

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #79 – Tsering (alias)
July 6, 2007

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #79
2. Interviewee: Tsering (alias)
3. Age: 85
4. Date of Birth: 1922
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Thoe Gay-jar
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1961
9. Date of Interview: July 6, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Interviewee's residence, New Camp No. 4, Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 28 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Tsewang Dorjee
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tsering is a nomad from the Thoe Ngari region in Utsang. He became a salt-trader at the age of fifteen and Tsering describes step-by-step how Tibetans gathered salt and took it to Ladakh, where they traded it for barley, rice and wheat. From start to finish, the process of salt trading—including removing salt from the lakes, filling the saddle bags, loading them on the yaks and sheep, traveling to Ladakh, and returning home—took the traders around two months.

Tsering then explains how the salt trade came to an end when the Chinese suddenly barred Tibetan salt traders from traveling to Ladakh. With their livelihoods threatened and with no means to challenge the Chinese on their own, all of Tsering's fellow villagers left to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force in Dhoporang.

The journey took several days and before the villagers could reach Dhoporang, Chinese soldiers intercepted and captured around 300 of them, including Tsering. Some villagers were arrested and the remainder, after months of indoctrination by the Chinese, were sent back to their village.

Topics Discussed:

Nomadic life, salt trading, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #79

Interviewee: Tsering [alias]

Age: 85, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: July 6, 2007

Question: Do you give your permission?

Interviewee #79: Yes, I do.

Q: Tell us, where is the province you were born in Tibet?

#79: It comes under Ngari. Previously, we lived in Kham Dege. Then the family moved to Thoe and settled in Thoe Ngari. Later, we came to be under Ngari. Thoe Ngari lies close to Mount Kailash. It comes under Utsang province. Earlier we were under Dhotoe [Kham province].

Q: What did your family do for a livelihood?

#79: We were nomads. We had two sources of income. One was raising animals for milk, butter and cheese; the other was salt trading. The main item was salt. Salt was bartered for grains for us to make *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.'

Q: How many generations was your family been salt traders?

#79: It was since we arrived in Thoe from Kham. It might have been about four generations.

Q: When did you start going on the expeditions to gather the salt, at what age?

#79: I traded in salt from the age of 15 until I left my village. I started going to gather salt at the age of 15.

Q: Can you tell me how many children were in your family?

#79: We are two old people and three children. One child passed away and we have two children now. Our children were born in Tibet. One child died after we reached India. At present we have two sons. My wife and I had three sons and after we came to the settlement here, our middle son passed away. Now we have two sons.

Q: When you were born, how many children were in this family? Your parents and how many children?

#79: You mean those that were left behind in Tibet?

Q: While you were in Tibet, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

#79: I left behind a brother and a sister. Four siblings, including me, were able to come to India.

Q: How many children did your parents have?

#79: My parents had two sons and three daughters.

Q: Which son were you?

#79: I am the second child after my sister.

Q: So when you were growing up, when you were under 10, what situation were you living in? In a nomad tent or in a house? What was your family life like? Where did your family live when you were growing up?

#79: As we were nomads, we lived in a *ba* 'tent.' Do you know what a *ba* is? A tent made from the fur of yak is called a *ba*.

Q: Did you have one tent or more than one tent?

#79: We had two different sizes; a large one and a smaller one, which we used when we moved from place to place to graze the animals.

Q: How many days would you go out and live in the big tent? Did you go for months at a time or weeks at a time? How often would you change locations in your tents?

#79: We changed locations several times. There were different locations where we stayed during the summer, winter, autumn and spring. We did not stay in one place; there were about four different places.

Q: The reason for the change was to have different foods for the animals?

#79: Yes, that is right. When the grass for the animals was exhausted at one place, we moved to a new area.

Q: Where would you find pasture for the wintertime?

#79: In winter the animals ate the old and dried grass left over from summer. We went to the mountains and hills during winter.

Q: Was there food for the animals there?

#79: There was more grass and it was warmer on the hills. In winter you couldn't live on the lower ground because of the wind, snow and the cold. We went to the hills.

Q: When you traveled from one place to the other, how many families moved with you?

#79: In summer everybody [in the family] lived together. We did likewise in the winter. However, in spring and autumn, some the family members lived in the large tent and the rest moved about with the animals.

Q: What are some of your favorite childhood memories of those days?

#79: When I was young, I used to wonder how the salt trade would fare. We bartered the salt for grains. The expedition took place twice a year, in summer and autumn. Each trip took us a little less than two months. We traveled a great distance to sell salt. It was to the border of India that we went from Tibet. We traded with the Indians that lived in the border regions like the Ladakhis and the Khunnus. Then I used to think about the welfare of the animals. They had to have good food to multiply. I only had such thoughts.

Q: Twice a year you went to gather salt, is that correct? Could you tell us about the preparation that you had to make in order to make the journey? How long was the journey to get the salt? Can you then tell us about the preparation?

#79: The salt was found in our region. We could easily gather it. We went to sell the salt at two places: in the southeast near the Himalayas and Ladakh [northern India]. It took a little less than two months to go there and reach back home. First, we gathered the salt and loaded it on the animals. We did not carry the salt ourselves [during the journey]. We had to repeatedly load and unload the animals and it was a lot of hard work. We returned home within two months.

Q: Salt was found in your village?

#79: Yes, salt was found in my region. We did not have to pay tax nor purchase it. However, one needed a helper to gather the salt. There was as much salt as one could gather. There was no limit.

Q: You didn't go and dig up the salt from the salt place?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They got it from their village.

Q: Where did the village get it?

#79: The valley contained salt. For example, there was a valley with patches of water with two hills on both sides. The valley stretched to a distance of a day's horse ride. The whole area was full of salt.

Q: Did the salt come from the river?

#79: No, it was not a river. Salt came from the lakes. Not one single body of a large lake, but an area that consisted patches of many small lakes. It stretched a distance of a day's horse ride. We gathered salt from there.

Q: Did you ever go and get the salt yourself?

#79: Yes, I went to get the salt myself.

Q: Could you tell us how many people went with you and what did you take in preparation to get the salt? What did you have to take, a horse, bags? What did you take?

#79: We drove yaks or sheep with us. Either yaks or sheep were loaded with the salt in *gye*.

Q: Is that a bag?

#79: No, they were woven from wool and called *gye*. There were two types of *gye*, bigger ones for the yaks and smaller ones for the sheep. It [salt] was put in it, the opening stitched and loaded on the animals.

Q: So they were bags made of wool?

#79: Yes, they looked like bags. In India we have these large *jute* sacks, but we did not have such sacks in Tibet. They were made from the fur of animals, like wool and yak hair. They were not *jute* sacks nor were they made of cloth.

Q: How many people would go together to the lake to get the salt?

#79: About five or six people went together.

Q: How old were you when you started to go for the first time?

#79: I was about 15 years old when I first went to gather salt. I was a child and just old enough to drive the yaks and sheep. The animals were laden with the loads and they had to be herded.

Q: It took one day to get there. Is that right?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, the lake was so big that if one rode a horse, it would take one day to reach the end of the lake. That was just to describe the size of the lake.

Q: So you could go and come back in one day?

#79: Well, almost. The salt was found at one location. Being nomads, we did not live at one spot, but moved from place to place. So from certain places, it took two to three days [to reach the salt location] and from other places, within a day. We reached there the same day, while from some distant places it might take two to three days. The nomads moved from place to place in search of grass for their animals.

Q: Was the lake frozen? Where was the salt in the lake?

#79: The salt is found in the center of the lake. It is a difficult process to gather it. One required good tools. We have a tool called *yakpa*, which you may not know. People called it either *yakpa* or *yangpa*. Some are made of wood and some of iron. It is a flat thing with a handle, similar to the hoe we have here. The hoe has just a small width while it [*yakpa*] is flat and wide and salt is dragged out of the water with it. The salt was piled and then carried away to dry ground. It was a very difficult task.

Q: Was there water in the lake or was it dry or frozen? What was it like?

#79: It never freezes. Perhaps it's because of the salt that the water never freezes. Salt is found in the water and normally it should dissolve in it. But the salt does not dissolve nor does the water freeze. It remains stagnant.

Q: The salt was under the water or around the edge?

#79: At times it becomes dry. When there is scanty rainfall, it [the lake] becomes dry and then salt is found on the ground and it becomes easy to gather. However, if there is no water, the salt might get exhausted. Salt cannot form without water.

Q: Salt cannot form unless there is water?

#79: Salt does not form on dry ground. Salt has to form in the water. When the water dries and if the salt is removed, then salt cannot form again. If there is water and if the salt is removed, it forms again.

Q: You put the shovel into the water and pull the salt out?

#79: Yes, you pulled the salt out of the water.

Q: Was the salt like the consistency of sand?

#79: No, it was not fine but like rough granules. It was not very fine like sand, but moderate size granules.

Q: You would put these into the saddlebags, and how many hours did you work all day doing this?

#79: We did not look at the time, but worked the whole day. We worked as much as we could from sunrise to sunset.

Q: How many days would you stay at the lake before you returned?

#79: It took us not more than two, three or four days at the salt site. It took us a long time when we set off to sell the salt. It did not take more than three or four days to gather the salt.

Q: How many pack animals would you return with the salt? How many animals would you bring back bearing salts?

#79: We had a sort of limit [to how much one person was capable]. One man would not be able to load more than 20 yaks. The limit was 20 yaks per person. Normally men worked in pairs, so two men had 40 yaks with them. Likewise, if there were four men, they had eighty yaks. We had separate yaks for transporting provisions and tents. Four people would have 80 yaks bearing salt and that was the limit. In case of sheep, it was a hundred sheep for one person. He had to perform the task for a hundred sheep load [of salt], be it gathering salt, loading or unloading the saddlebags and selling the salt. Some people had over 100 sheep as there was no rule forbidding it. The actual share was a hundred sheep or 20 yaks per person.

Q: It must have taken a long time to fill up those bags. Were the sacks of salt very heavy?

#79: Each sack weighed about 40 kilograms and two of that is 80 kilograms. An animal carried two sacks each weighing 40 kilograms. One yak carried 80 kilograms.

Q: How did they react to that much weight? Did the yaks have any problem with it or complain?

#79: Yes, the yaks faced problems, but much depended upon their owners. If a bad owner drove the laden animals the whole day, they would be tired. Some people traveled for short distances, allowed the animals to graze on the way and walked slowly. Then the animals did not face any problems, so it depended on the kindness of the owners.

Q: What do you mean by take good care of your yaks? What would be a man who takes good care of his yaks? What would he do?

#79: He should not drive the animals for long distances. He must let them eat grass and see that they are not hungry. He should see that the load on the back of the animal does not cause any abrasions. Normally, because of the load, some animals develop sores on the back. So [a good owner] should check that the animals do not develop sores, are not hungry and not drive them for long distances at a stretch. If one drives them slowly, they would not face any problems.

Q: When you are digging the salt from the water, wasn't the water ice cold? How did you keep your feet from getting frozen?

#79: Yes, it was very difficult and our legs would burn. When salt water dries, it tightens around the legs. One should immediately rinse the legs in ordinary water. However, the water was not very cold.

Q: What seasons did you go to gather the salt from the lake?

#79: Except for winter, we went every season: spring, autumn and summer.

Q: About how many times a month?

#79: We cannot go every month. We went twice in a year, once in summer around this time [July] and another time in autumn. We cannot go in winter. We went to sell salt twice a year. However, yaks cannot go there in autumn except in summer. Its hoofs developed cracks, so sheep were used then. We took the yaks only in summer.

Q: What made the difference? Why would you take the yaks in summer and the sheep in autumn?

#79: The reason was that the ground turned cold [in autumn] and the hoofs of the yaks developed cracks. The ground became frozen then. They might be able to walk to the salt area, but they would not be able to take the return journey because winter would have set in by then.

Q: Did women ever go on these journeys?

#79: No, women did not go.

Q: Why not?

#79: They would not be able to perform the work. It requires a lot of strength and women cannot do that. Salt gathering needs a lot of muscle power.

Q: Did you have any favorite songs that you would sing on this journey to get the salt or while digging the salt or bringing it back?

#79: People used to sing while gathering the salt, but I do not know how to sing. While doing the gathering many songs were sung. However, I do not know to sing.

Q: So you would get the salt and then you'd come back. It would take a couple of days to return and then what would happen when you got back home with the salt? How long did it take to come back and what happened when you returned? Did you have a celebration, or what happened?

#79: We would be back within two months at the most. We gathered and sold the salt during the same trip. We left home to gather salt and instead of returning home, we went to sell the salt. It took us nearly two months.

Q: I forgot to ask the name of the lake that you got the salt from. Could you say it please?

#79: The place had a name. There were many lakes and many names. The end of the area where salt was found was called Lorin. The starting point was called Tson-go. From the Tson-go, one moved on to Duthetsa. Those were the bigger lakes. Then there was one called Dakpun.

Q: So it was not one lake, but there were many lakes.

#79: Yes, there were many lakes. It was not one large water body. Some areas were dry grounds and at certain points were the lakes. Salt formed in the lakes, but the open ground was barren.

Q: What was the region called?

#79: The whole region was called Dangtsam.

Q: This was in northern Tibet, right? You said you went to Ladakh?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: This was in Utsang.

Q: How many days journey is it to Ladakh from there? You went to sell in Ladakh, right?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Where else?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In the Himalayas.

Q: So if you were going to Ladakh, did you go to Leh the capital? Where did you go in Ladakh?

#79: We journeyed close to Leh. There was a place called Sakte just before reaching Leh where we went. It was a day's journey from there to Leh.

Q: How long did the journey take from the salt lakes to Sakte?

#79: The journey took about 15 days. If one went directly, it took a little less than 15 days. It took longer if we let the animals to graze. Normally we did not go directly. Instead we rested a day or so for the animals to eat their fill. A direct journey would not take 15 days.

Q: Did you ever worry? This was a very valuable cargo, right? Did you ever worry about robbers, or were you ever attacked by people who wanted to steal your salt?

#79: No, never. I never met any robbers.

Q: When you got to that city in Ladakh, who did you trade the salt to? Who did you trade it to and what did you get in return?

#79: We received barley, rice and wheat. We sold the salt to the people of Ladakh.

Q: Did you get any special treats or delicacies that you wanted to bring back to the family besides rice, barley and grains?

#79: We took apricots, but besides that there was nothing.

Q: Did you ever get money for the salt or did you only want to trade in goods?

#79: If we wanted to we could sell it for money. However, we traded it only for grains and not for money. We bought grains with money. If we wanted we could buy grains. We exchanged the salt for grains and in case the salt value was less, we paid in money, butter or cheese.

Q: Did you pay them money?

#79: Yes, we paid money to buy [grains]. We also sold butter and cheese to buy barley.

Q: Was it Tibetan currency that you used?

#79: It was the Indian notes. A long time ago when I was a young child, the money we used was silver. There was an Indian note with a picture of a person with long hair. We also used an English note, which had the head print of a bald man. There were two types of currencies.

Q: Did you receive money for your salt or did you exchange it for grains?

#79: We did not receive money. We traded for the purpose of getting grains.

Q: Did you ever bring special presents home for your wives or daughters? Some special thing that you could buy in Ladakh, but you couldn't buy in the place that you lived in the plains?

#79: You mean things besides grains? We took back many things. We took different types of cloth materials like *buray* 'silk,' *gonam* 'serge,' jean, etc.

Q: Did the women and the children like it when you brought these back?

#79: Yes, they liked it. We also bought toys for the children.

Q: Do you have any special memory or special experience that you had because you were doing this since the time you were 15? Do you have any special memories of any of those trips you made? Something exciting happening, or scary or memorable?

#79: No, except that salt gathering was very difficult. There was no danger to man or animal on the route to Ladakh. However, if one went to the place called Shawok in the Himalayan region, men and animals could perish in one day under landslides. For other such dangers, there were no other fears or robbers.

Q: Where would you go in the Himalayas to sell this? Was there a city or people or camps? Where would you sell your salt?

#79: There were places called Shawok, Kotey and Chonam. We sold in three places. One could go to any of these places.

Q: Where would you locate it—in which province and which area of Tibet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In Utsang province. They migrated from Kham and stayed in Ngari, which comes under Utsang.

Q: So when you got the salt, you would either go to Ladakh or you would to the Himalayas?

#79: Yes, that is right.

Q: Were you ever caught in a landslide or anything like that?

#79: No, I have not been caught in a landslide, but I have seen people killed under landslides.

Q: Were they from your party?

#79: No, they were not from my party. They were different [party].

Q: You started at age 15. How many years did you do these journeys for salt, until what age?

#79: I did it from the age of 15 until Tibet was defeated. I was 37 when we lost Tibet. So how many years was that from 15 to 37?

Q: Did your trading...was it affected as the Chinese came in or gradually? What effect did the Chinese entrance into Tibet have on your trading of salt?

#79: After the Chinese arrived, once they did not allow us to go [to Ladakh] and we had to return empty-handed. The Chinese had arrived much earlier in our village. But for about nine years they just lived there. They set up a large army camp at Rutok, a little further away from our village. They were there for about nine years. Then suddenly one day they occupied our country. They suddenly bombed the Potala Palace one day. Until that time,

for about nine years they stayed put. They set up their army camp and told us, "We are here to help you." It was in 1957 that the Chinese did not let us go. They did not issue us the travel permit and so the Indians did not allow us in without the travel permit and we had to return empty-handed. We faced such problems then.

Q: The Chinese did not allow you to gather salt?

#79: No, they allowed us to gather salt, but they did not let us go to Ladakh. We gathered the salt, but they did not permit us to go to sell the salt.

Q: Why didn't they let you go? What reason did they give?

#79: The reason they gave us was, "You should have a letter when leaving your home. Without that we will not let you go through. If you had brought a letter with you when you left home, we could issue you the permit. Since you do not have the letter, we will not let you go."

Q: When they said a letter from home, did they mean a letter from the district officer of your region?

#79: Yes, they said that if we had a travel permit issued by the leader of Ngari, they would let us go. Since we didn't have that, they could not let us go. They stopped us at the border of Ladakh.

Q: Could you get the letter?

#79: No, we couldn't go. It was too far away. It was not a distance of a day or two; one had to travel almost a month. So we returned empty-handed.

Q: You had all the salt with you to trade. What did you do?

#79: Then we returned. What else was there to do?

Q: With the salt?

#79: Yes.

Q: This meant no food for your families because you couldn't trade for grains, right?

#79: Then we faced problems due to lack of food.

Q: How did you survive without grains?

#79: We could not buy grains in bulk, but we managed to buy small quantities and somehow managed to survive. We faced a lot of problems. People in areas like Rutok and

Tsapu cultivated small farms and we bought small quantities [of grain] from them. However, they did not have a plentiful supply.

Q: What happened to that whole shipment of salt? What became of it that you couldn't take to Ladakh and you had to bring home?

#79: That was useless. You cannot eat salt, so that was useless.

Q: Did the Chinese ever collect salt themselves to take or sell to other people? Did the Chinese go to the salt lakes and take the salt?

#79: No, not at that time. They did not have plans to collect salt.

Q: It was in 1957 that the Chinese stopped you at the border. Did the Chinese have any other effect on your lives?

#79: We decided not to surrender our weapons to the Chinese, but to go away. We hoped to be able to resist the Chinese. However, we knew that we could not do so alone because we were just one village. Furthermore, we did not possess any arms nor did we have a large number of people or any experience [in warfare]. We planned to join the famous Tibetan army [*Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force] led by Andrug Gonpo Tashi and resist the Chinese.

However, we thought it was not the right thing to go immediately, so we sent a messenger with the message, "We have plans to join your force. Is it alright for us to come and join you?" The messenger was sent to Dhoporong, where we heard the army camp of Andrug Gonpo Tashi was. We felt that if we suddenly appeared there and they refused to take us in, we might be left in a critical situation. So we sent two men to ask them, "We are ready to join you and we have not surrendered our weapons [to the Chinese]. Will you accept us in your organization or not?" They sent back a message saying, "Yes, that is fine. If you have plans to come, do so immediately. Do not delay, but come immediately." Then we started out immediately. The whole village left with not one family staying behind.

Q: Not one family staying behind?

#79: Yes, not one family stayed back. We were about 600 to 700 families. The entire population moved together.

Q: Six hundred to 700 families joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#79: Yes, there were more than 600 families.

Q: Families or people?

#79: Whole families including the animals. [During the journey] those animals that became exhausted were left on the way. The entire population moved with their animals. Not one man was left in the village.

Q: That's not the number of people. That is like 700 individual families; so it must have been more than 700 people. Like about 2,000 people, what do you think?

#79: I do not know the number of people, but there were more than 600 families.

Q: You were nomads at this point living in tents, so how far from where you lived did you go to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*? How many days?

#79: Yes, we left and then encountered the Chinese on the way.

Q: How far was it [the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp] from where you lived?

#79: We journeyed for several days towards Mount Kailash. We were a lot of people and those who were in the lead had crossed Mount Kailash while those bringing up the rear were close to it [Mount Kailash] when the Chinese soldiers arrived. They were in 80 vehicles. I do not know the exact count, but I heard people say that there were 80 vehicles.

[Tape change]

Q: When the *Chushi Gangdrug* said you could come, how many days did it take the 500 families to travel from your campsite to where *Chushi Gangdrug* was?

#79: We were not able to reach Dhoporong [the *Chushi Gangdrug* campsite]. Chinese soldiers arrived when we were near Mount Kailash. I heard that just before one reached Dhoporong, there was a river called Martsang Tsangpo. If one could cross Martsang Tsangpo, one was over the border and need have no fear. However, we did not reach Martsang Tsangpo. We were a huge number, a matter of 600-700 families and while we were nearby Mount Kailash, 80 army vehicles arrived. I did not know the exact figure then.

The soldiers arrived and initially they captured about 300 people. They then separated the people into groups. Perhaps they had no place for such a large number of people. They arrested all the leaders. They first arrested about 300 people, but they released some after two or three days. Then by the third month, only about a hundred people remained, while the rest were released. They [the Chinese soldiers] formed three groups of the people and said they were going to teach us. We had left our village and we were living in another area. We were divided into three groups and taught. They kept the influential people under arrest. They kept on giving instructions [indoctrination] to the people for three months.

Then it was nearing winter, around the 10th Tibetan lunar month. The weather would turn very cold. A little before the cold weather set in, they [the Chinese] brought out the leaders and ordered the people to oppose them. They [the Chinese] had indoctrinated the people who used to be beggars and such, who vigorously opposed the lamas and the leaders. They

beat them, spit on them and did various things. I witnessed it. After separating the people, they [the Chinese] did not release the hundred that they had kept with them. They were put in prison. About 10 to 15 days passed. Then suddenly one day the hundred men had been taken away in the vehicles, no one knew where. We could see no one. There were no vehicles and no tents! They had disappeared.

Q: When the Chinese arrived, had you almost reached Mount Kailash?

#79: Some of the people had crossed Mount Kailash, while others had nearly reached it. As there were a large number of people, everybody cannot move together. There was a difference of a few days.

Q: Did one reach Dhoporong after one had crossed Mount Kailash?

#79: Dhoporong was still a few days' journey away from Mount Kailash. After crossing over the mountain pass one reached Martsang Tsangpo a few days later. Then one reached the border and one need have no fear [of being captured by the Chinese]. That's what was said.

Q: Where were you in this story?

#79: I was not among the 300 that were arrested. I was captured, but released after three days.

Q: You joined the families that were going to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*. You were in the crowd and were arrested when the Chinese came?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: What happened to you in prison?

#79: They kept interrogating me, but did not do anything else.

Q: Did they ask the people if they were going to go and join the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#79: No, they did not ask that.

Q: The people that disappeared, did they happen to be the leaders of the community?

#79: I heard that some of them returned two or three years later. It was autumn then and by spring we had escaped. I heard that most of those people returned in around three years. However, about seven of them never returned.

Q: Can you tell us approximately what year this was or how old were you when this was happening?

#79: I was 38 years old then. That was in the year 1960.

Q: So what happens to you next? You couldn't trade salt; the Chinese wouldn't let you join the *Chushi Gangdrug*, what happens to you next?

#79: So for three months we remained there. We were divided into three groups and tutored. They [the Chinese] said, "You people have no knowledge. It is wrong on your part to go against the Chinese [government]. You are opposing the Chinese government. You have made a mistake and you must be advised. We will instruct you." So for three months they held us there and taught us. After the three months, the soldiers took us back to our village. They brought us back to where we lived and left us there. The soldiers then went away. We lived there for the three winter months and when spring began late in the first Tibetan lunar month or in the early second Tibetan lunar month, two families managed to escape to Ladakh. The two families fled. They were my family and another one. Later, many people also arrived.

Q: Where was the place you were held for three months?

#79: The name of the place was Shang. There were three places, Upper Shang, Lower Shang and Dhoom. We were separated into three groups and given lessons.

Q: Were they small cities Upper Shang, Lower Shang and Dhoom?

#79: They were villages and not cities.

Q: The Chinese were in control of these villages?

#79: Yes, that is right.

Q: So in three months you all had to return to your own area where you had come from? Is that correct?

#79: We were escorted to our village by the soldiers. There was no other option, but to go as the soldiers were ushering us. They were Chinese soldiers and we had no choice.

Q: Did they drive you in vehicles?

#79: No, not in vehicles because we had the yaks and sheep with us. Most of the animals had scattered, but we still had some left. So with those animals, we were escorted back to our village after three months. We lived in the village for the three winter months. We couldn't leave as the Chinese were there. Then the Chinese packed up their army camp and left. There were no Chinese to be seen in our village. We stayed for three months in the village and when spring began around the second Tibetan lunar month, we fled to Ladakh. That's how it was. That was how the Chinese troubled us.

Q: You escaped to Ladakh. So this was away from the Chinese and you left the area they controlled.

#79: Yes, I went to Ladakh.

[Tape Change]

Q: We are going to continue. We are almost finished.

#79: We suffered a lot. We underwent immense misery. We hoped to be able to resist them [the Chinese], but we had no manpower. We decided to surrender to [join] the Tibetan army [*Chushi Gangdrug*], but we were not sure if they would accept us. Two men were sent to enquire from them and we received word that we were not to delay, but to join them immediately. We left, but the soldiers stopped us and we couldn't proceed. We suffered a lot then. They treated us very badly.

Q: Did anybody from your group actually go to *Chushi Gangdrug* in the end? Did anybody escape and sneak back to the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#79: No, nobody could go. Everyone was captured by the Chinese.

Q: What was the year that you actually escaped to Ladakh?

#79: It was 1961. We returned to our village in 1960. It was in 1961 that I reached Ladakh.

Q: May I ask, how many people were you able to bring with you in your family?

#79: We were six family members: the two parents, our three children and my mother.

Q: Is this one of the sons here?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, this is one of his sons.

Q: When you got to Ladakh, what kind of business or work did you do? And how long did you stay there and what kind of work did you do in Ladakh?

#79: We faced a lot of hardships in Ladakh. We were able to drive a small number of our animals to Ladakh, but all of them died under snowfall. Then we were left with nothing. We sold the few things that we owned. We lived for five years in Ladakh with no work. We had nothing and we lived there idly, unsure of where to go. Some people went to India and some went to the settlement in Leh.

We were wary about joining the settlement as I saw that it looked extremely poor. I heard people say we would die of the heat if we went to [southern] India. So we daren't take the risk. We listened to news and it took us five years. I sent this son [points to son] and the one that passed away to school in Ladakh. Three years passed since their admission into the

school and not to mention seeing them [during this period], we never even had a letter from them. We were in a sort of daze not knowing where to go. We didn't know how to get to India or to go to Ladakh [Tibetan settlement, Leh]. We knew nothing. The children had been sent to school in India, so in the hope of meeting them and risking death due to the heat, we left for India.

Q: Where were your children in school?

#79: They were sent to a school in Ladakh. From Ladakh they were sent to Kangra [Himachal Pradesh in India]. After a few months in Kangra, they had been sent to Panchmari. When I reached India, they were in Panchmari. I met them there after three years.

Q: Where is Panchmari?

#79: I don't know where it is. They were in a school there.

[Interpreter to Interviewer]: It is in Madhya Pradesh [India].

Q: What advice or message would you like to give the next generation of Tibetans? To the children of Tibet, when they grow up what advice would you like to give them now?

#79: I cannot give any advice. I am not a highly capable person who can talk well. I cannot advise them except that they should study hard.

Q: I thank you for the interview and that the Dalai Lama would be very happy that you shared your story as a salt-man of Tibet.

#79: [Smiles]

Q: And also that we have this permission. Is it okay for us to use your story for television etc.?

END OF INTERVIEW