

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #62M – Sither Tsering
April 6, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #62M
2. Interviewee: Sithar Tsering
3. Age: 76
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dawa Zong
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1967
9. Date of Interview: April 6, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp Number 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 27min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Sithar Tsering's family was *samadok* 'farmers and herders.' His family owned 60-70 yaks and over 400 sheep. He started working around the age of 14-15, dividing his time herding, trading and farming. His middle-class family lived in a tent made from yak hair. They were obliged to pay an animal tax called *sog-tel* based on every unit of one yak and six sheep. The tax was paid in money and if it could not be paid then animals were taken by the government. Villagers also cared for the local monastery's sheep and repaid the monastery in lambs and butter.

The Chinese first appeared around 1947-48 in Sithar Tsering's village. He describes their uniforms and explains how they repealed the taxes, distributed of *dhayen* 'silver coins' and conferred titles like *u-yon* 'leader' on the poor people. Then he describes the gradual change in the attitude of the Chinese, the destruction of the holy Buddhist images in the Tholing and Dawa Monasteries and *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' conducted on the abbot and others.

Sithar Tsering and the villagers felt they were "left in a void" after His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped in 1959, but he remained in Tibet until 1967 because his village had not been as affected by the Chinese occupation as Lhasa. He escaped through the Wuri mountain pass with his yaks before reaching India. He describes his marriage that took place before leaving Tibet.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, herding, taxes, festivals, customs/traditions, first appearance of Chinese, destruction of monasteries, forced labor, life under Chinese rule, *thamzing*, escape experiences.

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Interview #62M

Interviewee: Sither Tsering

Age: 76, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 6, 2010

Question: Could you please tell us your name?

00:00:18

Interviewee #62M: Sither Tsering.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans and to share their experiences with the young generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and with people in the outside world, so that everyone can better understand the true experience of life in Tibet.

#62M: Okay.

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

00:01:21

#62M: Of course.

Q: Thank you.

#62M: [Nods]

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

00:01:48

#62M: Okay, sure.

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

#62M: Okay, sure.

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

00:02:21

#62M: No, because I live here.

Q: Thank you very much and we really appreciate your coming to share your story with us.

#62M: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' take your time to answer. If you need some time to reflect, please do so.

00:02:48

#62M: Okay.

Q: If you could please try to keep looking at Namgyal [interpreter] when you give your answer.

#62M: Okay, sure.

Q: You are from a farming and dairying family. Can you tell us a little bit about your life growing up in Tibet?

00:03:32

#62M: While I lived in Tibet, I used to work with the animals. I looked after the yaks and sheep.

Q: Were you not farmers?

#62M: We were *samadok* 'farmers and herders.'

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about what your early life was like? What is an early memory that you have?

00:04:02

#62M: I can remember going on trade and cultivating the lands.

Q: At what age did you go trading?

#62M: I started trading at about the age of 14 or 15.

Q: How about farming?

00:04:17

#62M: The *samadok* started working in the fields around the age of 14 or 15.

Q: So you were both a farmer and a herder.

#62M: I went to trade in summer and worked in the fields in autumn and spring.

Q: What was your house like? Can you describe your house?

00:04:51

#62M: It was a tent.

Q: Wasn't there a house?

#62M: There was a house, but it was not a proper house. We kept our belongings in a sort of cave. The cave was dug out of the hills.

Q: You always slept in a tent?

00:05:18

#62M: We lived in a tent. That's where we slept and did all other activities.

Q: How many family members slept in the tent with you?

#62M: We were seven, eight, nine or 10 family members who lived in the tent.

Q: How big was the tent?

00:05:47

#62M: The tent was about the size of this room.

Q: How big was the tent? Can you give us a general idea?

#62M: It was not bigger than this.

Q: Sort of around where we are sitting right now. What was the tent made of?

00:06:35

#62M: The tent was made from *tsipa* 'yak hair.'

Q: Can you describe what you did when you first got up in the morning and how your day went on from there?

#62M: To take one day as an example, in the morning after I got up, I let the sheep out at 6 or 7 o'clock and we brought them back in the evening. That was the routine.

Q: So you stayed with the animals all day long?

00:07:39

#62M: We stayed with the animals and at the same time, spun and wove. We combed the *tsipa* and did the spinning.

Q: To shear, take off the wool from the sheep?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, no. Just weaving.

Q: Weaving? Yak, *dri* 'female yak' and sheep?

#62M: We spun the hair of yak.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He had yaks and sheep, his family?

00:08:14

#62M: Yes, we had.

Q: How many yaks?

#62M: We might have owned 60-70 yaks.

Q: And sheep?

00:08:20

#62M: Over 400 sheep.

Q: How was your family in terms of wealth compared to other people in your region?

#62M: We were considered among the poor. We were not among the poorest but in the middle.

Q: So lower middle class. Did you use to help with shearing the sheep?

00:09:36

#62M: We used to shear the sheep with a pair of scissors. [The wool] was made into bundles and sold off.

Q: When you were looking after the animals during the day, you were weaving. How were you doing this? What thing were you using to weave?

#62M: There was a wooden tool called *kuru*. It had a sort of hook at the top and that was rotated.

Q: Like a spindle. Did you enjoy this life?

00:10:44

#62M: At times I saw it as a happy life and at other times, I thought it was not. However, the region was cool.

Q: What were the difficult circumstances that you faced during that time?

#62M: We began to be unhappy after the appearance of the Chinese.

Q: What were your difficulties before the appearance of the Chinese?

00:11:18

#62M: It was fine if we had enough to eat. However, the taxes were high.

Q: What kind of tax did you have to pay?

#62M: There was a tax called *sog-tel* 'animal tax' on the animals. The tax was calculated keeping a yak and six sheep as base.

Q: One yak and...

00:11:49

#62M: Tax was collected on every unit of one yak and six sheep.

Q: Why were you taxed?

#62M: The tax was implemented by the government.

Q: Why did you have to pay taxes? Was it for the lands for the animals to graze?

00:12:03

#62M: No. That was the tax, the order for which came from the Tibetan Government.

Q: Was it sometimes difficult for your family to come up with this tax?

#62M: We faced problems. At times the problems were very severe.

Q: What would happen if you could not pay your taxes?

00:12:42

#62M: If you could not pay your taxes, your yaks and sheep would be taken away.

Q: Did that ever happen to your family? Was your family ever in a position where you could not afford to pay the tax?

#62M: We did not face severe difficulties. We managed so-so.

Q: Was there always enough resources for your family or sometimes were resources scarce?

00:13:34

#62M: We did not face such difficulties.

Q: Did you feel that the taxes, even though they were sometimes difficult—did you feel they were fair? Or did you feel they were unfair?

#62M: I wished for how nice it would be if there was no tax, but I knew we had to pay the taxes.

Q: So your family...you said had enough resources that you could afford to pay the tax. Were there other families who really struggled very hard to come up with this tax?

00:14:43

#62M: There were some cases.

Q: Do you know their names?

#62M: Yes, I know their names.

Q: What was their situation like?

00:15:00

#62M: They did not have money to pay their taxes. One had to either pay in money or cover the tax by way of animals.

Q: The punishment for not paying tax, you really, you just get some of your animals taken by the government. Is that right?

[Interpreter confirms]

Q: The animals that you owned, were any of them owned by the monastery or by the government or did you own all of animals yourself?

#62M: They belonged to us.

Q: The hardest thing was paying taxes.

00:16:09

#62M: Yes, paying taxes was the hardest.

Q: Did you have any other problems in Tibet?

#62M: At times we might lose our sheep. Apart from such setbacks, there were no other problems.

Q: What was something you really looked forward to? Something you really, not just enjoyed, but you wanted to happen? You looked forward to this thing happening; you anticipate this thing; something that you really enjoyed in the life that you led.

00:17:05

#62M: I do not know anything of that sort. I have not experienced any such thing myself.

Q: Were there no festivals or celebrations in your village or in your family?

#62M: There were none except *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year,' which was celebrated once in a year and another occasion when we went to the monastery.

Q: Was that [*Losar*] something you would get excited about?

00:18:14

#62M: I did not have any special feelings. Everything was the same.

Q: As children one feels excited about *Losar* and visited the homes of one's relatives.

#62M: That happened. Relatives invited each other to their homes on the first and second days of *Losar*.

Q: What did you specially like about the New Year? Was it the food? Was it everybody getting together? What was it that you enjoyed the most about it?

00:19:13

#62M: Suppose today was *Losar*, I now live in Camp Number 4 [Mundgod], so a relative living in Camp Number 3 will invite me to his house. He will offer me good food. Meat was aplenty. We would eat special food and enjoy ourselves.

Q: Were there songs, dances and *chang* 'home-brewed beer'?

#62M: Some, who knew danced and sang.

Q: Did people drink *chang*?

00:19:38

#62M: People did not drink much.

Q: Was there no *chang*?

#62M: There was *chang* but people did not drink much.

Q: Were you allowed to drink *chang* when you were a young boy?

00:20:29

#62M: They only allowed me to drink very little. The adults themselves did not drink much.

Q: Can you describe the singing competition? What would happen? Would the men be on one side and the women on the other? How would it work?

#62M: If this was the tent, the girls would sit on that side [gestures a row] and the boys on this side [gestures].

Q: The men would sing one by one and the women would sing one by one or they would all sing together?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, the whole group together.

Q: The whole group would sing?

00:21:31

#62M: They sang together. One would start and the others joined in.

Q: So the competition was which group sounded better than the other. Is that right?

#62M: We just heard the high-pitched voices [of the girls] and the low [of the boys], but nobody judged them.

Q: There was no winning, but they were trying to do better than the other?

00:21:12

#62M: There were no arguments [about which group was better].

Q: Would they sing a part of the song and the women would sing another part of the same song or would they be singing different songs?

#62M: It was the same song. If the women began a song, they [the men] joined in. They sang songs and danced.

Q: Do you remember any of those songs, *pa-la*?

00:22:58

#62M: I used to join in the singing. I have not sung since then.

Q: Could you sing now?

#62M: No, I cannot sing now.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have back then?

00:23:17

#62M: About four or five.

Q: How many brothers and how many sisters?

#62M: There were three or four sisters and four brothers.

Q: Were there 8 siblings?

00:23:25

#62M: Yes, but most of them have passed away.

Q: Where were you: the older, younger?

#62M: I was among the middle.

Q: When you were out guarding the animals all day and you were making wool, what else did you do to pass the time? It must have been a little bit boring. What else did you use to do?

00:24:17

#62M: At times I used to go to trade.

Q: I mean when you were grazing the sheep.

#62M: While grazing the sheep, we also herded the yaks. In that way, we passed the time. There was nothing special to do.

Q: When you grazed sheep the whole day, it was a long day and you might get bored at times and play games or sing songs...

00:24:41

#62M: No. We only watched over the sheep.

Q: What experience did you have of wild animals? What animals did you see?

#62M: There were wild animals like wild yaks, wild sheep, blue sheep and wild asses.

Q: Did you ever experience any danger from animals?

00:26:01

#62M: Yes. The worst animal in my region was the wolf. It resembles a jackal. Other than the wolf killing a sheep or two, there was no other animal which gave us problems.

Q: Where was your first experience of seeing Chinese people in your area?

#62M: They first appeared in '47-'48.

Q: Did they come to your village?

00:26:57

#62M: Yes, they came to my village.

Q: How many Chinese were there?

#62M: I saw 36-40 of them with my eyes.

Q: Were they in civilian clothes?

00:27:18

#62M: The officials were dressed in blue.

Q: Were they in uniform?

#62M: Yes, they were in uniform.

Q: Light blue or dark blue?

00:27:28

#62M: It was a sort of dark blue.

Q: What did they do?

#62M: They came and stayed as sentries on the mountain pass. They stayed at the border of India and Tibet.

Q: Nepal-Tibet border?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: India-Tibet border.

Q: In Assam, Tawang?

00:28:10

#62M: The border was at Nyidhi. Our border region extended from Chomoley. There was a mountain pass where they stayed as guards.

Q: When did the life you described to us, when did that start to change? When did that life start to change as a result of the Chinese presence?

#62M: They stayed guarding the mountain pass for two to three years. Then they gave a lot of *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins' to the important people. Titles like *u-yon* 'leader' and...[not discernible] were given to the people and they were paid high salaries.

Q: What did you think about that?

00:30:01

#62M: Nobody ever gave us such money. I used to transport things on my yak and received payment for it. They did not pay the person [who drove the yak] and I did not receive a salary. I was not paid a salary because I had no education.

Q: Can you just continue? And then what happened?

#62M: The titles were given and it continued for sometime. Then in '59, those people that used to be paid a salary were captured. When the Chenrezig 'Avalokitesvara, the patron saint of Tibet' [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] left—it was in the winter of '59—they were captured.

Q: Before 1959, the important people were treated very well. Once His Holiness the Dalai Lama left, they were treated very badly. Did you ever have any personal interaction with the Chinese during this time before 1959?

00:32:15

#62M: They used to come to our house and asked for transportation. They would say that if we provided our yaks, we'd be paid for it. Such requests were made many times.

Q: What kind of work exactly were you doing for them?

#62M: For example, if they [the Chinese] were staying at Camp Number 4, they would require us to transport things from Camp Number 4 to Mundgod [the next village] and to other areas.

Q: How did they treat you?

00:33:24

#62M: Personally, they did not treat me badly. I would say that they were so-so. Much later, after the arrest of the important people, they [the Chinese] said that I had relations with them and interrogated me.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: Before 1959, when you said you were working for the Chinese and they were using your animals, did you ever have an opportunity to speak with them directly, you and the Chinese people?

#62M: I have been together with them and spoken to them.

Q: What was the attitude, meaning were they rude to you, were they polite to you? What was their attitude to you?

00:35:19

#62M: They were peaceful at that time. They were deceiving us then.

Q: Did you believe them then?

#62M: We used to say that we were being deceived and that they were giving away a lot of *dhayen*. Later, saying that the *dhayen* should be deposited in the bank, they collected them. It was then that we said, "This is not good. This is not good."

Q: When they were distributing the money, there was a little bit of a feeling of not trusting this? The Tibetans were not really trusting this?

00:36:37

#62M: We believed this was not a good sign, seeing the huge amount of silver they distributed. The money was a way to deceive us and this was not good. Moreover, if this was a good thing, His Holiness would not have left for India. He had left and we believed things were not fine.

Q: Did they ever talk to you about political matters?

#62M: They did not. They would keep on saying, "You will have happiness. There will be no taxes later. Everybody will become equal."

Q: So they did talk about taxes. Did they ever talk about the Dalai Lama?

00:38:21

#62M: They told us that His Holiness had left but did not specifically broach on the subject; it was said just in passing. They did say that the Dalai Lama was gone and that was it.

Q: Did they mention the Dalai Lama prior to 1959?

#62M: No, they did not.

Q: Did things then change quite dramatically, quite quickly after 1959? Or was there more of a gradual change? Was it after March 1959, everything just suddenly changed?

00:39:15

#62M: A change that they brought about after '59 was the abolition of tax. We did not have to pay any taxes. When this change occurred, some people commented that we would see happy days, while others remarked that we would not and that this was just a ruse and one fine day, we would face problems. So people made such observations.

Q: What impact did you experience in your village? What changed in your village?

#62M: They implemented reformation in '59-'60.

Q: What does reformation mean?

00:40:30

#62M: They had already abolished taxes. Then they gave the so-called freedom [to the poor], in the sense that the wealthy people's riches were distributed among the poor and the poor had to bad-mouth those that were categorized among the rich.

Q: Did you think that there was something good about this system?

#62M: I felt that this was not a good thing and a ploy to deceive us. When people had to oppose the wealthy and their riches were divided, when such occasions became many, I felt that was not good.

Q: The people in high positions who were taken into custody after 1959, the feeling amongst people like you... Had you had pretty good relations in your ordinary life with these people in high positions? Did you have fairly good relationship between the poorer people and the people in these higher positions? How would you describe that relationship?

00:43:04

#62M: There were some families who turned against [their people and] sided with the Chinese. Others commented that it was not good and that the Chinese were deceiving us. We used to say such things among ourselves. There were some who totally turned against [their people].

[Question is repeated]

#62M: My family was also included among the categories.

Q: The higher category?

00:43:37

#62M: Yes, we were categorized among those who were said to have oppressed the [poor] people. My family used to live with such a [wealthy] family and later, we separated from them. We were categorized in that group.

Q: Did you face any special problems because of that?

#62M: They did not oppose us as such, but we faced other problems.

Q: What happened to you?

00:44:17

#62M: Later, the wealthy category people lost. And once they were overcome, it came to our turn. Now they were planning to capture us. Once captured, we would be opposed and put in prison.

Q: You mentioned about a person escaping. Who was he?

#62M: He was among the wealthy category. Their *leytsab*, *dokdha* 'local officials,' all of them fled. We were left behind.

Q: Were you captured?

00:44:58

#62M: We were not actually captured, but were sort of under house arrest. We were given the designation of *leytsab*.

Q: So you felt you were being watched?

#62M: They were preparing to capture us. After capturing us, they would question us about their [the wealthy people's] escape. But they had left without telling us and were successful in their attempt.

Q: Then what did you do?

00:46:27

#62M: Then for a few years life continued that way.

Q: Did the Chinese not interrogate you?

#62M: They did question us a lot, but we continued to live that way. Then in '67, the monastery was dismantled. So we left in the 4th lunar month of '67.

Q: What was the name of the monastery?

00:47:05

#62M: It was the Dawa Monastery.

Q: When the Chinese authorities would question you about these other people, did you give them the information that they wanted? Or did you lie?

#62M: After they [the wealthy people] escaped we were questioned, "Under what suspicion did they escape? What was the reason for their escape? Why did they escape? We gave them a salary and they had money. You would know the reason why they escaped. Tell us the truth or you will face arrest some day."

Q: So what did you say to them?

00:48:37

#62M: When they posed the questions to us, we replied, "We do not know. We did not know about their escape until after they were gone. More than rumors, the monastery is dismantled. That is the reason they might have left. Other than that, I do not know of any such rumors."

Q: Was the monastery dismantled before their escape?

#62M: It was dismantled just prior to their escape.

Q: Can you describe the relations between your family and other people around and the monks in your local monastery? How was that relationship?

00:50:00

#62M: The main relation between the monastery and us [the villagers] was that people looked after the monastery's sheep. At times people took care of 30-40 sheep of the monastery and paid back some remuneration. That was the main relationship.

Q: Looking after their sheep...

#62M: Yes, taking care of their sheep and giving the butter to the monastery. They [the villager] also gave two lambs for every three mother sheep that they took care [for the monastery]. That was our relation with the monastery.

Q: Did you have to give back two lambs annually?

00:51:03

#62M: For example, there were a 100 mother sheep. It was necessary to give 30 lambs. That was a must.

Q: Did you think this was a fair exchange?

#62M: That was the custom since very long ago. I do not think that that was not correct. I think that was fine. It came to an end from '59.

Q: But this is one of the regulations that the Chinese were planning on stopping, right?

00:52:58

#62M: The Chinese did away with it in '59. There was no giving and no taking; everything was closed.

Q: There was a feeling of relief then.

[Interpreter confirms this based on smile on interviewee's face.]

Q: Did the monks ever come to your house?

#62M: We used to invite monks to read prayers at home, just like the custom here.

Q: Did you invite them to your house?

00:54:05

#62M: I have invited them many times. Later the Chinese objected to it, claiming that they [the monks] were demons. However, despite their objections, I continued it until I left.

Q: Why did you feel it was important to invite the monks into your house to do the prayers?

#62M: You were free to do the prayers earlier. You could request them [the monks] to come home if someone was sick. Later the Chinese announced that that was not permitted, but I still practiced it.

Q: Before you met any Chinese people, when monks would come to your house, what kind of feeling did you have towards them?

00:56:07

#62M: When high lamas came to our house, we cleaned the house. We put up a tent for the prayer session. And we did every preparation for the prayers, which was good for us. Nobody would say that was bad. Even after the Chinese arrived, I did the prayers [by monks] until I left.

Q: When you saw a monk, did you have a good feeling? Did it give you a good feeling inside?

#62M: Yes, it did. We would be happy that we could hold the prayer session and it was very meaningful. [That day] we would eat good food and drink good tea.

Q: Did that feeling change at all after you heard all these things from the Chinese and the different system was imposed? Did your feelings towards monks change?

00:58:15

#62M: No, I have the same feelings.

Q: Your nearest *gonpa* 'temple' was called Dawa Gonpa. Is that right?

#62M: Yes.

Q: How far away was that from...

00:58:33

#62M: It was at a distance of half a day. We lived in the village and the monastery was in the other area. One could reach it in half a day.

Q: You said the Chinese destroyed this Gonpa in 1967. Was the Gonpa completely untouched then before 1967? Did they not damage the monastery at all before that?

#62M: They did not touch the monastery at all prior to that.

Q: What about Thoeling Gonpa? Was that affected before 1967?

00:59:29

#62M: Thoeling Gonpa was located at a distance of a day's journey.

Q: Was that destroyed by the Chinese?

#62M: [We] lost to them [the Chinese] in the year '59. It was slightly destroyed in '57-'58. Later, it was completely destroyed.

Q: Thoeling Gonpa, was that an important place in your daily life? Was Thoeling Gonpa considered an important place?

01:00:25

#62M: Thoeling Gonpa was the mother-monastery of 25 branch monasteries. It was the main monastery where the villagers worshipped.

Q: So when that was destroyed, did you hear how it was destroyed? Did they use bombs? How did they destroy it?

#62M: I did not see it being destroyed myself. The images were destroyed. There were no images left in it.

Q: When did you go there?

01:01:39

#62M: It was destroyed in '58-'59. I have been there.

Q: When did you go there?

#62M: I went there in '61-'62.

Q: What was left?

01:02:06

#62M: There was nothing left behind. There were no images. They were killing sheep inside.

Q: The Chinese were killing sheep?

#62M: They were not Chinese. They were Tibetans.

Q: I was just wondering if there was some reason that that's where they chose to kill the sheep.

01:02:53

#62M: They were Tibetans but they were incited by them [the Chinese]. They announced, "Anybody can come and kill. You are free." And they killed.

Q: When you heard the news that Thoeling Gonpa was destroyed, what was your reaction? What did you think?

#62M: When I heard that Thoeling Gonpa, our main monastery was destroyed, I felt that the branch monasteries, which were much smaller, would all be destroyed too. I knew nothing good was going to come. However, they did not touch the other monasteries then. Except for destroying Thoeling Gonpa, all the other monasteries were left as they were.

Q: I think my question was more like, what was your emotional reaction? Were you shocked, were you upset, were you angry, were you happy? What was your feeling when you heard this?

01:04:56

#62M: I felt despair. "Such magnificent images of the Buddha are erected and now it was like seeing our corpses." If we said so to the Chinese, they would arrest us. So we spoke among people we trusted. However, we did not discuss such with people we could not trust.

Q: Were there Tibetan spies in your village?

#62M: There might have been. I would not know them. Many of them [the Chinese] come and go.

[Question is repeated.]

01:05:58

#62M: Tibetans? No, there were no Tibetan spies.

Q: Would there have been any?

#62M: There might have been. There were some like the *u-yon* 'leaders appointed by the Chinese' that liked the Chinese. But we could not talk to them [the Chinese]. We could not question them as to why they were appointed. We just had to keep our mouths closed.

Q: Did you have a feeling about the protectors of Tibet? Did you wonder that if Tibet has these protectors, like Palden Lhamo and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, was it then surprising to you that the Chinese were able to do what they did in Tibet? Did you wonder about the power of the protectors after that?

01:07:35

#62M: I did wonder because if we committed some slip-ups, the consequence was immediate, while when they [the Chinese] brought destruction, nothing happened. I felt the protective deities too had left us and gone to India. I did think that.

Q: How did you feel when you learned that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left Tibet?

#62M: I heard the news sometime in the 7th lunar month. Some people did not know if he was a deity. There were many people who asked if he was a deity or a human. Some knew him as the real Chenrezig and that he had left and we were left in a void. There were some who said like that.

Q: When so many people left Tibet in 1959. Why did your family decide to stay?

01:10:15

#62M: The reason why we stayed back was that in 1959—those people living beyond the Lhasa region witnessed the destruction of their monasteries and encountered attacks and due to the critical situation, they escaped—in our case, except for Thoeling Monastery, the rest of the monasteries were left untouched. At that time, they [the Chinese] planned to implement the liberation in a peaceful way with us and deceived us by their peaceful manner. So that was why we were left behind.

Q: When Thoeling Gonpa was destroyed, that was a sign to you that this was the time to get out of here.

#62M: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us anything more about what happened at Thoeling?

01:11:55

#62M: All the images in the monastery were taken away.

Q: Where?

#62M: A few of the icons were brought to the Thoeling Gonpa here [in India], while a few of them were seized by the Chinese. That was it.

Q: What about the monks of the Thoeling Monastery?

01:12:14

#62M: There were none [when I saw it]. There were no monks. There was absolutely nothing.

Q: How many monks were there actually?

#62M: The older people used to say that there were 30-40 monks in Thoeling Monastery. But when I went there, there were no monks.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Sorry, Namgyal-*la*. We'll have to ask him this question.

Q: Did you witness any *thamzing* 'struggle session' at the monastery?

01:13:13

#62M: When the Revolution of Democracy was implemented, that year Tamdin Tsewang and the abbot of Thoeling Monastery were subjected to *thamzing*. I witnessed that.

Q: Who was Tamdin Tsewang?

#62M: He was the administrator of Dawa District.

Q: Was the Thoeling Gonpa, was it Nyingma [a sect of Tibetan Buddhism]?

01:14:03

#62M: No, it was Kagyu [a sect of Tibetan Buddhism]. The Thoeling Gonpa and Dawa Gonpa were Kagyu.

Q: So the people in your region were mostly Kagyu?

#62M: Yes, we were followers of the Kagyu sect.

Q: What did you see at the *thamzing* session?

01:14:35

#62M: We were told to assemble for a meeting. It was announced, "Assemble for a meeting as there is urgent news. The abbot of Thoeling and Tamdin Tsewang of Dawa District are arriving. Preparations must be made for their visit in advance."

When we reached there [the meeting place], they said, "You must oppose the abbot of Thoeling and [Tamdin Tsewang of] Dawa District. The poor must carry out the opposition."

The poor people were told to get up, while we just looked on. The Chinese ordered that we were not allowed to leave. We were surrounded by the Chinese. Tamdin Tsewang was brought in with his hands tied behind his back. He was dressed differently and then the opposition [accusation] began, "You have consumed my wealth." The opposition went on.

Q: What was it like for you to see the abbot of this very important monastery being treated this way?

#62M: Subjecting a man of the Buddha [Dharma], a *geshe* 'monk with philosophy degree,' I felt now I shall perceive no happiness. I just sat there helpless.

Q: Then you decided to escape. What did you bring with you on the journey?

01:17:33

#62M: I brought along all my yaks and horses. I had a huge stock of grains. I could not carry all of it, so I threw them in the river. If I left them, the poor [who sided with the Chinese] would eat them and that was useless. Whether the poor ate them or not, no [good] Tibetan would get to enjoy them. There was nobody in the house to take care of them, so I threw them in the river. I brought along my belongings, which my 30-40 yaks could carry.

Q: Which border did you cross?

#62M: We came through the Wuri mountain pass, then to Nyidhila pass close to Chomoley.

Q: To the Indian border? How many days did it take?

01:18:52

#62M: It did not take us many days. If I left [my village] this morning, I reached at around this time [4-5pm]. It was very close.

Q: Assam?

#62M: We reached the border at Wuri.

Q: Which is the next Indian city from Wuri?

01:19:18

#62M: Then we came to Chomoley.

Q: Where did you reach after Chomoley?

#62M: We reached Zushimatey.

Q: From Zushimatey to?

01:19:27

#62M: If we were sent directly, we would reach Delhi or Poona. However, we were taken to a prison in Bijnor.

Q: Uttar Pradesh? Which part [of India]?

#62M: I do not know where it is, but it was close to the River Ganges.

Q: How many yaks did you bring?

01:20:05

#62M: I think I had over 50 yaks. Nobody would pay us a price for the yaks.

Q: Where did you sell your yaks?

#62M: I sold them at Nyidhi. They did not fetch a quarter of a *rupee*. I received 25 for a sheep.

Q: All your treasure was gone. Well, is there anything else you would like to tell us?

01:21:00

#62M: There is nothing more than this.

Q: Perhaps about marriage or flirting?

#62M: No. [Laughs] This is all.

Q: Where did you get married?

01:21:20

#62M: I married in Tibet.

Q: How did you seek the hand of the bride?

#62M: One traveled a day or sometimes half a day on horseback to seek the hand of a bride in Tibet.

Q: How did you ask for your bride's hand? Was it an arranged marriage or a love marriage?

01:21:44

#62M: My marriage was arranged by my parents.

Q: Had you seen your bride before the marriage?

#62M: Yes, I had seen her. I had also spoken to her. [Laughs]

Q: Who were in the group that went to ask for the bride's hand?

01:22:27

#62M: My relatives went to ask for her hand.

Q: But had you ever seen her before?

#62M: I had seen her.

Q: So you knew her a little bit?

01:23:07

#62M: Yes, a little.

Q: Were you quite happy that your parents chose this girl?

#62M: [Jokes] I was ecstatic. [Laughs]

Q: Was she also happy?

01:23:36

#62M: Of course, she was.

Q: So you had special feelings before?

#62M: Of course. [Laughs]

Q: Maybe you can just tell us quickly about your wedding. What was your wedding like?

01:24:15

#62M: One must travel on horseback to the marriage in Tibet.

Q: How long?

#62M: It was less than a day's journey. If she started early, she would reach around this time.

Q: She came to your house, to live with you?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Some person has to go to and bring her.

Q: How did she come? Was she walking?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: By horse, on the horse. She was crying, for she has to leave all the family back and come and stay in a new house.

Q: She was crying?

01:24:59

#62M: Yes, she would sort of cry. [Laughs]

Q: Did she come to live with your parents and you in the same house? Or did you move to another house?

#62M: We lived together with the family.

Q: Was there a lot of *chang* drinking?

01:25:38

#62M: There was the custom of drinking *chang* in Tibet.

Q: Do you remember what you wore?

#62M: We wore *puruk chupa* 'traditional fur coats/dresses' and sheepskin in Tibet.

Q: So you were very happy that day?

01:26:15

#62M: Yes. [Laughs]

Q: Thank you so much. It was really interesting to talk to you. I want to say a couple of more things. I should say one more time because now you told us so much information. If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would it make any kind of problem for you?

#62M: There will be no problem. I have reached this country.

Q: Is it okay to use your real name?

01:26:57

#62M: There is no problem.

Q: Thank you very much for sharing everything with us.

END OF INTERVIEW