

Preface

In our society, in the fifth decade of the last century, there was no Tibetan Women's Association; there was absolutely no tradition of women standing shoulder-to-shoulder with men when it came to dealing with public affairs. In fact, the Tibetan adage of the time was, "the mother is the precious jewel-at-home, the father the external fencing." Thus, in a period when women remained totally homebound to care for the family, cocooned thus in a corner of the walls of time, the communist Chinese occupiers newly established what it called the Lhasa Patriotic Women's Organization. Externally, this women's organization presented an impression of being a great leap forward of progress in keeping with the requirements of the time. However, in reality it was obvious that it was designed to be used as an evil instrument of occupation by the communist Chinese. However, in some cases, actions yield results that are quite the opposite of what was intended, as happened in this case, when the women of Tibet came to realize the need to set up an association that was justice oriented and very much their own.

On March 12, 1959, a great uprising was staged in Lhasa involving only women participants. They staged large-scale demonstrations and numerous other kinds of protest actions. Apart from that uprising, there were numerous outstanding women who took part in successive protests and struggles against the Chinese occupation forces in 1959.

In order to continue the work of those heroic Tibetan women, their women's associations were set up in exile in the 1960s. Although in those days, some 99 percent of the members were illiterate, they, by sheer selfless service and dedication, demonstrated capabilities through sizeable achievement in politics, social welfare and other fields. Some of these achievements could still be seen today, for example, the Tibetan Co-operative Society at Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh and the Tibetan Women's Co-operative Handicrafts Center at Rajpur, both in Northern India.

In 1984, a Tibetan women's association was established in Dharamsala, the present seat of the Tibetan government in exile and eventually became the foundation on which a central Tibetan Women's Association would be built. As the members were all educated and capable people endowed with dedication, the Tibetan Women's Association took off at once like a bird does to the sky and quickly gained reputation on the world stage, rubbing shoulder with women from progressive countries and discussing issues with them in roundtable forums as equals.

The Tibetan Women's Association did not restrict itself to continuing to pursue the political goal merely in name. It also assumed definite responsibilities in the areas of culture, education, religion and social welfare. In its own offices, the association made it mandatory for its officials to speak unadulterated Tibetan. In support of Tibetan culture and the Buddhist tradition, TWA makes offerings to monks and nuns irrespective of their sects, and organizes introductory lectures on Buddhism for the public. In the interests of social welfare, environmental clean-up and protection campaigns have been initiated along with sponsorship programs assisting the elderly. With a focus on education, TWA provides scholarships to the children of indigent Tibetan parents, and has set up tailoring training initiatives to benefit women who often lack vocational skills. The association initiated these and numerous other programs, one after another and they have proved to be highly fruitful and beneficial.

Likewise, the association incorporated Tibetan nuns within the scope of its work to ensure that all sections of Tibetan women would benefit equally. For this purpose, it newly set up the Tibetan Nuns Project in collaboration with the Department of Religion and Cultural Affairs, Tibetan government in

exile.

The first two nunneries established by TNP, Shugseb and Dolmaling, were placed under the strong leadership of Rinchen Khado Choegyal, the first president of the TWA. Today, most Tibetan Buddhist nunneries are part of this project, and it has also reached out to Buddhist nunneries in other Himalayan regions as well as to nuns in other countries.

Some commentators from the Chinese side and from occupied Tibet contend that since the Chinese invaded Tibet, Tibetan women have won numerous kinds of basic rights. By citing some texts out of context from the Code of Ten Virtuous Deeds and the Sixteen Ethical Principles codified by Tibet's legendary king, Songtsen Gampo, besides other sources, they make the vicious contention that there was no gender equality in traditional Tibetan society. Gender inequality remains a global issue, this disparity is hardly confined to the Tibetan community. One of TWA's priorities is to address the roots of gender discrimination within Tibetan society. To this end, we have initiated numerous gender sensitization workshops throughout Tibetan communities in India.

Historically, small numbers of Tibetan women have attained the highest status within the religious realm. For example, Kharchensa Yeshe Tsogyal, Machig Labdron, Samding Dorje Phagmo through successive generations and Shugseb Jetsun Kushab have all been renowned women who have been revered by men as well.

Throughout Tibetan history, some women, in time of crisis, have stepped forward and assumed the mantle of political leadership. Nyemo nun Trinley Choedon led a group of Tibetan freedom fighters in the 1960s and fought fierce battles with the Chinese. Her fame spread even in the prisons at the time where the inmate composed an unprecedented praise for her, saying: "You, Trinley Choedon, who risked her life to defend the faith Are the supreme heroine in the defense of the faith. All Tibetans behold you as an example to be emulated. We shall remember you for ever".¹ Despite entrenched conditioning, Tibetan history reveals that the accomplishments of women are both recognized and celebrated.

In the case of the Tibetan Women's Association too, it was not merely a matter of verbally arguing for women's rights vis-à-vis men. Rather, it has made, and continues to make, strong efforts through actions that constantly seek to enhance women's understanding of their own potential and capabilities.

At the ground level too, this has been a reality and if a great Tibetan nation is to be re-established and to progress, improvement must definitely be made in enabling the over 50% of the Tibetans in Tibet and 44.5% of the Tibetan population in exile to realize their potential.

It is to be noticed that until 1997, the TWA advocated Tibet's complete independence. In 1995, as advised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Kashag and the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile began the process of holding a referendum among the Tibetans with four options for them to vote on: the Middle Way, Independence, Self-determination and Steadfastness in Truth. In 1996, the TWA called a five day meeting of the executive committee members of all the Regional TWA in Delhi, during which the members held discussions with experts. The Regional TWAs then imparted what they learned to the people in their respective localities.

The Tibetan Women's Association, in its Fifth General Body Meeting held in March 1997, adopted a resolution, pledging to unquestioningly follow whatever advice His Holiness the Dalai Lama

may give on the basis of changing political realities. From that time on, all TWA members and chapters have adhered to non-violence and the Middle Way approach.

Reference:

1 Tears of blood: Life Story of Douche Konchog Tenaha (*rod chord don macho stand dark gyi mi tshe'i mongo thorn, crag gi mug chug*). P. 284

Chapter One

The Patriotic Women's Organization, Lhasa

In his *Clear Mirror of History*, Sakya Sonam Gyaltzen writes: "The foundation of all these benefits, from the time of the Tibetan dynastic king Nyatri Tsenpo, until that of Lha Thothori Nyenshel, had been a lineage of twenty-seven kings over a period ascertained to be 500 years. However, none of these kings had connection with Buddhism. Hence, no detailed history about them is recorded here."¹ As thus recorded, if the standard works of history on Tibet deal only with the deeds of the kings who had ruled religiously, the fate of the history of women could hardly be better.

In the works of Tibetan history, there are some women with records of major deeds in the religious field. However, the first famous woman in Tibetan history with a record of accomplishment entirely in the secular realm was Tsemo Seymakar, younger sister of religious king Songtsen Gampo. Ancient historical records show that she scored outstanding achievement in having brought back under the rule of the king the rebel region of Shang-shung.

Scholar Gendun Choephel wrote in his book, *White Annals*, that in China there was talk among scholars about a book on the history of Tibet, probably written in another language, which contained a chronicle of a Tibetan queen.² Going by such a record, it appears possible that there was, indeed, a queen of Tibet, although there is no certainty about the period of her rule. Today, scholars both in Tibet and in exile continue to research Tibetan women of such renown. This being the case, we shall not add to efforts made in this field. Rather, in order to complement what will be history in the future, we shall direct our attention to the present. With this end in view, we shall focus mainly on the recent establishment and growth of the TWA. In doing so, we shall speak about the contributions of Tibetan women to their country, their people, and to the world.

It is universally known that, in 1950, troops of the Chinese People's Liberation Army entered Chamdo and captured its Governor Ngapoe and others. Gradually, the Chinese made their way to Tibet's capital Lhasa, and, using both peaceful overtures and violence, attempted to annex the country. After that, the Chinese, in an overt and superficial show of friendliness, took to sometimes inviting the wives of the Tibetan nobility and others to banquets and similar kinds of gatherings.³ One day in May 1952⁴, in order to fulfill the interest of their government in Beijing, Yang Gang, the wife⁵ of the Chinese army officer Fan Min and the wives of four other Chinese army officers, called a meeting at the recreation hall of the Shakabpa's house in Lhasa. Approximately 20 wives of Tibetan aristocrats of different ranks were called to the meeting, included Taklha Tsering Dolma, Ngapoe Tseten Dolkar, Surkhang Dekyi Lhaze, Dokhar Rigzin Bhuti, Sampho Youdon, Shesur Lhacham and Tsarong Pema Dolkar. Yang Gang told the meeting by means of an interpreter, that, in order to implement the 17-Point Agreement successfully, the women of Tibet should set up a patriotic Women's Organization. Taklha Tsering Dolma responded by saying, "Thank you for your advice for the establishment of a women's association in Lhasa. However, we are in no position to make a decision to immediately set up such an association. We need to seek permission from the Kashag (Cabinet) of the Tibetan government." The others supported her assertion. In view of this, Yang Gang too agreed.

The next day, a meeting was again held in the recreation hall of the Shakabpa residence, at which Dokhar Rigzin Bhuti and Shesur Lhacham stated that the Kashag had granted permission to set up a patriotic Tibetan women's organization. After that, Taklha Tsering Dolma was made the Chairperson and Ngapo Tseten Dolkar, Surkhang Dekyi Lhaze, Dokhar Rigzin Bhuti, Sampho Youdon, Tsarong Pema Dolkar were made Vice-chairpersons.

Tsarong Pema Dolkar's health was deteriorating. She was replaced by Taring Rinchen Dolma, who was later made the General Secretary. The others were confirmed as the executive committee and other members. Apart from that, wives of Chinese leaders were also made members of the association, and two of them were appointed as secretaries.

The women were repeatedly called to meetings at the residence of the Yuthok family. Yang Gang announced the ceremony for the inauguration of the Lhasa Patriotic Women's Organization and the organization's work agenda. From that time onwards, the principal task of the women's organization was to have the Chairman and other members present at important meetings in society. Every member was also required to take part in political education, planting of saplings, building of new meeting halls, and in road construction works.

In 1954, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Beijing. The Chairman of the women's organization, Taklha Tsering Dolma, and Ngapoe Tseten Dolkar also went upon receiving an invitation from the Chinese government. In 1955, Taklha Tsering Dolma and her assistant Taring Rinchen Dolma again visited Beijing after being invited once more.

In 1956, a delegation of representatives of Tibetan women led by Taring Rinchen Dolma left for China to attend a meeting of the All-China Women's Federation. As programs such as these continued to take place over a period of time, Tibetan women who visited Beijing were taken on tours of the city. The Chinese presumed to impart health education to them, and Chinese leaders continued to visit them, seemingly in an act of kindness. Chinese leaders oftentimes saw fit to sweet-talk with individual members of the organization, making their meeting seem private, and therefore a show of genuine concern. It was in this way that the Chinese government attempted to win over Tibetan women. In particular, during the women's association's first visit to China, the Beijing chapter of the women's federation hosted a grand banquet at which the wife of Premier Zhao Enlai gave a long speech. She said that China was going to draw up a national constitution and set up a preparatory committee for an autonomous region of Tibet. In view of all this, it was beyond doubt that the Chinese had a wicked ploy to use the Tibetan women to accomplish their own covert design on Tibet.

At the time of the Chinese invasion, the only policy of the Tibetan government in dealing with the invaders was to employ tactful diplomacy and non-violence. In tune with this, the members of the patriotic women's organization also adopted a policy of being cordial and amicable with the Chinese. Apart from this, they did not volunteer to submit to the Chinese dictates and designs. The establishment of the patriotic women's organization itself took place with the permission of the Tibetan government's Kashag. They ended up carrying out the wishes of the Chinese government by combining them with their ardent loyalty to their nation. At the same time, in order to clearly manifest their true ideology of patriotism to their country, the members of the above patriotic women's organization refused to take part in the Chinese government's activities, and, as a result, the Chinese took to organizing the teaching of *Shetring* (a letter by Nagarjuna widely studied in Tibet) in the entirely political organization as a way to entice the Tibetans. In particular, when International Women's Day was marked in the new meeting hall in Lhasa on March 8, 1959 and a Chinese military leader began delivering a speech, the Tibetan women showed a clear sign of protest by refusing to listen and, instead, filled the hall with loud noises.⁶

Although the establishment of the patriotic women's organization *did* benefit the Chinese government in terms of its external propaganda efforts at the time, most of its members later joined the Tibetan women's uprising written about in the following pages of this book. Most of the Tibetans who

had been appointed to leadership posts (such as Chairman) in the patriotic women's organization in Lhasa later fled Chinese oppression and escaped into exile. Taklha Tsering Dolma and Taring Rinchen Dolma took responsibility to care for hundreds of orphans. They set up two networks of schools for Tibetan children in exile that have today become renown across the world. All Tibetans in exile wholeheartedly recognize the two as great individuals of the Snowland of Tibet.

Notes:

1 Clear Mirror of History, p. 62, See line 3. People's Publishing House, 1981.

2 The White Annals, P.72, See line 18. Sichuan People's Publishing House.

3 Life Stories (Volume II), P. 245, line 1. Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala.

4 Although the young daughter of a highest level Tibetan aristocrat mentions the year as 1953 in her A Brief Window-view of an Impression of Tibet's Capital Lhasa, both Life Stories (Volume II) and Daughter of Tibet mention it as 1952.

5 Although Daughter of Tibet mentions her as the wife of Zhang Jin Wu, Life Stories (Volume II), describes her as the wife of General Fan Min.

6 Oral Histories (Volume 11), Daughter of Tibet P. 262, See lines 13 to 268, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

Chapter Two

Women's Uprising of March 12

All groups and organizations are invariably set up with a view to counter some particular force. The patriotic women's organization set up by the Chinese should be viewed as the underlying cause of the establishment of the group which staged the March 12, 1959 Tibetan women's uprising.

The conscientious among the Tibetan public feared that the women's organization set up by the Chinese government might fulfill Chinese desires and thereby become a counterforce to the Tibetan government. Perceiving serious danger to the survival of the great nation of Tibet, the Tibetan public rose in a sudden act. It was in this milieu that on, March 12, 1959, a group of Tibetan women held a meeting on the Drebu Yulkhey ground. It was decided at the meeting to set up a Tibetan women's association that would be true to its name. A section of the women, including Ghurteng Kunsang, Galingshag Choetsun and Chime of Drung-yig Shongkha Tsenkhang, charged on the stage to raise their voices. In particular, Phamo (heroine) Kunsang, speaking out at a large gathering of Tibetan women, cited some religious and secular historical sources to make the point that Tibet had been a fully independent country since ancient times and how it had only recently been invaded by the Chinese. She said Tibet was, firstly, a religiously oriented nation and secondly, there was absolutely no way Tibet could match the Chinese military. She said Tibet did not intend to confront the Chinese by standing erect and hurling stones at them. Rather, she said, Tibet should non-violently protest and urge the Chinese to return to their country. These, in addition to other comments made in her first speech, earned her high praise from the other women present.

Although 50 years have passed since then, any impartial observer can see that the strategy of non-violence she articulated at that time was entirely devoid of fault. Going by the Tibetan people's level of understanding of political affairs at that time, it is undeniable that she deserves a high level of praise and appreciation.

On that day, Tibetan women voiced their thoughts as one. Given the fact that the proof of Tibet's independence was indelibly enshrined in numerous historical documents, they never allowed themselves to be won over to the Chinese side either under repressive force or deception. Rather, they remained resolute in struggling for their country's independence and discussed the launch of campaigns for this purpose from that day onwards. Following the discussion, a procession was carried out led by Ghurteng Kunsang, Galingshag Choetsun, Pema Dolkar of Gyatso Tashi, Risur Yangchen, Ama Meymey from below the Meat Market, Sonam Dechen, Ama Dechen, Sweet Teashop Owner Meymey, and many more. They led the crowd to the Indian embassy in Dekyi Lingkha, the Nepalese embassy, the chief of the Kashmir Muslims, and the office of the Bhutanese representative at the Tromsikhang and informed them of the Tibetan demands.¹

On the 13th day of that month, the leaders met many times to discuss the best possible course of action to further the campaign. On the 14th day², an office was opened in the Tsemonling area and Chime of Drung-yig Shongkha Tsenkhang, newly joined by Pelgong Pendon³, set up a donation room and performed a wide range of religious prayer services. At the same time, they maintained relentless contact with representatives of the Tibetan masses and in keeping with the circumstances, exchanged ideas.

On March 17, corresponding to the 8th day of the 2nd Tibetan month, at the second gathering on the Drebu Yulkhey ground, members of the Lhasa patriotic women's organization also appeared. On

that occasion, Ghurteng Kunsang delivered a speech. A major incense offering (*Sangsol*) ceremony was held at the Chakpori, and women filled the hill from its top to the base.⁴

March 19, corresponding to the 10th day of the 2nd Tibetan month⁵, when the third meeting of Tibetan women was held on the Drebu Yulkhey ground, a heroic Ghurteng Kunsang appeared, exuding an elegance that was characteristic of Tibetan womanhood: tall and proportionately well built, with her face glowing and eyes wide open, but reserved in her speech. While she usually preferred dark colored, low-flowing, ordinary kinds of attire, on that day she wore her *chuba* raised and also wore a woolen cap. With a pistol slung by her waist, she took command of the Tibetan women's uprising.⁶

The gathered women shouted, "Tibet is a country whose history could testify to her independence! Throw the Chinese out of Tibet! Tibet belongs to Tibetans! May His Holiness the Dalai Lama live for ten thousand years! May the Ganden Phodrang Government of Tibet endure forever!" Raising these slogans, the women marched from Changseb Shar through the Bharkor to the Pel Lhachog terrace of the Tsuglakhang. A grand and solemn incense prayer ceremony was held, with Acha Chime from Lugug dressed in the costume of the women of Utsang, Gapa Dolma dressed as a Khampa woman, while a woman living below the Meat Market dressed as a woman from Tsang, and a Lhasa woman dressed in the costume of a Kongpo woman. They, among the others, stood in front on the basis of prior preparations to represent women from different parts of Tibet.

As the procession of women was returning to Drebu Yulkhey ground after the ceremony, passing through Yuthok along the Bharkor, stones were hurled by the Chinese from Yuthok. Galingshag Choetsun was hit on her forehead and Ama Gayey on her knee. The two had to be rushed to the hospital at the Indian embassy in Dekyi Lingkha.⁷

From March 12 to 19, the Tibetan women held three assemblies, two demonstrations and one slogan-shouting rally in full view of the Chinese, whose weapons were aimed at them. In all these places at the time, it appeared to be only women, with not a man in sight. At a stage during that period, the Tibetan women agreed upon and undertook a solemn oath on a set of written commitments, which stated:

"At the feet of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and as witnessed by the glorious Six Armed Protector of Wisdom (Gonpo Chag-drugpa), Dhamchen Choekyi Gyalpo, the glorious war pre-empting supreme deity Remati, besides the other fierce protector deities of power and daring who had vowed to protect the Buddhist religion and government of the Snowland of Tibet as if they are their own eyeballs.

We the undersigned hereby resolve, with commitment never to alter, to abide by the following clearly spelled out pledges: The inhabitants of the Three Provinces of the Snowland of Tibet had already been tamed by the supreme Bodhisattva Chenrezig. As a result, all of them, whether lay or belonging to the monastic community, whether high or low in status, and whether peacefully or violently disposed, had remained in a state of peace, well-being and calm across the land, faithfully observing and implementing their vows to abide by the Code of Ten Virtuous Deeds and the Sixteen Ethical Principles in heartfelt faith and belief. However, all this was shattered when the big insect of the army of the Communist Party of China, looking to prey on small insects, invaded Tibet and coerced the latter to sign a '17-Point Agreement'.

China, however, was unsatisfied and embarked on a profoundly devious course

of continuing to obliterate Tibetan religion and culture so as to thereby turn Tibet into Chinese territory. Apart from that, China imposed restrictions on the authority of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the essence of the Snowland where religion and politics were intertwined. And in furtherance of its multitude of evil designs to physically bring harm to him, the Chinese invited His Holiness the Dalai Lama, as if in a routine manner, to come and watch a stage show at a military camp. He was, however, given coercive instructions not to bring his personal bodyguards. This was beyond any Tibetan's capacity to endure for even the briefest moment. We the women of the Three Provinces of Tibet, being unanimous without the need for discussion in our feeling of unity of purpose, launched an all-out protest against communist China, being fully resolved to regain Tibet's independence.

Whatever awesome conditions it takes to fulfill the grand task of ensuring the personal safety of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the well-being of the Tibetan nation in both its religious and political aspects, we, the entire women of Tibet, are unanimous in our resolve in being willing to carry on the struggle, confronting any difficulty that may come our way even at the cost of our lives and by whatever means it takes, peaceful or violent. To such of us all as above who have dedicated ourselves to serve the nation without any sense of deceit, we beseech the protective deities of power to provide protection and company, day and night, with such sense of affection as a mother has for her child. Undoubtedly, you would vanquish with your wisdom-thunderbolt those doubters who cunningly offer their allegiance to the enemy and thereby make sacrifices of them while the blood is still warm in their hearts. With such protective deities of power as witnesses, we, pledging never to alter our solemn commitment, sign our names below.”⁸

Under the oath thus recorded, many thousands of Tibetan women, pledging never to alter their commitment, signed their names.

On March 10, 1959, during the Tibetan people's uprising, many women left their family homes, spouses, and children, to risk their lives and join the protests in the area around the Norbulingkha Palace. Regarding this, the Honorable Kasur Shenhawa Gyurmey Sonam Topgyal, a first-hand witness, revealed in 'My Life Story, the Unadulterated, Natural Copper', the characters of the Tibetan heroines of the time,

“At that time, not to mention men – both lay and religiously ordained – but even women carried swords. There were women in felt hats. Some of the women were of physiques so fine and faces so beautiful and fair, with tints of redness; they bore countenances of fieriness marked by three closely formed wrinkles in the middle of their foreheads, while their pleasant mouths flashed smiles of white froth. Their hands, which were fair and smooth and had long slender fingernails, held swords by their hilts. When I saw all that, I could not help wondering whether that was not as it is thus written in The Prayer of the Praise of Tara, ‘glowing with utmost brightness from an excellently radiating light’.”⁹

Women of Recognition

Inspired by the profound achievements of many women in Tibetan history, the TWA wants to

recognize these women specifically who have contributed to the women's cause for equality. Tibetan women from all walks of life have helped to propel the Tibetan women's rights movement through the 20th century and into the 21st. The TWA would like to thank these women whose resilience, courage, and dedication have driven the movement forward.

1) **Ghurteng Kunsang**

Ghurteng Kunsang was born in Lhasa, to Tsarong Chagzoe Khyenrab, a younger brother of the former Tibetan army chief, Dasang Damdul.¹⁰ It was common knowledge at the time that the heroic Kunsang led the Tibetan women's uprising in 1959. When she fell into enemy hands, she was subject to brutal torture and thrown into solitary confinement for many years.

1970, the communist Chinese executed Kunsang by a firing squad in the northern part of Drapchi Prison in Lhasa, as well as Sang-ngag Choedon, Tachog Bhuti and four other Tibetan prisoners. They were buried while still breathing.

2) **Galingshag Choetsun**

Born in the U region of Tibet, Ghalingshag Choetsun was a nun at Nechungri Nunnery near Lhasa. However, apart from occasionally visiting the nunnery for official work, she usually lived in Lhasa at the Ghalingshag residence. After her arrest, the Chinese jailed her in Taring Prison. She was kept shackled in metallic cuffs by both her hands and feet, day and night. In 1960 she fell sick in prison and died in hospital. She was about 56 years old at that time.

3) **Pelgong Pendon**

Pelgong Pendon was born in Lhasa into the family of Chagzoe Pelgongwa. She was the secretary during the Tibetan women's uprising. In March 1959, the Chinese took her into custody and all her family properties, including her home, were confiscated. She was later sentenced to a jail term of eight years and held at the Taring and Drapchi prisons. Her husband, Choephel Jampa, a government official, disappeared.

Relatives looked after their two children, six-year-old son, Wangchen Gelek, and four-year-old daughter, Ngawang Dolkar.

One day towards the end of 1961, when she fell seriously ill while in Drapchi Prison and was lying in a hospital, she was secretly delivered a photo of Choephel Jampa and a little money, along with a letter by a Nepalese person. The letter said that, during the uprising in 1959, Choephel Jampa was injured but had managed to escape into exile in India. It thanked the relatives for looking after the children and asked for continued care as much as possible for them, with a promise to repay the kindness in a future reunion.

When Pendon saw her husband's photo, her eyes filled with tears; she said it was very good that he had managed to escape, for if he had been captured, there would have been nothing but the spread of suffering. Her sister told her to destroy the photo and the letter because there would be huge danger for

her if the Chinese were to find out about it.

One day, Pendon asked an acquaintance to pass a message to her two elder sisters, telling them to come to the hospital briefly. When they arrived, she told them that her ailment had deteriorated a little bit. She said that, going by her recent dreams and current state of her illness, it was extremely doubtful that, despite all her constant prayers and hopes, she would live to receive a visual blessing of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. But she was certain that during her brief life on this earth, she had never knowingly engaged in any sinful conduct. In particular, she expressed certainty that she has done her utmost to sincerely and selflessly perform her duty to her religion, nation and people. She had no regrets dying.

So that she would not need to die in a hospital, Pendon asked her sisters to seek sick leave for her from the prison chief. They, in turn, tried every possible means and finally received permission. They were given a red-stamped permit on the condition that the sisters should be responsible for ensuring that there would be no troubles from Pendon during the period of sick leave. They were required to deliver her back into the custody of the people's government in case she recovered.

In keeping with her wishes, Pendon was given a small living quarter at Tsamkhung Nunnery, where she stayed for about two months. Every possible kind of available medical care was given to her and she recovered a little bit. As a result, she was able to join the other nuns in their mass prayer services and had the opportunity to devote herself fully to prayers and performing religious services.

One day in 1962, her ailment suddenly deteriorated considerably. Her relatives and her children came and they had a whole day of final togetherness interspersed with emotions of sadness and joy. At 6:00pm that day, she called her son Wangchen Gelek to come close to her. Patting his head with great affection, she told him to be obedient to his aunt and the others, and that she, his mother, would pray for happiness for all of them. After that, she made her son and everyone else to leave her room and she passed away, all by herself, that night.¹¹

4) Risur Yangchen

Risur Yangchen was caught and held in Taring Prison, to be later transferred to the Ngachen power station project to undergo forced labor. She was then about 49 years old. After the Ngachen project was completed, she was tried and sentenced to a jail term of 20 years. She was initially sent to Chamdo¹², and later transferred to Drapchi Prison. After release, she lived in Lhasa, where she died in 1980.

5) Pema Dolkar of Gyatso Tashi

Pema Dolkar was born in Tibet's capital Lhasa. She took part in the Tibetan women's uprising in 1959. After China annexed Tibet, the Chinese did not have clear information about her involvement in the uprising, and she escaped arrest. However, not long after, she was exposed during a political education meeting at Tsemonling.

Nevertheless, she could not be prosecuted due to a depression-related disorder (*rlung nas*). There was, therefore, no choice but to grant her sick leave. Although she was unable to sustain herself and remained in bed day and night, Pema Dolkar was kept under the supervision of a Chinese secret

service officer until her death in the beginning of 1960, at the age of 52.

6) Sonam Dechen

Nicknamed “Cooking Pot Number Label” (*ha yang lan par*), Sonam Dechen was arrested by the Chinese army and held in Taring Prison. After being tried and sentenced to a 15-year jail term, she was taken to Chamdo¹³ to be later transferred to Drapchi Prison in Lhasa. She was about 50 years old then. After completing her jail term, she lived in Lhasa and died in about 1985.

7) Tsamkhung nun Yonten

Yonten was held by the Chinese troops and held in Taring Prison. After she was tried and sentenced to a 15-year prison term, Yonten was taken to Chamdo¹⁴; afterward she was moved to Drapchi Prison in Lhasa. She was about 40 years old then. After completing her prison term, she was sent to undergo reform at a labor camp in Kongpo. In 1980, she was able to visit Lhasa and took part in the renovation of Tsamkhung Nunnery. She died in 1990.

8) Tawutsang Dolkar

Tawutsang Dolkar was caught and detained in Taring Prison by Chinese troops. Although it is not clear what length jail term she received, Dolkar was seen held in Drapchi Prison later on. She was about 40 years old at that time. After completing her jail term, she was sent to undergo re-education at a labor camp and died while being subjected to great hardship.

9) Sonam Dolma of Ramoche residential compound

Sonam Dolma was arrested and held at Taring Prison by Chinese troops. There is no information where she was jailed after that. However, after release, she lived in Lhasa. In 1985, she visited India and was blessed with an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She returned to Tibet and died in 1990.

10) Kungashar Kelsang

Kungashar Kelsang was arrested and held at Taring Prison by Chinese troops. After being tried and sentenced to a jail term of five years, she was taken to Drapchi Prison. She was about 45 years old at that time. After release, she lived in Lhasa. She died in 1990.

11) Ama Meymey, who lived below the Meat Market

Ama Me-me was arrested and held at Taring Prison by Chinese troops. She was tried and sentenced to a jail term of 10 years and was taken to Drapchi Prison. She was about 60 years old at the time. She was granted medical parole in 1970 and died shortly after that.

12) Ama Ga-ye

Ama Ga-ye was arrested by the Chinese troops and detained at Taring Prison. There is no information about her after that. She was about 45 years old at the time.

13) Chime of Shongkha Tsenkhang

Chime was arrested by Chinese troops and detained at Taring Prison. After being tried and sentenced for five years, she was taken to Drapchi Prison. She was about 50 years old then. She succumbed to lung disease in 1960.

14) Dhonden the Drigung Neymo

Dhonden was arrested and detained in Taring Prison by Chinese troops. After being tried and sentenced to a 10-year jail term, she was transferred to Drapchi Prison. No information could be gathered about her after she was taken to Drapchi. She was about 50 years old at the time of her arrest.

15) Sweet-Tea shop owner, MeyMey

Me-Me was born into a Chinese family living in Lhasa. She had lived in India for a long time when she was a child and could speak Hindi. She served as the interpreter during the women's uprising in 1959 when the Tibetan women visited the Nepalese and Indian embassies to present appeals. She joined the women's uprising with a firm commitment. After being arrested by Chinese troops, she was held in Taring Prison. She was about 42 years old at the time. No information about her could be obtained after that.

16) Ama Masor

Ama Masor was born in Lhasa. She was arrested by Chinese troops after the women's uprising and detained in Taring Prison. After several months there, she was sent to work at the Ngachen power station project. She was about 56 years old at the time. She died in 1970.

17) Ama Dechen

Ama Dechen lived at Lhasa Jamyang Kyil. She was about 65 years old when the women's uprising took place. After being arrested by Chinese troops she was detained in Taring Prison. No information about her could be obtained after that.

Notes:

1 Political History, Volume II, P. 532-33. "Many tens of thousands of Tibetan women, including from the Tibetan Women's Association, took part in a demonstration along the Bharkor circuit of Lhasa, shouting slogans of such volume as from a thunder, saying Tibet is Independent! Chinese communists Quit Tibet! In this manner, they marched to the Indian and Nepalese embassies. There they urged for

mediation over China's invasion of Tibet and support for the Tibetan people's feeling and wishes." Daughter of Tibet, P. 328, line 14. The book talks about the protesters marching to the Indian embassy and making an appeal to the Indian ambassador there, Mr. Chibar. Although the book does not specifically say that a document was presented, the Chinese publication The Story of Tibet's Revolution (*bod kyi gsar brje'i lo rgyus*) published in August 1992 by the Tibet Autonomous Region People's Publishing House, says at p. 328, line 4, "documents announcing Tibet's independence were presented and it was proposed that India mediate for the withdrawal of the Chinese."

The Dolma Magazine issue of 1994 also states: "(The protesters) visited the Nepalese embassy and the Indian embassy at Dekyi Lingkha and presented to them appeals to testify to the truth about Tibet's independence. Likewise, a protest letter was presented to the headquarters of the communist Chinese."

2 Lukhangwa Sonam Dekyi said that she visited the office of the Tibetan Women's association to offer donation on the day it was inaugurated at Tsemonling and on that basis this date was ascertained.

3 Told by nun Lobsang Dekyong of Gyatso Tashi Nunnery.

4 My Life Forged in the Fire of Hell (*nga'i mi tshe dmyal me'i nang btso sbyang byung ba*), p. 24, line 8. On being asked, the book's author and protagonist Pelgong Lobsang Yonten said that when he saw the Tibetan Women's Association members performing the incense-burning prayer ceremony on the Chogpori, it was the third day since he had returned to Kunling and the date has been ascertained on this basis.

5 Although nun Lobsang Dekyong of Gyatso Tashi was not sure of the date of the third event of the Tibetan women's uprising, she did say that on the dawn of the day after it, the Chinese began their violent repression. It is acknowledged by all that the Chinese launched their first violent repression over Lhasa on March 20, 1959, hence the above date.

6 Daughter of Tibet (English), P. 14, published by Songtsen Library.

7 Told by nun Lobsang Dekyong of Gyatso Tashi.

8 A tale of Fruits of Courage Derived from the Story of My Life (*mi tshe'i lo rgyus las 'phros pa'i gtam thabs byus snying stobs kyi 'bras bu*), p.206, line 12

9 My Life Story, the unadulterated, Natural Copper. See p.384, line 3, published by LTWA

10 Daughter of Tibet. See p. 328, line 5.

11 My Life Forged in the Fire of Hell. See p. 129, line 13 to p. 140, line 14.

12 Spark in a Rainstorm (*char rlung khrod kyi me stag*). P. 63, line 2. It says she was transferred from Chamdo to Lhasa along with Gojo Ani Pachen Dolma.

13 Spark in a Rainstorm. P. 63, line 2.

14 Spark in a Rainstorm. P. 63, line 3. It is also stated that the group included about 20 other women prisoners as well, including Choenyi Wangmo and Pema from Lhokha.

Chapter Three

Tibetan Women's Association in Exile:

Ka-Dor Women's Friendship Association; Northeast India

In the spring of 1959, after the Tibetans fled into exile and arrived in India, there was talk among the women who had reached Kalimpong of establishing a women's association. At the same time Maja Ngawang Thutob, Chaba Rinpoche and Ku-ngo Tashi Pelrey also urged that a women's association be set up. Pursuant to this, the women held several incense-burning prayer ceremony gatherings.

Then, in the first Tibetan month in 1960, Shi-tse Noyon Dewang, Tashi Yangzom of De-nyentsang, Dekyi of Charasipa, Dolma of Setoe Lhoma, Gawa Youndon of Jamyang Kyil and Ama Choezom of Phagri Lachi began to hold frequent meetings at De-nyentsang. In those open discussions, in which everyone spoke without any reservations, it was stated that, at such a critical juncture in the history of the Tibetan nation, it was unthinkable that the Tibetan women who had managed to escape into the free world remain inactive. In order to continue the campaign initiated with the founding of the Tibetan women's association on March 12, 1959, discussions were held about the need to set up a women's association in exile. It was decided that the question of whether it was desirable to set up such an association should be posed at a public meeting open to everyone. And so, on the 10th day of the second Tibetan month in that year, an incense-burning prayer ceremony was held at Tharchoe Gonpa in Kalimpong. All Tibetans in the area took part. After the ceremony was over, it was announced that a decision had been reached to revive the Tibetan women's association in Kalimpong and to commemorate the accomplishment of the women of Tibet on March 12, 1959. The potential benefits of setting up a women's association, extending cooperative and complementary roles both to the Tibetan public and the Tibetan government, were announced. The entire gathering of Tibetan women at the ceremony was greatly moved by the initiative and they unanimously approved the decision. And so, exactly a year after the Tibetan women's association was set up in Lhasa, a formal announcement was made informing the public of the Tibetan women's association in exile.

At that time, although no leadership titles were officially given, a Governing Body of eight was elected - Shi-tse Noyon Dewang, Gawa Youdon, De-nyentsang Tashi Yangzom, Dolma of Setoe Lhoma, Ama Choezom of Lachi, Dekyi of Charasipa, Dadon the daughter of Drigung Neymo, and Lhasawa Ama Yangchen. Lady of Gyatso Shar Nornang and a number of Phagri mothers made major fruitful contributions at every stage of the association's conception, and continued these contributions after its formal launch. Regarding the success of their future endeavors, these women took a solemn oath before the Red and Black (Nechung and Palden Lhamo, respectively) state protector deities to dedicate themselves to work cooperatively for the good of the public interest. Their resolution consisted of at least five points:

One: All the members of the Tibetan women's association shall forthrightly follow the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama; none shall join welfare associations or groups of other kinds.

Two: The members shall strive to preserve and promote or, as the case may be, revive the religion and culture of our Snowland.

Three: The members shall observe the norms and proper behavior of being a (Tibetan) woman without any dilution thereof.

Four: Care shall be provided to compatriot Tibetan women living in difficult circumstances.

Five: The members shall refrain from such debased practices as business dealings in liquor and gambling.

Other commitments included holding an incense-burning prayer ceremony every month on the day of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's *bla bza'* (Wednesday), and making timely announcements of important developments to the public.

In that year, when it became known that the Chinese Premier, Mr. Zhao Enlai, would visit India in February, the members of the women's association and the *Panchey*¹ welfare group decided to lead a protest in the Indian capital, New Delhi. A three-point resolution binding everyone wishing to take part in it who wished to participate in the demonstration was adopted.

Thus resolved, a tightly crowded gathering of Tibetans stood in readiness to stage a protest against one of the principal Chinese characters responsible for subjecting so many Tibetans to such harsh and ongoing hardship that there was no end to the flow of their sweat and blood; he was responsible for driving several tens of thousands of Tibetans into exile where, on account of alien natural elements and difficulty maintaining a livelihood, large numbers were dying on a daily basis; he had helped to brutally alienate the Tibetan people from their own land, parents, and children - whether by geographical barrier or death - even as the sea of blood that had flooded the land of snows had barely dried up.

However, on the appointed day of the crowd's departure, the protesters were denied permission to demonstrate by the government of India. The local police stopped them successively at the bus station, about eight kilometers away at Tashidrag Bridge, and at Zibug Bridge located about 26 km away. Nevertheless, some women, Kalimpong Tibetan Welfare Officer, Mr. Thupten Nyima, the Phala estate resident, and some others managed to slip through hidden passages and make it to Siliguri town. But as they prepared to take the train to Delhi, having successfully purchased tickets, the police stopped them. In desperation, Shi-tse Noryon Dewang, Dechen Tsono of Khangmar Eshu and Drigung Neymo's daughter Dadon flung themselves over the railway track without care for their lives. As a result, the train could not leave on schedule, and the incident was widely covered in the press. The Tibetans then returned to Kalimpong where they burned pictures of Chinese leaders and the Chinese national flag while holding a very angry protest rally.

The main routine functions of the Kalimpong-Darjeeling Tibetan women's association included observing the yearly Tibetan festivals and, especially, organizing "a thousand religious offerings" (*stong tshogs*) prayer service on the 15th day of the fourth Tibetan month every year at the Tharchoe Gonpa in Kalimpong.

On one occasion, after His Holiness was informed about the establishment of the Tibetan women's association in the region and about its objectives and functions, an immediate acknowledgement was received. The acknowledgement was read out at Tharchoe Gonpa by the Welfare Officer Ku-ngo Namseylingpa in the presence of the monastery's lama-tulkus, and both the lay and religiously ordained Tibetan public. It was announced that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had named the association as the Ka-Dor (Tibetan) Women's Friendship Association (*ka rdor bud med mthun grogs tshogs pa*).

When it appeared certain that, thanks to the kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the unity of the people, the Tibetan struggle in exile was achieving a certain level of stability and strength, the Taiwanese Kuomintang's Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission launched a naked policy of beguiling in an effort to gain control of the Tibetan community in exile. Thus, by enticing Tibetans in exile who had been rendered extremely poor, it launched a vicious campaign of destroying the strength of their unity.

In connection with this, after engaging in smooth-talking designed to deceive and plot, fairly significant numbers of Chinese people impersonating students were sent to monasteries in Tibet. These Chinese wore the masks of religious practitioners, but engaged in subverting Tibet's development for the future. In particular, they were responsible for subverting the revolutionary visions of great people like His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and Tsipon Lungshar. Their foul deeds are clearly visible in today's mirror of time.

Tibetans were, thus, not solely to be blamed for having failed to modernize their country in earlier times. The British government, successive Chinese regimes and, especially, the Kuomintang also shared the responsibility. In view of this, China historically remains the most heinous enemy of Tibet. The Ka-Dor Tibetan women's association, keenly aware of this, used the monthly incense-burning prayer ceremony to educate the Tibetans about it. As a result, a resounding blow was struck on the prospects of the success of the enemy's immoral designs.

When the women in the Ka-Dor region learnt that the monks at the Tibetan religious centers in the Buxar area were faced with great scarcity of religious texts, they sought to address the problem. It was proposed that, for the coming year's *stong tshogs* prayer service, the religious text Graduated Path to Enlightenment (*byang chub lam rim*) be printed. The women consulted Tehor Kagyur Rinpoche, who complimented the idea and called for donations be collected from all sections of Tibetans so that all might gain merit. For the success of the initiative, the governing body members divided the responsibility equally amongst themselves. The religious department of the Tibetan government in exile, having been informed of the initiative, expressed great happiness and also made a generous contribution.

Apart, undoubtedly, from the members of the TWA, token donations were sought from all sections of Tibetans by appealing to their sense of religious merit. It was decided that, rather than using type for typesetting or a typewriter, the traditional Tibetan method of wooden block printing should be used. Wood block engravers were sought out everywhere and it was learned that such engraving was being practiced at the Karmapa's seat in Gangtok. As soon as the seat's Chagdzo (manager-cum-treasurer) agreed to take on the task, wood for the blocks were purchased in Kalimpong and sent to Gangtok and, after some time passed, the project actually begun. While the Ka-Dor Women's Friendship Association carried out its work, Committee members responsible for its fund dutifully collected donations small and large and defrayed the costs. Narrative and financial reports were lucidly written every six months and sent to the Home Department of the Tibetan government in exile.

The subversive activities of the Taiwanese Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission have been referred to before. During that period, the Taiwanese commission's agent Amdo Tsepak Dorje's relative Phuntsok and his deviant collaborator Gyami Kangkyog² (limping Chinese) had infiltrated the Tibetan community. The women's association carried out their commitment to their country by making a stark and thorough exposure of their subversive identity, dealing a resounding blow to their character and leaving them defenseless and in utter shame. They took to using threats against the responsible members of Ka-Dor Women's Friendship Association, rendering it difficult for them to remain in the

place. In light of this, the Tibetan government in exile acknowledged their achievement and did its best to protect them.

Later on, De-nyentsang Tashi Yangzom left the organization to serve as a foster mother at the Tibetans Homes Foundation, Mussoorie. Shi-tse Noyon Dewang and some other members successively moved to Rajpur in the state of Utter Pradesh.

Notes:

1 Refers to Number 5 in Indian language.

2 He earlier lived in Shigatse, making lamps, but was expelled by the Tibetan government on spying suspicion.

References:

1 Memoriam to Heroines, Life Story of a Tibetan Woman (*dpa' mor dran gso, bod kyi bud med cig gi thog mtha' bar gsum gyi lo rgyus*) Printed by Shi-tse Noyon Tsang.

Interviewees:

1 Shi-tse Noyon Dewang

2 De-nyentsang Tashi Yangzom

Tibetan Women's Co-operative Society, Dharamsala

In the 1960s, people coming to India from outside could receive blessing from His Holiness the Dalai Lama whenever they wished. The public in Dharamsala used to get a monthly visual blessing, during which His Holiness used to devote significant time to giving religious and political advice. During one such lecture, His Holiness said, "During the period of change in Tibet, a women's association was set up and it undertook great and numerous campaign actions.

"We have come into exile not as an attempt to take care of ourselves but with an aim to struggle for freedom. Hence, if a women's group is set up in Dharamsala, it will be beneficial both to the fundamental interest of Tibet and for the welfare of the Tibetan public even though this may require dealing with many difficulties."

Less than a month later, in January 1963, Kelsang Tsomo, Tseten Dolkar and a group of six women started making contacts and holding discussions. They eventually drafted a proposal to set up a Tibetan women's co-operative society. This was reported to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his two tutors. His Holiness personally granted Rs. 10,000 while his two tutors provided substantial contributions. Donations were also collected from Tibetans, both men and women, who had the means to donate varying amounts. Businessman Sonam Dorje donated Rs. 1,000 and he became famous as "Tongtrak-wala" (a combination of Tibetan and Hindi words meaning 'man who gave a thousand').

Kelsang Tsomo and the others who took the main responsibility for the project leased the big building where the co-operative society has its office to this day and had it renovated substantially. Following discussions among them, Kalon Phala Thubten Woeden and Taklha Tsering Dolma were made its honorary heads while Rikha Dolma, Lady of Chamdo Yabtsang was made its chief executives.

For external relations and daily supervision, Kelsang Tsomo and Tseten Dolka were appointed. Kyirongwa Dingpon was appointed the office head, with Dromowa Tashi as assistant.

The Tibetan women's Co-operative Society was formally launched at a ceremony on April 10th that year¹ and speeches were given by about six dignitaries, including Kalon Phala Thubten Woeden, Taklha Tsering Dolma, and Indian dignitary Mr. Malik Sahab. After some days, U-Tsang Deputy to the Tibetan parliament in exile, Mr. Wangdu Dorje arrived and allocated tasks to the workers in areas such as sweater knitting, wool spinning, and wool washing based on their own choices. The wool-spinners were all family mothers and they managed to complete about one kilo of wool per day. The sweater productions were taken by businessman Sonam Dorje and an assistant to other places for sale.

Although the Tibetan women's Co-operative Society at Dharamsala was set up to benefit the initiative of women, there was no discrimination as far as its workers were concerned. At that time, all Tibetan families in Dharamsala, except for about three, were employed at the co-operative, which had about 70 workers. They took part in putting up *lungta* prayer flags and performing incense-burning prayer ceremonies on Tibetan festivals such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama's birthday and building roads in and around McLeod Ganj town. They were of significant help, in particular, to those who were destitute and sick.

Notes:

1 Handbook of Basic Tibetan Information (*rgyun mkho'i bod gnas lag deg*). p. 269, line10.

Interviewees:

1. Tseten Dolkar who currently lives in Dharamsala and was among those who played leading roles in the co-operative.
- 2 Acho Pasang and his wife granny Nordon who now live at Dekyiling.

Formation of United Women's Association at the Co-operative Society in Dharamsala

In the third Tibetan month of 1964, the Kalimpong Tibetan women's association completed the printing of the *Lamrim* text. And so, in June, Noryon Dewang, Drigung Neymo Dadon, Lumogang Tsering Pelmo and Norzom from U.P. state, and the remaining member from Kalimpong arrived in Dharamsala to offer the very first copy to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan women's Co-operative Society had, of course, already been established in Dharamsala at that time. In addition, delegates representing Tibetan women in Shillong, Mainpat, Shimla, Changlang and Dalhousie also arrived one after another. They also brought the information that would be used for the fundamental good of the public. Altogether, some 45 delegates gathered in Dharamsala, and it was agreed upon that those scattered in other areas would be considered a part of the Dharamsala co-operative society.

The very first print copy of the *Lamrim* volume was presented to His Holiness the Dalai Lama during an audience, along with the leftover Bhutanese papers and the woodblock printing plates complete with their container. Advice was sought for future activities. His Holiness urged Tibetan women to stop indulging in vice practices in major cities in India, and called for the improvement of regional associations so that the set up would be on par with mainstream women's groups across the globe. He said that, at a time when the Chinese had embarked on a campaign to obliterate the Tibetan

race, it should be ensured that the Tibetans were brought up as true Tibetans.

Spurred on by His Holiness the Dalai Lama's call for the improvement, the members of the women's association held a series of discussions. In the end, Taklha Tsering Dolma was made the President, and Chamdo Yabtsang Ama, Tikha Dolma, Kelsang Tsomo and Tseten Dolkar were confirmed in their existing positions under her. A ceremony was held, at which all the members offered ceremonial scarves to Taklha Tsering Dolma. Discussions on future work were held over several days. As advised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it was decided that the Tibetan women living in the major cities in India should be brought together. To ensure their livelihood, it was suggested that the handicrafts section of the women's co-operative society in Dharamsala should be improved. For this purpose, the members made donations of varying amounts. A resolution was passed to set up regional Tibetan women's associations.

After the meeting was concluded, the members attended banquets held in their honor and were presented shows by the Tibetan Children's Village and the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts. Several people, including the two senior tutors of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Prime Minister Lukhangwa Tsewang Rabten, former Education Minister Jangsa Choeze, and former Minister for religious affairs, Chogteng, gave the highest-level appraisal to the achievements of the women's association. They also provided counsel on the association's future activities.¹

Three years after the Tibetan women's co-operative society was set up in Dharamsala, and two years after the consolidation of the Tibetan women into a single association, there was a decline in sales-turnover in the local area, coupled with inadequate knowledge and experience in relevant fields. Workers could be paid only just enough to feed themselves, even though they had been toiling for nearly three years. At one stage, they had to work through the day and night. There were, however, no other livelihood opportunities in the alien land and keeping in mind the greater good and wellbeing of the community, everyone worked with dedication and a genuine sense of selflessness. Instances of those showing dissatisfaction were very few, if any at all.

According to granny Nordon and Acho Pasang, who now live in Dekyiling and worked in the area at the time, "During the period we both worked in the co-operative, we did not have enough to spend on our daily necessities, and, as a result, had to sell the household items and ornaments we had brought from Tibet."

Gradually, however, the workers left to seek other means of livelihood and turnover at the co-operative in Dharamsala began to decline. Nevertheless, it still exists today, solving the employment problem of Tibetan men and women while helping to preserve and continue the traditional Tibetan handicrafts. The reason for this lay mainly in the fact that the Tibetan government in exile took over its administration at a later stage; it is the fruit of the hard work put in by those who were there from the beginning and those who worked on the project during its early stages.

During the early days of the establishment of the co-operative society in Dharamsala, Doctor Ama Lobsang provided uninterrupted monetary donations to help it overcome hardship. Kelsang Tsomo donated her salary to the cooperative right from the time of its conception while devoting whatever time she could, day and night, working to keep it afloat. People today still remember the gratitude owed to them. And, in further contribution to her humble actions, TWA supported Kelsang through her retirement and gave her hospice care in her dying days.

Kelsang Tsomo was born in Dotoe and had been living in exile in India since before 1959. She

knew the language and practices of the land so that, after she moved to Dharamsala, the government of India gave her the job of security women for visitors to the Dalai Lama. She routinely helped the needy by giving them whatever she had.

Notes:

1 Memoriam to Heroines. See p.72, line 16.

Interviewees:

1 Noyon Dewang

2 Tseten Dolkar

3 Acho Pasang and granny Nordon, a couple living at Dekyiling

Tibetan Women's Association, UP state

Not long after the women's associations were consolidated with the women's co-operative society in Dharamsala, Noyon Dewang and Dadon made an announcement of a speech by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the gathered public during an incense-burning prayer ceremony in Mussoorie. They called for the set up of a regional Tibetan women's association in keeping with His Holiness the Dalai Lama's wish and in the fundamental interest of the Tibetan cause. They presented a proposal letter to the head of the Tibetan Homes Foundation School, Mrs. Rinchen Dolma Taring. Her permission was thus obtained to gather a list of the women in the area and her own signature was also received. A total of 270 women from three localities in the area gave their names and joined the women's association.

Shortly after that, an association charter was drawn up, but no office bearers were appointed as such. Rather, Noyon Dewang was made a sort of overall head for all three localities, leaving Drigung Neymo's daughter Dadon and Jamyang Kyil Phuntsok Dolma responsible for routine matters.

At one time, there was talk of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile shifting to Rajpur, and so the Tibetan Women's Co-operative Society received request from the Tibetan Women's co-operative to look for a house for the center. Accordingly, Nabha House No. 210 was taken on lease from a (former) queen. However, women's co-operative in Dharamsala, did not shift. As a result, the governing body of the regional women's association held a meeting and it was decided to set up in it a handicrafts center for Tibetan women unable to earn their livelihood in the above house. It was named the Rajpur Tibetan Women's Co-operative Handicrafts Center. It was decided that the center would initially produce only woollen knitted garments. However, there was no capital to set up the workshop at that point in time. The association members as well as public-spirited Tibetans offered donations, and Rs. 5,500 was raised.

On 5 January 1965, the project began its operation with 17 workers collected from around Mussoorie. Taring Rinchen Dolma and an Indian named Shantibai were made advisors. In addition, a governing body of 10 was appointed to both run the handicrafts center and to manage the affairs of the regional women's association. They were Shi-tse Noyon Dewang, the Sakya Jetsun Chime, Phuntsok Dolma, Dadon of Drigung Neymo, Dag-yab Namgyal Dolma, Ngapa Sangkyi, Chatreng Ashel, the wife of Dra'u Pon, Trochu Youdon and Amdo Dolkar Ringmo.

The handicrafts center produced incense-leaf pouches, Tibetan boots, and socks. Narrative and financial reports were regularly submitted to the Tibetan government in exile so that the co-operative

could be monitored properly.

The number of workers increased gradually while, at the same time, the difficulties also became more pronounced. A petition was submitted to the Tibetan government in exile, which contacted the Central Relief Commission of the union government of India. The commission provided generous assistance in the form of clothing and medical facilities on a continuous basis. This raised enthusiasm of the workers at the handicrafts center and helped the business to progress. Pursuant to this, a project was initiated to introduce carpet weaving. Under the guidance of the Tibetan government in exile, ten workers were sent to Amritsar to be trained as carpet weavers. After six months of training, workers at the handicrafts center were able to produce carpets. Thereafter, apron weaving and *chuba* tailoring were also introduced.

At a later stage, contact was made with a US emergency aid group which gave indications of providing major assistance to the handicrafts center. The Rajpur Tibetan Women's Co-operative Handicrafts Center accepted the assistance offer in the hope of improving the center without compromising its firmly-held basic positions. However, because many project proposals were drawn up in which the information about the administrative officials did not comport with the reality, the co-operative workers and the public refused to accept them. Hence, the cooperative endeavour between the two sides did not materialize. As a result, the handicrafts center plunged into a very serious decline.

The responsibility for the failure of the cooperative center, which had spurned previous projects, which did not prove compatible with subsequent new projects, resulted in a shut-down which fell solely on the shoulders of the women's association. Official's pooled donations while the public in the surrounding area provided voluntarily labor for a week without any pay. De-nyertsang Tashi Yangzom and others served snacks and tea to the leaders and provided strong encouragement.

While working hard in the emergency situation, the co-operative leaders also urged the Tibetan government in exile to provide a leader for the center. In response, Phala Dapon Dorje Wangdu arrived to lead the women's co-operative center. However, during his tenure, business turnover was not significant because of his lack of experience in the field. Thus, the handicraft center, which was already in serious danger of going bankrupt, could not be saved, it was suggested that it be merged with the women's co-operative society in Dharamsala. However, its workers, being already fully settled in the areas with their families, did not agree. The Tibetan government in exile then instructed that a leader should be appointed for the handicrafts center by the center itself. In lieu of this, Taring Rinchen Dolma, Shi-tse Noyon Dewang and Sakya Jetsun Chime were appointed by popular approval. They all worked with great diligence, and the handicrafts center began to flourish as before. In 1976, the Home Department of the Tibetan government in exile took over the Tibetan Women's Co-operative Handicrafts Center in Rajpur and has been personally appointing its head ever since. Although the handicrafts center had shifted to another spot, the old board with the name "Tibetan women's Cooperative Handicrafts Center, Rajpur" still stands.

Having started with 17 workers, the handicrafts center has seen their number of employees rise and fall in accordance with its rising and declining fortunes. However, according to its current manager Mr. Karma Dhargay, "Since the past several years until now, there have been 86 women workers, and the total number of people at the center with their families is about four hundred." When I visited the vast handicrafts center in the course of researching this report, I noticed that those who had worked there as youngsters in its early years were now elders walking about with crutches in their hands, while the next generation were busy going about their work, as some of the third generation youngsters were zooming in and out of the large gate on their motorbikes.

The handicraft center's former instructor, Mr. Namgyal, was now the caretaker of the handicrafts center's temple and had no other job but to perform *'phrin bcol* (ritual offering designed to ask for favors from deities) for others. He was devoting the remaining years of his life to religious pursuits. He spoke to me about his life at the handicrafts center through its vicissitudes of good and bad times for over three hours. It was obvious that, in his mind, the handicrafts center was his home.

The old man had, since leaving his home in Tibet as a young man, devoted all his life's efforts to the handicrafts center. I developed an intense sense of empathy with him from the depth of my heart for his selfless, life-long devotion. There were others like him, such as Gen Lobsang, Tsering Phuntsok and Mithue Gyalnor Bhuchung. But because of paucity of time, I could not meet with them.

Interviewees:

- 1 Noryon Dewang
- 2 Retired handicrafts instructor Namgyal
- 3 Handicrafts Manager Karma Dhargay

Regional Tibetan Women's Association, Dharamsala

The Ka-Dor Women's Friendship Association, the Dharamsala Women's Co-Operative Society, and the Rajpur Tibetan Women's Co-Operative Handicrafts Center were set up in exile one after another in early 1960s. However, because main efforts and the devotion of time and capabilities were made solely to alleviate livelihood problems among fellow Tibetans in exile, the strength of efforts in the political field went into a gradual decline. As a result, the Tibetan Women's Association became synonymous with handicrafts centers and remained mere nameplate displays. This is evident in a subsequent speech by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

On September 6, 1984, in the course of delivering a speech to a gathering of about eight Tibetan organizations on how the Deputies to the Ninth Tibetan Parliament in Exile might be elected, His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "All organization should work with the common aim of being beneficial to the greater good of the community. Every organization should invite representatives from other organizations as observers in their meetings with a view to ensure transparency in their major undertakings. There should be no secrecy in undertakings having concern with the general public. An undertaking requiring maintenance of secrecy obviously won't be good. The more organizations there are the better it is if they all benefit the public. Previously there used to be women's association; now it has faded, just like a rainbow."

His Holiness spoke about the benefits of having a well-established women's organization, as was prevalent in countries across the world at that time. After the speech, the different organizations began inviting representative of other organizations as observers to their meetings. Eighteen women living in Dharamsala came together to act on His Holiness the Dalai Lama's noble speech. On September 10, 1984, a day of auspicious confluence of stars and compatible elements, a governing body meeting of the regional women's association was held. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was duly informed about it, as was the cabinet (Kashag) of the Tibetan government in exile and the Tibetan parliament in exile.

Thereafter, a general meeting of all Tibetan women living in Dharamsala was called. About

eight hundred women volunteered to join the association. Seven were elected by popular vote as executive committee members. Rinchen Khando Choegyal was elected as President, Gyaltong Tsering Dolma became Vice-President, Adruk Tamdin Choekyi was made the General Secretary, Gorap Pema Dechen became the Deputy-Secretary. The others were Penpey Tseten Namgyal as Accountant, Namling Choekyi as Treasurer and Gadong Dawa Seldon as Assistant Treasurer. They assumed charges as the first Executive Committee Members of the Dharamsala Regional Tibetan Women's Association.

At that time, although the association was devoid of any funds, the executive committee and other members offered voluntary services in every undertaking. They carried the association's workload on their own shoulders and even donated money whenever needs arose.

The executive committee members, through newspapers as well as Tibetan Welfare Officers and Settlement Heads, wrote to all intelligent Tibetan women in all the Tibetan settlements and communities who had a sense of responsibility, informing them about His Holiness the Dalai Lama's speech exhorting the need for a Tibetan women's association. It was explained that a Tibetan women's association should be brought into existence, and improved, uniting the women of all the Three Cholkhas (provinces). Opinions were sought on this through correspondences. The initiative yielded about sixty responses by letter, coming one after another and all uniformly vowing to unite behind the initiative. And so, a firm mass-based ground was created, and for the first time, a Tibetan women's association was founded whose greatness would lie in its representation of every woman from Tibet.

According to Rinchen Khando Choegyal, who was the President at that time, "The results of that time were not an achievement of the Dharamsala Tibetan women alone. The Tibetan Women's Association was set up in Tibet at a critical time in the country's history in 1959. In exile, they were first set up in Ka-Dor, Dharamsala, and other places. Besides, living on alien land, with poor knowledge of the local language and experience, mothers having families to look after came together to raise high the banner of Tibetan women's association. They undertook such initiatives as holding incense-burning prayer ceremonies and printing the Lamrim text. These are indications of unrivalled enthusiasm and sincerity to the national cause. They warrant our respect and admiration at all times. The Tibetan Women's Association that His Holiness the Dalai Lama referred to as having once existed is one that we have looked for a revival, not something that we have newly established."

As stated by her, the Dharamsala Regional Women's Association revived the Tibetan Women's Association, which had otherwise gone out of public view. In addition, for the seven months of its tenure, the executive committee pursued the task of building the framework of a political association that would be representative of the women of all the Three Province of Tibet. By achieving this goal, the capability of the Tibetan women was rendered obvious on the world stage.

Interviewees:

- 1 Rinchen Khando Choegyal
- 2 Adruk Tamdin Choekyi