Perhaps we could start with a milking song. Could we hear a milking song?

#49M: If you ask me to sing, I have to. I have come here for that purpose and it is not right if I do not sing, when I know a song. Shall I sing now? When you start to milk the *dri* 'female yak' you sing:

***Dri dhu lo thang dhu lo* [explains] you are describing the color of the dri**

Dhu lo

Mar senchu thang kunchok

Bholgyur yin

***Chop chop chop* [explains] thus you keep milking**

[Milking the young dri

Whose yellow butter [I] offer to the Gods]

It's very melodious, really a melodious song.

Q: Could you sing a little more?

00:31:43

#49M: *Dri dhu lo thang dhu lo* [moves hands in milking gesture]

***Karma kyoe* [explains] that's the color**

Karma kyoe

Pangser moetang sertsa thang sa dhue te

Phu shonpa dha nangwa kyipo jung

[*Milking the brown dri*

When [it] feeds on the meadow

[I] the young man feels happy]

Q: What does that mean?

#49M: It means when you [meaning the *dri*] eat the *pangtsa* 'grass in the pasture' I [the herder] am happy. When we get *mar* 'butter' we offer it to *kunchok* 'God,' which is great. The song has many words but I have forgotten them now. It's been many years since I sang and I am also at an advanced age now. Since Tibet was invaded, [I have not sung].

Q: It's a very good song. Could you sing us another song that is sung on another occasion?

00:33:04

#49M: I will sing a song of religion.

***Gangchen Bhod kyi tenpa* [explains] Tibet's dharma has not been touched**

Dha la la thupa la mindu

Gyalwala Tenzin Gyatso

Serti teng dhu shuk yoe

Yultri teng dhu la shuk yoe

Jang ga la ya la phu ni

Ama le wo jandhue la mala nang jung

Sundue kye la la ghong ney

Rang yul la tey ney lo doe go

[*The dharma of Tibet*

Cannot be overcome

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Is sitting on the golden throne

Is sitting on the turquoise throne

[I] made a khata offering

And received a blessed cord

Wearing the protective cord on the neck

[I] will go back to [my] land]

That's how it is sung. It's very good. The dharma of Tibet has not been vanquished. No one, not even if the fathers of China invade us, would they be able to do that. We have the reincarnation of the Chenrezig [Avalokitesvara, the patron saint of Tibet, reincarnated as His Holiness the Dalai Lama] in flesh and blood in the land of Tibet and there is none like this Buddha anywhere in the world. Really, there is none like him. We have someone like him, which is why they [the Chinese] have not been able to destroy [Tibet]. The Chinese are so evil that they did such things to us mindlessly. They will naturally do bad things because, poor things, they are made up like that. The dharma of Tibet has not been destroyed and one day we will return along with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: Any other? A harvest song?

#49M: When we harvested, [starts to sing]

Dhi nay rang yul kyi sho [moves hands as if cutting plants]
Mi yul ta lay la la goe song la
Lay la koe yul la mi yul
Mi kyi shu sa la min dhuk
Mi kyi shu sa la min dhuk

[*The happiest [place] is your village*
But your destiny is an alien land
That is what you have been destined
One cannot complain that one is not happy]

[Explains the meaning of the song] You are happy in your village but your village is lost. Your fate is in a foreign village and you cannot complain that it is not a happy land. There are many such songs. This is a song sung in Tibet and not one that I made up. I am not capable enough to invent such a song.

[After the interview, Palden Chonphel explained that this song used to be sung by women who left their village to marry someone in another village.]

Q: Could we hear a love song?

00:36:28

#49M: [Laughs] I will recite a few lines.

Kyoe ni nga la dhung dhung
Nga ni kyoe la dhung dhung
Wo rang dhung dhung nyi po
Dhung kor cha chik nyoe go

[*You fell in love with me*
I fell in love with you
Let us both
Buy a pair of shells]

In my village we used to wear a *dhung* 'shell,' which I think is worn in many places.

[Interviewee sings the following song]

Kyoe ni ni nga la ga jung
Nga ni kyoe la la ga jung
Wo rang la kar kar la nyi po
Ka yul la cha chik nyoe go
Ka yul cha chik nyoe go

[*You fell in love with me*
I fell in love with you.
Let us both
Buy a pair of cups
Buy a pair of cups]

Q: Was there a song that was sung when you were just out with the animals in the grasslands?

#49M: When we went out with the animals, people used to sing *khamlu* but not many people sang it.

Q: Do you know that?

00:38:03

#49M: I used to know a few but to tell you, if I sang everyday, I think I might be able to recall the words. Now it is quite sudden and if I remember the tune, I would have forgotten the words. I am getting older and it has been so many years since I left [Tibet]. Therefore I find it hard to recall, though there is one I can sing.

[Tries to recall words of song] **I have completely forgotten it because I did not care [to sing it].**

Q: Do you know any songs of the sixth Dalai Lama?

#49M: I do not know which Dalai Lama it was but I do know a song.

Q: Could you sing that?

#49M: [Tries to remember]

Q: Do you know the Pema Thang?

00:39:43

#49M: No, I do not know the Pema Thang. [Still trying to recall the earlier song]

Q: That's okay. We can do it later when you remember it.

#49M: Okay.

Q: If you can think of more categories and then later, even another day we can do some more. You talked [during the pre-interview] about a tradition in your village about not allowing women, monks and yaks into the village after noon time in summer. We would be very interested to know more about this.

00:41:00

#49M: Yes, in our village after the fields were sown in summer, monks, women and yaks were never permitted to enter for half a day. They were not allowed to come in after the seeds had germinated into plants. The reason for not allowing them in was that it would start to hail. I do not know how, but it would start to hail and that was very dangerous. Once it hails, all the crops would be destroyed. That was extremely dangerous.

Q: Are you talking about women, monks and yaks from other villages or would you also not allow women, monks and yaks from your own village to come in?

#49M: It was the same irrespective of where they came from. They were allowed in before noon, but after mid-day they were not permitted to enter, wherever they came from. For example, if today they were arriving from Mundgod, Camp Number 1 is the border area and so they had to halt beyond that [Camp Number 1] and were not allowed to proceed further. If a person who was ignorant about the law entered, he was penalized. However, people who lived around the region and knew the law did not venture in, but halted at the border for the rest of the day.

The person [who entered the village after noon time] had to take the responsibility for the year's [loss]. He had to take the entire responsibility of the village for the year and no one could do that. The whole year [harvest] was lost when the damage occurred from the sky. If the hail fell, it destroyed the crops. The plants would be bearing grains and all the grains fell.

Q: Did such a thing ever happen?

00:43:37

#49M: I do not know if it happened because people entered the village but hailstorms did occur.

Q: Did it ever happen that it hailed after monks and animals crossed the border into the village?

#49M: It happened a long time ago. However, I cannot say that it hailed after the people entered the village, but it did hail at times.

Q: It hailed even if people did not enter [the village]?

00:43:58

#49M: It could be the result of the protective deities' likes or dislikes. People believed a lot in the protective deities in those days. On the day of sowing, the whole village went to the designated place to offer prayers to the protective deities and request them to protect the crops from harm. The prayers went on for a full day, attended by all the people of the village. Then they enjoyed themselves, drank tea and flew prayer flags. That was the custom.

It was fine if one arrived during the earlier part of the day [into the village]. However horses and men could enter [at any time]. I do not know the origin but the gist was the hailstorm destroying the crops. Tibetan tradition was held in high esteem from generation to generation. So people did not arrive [in the village during the inauspicious time] except visitors from outside. Those who knew about the tradition did not come.

Q: What punishment would people receive if they crossed this boundary during this time?

#49M: For me to tell you about it, this has never happened. Besides the people of the village, people from the surrounding regions too did not come [after the inauspicious time into the village]. The rule was very strictly observed unlike here. These days a bad person would surely arrive. As far as I can remember nobody turned up. And nobody told me stories about it having happened in the past.

Q: Everybody in the surrounding villages knew about this rule?

00:46:55

#49M: They knew because this rule pertained to many generations. This was not a rule which existed for a generation or two but was made many generations ago. So nobody ever came. It [the rule] applied to only about four months in summer. People were free to come anytime of the day or even at night during winter and other times. Nobody came during the time [the rule was in force].

Q: Was this rule in force just in your village or in all of the villages around?

#49M: I know this rule does not exist in Zonkha but I do not know about Danya village. The region further to that was Changthang 'Northern Desert' and there were no farms, so the rule did not apply. The name of the rule was *nakdhong* and I think the nomads normally considered it inauspicious for women to arrive anytime after noon. The elders used to talk about such stories. They did consider it an ill omen for women to come during the latter half of the day. They did not like it. The name *nakdhong*, I think might mean "to stop all kinds of *nak* 'black.'"

Q: No problem with *dri*?

00:49:20

#49M: *Dri* and yak are the same animals. Yaks [and *dri*] and women were not allowed. However sheep were an exception as well as men and horses. I cannot explain why.

Q: It was the same problem for the *dri*, yak and *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow'?

#49M: Yes, it was. However horses, sheep and men did not pose this problem. I do not know why.

Q: Nuns?

00:49:51

#49M: Nuns were not allowed to enter.

Q: How come monks were not allowed?

#49M: I do not know the reason. All things considered black were not allowed. I do not know the reason why. They [monks] were also considered black though I do not know why. If they [women, yaks, nuns, monks] came, it was certain to hail that year.

Q: How long did it take to get to the nearest village from your village?

00:50:32

#49M: It was three days' journey. It took three days if you traveled to Zongkha and three days to Tanka.

Q: Walking or on horseback?

#49M: Walking. We walked and drove the yaks along.

Q: I am still a little bit curious about this law. How was it enforced? Were there people posted around the border of the village or was it just assumed that nobody would enter?

00:51:07

#49M: No, no, there was no one [around the border]. That [the law] was there since long ago and later nobody came to our village. If a stranger passed by, people would warn him not to enter and nobody did. I do not know why. There was no one posted to stop people. Since the time I can remember I have never heard of anyone arriving and having been fined for it in my village. Actually our village's location was in a remote area so that not many passed by.

Q: Where was the boundary?

#49M: There were two groups of villages. For example, like Camp Number 3 [Mundgod] and another camp here. The two groups consisted of 60 families, though I am not exactly certain; perhaps even about 80.

Q: If I was a woman in your village and I went wandering off one day to do something and then I came back afternoon, would I face a problem then?

00:53:10

#49M: If she knew she would reach in the evening, she must understand it and come the next morning. Even people belonging to the village were not allowed to come. If a woman arrived driving a yak, she will make it before the [earlier] half of the day and will not come in the afternoon. Naturally residents of the village must observe the rule. Whether it was bringing the yaks in or people coming, they would do it before noon and nobody came after that.

Q: I am saying that if I did do it, even though I knew I shouldn't. But if there is nobody enforcing this rule, if there is nobody watching, then how do you know?

#49M: The rule was there. If it was someone from another village, she might not know but a woman of our village knew it. However, people from the surrounding villages knew about it [the rule]. The name of our village was Khalung and it was popularly understood that nobody entered Khalung after half a day. That was acknowledged.

In case a man came with a yak or a host of women visitors arrived from another village, they would be informed not to come after half the day was over. Normally nobody ever came [after the particular hours]. For around four months, nobody ever came.

Q: So it seems like the biggest problem with the harvest and the crops was the hail. It seems like hail was a very serious issue?

00:55:25

#49M: Yes, hail was the most serious problem. Water was available. Though manual labor was not deemed as difficult, however, feeding water to the crops was not as easy since one was required to get up in the night to channel water. That was because there was not sufficient water, which had to be shared among many farms.

Q: How did you feed water?

#49M: One must feed water to the fields by digging a canal.

Q: Where did the water come from?

00:55:45

#49M: There were water bodies in the region. Water was found aplenty in Tibet. Water [from the main body] was fed [to the fields] from many directions; from the right and from the left. We took turns in channeling water to our crops.

Q: So you did not face any water problems?

#49M: No, there was no problem due to water scarcity, but one must feed the water early so as to complete the work. That and the hail were our problems. Other than that unlike here, we did not face the problem of softening the soil or fertilizing the fields because the water brought fertile black soil with it and covered the whole area.

Q: You mentioned a special ceremony that you did to protect the crops from bad weather, can you describe that ceremony?

00:57:21

#49M: As I told you earlier, there was a person who could stop hail. He was from Danag, from a family who performed this for generations. He lives in the Tibetan Settlement in Orissa [India]. He was a *serkempa*, a married man and a renowned *ngagpa* 'shaman.' He was invited and then all the people of our village assembled.

Q: Where did he come from?

#49M: He came from the place called Danag. He could stop the hail. He possessed a curved tool called *ratsap*, which resembled a knife in shape and was made of wood. Since he did not live in our village, he blessed this tool by reciting a *ngag* 'mantra' over it. Then the person [of the village] whose turn it was to keep watch over the fields did so [armed with the *ratsap*] and it did not hail. There was also a conch, which if you blew, it [the hail] went away. That was how he stopped hail from falling. I told you earlier about the *chontham*, when we made offerings to the gods requesting them to protect our fields for the summer and then the people made merry and enjoyed the day. Who else would one ask for protection if not the protective deities? The shaman was very accomplished for if it looked like a hailstorm was imminent and people feared the worst, he could ward it off.

Q: What was the carving [on the tool] of?

01:00:01

#49M: The wood [tool] was very ancient. It looked like a curved knife, like the ones the *lhamo* 'opera' performers carry. It was called a *ratsap*. It was made of wood and blessed with the mantra since ages. It was not a knife but [a piece of] wood.

Q: What was the carving of? What was the image on the carving? Was it words? Was it a picture? What was it? Was it a person?

#49M: *Ngag* 'mantra' words were written on it.

Q: Was it Sanskrit?

01:00:49

#49M: It was *ngag* in the Tibetan script. The whole family was very adept at *ngag*.

Q: How big was this piece of wood?

#49M: The wood was about this big [shows left arm in a curved position]. It was shaped so, like my arm. It was not very thick.

[Interpreter]: And it looked like a knife.

Q: It looked like a knife?

01:01:25

#49M: Yes.

Q: And the writing is on the blade?

#49M: Yes, the *ngag* was written on it. It was kept wrapped in a cloth and was not taken out often. I have seen it when it was taken out during the prayers.

Q: This is really interesting. When the *ngagpa* would show the carving to the sky, can you show us the action that he made?

01:02:21

#49M: If the *ngagpa* was present, he would blow the conch and show the "knife" [moves right hand in air] in a gesture as if to ask it [the hailstorm] to go away. He blew the conch and it went away. If he was not there [at the village], the "knife" and the conch were left behind. The *ngagpa* could not stay but went away to this monastery, which was at a distance of three days' journey. He returned to his home. Once he had warded off [the hail], it did not fall again.

There were times, as it happens here too, when it does not rain for a long time and at such times, it hailed. Under such circumstances, there was a certain dance called the *gyatak*, which was performed only at another area since this dance was not allowed to be danced in the village.

Q: When he showed the wooden thing to the sky, can you show us what he did? Can you physically show us what he did?

#49M: This is how he showed the wood [moves outstretched right arm in a semi-circular motion] towards every direction. He did not hold it like this [making a fist] but like this [palm outstretched]. The conch is blown slowly as if showing the way.

Q: When he held the wooden thing, can you show us; did he do this? What did he do? Can you show us? Because I can't see it in my mind, you can.

01:04:54

#49M: That is what I just showed you. He moved his hand like this [moves outstretched right arm around]. He murmured his prayers and blew air from his mouth. The direction was always like this [moving arm towards the right] and not like this [towards the left].

Q: Did you ever see a time when there was hail and the *ngagpa* actually stopped the hail with this ceremony?

#49M: Before a hailstorm, when black clouds were seen in the sky, the conch was immediately sounded. If he [the *ngagpa*] was not present, we [the villagers] had to do it.

[Question is repeated.]

01:06:02

#49M: Once it has started to hail for sometime, it must be difficult to control. We kept watching and could see and would know if a hailstorm was on the way because the sky filled with black clouds. That was the time to stop it. If it was stopped at this point, it did not hail. Maybe in a certain year, we might miss seeing it come due to certain unfortunate things, but otherwise, it [the hail] was successfully stopped. Crops are very important and this did not concern just one person but a whole village, so a man was appointed to keep watch. Then it was warded off.

In general it rains in summer and clouds are there in the sky. But the clouds [of rain and hail] were different. It [the hail bearing cloud] was black and looked like a cloud of dust. So when that was seen, there was nothing to do but ward it off.

Q: How did you know whether it was hail that was going to come or rain? The clouds would get grey or the clouds would gather? What was the sign that there was going to be a hailstorm rather than just rain?

#49M: The clouds were different.

Q: Can you describe the difference?

01:08:21

#49M: The clouds either looked like a dust storm or were black. Normally when it rained the clouds are grey and then the rain falls. It was not like that [during a hailstorm] and it came at full force.

Q: Would everybody in the village come out to watch this ceremony when it occurred?

#49M: At first when the prayers were offered, everybody came. However if the hail had to be warded off, only one person was required. There was nothing for everyone to do.

Q: So everybody assembled for the prayers for a good harvest?

01:09:18

#49M: Yes, they did. Take for example, Camp Number 3 here [Mundgod]; every family must attend the ceremony in their best clothes. The place [of ceremony] for the protective deities was at quite a distance. In the olden days in Tibet, prayer flags used to be flown, *solka* 'prayers for well-being and good fortune' offered and people stayed there and enjoyed the whole day. That was a sort of plea to the gods. Prayers were recited and drums beaten. Then [someone] blew on the conch and the "knife." However they [the conch and the "knife"] did not have to be used on this day. [The *ngagpa*] would have instructed the people to use it when the sky looked ready for a hailstorm. He [*ngagpa*] did not stay back but had to leave for his home.

Q: Do you remember any of the prayers that you did with the village around this weather?

#49M: That was the usual *solka* prayers with *serkim*. However I do not know what prayers the *ngagpa* chanted. The main prayer was seeking protection from the local deities.

Q: Do you remember the name of the protector of your village?

01:12:10

#49M: The name of one was Choedhay and the one to whom we offered prayer was called Ama. Ama is also known as Tsendupun and our prayers were offered to Ama Tsendupun-sum.

Q: Can you describe what she looked like?

#49M: I have not seen his photograph. The one who performed the *solka* prayers might have it. However the place [of prayer offerings] was a *tsekhang* [a tiny cell]. There used to be big stones in Tibet which were piled to form a mound and a prayer flag was mounted on it. This has been in existence since generations. It was located behind a rock.

Q: It was a female protector though, Ama?

01:12:47

#49M: [Continues without listening to question] Photographs were rare in those days. There might have been a picture of it with the elders, but I was a child at that time and did not see one for me to recount what the protective deity looked like. There might have been a picture, even if it was a hand drawing. In those days in Tibet most pictures were hand drawn ones. I cannot describe it as I have not seen a picture.

[Question is repeated.]

#49M: It was a *tse*.

Q: What gender was a *tse*?

01:14:12

#49M: I do not know what gender they are. During the prayer ceremony to it, no meat was allowed. We offered dairy items like curds and others. Besides drinking delicious tea, people were not allowed to indulge in certain activities.

Q: You ate meat rest of the time?

[Interpreter]: They ate meat the rest of the time, but not during the ceremony.

Q: Ama Tsendupun. What does this mean? Does it have a meaning? Mother [*Ama*], I know.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Pun* means brother. Perhaps [it means] mother and three brothers. I feel like that but I am not sure. He [interviewee] also does not describe anything about it.

Q: Did you sometimes go out into the fields with the *ngagpa* and saw him do this special "knife" wielding ceremony? Did you see him do this?

#49M: I have gone there. If my father was home, he went and if he was not, I had to attend it. I used to go. If there were only women in a family, a woman attended, but normally it was the men who went.

Q: Were women not allowed to attend?

01:16:08

#49M: Women were allowed but normally they did not attend. A woman went [for the ceremony] only in the absence of a man in the family.

Q: How long did the ceremony take—the *ngagpa* ceremony?

#49M: It took a whole day. It was not simple at all. Of course one had to walk for quite a distance. It might be the distance from here to Camp Number 6 [?]. In those days one walked as there was no path for horses.

Q: To reach the place of ceremony?

01:17:00

#49M: Yes, one had to walk across hills and stay there the whole day. From whatever time we reached in the morning, we spent the rest of the day there.

Q: How long did the prayer last?

#49M: He [the *ngagpa*] continued to recite *solka* the whole day with a break for food, of course. The people drank tea and said their prayers. Those who knew the *solka* prayers joined him [the *ngagpa*] and those who did not just stayed there, eating and talking. It took a whole day.

Q: When the *ngagpa* was out in the field doing this more secret ceremony, how long did that take, that part of it?

[Interpreter]: The whole day.

Q: So you would spend sometimes the whole day in the field with the *ngagpa*?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not sometimes but only once before the crops were sown.

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father' said that he went a few times with the *ngagpa* and saw the ceremony in the field.

01:18:38

#49M: I have been about three times when my father was unable to attend.

Q: This particular part of the ceremony, I am not talking about when the *ngagpa* is with the villagers and the whole drinking and praising the protector, not that part but the part that the *ngagpa* actually goes to the fields and does this thing with the knife that you are describing. How long does that part of the ceremony take?

#49M: That [part of the ceremony] was only done when a hailstorm was likely to come and not otherwise.

Q: How long will he do it?

01:19:19

#49M: He will do it until he is satisfied that it [the hailstorm] has gone away. If he leaves it [the ceremony] before he is satisfied, it [the hailstorm] might turn back. He continued to do it until it passed away and he was fully satisfied. There was no minute or hour limit [to the ceremony].

Q: So when you were watching this, when the *ngagpa* was doing this ceremony in the field, can you describe what you saw happen in the sky?

#49M: It was definite that there was a change [in the sky]. If it does not change we would not be able to see it. That was certain that there would be a change. The *ngagpa* was really great.

Q: No, No, I am not questioning it. I am just asking to describe what you saw. What did you see? What happened in the sky?

01:20:49

#49M: When the dark sky [clouds] started to approach, the *ngagpa* might not be available; if he was, he would do the needed [ceremony], however one of our man was present. If the hail was seen approaching, every person in the village was scared. He [the man in charge] waved [the wooden knife] and gradually it [the hail bearing dark clouds] went away. Sometimes it moved away to another region or towards deserted areas.

Q: Was there any time that it didn't work?

#49M: I do not remember much but my parents told me about it. It happened once during my father's lifetime. I heard that once they had to go to do the dance at the Zonkha and other villages. He told me that he went once for that. I do not know how it happened but I was not told if it [hailed] due to visitors. However, it was possible for it to occur once in a while even after trying to stop it.

Q: Where did the *ngagpa* live?

01:22:45

#49M: Danag. There were many people in Danag.

Q: Was it a village?

#49M: It was a large town.

Q: How many families lived there?

1:22:57

#49M: There might have been many families but I do not know the exact figure. It was a large town.

Q: So this village was the one that was three days by foot?

#49M: If one rode a horse, one could reach sooner, but by walking it took about three days.

Q: Did it take three days by horse?

01:23:19

#49M: No, one could reach it in a day and a half by horse.

Q: I am a little bit confused. If it took that long to come; you said by horse one and a half days and I am assuming the *ngagpa* rode a horse, that's one and a half days that it would take him. So if you saw clouds gathering and it looked like it was going to hail, wasn't that a sort of long time that it would take him? You have to send a message to the *ngagpa*, "we need you to come because it's going to hail." How did that work?

#49M: No, nobody called him [ngagpa]. There was no need to call him. He was never called.

[Interpreter]: There was no need to call him because the things [the ritual implements] were kept at the village for a period of four months. Anybody could use those things.

01:24:35

#49M: Actually there was no time to call him because it [the hailstorm] arrives in an hour or two. It was over by then. It would be impossible to ward it off. There was no time to call him [laughs].

Q: So in the beginning the *ngagpa* would arrive and do the ceremony when the farming started and then pass on the ritual implements to the others. What did the *ngagpa* look like?

#49M: The *ngagpa* dressed in the *ngagpa* attire. It was a sort of monk's robe.

Q: Was it a monk's robe?

1:25:46

#49M: It was not exactly a monk's robe but sort of a *may-yo* 'wrap-around skirt' with a cloth wrapped on the top. They did not wear the complete monk costume.

Q: Did he have hair?

#49M: No, he did not have [long] hair. The *ngagpa* that lived in Danag had shaven head. He performed a lot of *cham* 'religious dance performance by monks' and was powerful enough to pick up heated pots. It was the *ngagpa* who our village invited that could perform it and our village did not invite any other [*ngagpa*] from Danag. Being a *ngagpa* was a tradition for this family, a large family with many children and relatives that had carried it down since generations. He performed the *cham* and was very powerful. He would lick pots which had been heated red and dance with it in his hands. He possessed extremely potent mantra strength.

Q: Did you see this?

01:27:43

#49M: I did not go [to watch the performance] but many people from my village used to go. The *cham* required that they do it [lick the heated pots].

Q: He used to do that? Was it like a long...?

#49M: No, it was not a knife. It was called *changkey*, a stove on which a pot was placed. Just like we have the round stove here [in Mundgod]. He placed a heated pot on it [the stove] and performed the *cham* carrying it in his hands. That's what I was told. He then licked the pot. There is no need to describe the power of his mantra. Hailstorms occurred only due to certain broken vows or obstacles, otherwise it was impossible. The power of the mantra was definite.

Q: Did this *ngagpa* service a number of villages?

01:29:28

#49M: I do not know about other villages. He might not but I am not certain. He did it for our village.

Q: Did he come to stay in your village?

#49M: Of course he came to our village. He came around the 4th month when the sowing was to commence. He came every year. We had to go to [his village to] escort him. As for his remuneration, we did not have money then like now and I suppose he was paid in grains, but I was too young then to know how much he was paid as the adults took care of that. He had to be treated grandly. It was not so simple to invite him nor would he come just like that.

Q: In your village who were the people who made the decisions for everybody else?

01:30:38

#49M: The bigger [wealthier] family did it. In our village it was the Khatem Barro family. Sometimes people took turns but mostly it was that one family. His name was Phuntsok Rabten. He acted as the District Administrator as he was the richest person. However just

because he was in charge did not mean that he took complete power over everything. If any decision had to be made, though there was not many occasions when such decisions had to be made, except for collection of taxes and that was decided collectively. Normally he was in charge.

Q: Khatem Ba[rro] is a title, like a village leader?

[Interpreter]: He was the supreme leader of your village. Was he appointed by the Tibetan government or by the villagers?

#49M: The villagers selected him because we required a good person in the event that the village had to approach officials at the district level. Lungti Amchay was the head of the other division of our village. In case they were occupied elsewhere, a person who was more knowledgeable and spoke well was sent to meet the officials.

Q: So Khatem Ba[rro] is a title, not a name?

[Interpreter]: Not a name. It's a title.

Q: When you said that he was appointed...elected? They won't just sit around and discuss and say this guy will be the best guy. How did that decision take place?

01:33:13

#49M: He was always the leader and there was no election as such. He was from a rich family and it was trusted that he would not do anything adverse. So I think he remained a leader just like his forefathers. We did not have the system of voting in those days. I think most of the time the Tibetan custom was such that all the various heads like *gopa*, *genchen* and *kyichap* continued from father to son. However at the Zonkha, we had the *tsorpon* who was elected. Except for that I think in most of the villages it was similar, though I am not certain. There was a village called Telwa, their leader descended from a good lineage.

Those that were the leaders did not indulge in negative activities; they were stable and very just and acted fairly. They could be trusted and relied upon by the poor families. They were able to continue as leaders because they could be trusted and not because they could not be changed or people did not want change.

Q: Was there like a village counsel? Were there other people that worked with him or was he the only authority?

#49M: The other people with him [the leader] were the smarter residents of the village. Everybody [in the village] assembled and discussed [when there was an issue]. Just like at present, anyone could give his suggestions. Our village was obliged to pay a form of labor tax at the Zongkha which was at a distance of two or three days' journey. The duration [of the labor tax] was two months each in summer and autumn. So a capable person from our village was requested to undertake the job and was paid for it. The leader did not have to go on such duties. During a meeting one could say whatever one wished to say and nobody

stopped you.

Q: When you said that you invited the *ngagpa* to come, how is the invitation made? Did somebody just get on the horse and ride to his village? How would you communicate with him if he lived a day and a half travel away? Somebody would have to go and invite him on a horse, I would imagine?

01:36:55

#49M: It mainly depended on the availability of his [the *ngagpa*'s] horse, which he rode [to the village] and if he did not have his horse, we had to go to invite him. In case he had his horse, either a letter or a message was sent across to invite him over. Otherwise, a horse was sent. If his horse was used, I suppose the offering was more expensive.

Q: Did someone go to invite him?

#49M: At times a person must go with a horse to invite him.

Q: Did one of the leaders go to invite him?

01:37:21

#49M: Anyone could go.

Q: In 1954 you noticed some Chinese coming on horseback?

#49M: I think it was around 1956. [Counting the years] We escaped in 1959. No, it was in '47 or '48 that they arrived. It was in '59 that we escaped. Yes, yes, it was around '57 that I saw them at Zongkha.

Q: We have '54 written here [on the pre-interview form].

01:38:19

#49M: Then that must be '54.

Q: Were they the military or civilians?

#49M: They were not the military but inspectors. We did not have any knowledge about them nor did we have any contact with them as we did not know the language. They were gentle and just strolled around and stayed at the District [area]. What they did was ride on their horses the whole day. They did not levy any taxes on us and just went about their way. However children, as well as adults, used to be scared of them. Looking back I realize that they were not going to do anything. They had cameras with them and took photographs. They had binoculars which they aimed at the mountains and they went everywhere. At that time they arrived at the Zongkha. They were around 13 of them. They had a translator with them. They stayed for over a month.

Q: Do you want to talk to us about what you saw at the road construction—Tibetan workers at the road construction?

01:40:07

#49M: Regarding the road construction; the main reason we were forced to escape was that they [the Chinese] started road construction. As I told you earlier we [the villagers] were obliged to go on a labor tax to Zongkha at a distance of about two to three days' journey. Seven men, 15 yaks and three horses from our village had to work the whole summer and winter for the Tibetan government. Even though our village was in a remote region, we had to provide labor tax.

The winter tax was in the 12th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar and I heard that there were innumerable people on the road gang. Many of them had been brought from the lower regions of Tibet and some of them said that they had been working since four or five months; some for two or three months, while some said that they had been promised to be relieved in a week or two, but had not been let off.

Men did not have enough to eat and they were emaciated. They were very scared and weak. Some said, "We have children and parents and have heard nothing about them." There were no telephones then as we have these days. According to them [the Chinese], it was, "stay for one more week and then you will be let off and can go back home" and they kept extending the time.

So the seven men, 15 yaks and three horses of our village were there and the person who led them was told, "You alone cannot be of much help to the country. Go back to your village and collect horses, yaks and men, irrespective of whether they are rich or knowledgeable and bring them here. And you must come back because everyone is constructing roads. It is imperative that you return here." He said, "I will collect the men but I must be excused." If it was the normal labor tax, it was time for them to return home. "It has been so long here and we are weak people. The best men and the wealthy ones are back in the village. I will gather them but you must excuse me [from coming back]."

The Chinese had not yet come to our village and therefore had no knowledge of its location. He [the group leader] was asked as to how many days it would take him [to reach his village and back]. He replied that it would take him around 15 days. He lied and deceived him [the Chinese]. So he came back [to the village] and we assembled that evening. That was around '57-'58 and we had been hearing about the atrocities of the Chinese and all the people were frightened [makes gesture of shivering with fright] and preparing to flee but nobody managed to escape.

"If we do flee, the two divisions of the village must discuss and take flight. It will be futile to stay back for the sake of our wealth and animals. If you wish to remain, it's best to jump in the river. Everybody, men, yaks and horses, must escape." So the meeting was held one night after the man [leader of the labor tax group] had returned. So everybody discussed and agreed to flee. If the wealthy families wished to leave, so did the poor families. We all left together in one group. That was the worst time of the year. We left on the 29th day of the 12th lunar month.

[Interpreter seeks some clarifications from the interviewee to translate the above statements.]

Q: This person who did this, was he the Khaten Ba[rro]?

#49M: He was called Lobsang Tenzin. His son lives in [the Tibetan Settlement] in Kollegal [India]. He was later killed at the border, I do not know whether by the Chinese or others. He helped us a lot. Had he not told us what to do, we would have fallen into Chinese hands. Our village was isolated and the Chinese were certain to come there one day. He did a good thing by coming back to the village and telling us, "If you wish, let us escape. Working at the road construction is not a pleasant job at all. Innumerable people are there who mentioned being there for one, two, four or five months. They have come leaving behind their little children and aged parents. They are being promised to be let off in a day or two or a week but are actually being deceived. It is up to you if you wish to escape or not. We will be leaving behind our wealth if we flee but at least we will be saved." That was the reason we fled. His name was Lobsang Tenzin.

Q: Lobsang Tenzin, was he from that wealthy family who was in charge of the village? Or was he from a different family?

01:49:45

#49M: He belonged to a modest family and was one of the best speakers. Since many years he went as the head of the group who went to work for [labor] tax. He was a good man. Though he was not from a wealthy family, his was a modest one.

Q: How many families were in your village? How many families lived in your village?

#49M: As I told you earlier there might have been about 60 families. If we included all the families in both the divisions [of our village], it was around 70 to 80 families.

Q: From all those families, how many families chose to go with Lobsang Tenzin, approximately?

01:51:24

#49M: The whole village escaped.

Q: All the eighty families?

#49M: A few families had second thoughts and went back permanently. Otherwise it was the whole village that escaped. Then gradually, from time to time many people returned.

Q: Because the journey was so hard? Why did they return?

01:51:55

#49M: Some returned because of hardships on the journey. There was no food for the poor people to eat and besides they had many children with them. A few families who were more economically sound came a little way and then I do not know what they thought but they went back. In such circumstances there was no one to ask them to come, as each one had to fend for himself.

Q: If an average family was seven members or something, you are saying that almost 80 families [left together], we are talking about 500 people approximately.

#49M: I think there were around 300 people, though I am not sure of the exact figure. That was the number when we left the village, but on the way a family or two kept going back at intervals. I have no idea how many were left or went back.

Q: Approximately how many were left?

01:53:14

#49M: Seven or eight families might have gone back.

Q: The rest of them returned?

#49M: Six, seven or eight families might have gone back but the rest continued.

Q: You mean except for seven the rest went back?

01:53:22

#49M: No, no. Seven or eight [families] might have gone back. I do not know how many members or how many families, but the rest reached Mustang [Nepal] and then everyone scattered and I have no knowledge where they went.

Q: When Lobsang Tenzin came back with this information, did he call everybody in the village to come and listen to what he had to say, his idea that now we should leave?

#49M: He called a meeting and a discussion was held. He gave an option. "If we escape we must do it soon, else I will be captured and if we decide not to flee, you must go tomorrow itself [to the road construction site]." He said it was most urgent. He had lied that a distance of three days' journey would take him at least 15 days or 20 to reach. It was very fortunate that a Chinese did not accompany him, for if so we would have been caught.

Q: Lobsang Tenzin, he was not a monk?

01:55:20

#49M: No, he has a child who lives in Kollegal.

[Interpreter incorrectly says, "He {Lobsang Tenzin} stays in Kollegal."]

Q: I thought you said he died.

#49M: He is dead. His child lives in Kollegal. Let alone reaching India, he did not even reach the Nepali border. He was killed later by the Chinese or someone else; I have no knowledge since we dispersed in different directions.

Q: Can you describe a little bit of the journey because this is a lot of people who are traveling all in one group. Did you split up into smaller groups or did you stay together?

01:56:47

#49M: We were very stupid and started out like that [in a large group]. We were scared that we'd be pursued and we did not have any experience. Had they [the Chinese] come, they could have easily captured us. They did send spies and a person from Zongkha arrived.

Q: Was the spy a Tibetan?

#49M: A Tibetan was sent. He came along with 12-13 Chinese soldiers. There was a terrible snow fall at a difficult mountain pass. We had never been there before and it burnt our eyes. When they [the Chinese soldiers and the Tibetan] reached this area, they looked through binoculars [at the escaping group]. He [the Tibetan] could see that it [the large moving group] consisted of humans and animals. Costumes differed slightly from region to region and he noticed that it [the group] looked like us [from our village].

First the Chinese officer looked through the binoculars and then the interpreter and finally he [the Tibetan] was asked to look. They were the only three who looked through the binoculars while there were 12-13 soldiers. He [the Tibetan] innocently and truthfully said, "Those look like humans but I do not know from which area." The interpreter said, "Really? It cannot be. How can it be?" I met this man [the Tibetan] in Manali later and he told me [this story] when I reached there in '58.

The Chinese officer and the interpreter once again looked. He [the Tibetan] told them, "I have never looked through binoculars before and it seems like humans to me. I wonder what it is." A doubt crept into his mind and he did not want to push his opinion too far. He could not insist against the officer's words, not because he loved us, but for his own good.

The officer again took a look, said something and shook his head. Then the interpreter took a look and asked him to do it too. He [the Tibetan] said, "I do not think [they are humans]. It is some sort of dark shadow in the snow. It looks different from what it did earlier. I cannot be sure." The interpreter said, "No, those are not humans. You must never say such things. More so do not ever mention such things at the Zongkha, otherwise it will be the end of all three of us. You must be honest and tell the truth. He is a high officer with a lot of experience and he says it is not [humans] and I too think likewise."

I do not know who saved us but that was what happened. We were in extreme danger. It was snowing and the incline was very steep. Perhaps they did not want to risk climbing down [after us]. The Gods stopped them and that was how we could escape. Then there was nobody pursuing us and the caravan moved on.

Q: So didn't you set up camp at night?

01:59:23

#49M: We did not actually make camp. We traveled during the day and rested for a few hours and moved on. Most of the animals died; the sheep died, the yaks died. They were exhausted. We could not find any water in some regions; in some there was no grass. So in this way we came stumbling to Derkhang.

Q: So what time of the year was this?

#49M: [Continues without listening to question] This man [the Tibetan in the Chinese group] escaped from Zongkha. He had reached India before I did. I met him at Manali [in India]. We Tibetans believe that it was the gods and our protective deities [who save us]. He was amazed and said, "I have never seen such power of the gods and the protective deities as I saw for the people of Khalung. Even when I insisted to them [the Chinese] that it was [a group of humans], they denied it. Not only that, when they [the Chinese officer and his group] returned, though it was just two days' journey to Zongkha, they spent a week on the journey lying [to their superiors] that they had gone a long way."

It looked like in this way they found a few days of relaxation. They enjoyed themselves traveling among the nomads. They killed time moving here and there and then lied that they had been on a long journey. He told me that that's how they lied when they reached Zongkha. He was taught to say that they [the Chinese group] traveled far and that they [the people of Khalung Village] were not to be seen and perhaps they had gone towards the northern direction. Thus they [the Chinese group] moved leisurely enjoying themselves and ill-treating the people along the way. Then they reached Zongkha.

Q: How long did they stay?

02:03:27

#49M: They took seven days to cover a distance of two days' journey. They moved leisurely, stopping at people's homes and nobody could refuse them due to fear. They reached Zongkha in the evening and reported that "the people of Khalung are not to be seen. Perhaps they went northwards because we could not trace them in the south." He told me that he too lied because he had been told to do so by the officer. They reported that to the higher Chinese authority who was stationed at Zongkha.

Then three young men of Zongkha were called and instructed that they go in pursuit of the people of Khalung. Three hundred Chinese soldiers and the three young men were sent across the river towards the north, believing that we were fleeing in that direction. Of course they could not meet us. The person [the man in Manali] was amazed at us and the power of our gods and protective deities. It was perhaps because when we lived in our village, we were humble and cared for each other and there was goodwill.

Q: Do you know what month it was that you escaped?

#49M: I do not know what month it is in the Western calendar, but it was the 29th day of the 12th month of the lunar calendar that we left our village.

Q: How long after March 1959 was that?

02:06:58

#49M: That was the very year of 1959.

Q: Lhasa was lost in March 1959...

#49M: Yes, Lhasa was lost. It was the 29th day of the 12th month according to the Tibetan calendar. I do not know what month it is in the Western calendar. The year was 1959.

Q: Did you leave after Tibet was conquered?

02:07:20

#49M: Yes, it was in '59.

Q: So it was wintertime. How many people died on that journey?

#49M: Nobody died at that time. Fortunately, no one died. After we reached Nepal and then India, I do not know the whereabouts of the people.

Q: You said all the animals died. When an animal died, did you stop and do prayers?

02:08:29

#49M: There was nothing to do. Though we were economically sound back in the village, we brought along our grains and when that was consumed, we had nothing left to eat. There was nothing to do but recite the *mani* mantra [of Avalokiteshvara]. We had no other thoughts.

During the journey, 15-20 sheep would become too exhausted to walk and had to be left behind. We came across sheer mountains and steep inclines along the Nepali border. Our yaks and *dri* tumbled down, but we hardly felt any compassion or sadness. We felt helpless and suffered terribly.

Q: Did the *ngagpa* come with you?

#49M: He was not with us. He belonged to a different village.

Q: So this man, Lobsang Tenzin he basically saved the entire village.

02:10:16

#49M: Yes, he saved us. He was very beneficial to us. Had he not been there, we would have fallen [into Chinese hands]. I heard that some of our people [who returned to the village] were later taken to Zongkha and they suffered a lot. They were imprisoned at Zongkha and subjected to a great deal of suffering. It was only due to this man's greatness that so many lives were saved and we are here today. Had he not been there, there was no way out for us once the route to Zongkha was blocked as we were situated in the north. We

would have been captured as there was no way for escape. We left because he brought us the message. He helped us a lot.

Q: And how far did Lobsang Tenzin get before you heard that he had been killed?

#49M: I was at Mustang [Nepal] until '56 [?] and they were also living there. Later his child came here and told me that his father had passed away.

Q: Did he go back?

02:11:53

#49M: Perhaps he went back but I did not feel comfortable asking the child. I think he fell into the hands of the Chinese.

Q: How many days was the journey?

#49M: Oh my, we traveled for more than two months! However, we could not cover much ground. We had animals to herd and they were very weak. There were old people too and we traveled very slowly. We could not take any other route except through the mountains. One must escape through unknown regions, away from the regular easy path so as to avoid capture. So we fled through the mountains.

Q: I feel like we could talk to you whole day but we have another person waiting. So I am afraid we would have to end it for now. But we want to give you a phone number and if you have any more things to tell us, please call the number and we will arrange to see you again. And especially we want to hear more songs.

#49M: [Smiles]

Q: Sorry. I do have one more question. During this time when you were escaping...[interrupted]

02:14:26

#49M: Of course, if this would be of help. The independence of Tibet is something very great. It is such a terrible loss for us, if we did not have good leadership. You [addressing the interpreter] were a child then and do not know. Though there was no technology in the country [Tibet] like other countries of the world, however there were no diseases. Of course people died because everyone who is born must die. Really it was a country where there was no fear of diseases and no fear of starvation. It was a happy country with good water and good air. It was incredible. It was the country of the gods. It is unheard of. It must be amazing in Lhasa. I have not been there.

In our village there was no danger and we did not have to worry about enemies or wars which were unheard of. Of course one might face various difficulties earning a livelihood but everybody must work. Even if economically sound, one did not sit idle like people do here. One must care for the animals and work in the fields. A nomad, who did not own land, grazed his animals in rain or in shine. It was a difficult life but he had no anxiety in

his heart about his future or of the world. It was an amazingly fine country. Tibet was a great country. A person could remain full for a day or two by just drinking water.

Q: Do you remember any songs that you sang during the escape journey?

#49M: No, we did not sing at that time. We were so worried thinking about why Tibet was invaded. Whatever wealth we possessed was left behind and now we had nothing. However I did not think of the wealth. I wondered about my country and what my life would be like at the end. I came with a lot of anxiety. I never imagined that we would have a settlement like this.

Q: Can you sing us one more short song?

02:17:09

**#49M: Choepa ya sho
Ya la bul gyu
Lo ya sho tsa we
Lamala bul gyu
Ya sho chi mi
Yang do la bul**

*[The finest offering
Is made to one's root guru
Who delivers [us] from death]*

**Choe pa ya sho
Ya la bul gyu
Ya sho gon den
Ponpo la bul gyu
Ya sho kham su
Angdu la bul**

*[The finest offering
Is made to the leader
Who steers the people under his power]*

**Choe pa ya sho
Ya la bul gyu
Ya sho den chen
Pha ma la bul gyu
Ya sho so
Kyab den la bul**

*[The finest offering
Is made to the parents
Who protects [us]]*

[Begins crying]

Q: Thank you.

#49M: [Wipes away tears] Our parents were everything. I remember my parents. My parents were so good to me. Parents are incredible. That is the case not only for me but for everyone.

Q: Thank you and we'll let you go. I just need to ask you one more time because you gave us so much information. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for you?

02:19:36

#49M: There will be no problem. We, who are here, must do whatever we can [for the cause of Tibet]. Those in Tibet are suffering so much. They are giving up their lives. We are living very happily here, which is like heaven. What about those living in Tibet? [Very emotional] They are sacrificing their lives. I will not face any problems and I must do whatever I can for the independence of Tibet.

Q: I want to say to you that your life is your contribution because your experience, that is going to be recorded, is going to prove what Tibet was really like before the Chinese came and this is a big contribution, believe me.

#49M: Okay.

Q: And the Chinese are always saying that Tibet was a very bad place before they came and they made Tibet so much better, but your story is going to show that this is not the truth.

02:21:13

#49M: I do not have to demean the Chinese because I did not suffer in flesh and blood, but there is no place like my country. That is the truth. Tibet was heaven. There was no technology, but technology is not necessary. We had such a good religion and the freedom to practice it.

What the Chinese spoke about oppression is not the truth. However it is possible that there were one or two instances. When one is practicing religion, there is always an enemy. However, that was not the case. It was their plan to invade the country and annihilate the race. There was never anything like that [oppression]. They planned to plunder the country.

The world should know how [differently] we dressed and the [different] way in which we earned a livelihood. We had never heard or seen a Chinese, so what was the reason to say that Tibet was a part of China? The way we dress and the way we eat are different [from the Chinese]. We did not know a word of the Chinese language. How can they say that [we are the same]? Since '48 they forcefully occupied our country and since then destroyed the holy images and the monasteries. They killed the influential people. Had they killed only the leaders, okay they could cite that the leaders had erred. But why kill the wealthy people

who had been living off their wealth? Who did they harm? They [the Chinese] gave them [the rich and the influential] different labels.

The younger generation of Tibetans must think of their country which is truly incredible. It is difficult to find such a country. Now we are all happy because of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If we reflect deeply how can we live here without our country? Had the Buddha [His Holiness] not been here, where would we be?

Personally, we [my wife and I] are just an old couple. We are in our 70's and we have nothing [to lose]. I spent my time reciting the *mani* mantra at the Kagyu Monastery; I do not say that I will be reborn as a good human being though. Who knows I might have committed a lot of sins in my past lives?

However, the younger generation must strive hard. If we do not get [Tibet's independence] during His Holiness the Dalai Lama's lifetime, it will be difficult to get our country back. The whole world has seen that they destroyed the people [of Tibet], the religious icons and the treasures in the mountains. There cannot be such wonderful precious treasures anywhere in the world. There were such incredible [treasures].

Q: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW