

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #65D – Gapa Akar
May 17, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #65D
2. Interviewee: Gapa Akar
3. Age: 83
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Rungpo
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: May 17, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Bir Guest House, Bir, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 27 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Gapa Akar was born into a nomadic family. He gives a description of a nomad's life—how it's spent caring for the numerous yaks and sheep. He explains how a nomad herded the livestock and obtained all one's needs from his animals. Gapa Akar also gives us an idea of how the animals were taken care of when they fall sick, the role-played by the *ngagpa* 'shamans' in healing and the use of blessed pills as medicines.

This peaceful and contented life changed after the appearance of the Chinese. Gapa Akar talks about how the Chinese arrested leaders, confiscated their wealth and animals and forced him into a road construction crew. He recalls how the Chinese destroyed the Ranyag Monastery with cannons and machine guns and how most of the monks were killed there including Gapa Akar's own father and uncles. He describes the resistance put up by sword wielding monks who were no match for the well-armed Chinese soldiers.

Gapa Akar fled to Lhasa when the Chinese attacked the nomads and drove away his family along with their animals. He encountered many other people fleeing and Tibetan guerrillas fighting against the Chinese as he traveled across Tibet. He endured many hardships trying to escape from the Chinese and went many times without food or water. Gapa Akar narrates his final escape journey through the Changthang to safety in Ladakh in India.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, nomadic life, herding, shamans/mediums, invasion by Chinese army, destruction of monasteries, forced labor, escape experiences.

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Interview #65D

Interviewee: Gapa Akar

Age: 83, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 17, 2012

Question: First could you just tell us your name?

00:00:13

Interviewee #65D: [My] name is Gapa Akar.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your personal memories are going to help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#65D: Okay.

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

#65D: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#65D: [Nods]

Q: If anytime during the interview if you want to take a break, just let us know.

#65D: [Nods]

Q: If there's any question that you don't want to answer, that's just fine.

#65D: Okay.

Q: I have to ask you if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else in the world, would it create a problem for you?

00:01:57

#65D: What problem? There will be no problems. You ask questions and I answer and there is no reason why there should be a problem. You have taken the trouble to come here, which is a problem for you.

Q: Thank you very much.

#65D: Thank you.

Q: First of all, I want to ask you, your life as a nomad—to you I'm sure it's very ordinary, yeah? But for young Tibetans growing up in exile, they know nothing about what that means. So, could you give us a description about what that means to live a nomad's life?

#65D: A nomad's life [is spent with] animals like yaks, sheep, and by using horses a little bit. One milked the *dri* 'female yak' and made butter from its milk. One made cheese from the milk. You took [the animals] to the hills in the morning wherever there was good grass. In wintertime, [the animals] were brought down and you created nice sleeping areas. Each one was tethered at the neck with a rope. There were 100-200 [animals] to be tethered. Such were the activities.

Q: Growing up in this nomadic lifestyle, do you develop a special relationship with animals?

00:04:47

#65D: One cared for the animals and herded them where there was good grass and good water. We obtained all our food and clothing from them. [We] led our livelihood in that way.

Q: If your animals got sick, what did you do?

#65D: There were doctors in Tibet when animals got sick. The Tibetan doctors treated or one could obtain blessed pills from lamas. Then one could [also] request the lamas to chant prayers. We did such things.

Q: When the animals got sick?

#65D: Yes, if an animal got sick.

Q: Were the blessed pills effective?

#65D: The blessed pills were given to the [sick] animal and if an animal suffered a cut, the *mantras* chanted by an *ngagpa* 'shaman' helped. Consuming the blessed pills also helped.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about the shaman, who he is and what he does?

00:07:20

#65D: The shaman chanted mantras from the scriptures. [He] accumulated mantras and blew.

Q: Where did [he] blow?

#65D: [He] blew where there were cuts or swellings on the animal. Then the swellings subsided and the wounds healed. There were shamans with such powers. Then there were

certain illnesses caused to the animals by harmful beings that were warded off by reciting prayers. There were such remedies that could be performed.

Q: Does the shaman also work on human physical problems?

#65D: [The remedy] also helped humans. The *ngagpa* is one who has undergone a lot of dharma practice. Having practiced greatly, [he] is compassionate and is aware of what has do be done. He's very knowledgeable from having practiced the dharma and is powerful. A *nagagpa* concentrates in studying *ngag* 'tantra' according to the Buddha dharma.

Q: So this is *ngagpa*. This is not *lhawa* 'medium'? This is not definitely *lhawa*?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No. Shaman is *ngagpa*, right?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The shaman that we were told about before was called the *lhawa*. This is the...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Ngagpa*.

Q: *Ngagpa*. *Lhawa*. You never heard of this term *lhawa*?

#65D: There were mediums. There were those that acted as mediums but they were few. There were not many. They were not considered highly in our region. There were not many mediums.

Q: Your name Gapa Akar sounds like an unusual name to me. Tell me a little bit about your family history that you know of.

00:10:37

#65D: My family was a nomadic one in our region since long ago. [My] parents worked as nomads and there is not a lengthy story. Being nomads [we] raised animals and lived that way. As for stories pertaining to the forefathers, I do not know. Nobody except [my] parents would know.

Q: Can you tell me, was your family very religious?

#65D: [They] had faith in the dharma. Though they had faith in the dharma, there was a great number of animals to raise. Sheep were in thousands and *nor* 'yaks and *dri* 'female yaks' consisted of 400-500. Therefore, except for inviting monks to recite prayers at home once a year and performing rituals, there was not time. One held a rosary in the hand and rotated the prayer wheel and [life] went on in that way.

Q: What's the first prayer or mantra you remember learning as a child?

#65D: The mantras were the *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' "Hail the jewel in the lotus," *Dolma* 'Praises to the 21 Taras' and *benza guru* 'mantra of Padmasambhava.' I know [them] by heart. [I] learned the *Dolma* and then *barchay lamsel* 'clearing the

obstacles of the path' and *sampa lhundup* 'spontaneous fulfillment of wishes.' I know a little bit of the Gelug prayers, Kagyu prayers and others.

Q: In your family, were your family fairly non-sectarian then, not particularly adhering to one sect or another?

00:13:50

#65D: [The family] did not discriminate among the religious sects. [We] did not differentiate saying, "I am Sakya or I am Kagyu or I am Gelug." There was never any discrimination. [We] had faith in all lamas. Whichever lama visited, [we] made offerings of whatever [we] had. There was no "I or he" where religious sects were concerned.

Q: Did you do prayers and mantras then when you were out in the fields? You said you didn't have much time for formal prayers or study, so when you were out with the animals, is that when you would do mantras and prayers also?

#65D: Yes, one chanted when one was out with the animals. There was no time to sit.

Q: So the animals were also getting the benefit of your mantras, yeah?

#65D: It would benefit me and also the animals a little. [Laughs]

Q: Did you also sing at all, some traditional songs?

#65D: [I] did not sing *shay* 'songs.' [I] did not sing songs.

Q: You didn't sing, just the mantras. How did your life change...

#65D: [Interrupts] There were no *shay* sung but one did sing a *lu* 'song.' When one is very happy, one sang a stanza or two.

Q: Isn't *shay* and *lu* the same?

#65D: [I] knew to sing a *lu*. *Shay* and *lu* are different. *Lu* is what the nomads sing when herding the animals. When one is joyful with plenty of flowers around, beautiful pastures with good grass for the animals that made them grow healthy; then one was happy. When there was not snow or rain and plants sprouted from the ground, [we] played games. Two or three herders joined together and played games and sang *lu*. There were few such occasions.

Q: What kind of games did you play?

00:17:05

#65D: There were games to test strength and speed. Other than that there were no games for a nomad to play. [Laughs] [We] did not have knowledge in playing different games. One threw rocks or played with stones. Such were the games that were played.

Q: Can you remember any of the songs?

#65D: [I] cannot remember. There were *lu* but [I] cannot remember.

Q: Would you say you had a good life? It sounds like a hard life but was it a good life?

#65D: It was a good life as you were accustomed to it. It was a happy life. There were no problems with food or clothing because one milked the animals, drank the milk, made cheese and ate the butter. One obtained wool, hair and meat from the animals. Various types of food came from [the animals], so there were no problems with food.

Q: How did this life start to change?

00:19:25

#65D: It changed when the Communist Chinese appeared. The Nationalists [?] arrived and it changed. Fearing for one's life [we] left everything and fled. They [the Communist Chinese] seized everything.

Q: Before you fled, what was the... When the Communist Chinese came, what was the first changes you started to notice in your life?

#65D: The first change that happened to me was that they [the Chinese] said, "Work for us for 15 years to construct roads. [We will provide] electricity connections in the region. Leave your work in the village. Come and work for us." Such statements were issued.

Q: "Come and construct roads for 15 years?"

#65D: Yes. "Come to construct roads."

Q: Install electricity connections?

#65D: "Electricity and water connections will be installed. [We] will install various things."

Q: Did you do this work?

#65D: I went to construct roads for one month. Drivable roads had to be constructed for them [the Chinese].

Q: Can you describe what that was like, what the conditions were like?

00:21:40

#65D: At that time there was no bad treatment like beatings or hitting from them [the Chinese]. However, working with soil and rocks was tiring. One was not free to move about much. One must put focus on work. Each person was equipped with a spade.

Q: Where did [you] have to go?

#65D: Each person held a spade and dug out the pastures. Each one had a spade. You know a spade that is used to dig earth?

Q: Were you paid anything?

#65D: [We] were given a small amount, not much. [We] were given around three Chinese currency units per day.

Q: Was it Chinese currency?

#65D: Yes, Chinese currency.

Q: Why did you decide to flee? Was there like a final incident that made you decide you just can't stay here anymore?

00:23:13

#65D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] I must eat my own food while working for them. The remuneration was three currency units but three currency units would not cover one's food and clothing.

Q: When you decided to flee, was it as a result of this work and not wanting to face anymore or was there some particular incident that made you decide like we can't stay here anymore?

#65D: The difficulties...I will relate. We were told, "The wealth that you possess..." We possessed wealth like animals. "Give your wealth to the Communist Party. We will be good to you later. Think of the future." They had shops called *moyikongtsi* [?] and cooperative *tsongkhang* 'shop,' cooperative *tsongkhang* that were set up together by people. There was the *moyikongtsi tsongkhang* and then another one. There were three [types of] *tsongkhang*. Cooperative *tsongkhang*, *moyi tsongkhang*...there was one called *mosi*...one called *mesi tsongkhang*.

Q: Do [you] mean *timkhang* 'court' or *tsongkhang*?

#65D: *Tsongkhang*.

Q: *Tsongkhang*?

#65D: Yes, they collected everything and wanted the wealth as donations for the shops.

Q: Do you know what year this was?

00:26:11

#65D: ...It must be in the '40s...It must have been '55 or '56.

Q: So what happened next?

#65D: Nobody would give up [their wealth] without deliberation. One was to say, “My wealth is a contribution to the Communist Party. I shall be a member of the Communist Party.” The majority of the people declined and said, “We shall keep our own animals and continue to do our work.” When this was said, [the Chinese] ordered, “The leaders shall gather for a meeting. The leaders must meet.” Hence, a big meeting was held at Chekudho.

Q: When all the leaders...

#65D: When all the leaders gathered for the meeting, [the Chinese] said, “Today you have to agree to the people giving up [their] wealth. Should you not do so, you shall not be allowed to return.”

Q: ...that [the leaders] must agree to [the people] giving up their wealth?

#65D: “You must issue orders to the people to give up [their] wealth. If that does not happen, you shall not be allowed to go home.”

Q: So was this everybody...disregarding class...was this all different classes were to contribute property to the Communists?

00:29:14

#65D: Right. It was demanded of all the wealthy ones, as there was nothing the poor owned to give up.

Q: Okay, but the nomads had animals though, right? Were they also supposed to forcibly give their livestock?

#65D: Yes, all the animals of the nomads were demanded and the lands of the farmers. The farmers owned lands.

Q: Okay, and then what happened?

#65D: When the leaders were asked whether they would agree to the people giving up [their wealth], the leaders said, “We cannot agree. We do not agree because we cannot order the people to give up [their wealth] to the party.” Then they were arrested there.

Q: They were arrested?

#65D: Many leaders were captured.

Q: And then?

00:30:55

#65D: They [the Chinese] captured the leaders and imprisoned them. We requested that [they] be released and if not, “We shall not forsake our leaders. We cannot forsake our leaders. If the leaders are not released, we shall die.”

Q: The people said that?

#65D: Yes, the people.

Q: Then?

#65D: However, they did not release the leaders but told us, “Do you prefer a society of violence or of peace? You should think over it. If you choose a society of peace, give up your wealth to the government and become a member of the Communist Party. Then there will be peace. If you wish for violence, we shall attack. We shall launch an assault.” That is the order they gave.

Q: [The Chinese] said that if you didn’t live in peace, “we shall attack.”

#65D: “We shall attack and prepare for violent activities. [We] will create a violent society.”

Q: Yes, and then?

#65D: We replied, “We cannot give up [our wealth] to the government. Whether you cause violence or kill us, we shall not accept.” [I] do not know about what other regions were doing but it was so in our region. It was like that in Gapa. [I] would not know what others were doing.

Q: That’s fine. We only want to know what you actually saw and witnessed.

00:33:51

#65D: Okay.

Q: Don’t worry you can talk for longer. She [interpreter] can write very fast.

#65D: Okay.

Q: So please tell us what happened then.

#65D: And then they attacked. There was a monastery called Ranyag Gonpa where there were 500 monks. Six hundred Chinese soldiers attacked the 500 monks. There ensued an encounter for around two weeks. The monks did not have guns. Monks do not possess weapons. Carrying swords, they charged upon the soldiers. When [I] look back, from the 500 monks except for nine that survived, the rest were killed by them [the Chinese].

Q: You saw this?

#65D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] And then there were the nomads. They [Chinese troops] came in search of the nomads to attack. After destroying the monastery, it was the turn of the nomads. [They] came to attack wherever the nomads were. Nomads did not have an army and wherever they were, they [the Chinese soldiers] pounced, captured,

assaulted and killed some. They took all the wealth with them. There were thousands of large animals that they took. Actually it was our people who they had captured that were forced to take care of them. Tibetan people were made to raise [the animals] who gave up their guns for safekeeping. Thousands of animals were herded in large areas. Fearing for their lives, some people fled to the mountains while some were killed. They [the Chinese] killed most of the men claiming that they possessed weapons.

Q: Did the nomads fight back?

00:36:31

#65D: The nomads fought back. Nomads would fight. Should they encounter a person or two, they would put up a fight. However, they [the Chinese soldiers] arrived in battalions and there were only two or three nomads. Nomadic families lay scattered all around in twos or threes. There was only that many.

Q: Just backing up a second to the incident at the monastery, did you actually see the monks charging the soldiers with the swords?

#65D: I have taken part there. I have witnessed three or four encounters.

Q: At the Ranyag Gonpa...

#65D: ...have fought the Chinese.

Q: Ranyag Gonpa...

#65D: I have fought at the Gonpa. My father, sibling and paternal uncle were at the monastery and [I] went there. They [the Chinese] fired cannons and machine guns on the monastery and destroyed it completely.

Q: Wasn't it the 500 monks that fought?

00:38:08

#65D: There were around 500 monks and only nine older monks survived.

Q: You said that your father and paternal uncle were in the monastery. How did they get there?

#65D: Father and paternal uncle were there, but the majority were monks. My father had five brothers and all of them were killed in the same room by cannon shells.

Q: Was your father a monk?

#65D: Father was not a monk but father's siblings [who are my] paternal uncles were there. [I] had paternal uncles and maternal uncles then. There were five monk [uncles]. Not just these five monks but [the Chinese] fired upon many. There were many monks in the monastery.

Q: Was father also there?

#65D: Father was there and he was killed.

Q: So the monks, they ran out of the monastery and into the line of fire with their swords?

00:39:28

#65D: [The monks] drew the swords and ran. Ten to 15 monks charged and were killed by gunfire before they could reach them [the Chinese soldiers]. I saw this with my eyes.

Q: All 500 had swords?

#65D: All the 500 monks did not own swords. By 500 monks, [I] mean the older ones. There were many small monks that did not have swords. Though the monastery's monks did not own swords, there were numerous swords and guns hanging in the temple as ritual articles. These were removed and the swords sharpened. Having been kept there for many years, the swords had rusted and oxidized. They were sharpened on stones and then used. The monks did not possess swords themselves but there were swords and guns hung in the deity's temple in the monastery.

Q: And then what happened?

#65D: Such things were done. After they [the Chinese] had destroyed the monastery, there was nowhere to fight and they came upon the nomads.

Q: Yes?

00:41:30

#65D: They came upon the nomads and then attacked here and there [killing?] two or three nomads. All the leaders had already been captured and imprisoned. Thus there were no leaders to gather an army and guide the people to fight. Once they were imprisoned, there were no prominent people left. So every nomad sought his way and either fled or hid. One was forced to leave behind the animals and flee.

Q: What happened to you and your family?

#65D: My family that consisted of my children, wife and parents—Father was killed but Mother was there—were all captured and taken away.

Q: Captured and taken away?

#65D: Captured and taken away. The Chinese did not [physically] capture them, but there were the animals and they [the family members] were driven along with the animals.

Q: Along with the animals?

#65D: Driven along with the animals. They [the Chinese] looted, looted people and animals. A few of us were left. The majority was killed.

Q: How was your father killed?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: At the monastery.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, that was in the monastery in that fight. Sorry.

Q: And then what did you do?

00:43:59

#65D: And then I fled. I had a sibling that fled with me. There were two or three people from my village with me.

Q: Where did [you] flee?

#65D: [We] fled to Lhasa. There were many people taking flight; it was not just me. Numerous people were fleeing.

Q: Can you describe the journey and what happened on the way?

#65D: There were many nomads along the way and they gave us little quantities of food. The nomads had food just like we did. We were people of Kham and were travelling towards Tibet [Lhasa]. We were people of Kham and were coming towards Tibet [Lhasa]. They [the Chinese] had left Tibet [Lhasa] untouched then. They had left it alone.

Q: What do [you] mean by Tibet?

#65D: Tibet means the Lhasa part. There were many monasteries in Lhasa. There were many aristocrats and leaders in Lhasa. There were no riots in Lhasa then though arrests and destruction had already taken place in Kham.

Q: So when you told the people of Lhasa what had been happening back in Kham, how did they react?

00:46:18

#65D: There was not much for them to react because one could not say much since numerous Chinese had arrived in Lhasa. Many soldiers had arrived. They [people of Lhasa] remarked, "One dare not speak. One dare not speak for there is a huge Chinese presence. One dare not speak. Such a sad situation has come to pass. It is a disaster."

At that time His Holiness the Dalai Lama was living in his palace. There were the Sera, Gaden and Drepung Monasteries when we arrived. After spending a month here, we went back to the Changthang 'Northern Plateau' to a distance of 4-5 days on horseback. We came across many people from our village. And then the Chinese attacked Lhasa. The

March 10th Anniversary that we observe now took place in Lhasa. That is when Lhasa was lost.

Q: Why did you wait a whole month in Lhasa? Why did you just not continue on your journey?

#65D: I made a pilgrimage in Lhasa and saw [images of] deities and lamas. The Great Monlam ‘Prayer’ Festival took place in the great Jokhang ‘Central Cathedral’ that housed the Jowo ‘statue of Buddha Sakyamuni’ and other images. The monks of Sera, Gaden and Drepung [Monasteries] and many others performed the Great Monlam Festival in it in the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Various ritual offerings to deities were created and many prayers chanted by [monks of] the three great monasteries. One could observe the ritual offerings and prayer assemblies. One could also visit different monasteries, make offerings, circumambulate the monasteries and perform prostrations. Though we did not own riches, we went to the Jokhang to see the lamas and observe the gathering of thousands of monks. There were 8, 9 or 10,000 monks. Therefore, we stayed back.

00:49:46

Even though [we] did not have any food then, one could obtain *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ by begging in Lhasa. The food was not grand and did not consist of butter and cheese, as there was not much butter and cheese in Lhasa. One could obtain plenty of *tsampa*. So [we] stayed there.

Q: And then what happened?

#65D: And then the Chinese attacked Lhasa in the 1st lunar month, attacked Lhasa, attacked Nagchu and everywhere. Numerous soldiers arrived and destroyed everything and His Holiness the Dalai Lama had to take flight. I was not present when the attacks took place. I heard about it as I was near the scene. And it was then that Andrug [Gonpo Tashi] formed the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force].

Andrug [Gonpo Tashi] was a wealthy merchant in Lhasa long ago. As a wealthy merchant, he gave his riches to the people, made contributions [to monasteries] and built a golden throne for His Holiness [saying], “We need the *Chushi Gangdrug* in order to counter the Chinese. Otherwise, there is danger to [our] lives.” He went about stating such and all the wealthy ones donated weapons like guns, and horses. So His Holiness the Dalai Lama was just about able to arrive here [India].

There were thousands and tens of thousands of Chinese troops. The Chinese had planned ahead and surrounded the whole of Lhasa. Tibetans did not dare react and remained still like this [sits back in chair]. It was the same in our region of Cheku. [People] thought they [the Chinese] were good but in the end they...[not discernible]. [Laughs]

Q: Yes?

00:52:55

#65D: Initially the Chinese pretended to be good, pretended that [they] were gentle, but in the end, they demanded that they wanted everything.

Q: Did you feel like in Lhasa that people were little bit complacent, a little bit too relaxed because you had seen what the Chinese were doing in the east? Did you feel the people in Lhasa were maybe not taking the threat seriously or not?

#65D: They [people of Lhasa] were relaxed. The Chinese were in their region and had surrounded it. Despite that they remained quiet. The reason was that the leaders did not know how to react. There were leaders; there were many leaders in Lhasa, many great leaders. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a lama and except for religion did not interfere much in politics; it was mainly religion. There were many leaders. They [should have said], “You must fear [the Chinese]. We must do this.” This should have been done early but instead remained silent and left things alone.

Q: And then what happened when you left?

#65D: And then I went towards Lho. The monasteries in Lhasa had been destroyed and His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already fled. I went to Drikung where there was a large monastery and stayed there. And then the Chinese attacked; there were around 600 Chinese. Around 600 Chinese attacked and as I told you earlier, Andrug Phuntsok Dorjee who was the nephew of Andrug Gonpo Tashi was present at the scene of the attack. We were around 100-200 men. Six hundred Chinese arrived and there was an encounter for a day. Andrug Tseten, one of the able commanders and 20-30 men were killed there that day. Andrug Phuntsok was shot here [gestures off camera]. [He] had been shot around eight times.

Q: How many?

00:56:35

#65D: [He] was shot around eight times. Though [he] was shot around eight times, [the bullets] had not entered [him]. He seemed to have had a good protective amulet. Instead of penetrations, there were red wounds here [gestures off camera] that were bulging out. There were swellings on his body but none had penetrated. The clothes were ripped. Due to the gunshots, [he] was not able to sit up. We battled the Chinese but could not do much. However, we fought as much as we could. And then we fled. Numerous men had been killed then.

[Andrug Gonpo Tashi’s nephew] was called Phuntsok Tashi, not [Phuntsok] Dorjee.

Q: Were you also fighting at this time?

#65D: I was not at the actual scene of encounter when they fought. We were a little further away and then we happened to be together. He was injured and fleeing to Lhasa at the same time that we were escaping to Lhasa. We were together. I saw that [he] was injured then. I knew that their commander was killed.

Q: And then?

#65D: And then we fled and continued on the journey. [We] encountered the Chinese after crossing over the mountain pass of Drikung. [The Chinese] attacked here and there and [we] sought ways to escape. Two or three horsemen belonging to the Andrug group fled by themselves; Andrug Phuntsok escaped. A group of us ran in another direction. Their [Chushi Gangdrug?] soldiers also fled and the [Chinese] troops attacked.

We had nothing to eat to be able to fight or any possessions to bring, not even ammunitions to fight. We had used the ammunitions in earlier encounters. Each man was left with just 10, 15 or 20 bullets, nothing to fight with. Using these would mean dying of starvation. We needed to kill wild animals to survive and looked for ways to escape. That was the only means. I fled towards the Changthang.

I do not know what happened to the Andrug nephew. The Andrug soldiers left to find Andrug Phuntsok and the others. There were around 50 soldiers from the strength of around 100; the rest were slain. They left; [I] do not know whether on flight or to look [for the missing men]. [I] do not know what happened to them. We went in the direction of the Changthang.

Q: I'd like to just ask you before we move on. So Phuntsok Tashi, you said that the bullets you saw, that the bullets didn't actually penetrate him but they were sort of bulging. Can you actually describe that a little bit more clearly, whether inside his skin or where were they?

01:02:37

#65D: The bullets were...We Tibetans wear *chupa* 'traditional coats.' The bullets had fallen inside the *chupa*. He had been shot eight or nine times. Perhaps he wore a potent protective amulet or something that protected [him]. There were wounds on him that had swollen where each of the bullets had hit.

Q: The bullets had fallen inside the *chupa*?

#65D: The bullets had fallen inside the *chupa*, most of the bullets.

Q: And then?

#65D: And then what more do [you] want? [Laughs]

Q: You fled towards the Changthang...

#65D: I fled towards the Changthang and once again encountered the Chinese at Thoepa Nagtsang.

Q: Thoe?

#65D: There were around a thousand Chinese.

Q: Where? Did [you] say Thoe?

01:04:06

#65D: Yes, at the place called Thoe Nagtsang. I went beyond the north where there were one or two families living on the mountains with a few sheep or so. [We] ate from them or tried to kill wild animals. For 7-10 days we did not have food. Having no food, one kept going to the river to drink water. After drinking a little water, it sort of made your eyes see clearer. [Laughs]

One kept going to the riverside for water. In that way the Chinese blocked [our route] for 6-7 days. One could not release the *ker*a ‘waist band’ or the bootlaces at night. One could hardly sleep. [We] trudged day and night, such that some people had their eyes bulge out. [They] were unable to see and fell down. [We] suffered such miseries.

Q: What did [you] say about the *ker*a?

#65D: There was no time to release the *ker*a. The *ker*a remained tied. For 18 days and night, I could not untie the *ker*a of [my] *chupa*. So [I] had lice infested around here [waistband] and bootlaces. In [our] region one wore boots. I had a relative there at that time, a relative of mine that was killed there.

Q: By relative, do you mean from the same set of parents?

01:06:53

#65D: A sibling from the same set of parents.

Q: Brother?

#65D: Yes, a brother; a brother of mine.

Q: At Thoe Nagtsang?

#65D: At Nagtsang; [he] was killed at Nagtsang. And then I fled to the mountains and could not find food. [I] had nothing to eat. I continued for days and nights without turning back until I reached Ladakh. [I] arrived at the Indian border army camp at Ladakh.

The Ladakhi soldiers armed with guns started crossing the huge Indus River in a boat and charged upon us. Perhaps they thought [we] were Chinese or something. [Laughs]. Then the Ladakhi troops got off the boat and came to where we were camped. There was a Ladakhi man who acted as interpreter. Otherwise, we did not know the Indian language. The Ladakhi man could speak Tibetan and asked, “How and why did [you] come here?” “We underwent great suffering. The Chinese caused [us] misery. Our lama has left for India and we have followed him. [We] have escaped,” [we] replied. “That is true. [Your] lama is in our country, in India. We are aware of it,” they said. They gave us food like rice, wheat and sweetened tea. They also gave us bread and kept us there for around a week. Then they said we had have to leave and took us across the river. There were a few horses,

which were driven into the river and the men crossed in a boat. [We] were able to reach their place and finally our lives were saved.

Q: I just wanted to ask when [you] said that when they came at them, they came with guns. Were they sort of charging towards them with their guns pointed at them, aimed at them?

01:10:47

#65D: [They] came charging at us with guns. [Laughs] Some of them were in the boat and then waded into the water towards us. We were scared thinking that the Ladakhi men could be Chinese. We were that scared then.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Is this the *tsangpo* 'river'? Which river could this be? [Brahmaputra River is also known as Tsangpo.]

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That's another river that is there in Ladakh.

Q: What's the name of the river?

#65D: Senge Tsangpo.

Q: Yes?

#65D: It is called Senge Tsangpo.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: *Tsangpo*?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Indus. The Indus River.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But you call it *tsangpo* in Tibet.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Tsangpo* is river. That's the...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: *Tsangpo* just means river?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: River. Senge Khabab.

#65D: Yes, it is Senge Khabab. There is Senge Khabab and Langchen Khabab 'Sutlej River' that are rivers originating from Mount Kailash.

Q: So the person who is Ladakhi, who is in...who is the Ladakhi person?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He was in the Indian army.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, so he was shouting at them to explain who they were? Is that what happened?

01:12:01

#65D: [He] questioned, “How did [you] come? Why did [you] come?” We explained the way we had come. We explained to him how and why we came. Then he interpreted it. He said, “You need not fear. You are in Ladakh and need have no fear.”

Q: And then what happened?

01:12:45

#65D: There were many of our people in Ladakh, Thoepa families that were from Ngari. [I] lived among them. I lived among them for around *lo pheka* ‘five months.’

Q: Yes?

#65D: [I] lived for *lo pheka* along with them.

Q: What’s *lo pheka*? One year?

#65D: Five months.

Q: Five months?

#65D: Yes, [I] stayed around 5-6 months.

Q: And then?

#65D: They gave [me] food there. Some of them called [me] acquaintance or friend. Then the Indian army issued papers for [us] to go to India. One was given a permit.

Q: Amazing. Is there anything else you want to tell us about your story before we finish?

01:14:19

#65D: There is nothing left of the story. That is the story of how I lived and arrived.

Q: Can I just ask you, was it difficult to adapt to life in India?

#65D: Oh, it was very hot and extremely difficult. The sun was hot and one fell ill. One could not adjust to the heat and did not know how to eat the food. Back in the village, one was used to eating nomad food. Once here a person had to start a new life. One had to begin a new life, eat new food; one could not even cook the food. Having no awareness, one had to learn to eat.

Q: I’d like to just ask you, what are your feelings about the self-immolations going on these days in Tibet?

#65D: Communist Chinese have caused a lot of suffering in the past. There were many thousands of monks and monasteries. All the many thousands were annihilated, killed, destroyed and the holy images transported to China. The holy images contained gold, silver

and precious stones. They melted these into bullets, into shells for the cannons and manufacture of weapons.

In Tibet from earlier times until now—like the bullet did not penetrate the Andrug nephew—it is said that if precious metals like gold and silver are not present, bullets did not penetrate one when lamas granted protective amulets. If such images with precious metals are present then weapons penetrated immediately. They took these images to China and manufactured different things. [They] are doing such things.

Many thousands of monasteries with 8-9 lamas and *tulku* ‘incarnate lamas’ have been destroyed. Bigger monasteries consisted of 500-600 monks and 6-7 lamas and *tulku*. All the lamas were shot dead and buried in pits. Communist Chinese have done such things. [They] have inflicted such sufferings. Though the young ones have no knowledge about these, the elders narrate to them. There are older people that have been left behind.

01:19:04

They [the Chinese] did such things and stated that the Cultural Revolution would be launched. After taking over all the wealth and possessions of Tibet, they spoke about the great Cultural Revolution. What the Cultural Revolution meant was that, “If there are wealthy and influential people of the past left among you...” [The Chinese also told the people] how they [the wealthy and the influential] had oppressed the people and that the Communist Party would avenge the oppression. Saying that they [the wealthy and influential] were awarded black hats, they were not allowed to look here and there [moves head to right and left] or go anywhere.

There were *mani* [prayers] carved on stones and they were made to stand near the cairns and not allowed to turn about. “What kind of work did you do? How did you become wealthy? You did not give to the poor,” saying such he [the wealthy or influential person] was punished; not allowed to speak for many years, not allowed to move with people and not given food. Then some died from starvation. People were rendered hungry and thirsty.

If 4-5 couples cooked together, the able bodied ones—the nomadic areas consisted of pastures—were made to dig earth on the mountaintops. “You have to do farming, construct roads, work in the fields and build fences to prevent animals and people. [You] must carry out such type of work.” When they performed these tasks, there was nothing to eat, and doing such difficult tasks brought about the death of four, five, six or seven people every day. There was nothing to eat and one was not allowed to make smoke [light a fire] in one’s home. One was not allowed to place a pot on the stove or...[not discernible]. That was the Cultural Revolution.

01:21:30

The more intelligent and smarter among the people who had the potential to do something were taken in the night to China and to Karmo where there was a mountain to break stones. [They] were taken to distant areas in the Changthang in vehicles for four, five or six days where there were no people or water. [They] were forced to dig out pastures like this [points to ground] from good areas and transplant them in sandy areas to turn them into pastures.

When it grew hot [they] could not work and there was nothing to eat. [Their] food was the husk of grains. [To interpreter] You would know that. Gruel was made using this and fed to them. They grew hungry and died from starvation. If a person could not work, he was not given food. There was no food for children. The ration per day was just a ladle full. Trying [his] best, the one that could work shared a spoonful around. [They] had to remain in that situation. The Chinese made one work like that for 2-3 years.

01:23:58

If there were any prominent people or leaders, he was ordered to be brought out and numerous people forced to assault him. [The people] were made to hold him by the hair and assault [him] until he was nearly dead. He would have to be carried away and was rendered immobile for 4-5 days. A lot of sufferings were inflicted. This is the truth. I have three sons left in the village and they told me that such things took place when I returned. I went back in the year '83.

Q: Just a minute. We'll get back to that, but just a minute. *Aku-la* 'respectful term for paternal uncle,' I just was wondering about the... You've heard about the self-immolations happening these days in Tibet, yes? You must have heard.

#65D: In regard to this...

Q: Do you think it's, sorry, just one second... please wait. We just want to know if you think this is something that will create some benefit or do you think it is not a good idea, if it's a waste of life?

#65D: Actually they are doing it for the benefit of Tibet's cause. They would have felt that it was futile to fight or challenge them [the Chinese] in any other way to achieve the cause of Tibet. Living under oppression... Instead of living under suffering, without any hesitation in their minds, they have immolated and sacrificed their lives for the cause of Tibet. This is what I think.

It will make the world aware of what is happening and what the Tibetans are doing. [I] think this is beneficial. However, Communist China is a huge country and wealthy. Whatever their thoughts maybe, their reaction is lying and deceiving other countries, "We are doing good." But the point is that they are inflicting such terrible sufferings that one is forced to sacrifice one's life.

Q: And actually I have to say again as it was said at the beginning, we have to also remind you if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else, is it okay for you?

01:27:43

#65D: There will be no problems.

END OF INTERVIEW