

Dakpa Samdup's Account of His Life in Tibet
As recorded by
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My parents came from Kham. They were traders and settled in Lhasa. I was born in Lhasa. My father traded a lot of goods, including tea, rice, wheat flour, and clothes. He visited villages and sold ready-to-wear garments. He would make a note of the names of the families who purchased garments and then, in the fall, after the harvest, he would return and be paid in grain. He then sold the grain in Lhasa for cash. He also bought and sold horses, mules, knives, and guns.

Managing a Monastery's Estate

We were a large family and we went to the village to manage an estate. It was land that we leased from a monastery. There were seven or eight families who worked for us and we provided them with land and housing in return for their labor. In this system, if I purchased a large piece of land and converted it into farmland, I would allot plots of land to people who did not own land and construct houses for them. This was done on the condition that one person from each family would work on my farm.

If it was a large plot, one person would be required to come every day. If it was a smaller plot, they would need to send someone every other day. And, if it was an even smaller plot of land, someone would need to come once a week. The Chinese say this system was oppressive and that poor people were made to suffer. If viewed all of a sudden, it may seem like it. However, if looked at carefully, that was not the case because the tenant had been provided with something that needed to be paid back.

In the case of nomads, the agreement involved animals. For example, a nomad would be given yaks with the understanding that he would pay for the animals through an annual butter tax. Take my family, for example. We owned 62 or 63 yaks, which we gave to a nomad since we could not take care of them. When a female yak gave birth, the calf was considered ours, while the nomad could keep all the milk produced. However, we also received some butter and cheese when there was an annual accounting done at the nomad's site. At this time, all the newborns were marked with a stamp on the horns and the nomad gave us a block of butter the size of one square foot and an equal amount of cheese.

If a yak fell sick, we had to be informed immediately and one of us would go to the nomad's site to have a look. If the yak died, the horn that had been initially stamped would be returned to us to prove that the animal had died. If a tenant had a problem and couldn't work for us, they could ask for a leave of absence for 10 days, 15 days, or a month and permission would be given. For instance, this would happen when there was a sickness in the family. In some cases, the tenant had important work to do, and he was allowed to bring replacements later to make up the number of days lost.

Dakpa Samdup's Early Schooling

When I was about 7 or 8 years old, I spent two to three years learning to write the Tibetan script on wooden slates. Because my father was a trader, he had to make lists of goods that were

bought and sold and prepare accounts of income and expenses. My father could read the script, but he couldn't write much. He was desperate and thought, "If I send this child to study, it will benefit me, and also him."

I didn't study at a government school, but in a private tutor's home because at that time, there were no schools in Tibet for people with my family's limited means. My family paid the tutor in the form of meat and butter because we did not have much money. There were two other students. Sometimes we slept at the teacher's home and swept, dusted, and performed other chores that children normally did, but there were other times when we returned home in the evening.

Meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama

I met His Holiness the Dalai Lama only once. It was during the Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa, when we made an offering to the monks. When you made that offering, you became a sponsor and you could receive an audience with His Holiness. I was small and as we filed past His Holiness, he patted me twice on the head. When I looked up, His Holiness was smiling and seemed very happy. Afterwards, I was overjoyed. In fact, when we got home, I was so happy that I didn't feel hungry, even though it was time to eat. I just wanted to walk, and walk, and walk.

When the Chinese First Arrived

When the Chinese first arrived, before they occupied Tibet with soldiers, I was 12, 13, 14, or 15. The Chinese came marching in single file along the road and I went to look at them with many other children. However, the older people were very frightened. The Chinese had red faces and were short in stature, and each one carried a small square-shaped pack. Nothing else. At the sound of a whistle, the Chinese stopped, and at the sound of a whistle, they took off. I can recall that vividly.

We used to transport wood in carts. At that time, the Chinese faced a wood shortage and we traded a lot of wood with them. The wood buyers were the interpreters. The interpreters arrived to make a deal with us and the Chinese made the cash payment. The reason this wood trade came about was that the Chinese gathered together a huge number of Tibetans to construct roads. After the roads were built, we started trading wood since carts could travel on those roads.

The Defend Tibet Volunteer Force

When I was about 19 years old, the Chushi Gangdrug (Defend Tibet Volunteer Force) came into being. The Tibetan Government's policy was that we should live in peace with the Chinese. When Andrug Gonpo Tashi heard this, he called a meeting and said, "We cannot remain like this. We must rise up and make preparations. The Chushi Gangdrug will be formed."

The Tibetan liberation movement had already begun in Kham and Amdo Provinces and a lot of people came fleeing. What happened was that Kham descendants, wherever we were living, formed our own groups. Each one sought out their group members and the rule was that either one person from a family enlisted or the family had to make a donation. That was how I came to be in the Chushi Gangdrug. To be honest, I would rather have stayed cultivating the land.

At that time, our group was sent to the Tsethang area, near where the Lhasa airport is located today. We fought there for quite a while. When the fighting started, the Chinese went into houses belonging to rich families and we could not dislodge them. Eventually, the Chushi Gangdrug dug tunnels and planted dynamite. We blew up two huge houses; we didn't have enough of the chemicals needed to blow up more.

Then the Chinese fled into the belly of a mountain, built bunkers, and hid there. We stood guard, but we could not flush them out. We also used guerrilla tactics against Chinese army camps. Men scouted at night, looking for escape routes and making plans. Then five, six or seven men would attack smaller army camps with grenades. With the smaller camps, we could overcome the Chinese soldiers without suffering any casualties, but we couldn't succeed with larger units.

Fleeing to India

Chinese spies who spoke Tibetan infiltrated the Chushi Gangdrug. When we lost Tibet and were fleeing to India, 40-50 Chinese prisoners came with us. Most of them were soldiers, but some were spies. Their wrists were bound and they walked in single file. We brought them with us because we thought they might cause harm if we left them in Tibet. When we reached the Indian border, they were handed over to the Indians.

When fleeing to India, the Chinese pursued us and fired shots from aircraft with machine guns. Had anyone been hit on the head, it would have brought him down, but I didn't see any Tibetans getting hit. Every time an aircraft arrived, it turned foggy. The Chushi Gangdrug men aimed their guns at the plane, but they didn't do any damage as our weapons were outdated. Also, the fog made it hard to take aim.

The Chinese commander of an artillery regiment at Nordolinka in Lhasa surrendered and came with us to India. Because of disagreements with the Chinese military, he defected to the Tibetan Government Army. A few men from the army brought him to the Chushi Gangdrug and asked if they wished to keep him. They agreed and he stayed with the Chushi Gangdrug. We did not have any training and he was knowledgeable, so he helped us a little with strategies. He spoke Tibetan and lived with the exiled Tibetans in India.

Resistance Fighters in Nepal

I rejoined the Chushi Gangdrug in Mustang at Lo Chumigyatsa. It is in Nepalese Territory though the inhabitants were Tibetans. The Chushi Gangdrug stayed there for about two years. Many groups of 10 or 12 people snuck into Tibet and attacked small Chinese posts that consisted of around 10 sentries. The weapons were sent from the United States. All our men who received training in the United States were parachuted into Tibetan Territory, close to Mustang, as were the weapons.

A time for a night drop would be arranged through the wireless radio. We would set a dung fire as a signal to the plane, and Tibetan soldiers would surround the area. First, the men would be dropped and then the plane would circle twice and drop the weapons attached to parachutes. Then we carried them to Mustang in Nepali territory. When I was in Mustang, I crossed back into Tibet only once, although some men went many times.

I was in Mustang for only two years because there was so little food and clothing. I had good clothes and a pistol. I sold the pistol for 350 Nepalese rupees. I also had a sword; I sold it

for 50 rupees. I also had an amulet to hold my blessed pills. This amulet had been in my family for five generations. I sold amulet for 30 rupees. And then I sold my clothes. After everything was sold, food became difficult to procure. I could not find anything to eat and so I went away.