

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #11D – Kalsang Dakpa
May 16, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #11D
2. Interviewee: Kalsang Dakpa
3. Age: 78
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Namay, Porang
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: May 16, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 22 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Kalsang Dakpa was born in Namay village, which he describes as the birthplace of Chogyal Norsang, a religious king of Tibet. Kalsang Dakpa's father was a boot maker and a tailor. He describes the different types of boots and dresses that his father stitched. He became a monk at the age of 3, but continued to live at home for a few more years. Once he moved to the monastery he was assigned duties as a conch blower and kitchen worker.

Kalsang Dakpa talks about the various stages in a monk's life, such as taking the *rabjung* and *gelong* vows. He explains the daily meals, division of labor and studies at the monastery. He was not good at memorizing religious texts and was relegated to making tea offerings. Once he turned 20 he became a kitchen overseer. Kalsang Dakpa ran away from the monastery to join his brother on a pilgrimage. He talks about his journey to Bodh Gaya in India and Lhasa soon after the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

Kalsang Dakpa recounts that the Chinese initially ordered monks in his monastery to subject their deceased leaders to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.' Then they were told to falsely accuse and beat living people and Kalsang Dakpa did not like to be forced to do such acts. He was also discouraged because the Chinese had banned religious practice in the monastery. He and five other monks decided to escape to India in 1959.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, pilgrimage, *thamzing*, oppression under Chinese escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #11D

Interviewee: Kalsang Dakpa

Age: 78, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: May 16, 2012

Question: *Gen-la* ‘respectful term for teacher,’ please tell us your name.

00:00:13

Interviewee #11D: Kalsang Dakpa.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#11D: Yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us.

#11D: Okay.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break at anytime or stop at anytime, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#11D: Okay.

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China or around the world, would this be a problem for you?

00:01:58

#11D: There will be no problems wherever [you] show it. [I] have a child in Tibet but [I] do not think [he] will face any problems. [He] was left behind a long time ago.

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#11D: [Nods]

Q: *Gen-la*, maybe we could begin by... You could tell us a little bit about your family life, at least where you came from? What was the area in Tibet where you were born?

#11D: It is called Porang. Should [I] tell you my family name? The family name is Porang Tidhay. My home is called Khangpa Marpo ‘Red House.’ That’s the name.

Q: Khangpa Marpo?

#11D: It was known as Khangpa Marpo. The village is called Namay.

Q: What is the name of the family?

#11D: Yes?

Q: What is the family name?

#11D: The name of the family. It used to be called Khangpa Marpo because there was a [residence of a] *tse* ‘species of demon’ at the top of our house that was painted red. Hence the name, Khangpa Marpo.

Q: What deity was that?

00:04:04

#11D: It was called Chakpa Milan and it existed around Mount Kailash.

Q: Was your village located anywhere near Mount Kailash?

#11D: It was close to Mount Kailash. In the olden days when there were no vehicles, it took three days by horses and donkeys to reach [Mount Kailash] from my home. These days one can reach it within a few hours in a vehicle.

Q: Was your home in a large village or a small village? Tell us about that.

#11D: There were 4-5 clusters in the village. It was large. The area where majority [of the people] lived was called Tidhay but like [we] have Mcleod Ganj and Dharamsala [India] here, there were 5-6 different [clusters]. One of the villages located near ours was where the Chogyal [Dharma King] Norsang was born.

Q: Who was that king?

#11D: [The story of] Chogyal Norsang is enacted as a *lhamo* ‘opera.’ He was born in our village. It is still there. A large Chinese Army base has been established in the place of his residence.

Q: His residence?

00:06:21

#11D: A Chinese Army base has been established in his palace.

Q: How many people were in your family, *gen-la*?

#11D: Both my parents were there at that time and grandmother and three maternal uncles. Then there was an older brother and an older sister.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did your parents have?

#11D: There were eight children including me.

Q: Sons or daughters?

#11D: One daughter and the rest were sons. All of them were older to me. When [I] visited there a few years back, none were there. They had all passed away.

Q: You were the youngest of eight children?

#11D: Yes, I am.

Q: What are your earliest memories of your childhood?

#11D: [My] parents treated me most lovingly because I was the youngest. I had a maternal uncle that used to live in the Shapheling Monastery and it was the maternal uncle that took me to the monastery. [He] said that as my birth sign was the pig, pigs were stubborn and took [me to the monastery]. Now I have turned 78 years old. [I] was taken there. Actually in our region, if there were three sons [in a family], it was imperative to send one of them to become a monk. So I, the youngest was sent to become a monk.

Q: What kind of stubbornness?

00:09:12

#11D: By stubborn, here we would say bad disposition. [I] was said to be stubborn. Actually my maternal uncle required a student and claimed that I was stubborn. [My] parents said that I was too young to be sent to the monastery. And [maternal uncle] said, "It is imperative to admit [him in the monastery]. Otherwise, he will turn out to be a very bad, stubborn person." Hence, [I] was taken to the monastery at the age of 3.

Q: And had your other brothers gone to the monastery?

#11D: None were sent. Earlier the first son had [become a monk] but when he lived at the monastery, he did not get to stay long, as he passed away soon.

Q: So you were the next son to go to the monastery?

#11D: I was the second son to be sent to the monastery.

Q: Do you even...What age were you when they sent you?

#11D: [I] was 3 years old as I told you earlier. One was left there [at the monastery] at a young age.

Q: Can you remember that? Anything about that?

#11D: No remembrances. [I] was carried on [my] parents back and taken to the monastery's abbot. A piece of [my] hair was offered to the abbot to indicate that [I] was a monk and received a monk's name. One joined the monastery later at the age of 7 or 8.

Q: [You] were taken back home?

00:11:38

#11D: One was taken back home when little. However, even though [I] stayed home, [I] received all offerings that [monks at] the monastery was entitled to.

Q: That makes it clearer because I wondered how someone could be taken care of, a 3-year old in the monastery.

#11D: As I told you one was made a monk by the parents but stayed home. Later when one turned 5 or 6 years old, then [he] was left at the monastery and had to study scriptures from the teacher.

Q: Your parents had raised six sons already. It sounds like they'd be very experienced to handle a stubborn child. I'm wondering why they thought it would be so difficult to raise you?

#11D: [Laughs] Father used to stay out and mother at home. My father was a boot maker. [He] made a living for the children by making boots and selling them. He had a separate private unit.

Q: Were you not living together?

#11D: He had a separate house. He lived and worked in our home but his trade was making boots and selling them. He spent [the revenue] from it for the children.

Q: Were [your] parents living together? Were they married?

#11: Yes, [they] lived together. However, this [rubs thumb and forefinger to indicate money] was separate. Father kept the [proceeds] from the boots sale saying that it was for the children. It was mostly grains that were used and there was no need for anything else.

Q: What kind of boots did your father make?

00:15:02

#11D: They were boots that Tibetans wore; that women and men wore. They were typical Tibetan boots called *koptsa*. They were not like these [points to shoes].

Q: Were they called *zompa*?

#11D: Yes?

Q: What was the name of the boots?

#11D: It is called *zompa*. We called them *zompa*. The performing girls wear them here. Most of them were that type. [He] also sewed *chupa* ‘traditional dresses’ and *paktsa* ‘fur coats.’ He did a lot of stitching.

Q: Could you just please describe what the boots looked like? I’ve seen them but I think it would be nice for people who have not to know what they looked like.

#11D: There were two types of *zompa*. One was what the girls wore that reached up to here [not on camera but interpreter states “up to the knee”]. There was another type for boys. There was a different one made for monks called *khamtsen*. There were three types of *zompa*.

Q: One for the monks.

#11D: The one that the monks wore is what the monks of Namgyal Monastery here wear during the *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks.’ [The monks] were not allowed to wear anything but that.

Q: Another for men.

#11D: There was another type for men. The material was the same but they were made differently.

Q: Were these boots lined with anything and were they made...? What kind of leather were they made of?

00:17:30

#11D: There was warm fur inside lined with *nambu* ‘machine-made woolen cloth’ and covered with leather on the outside. There were two types, one that had a leather cover and another that was made with just stitches. Sheep’s wool was layered and covered with thread to make [the boots] thick. There were 2-3 such types. It was easy [to make] the leather-covered type.

Q: So your father made a good livelihood and was he well known in the area as a boot maker?

#11D: There were [people] that knew [him]. At times [he] visited [them] to make boots. [He] would be called [to their place]. Most of the time [people] came to him. He received money for that. [He] spent his time making boots, *chupa* and *paktsa*. [He] was a tailor. There were no sewing machines and [he] sewed manually.

Q: We go back to your experience. You were at home until about 7. Do you remember anything what your life was like up until the time you left for the monastery?

#11D: When I lived at home, since [I] was a monk [I] was not given many tasks at home. One was sort of considered apart. Hence, I cannot recall much. After coming to the

monastery [I] had to study the scriptures and do whatever was necessary and gained some experience. However, when I was small, being the youngest [my] parents treated me most lovingly.

Q: Do you remember when you actually left home to be in the monastery? Did you ever come back home again or when did you stay in the monastery?

00:20:57

#11D: [I] could come home for two or three days in a month from the monastery. One must seek permission for that.

Q: Tell us about your earliest days in the monastery whatever you can remember?

#11D: One initially went to live at the monastery at the age of 5 or 6. At the age of 8 one must take the *rabjung* ‘probationary monk’ vows. Of course, one must memorize the texts. I was among the weaker ones. [I] was not a good memorizer of the scriptures. One must take the *rabjung* vows at the age of 8. After taking the *rabjung* vows at the age of 8, one must perform some tasks for the monastery. One could either undertake the responsibility of blowing the conch or working in the kitchen. The tasks were to be performed for a year.

Q: Kitchen duty?

#11D: Kitchen duty. There were people that worked in the kitchen but one must take the responsibility of overseeing them.

Q: Blowing the conch?

#11D: Some [monks] did that. Those that did not do kitchen duty blew the conch for a year.

Q: Was there any duty that you got?

[Interpreter asks]: When you mentioned conch blowing, do you mean the long horn or the white conch?

#11D: Both the long horn and the white were used. There were two people [to blow the long horn and conch]. The white [conch] was blown to call for prayer assembly.

Q: The small white one which is the [shell] of an insect?

#11D: A small one like they have in Namgyal Monastery here. It is actually small but lengthened.

Q: It’s the white conch of the insects?

00:23:39

#11D: Yes, that is the one. There are big ones too.

Q: It's actually the white conch of the insects?

#11D: Yes.

Q: I see. So one person blew this and another blew the long horn.

#11D: There were two people to blow the conches. One blew the copper long horn during rituals and *cham* only.

Q: And were these your responsibilities?

#11D: I blew the conch and worked in the kitchen as well. Here in the Namgyal Monastery when there is a prayer assembly, the gong is sounded *dhing, dhing*. In our village that was not sounded for a prayer assembly, instead the conch was blown.

Q: Do you know where the conch came from? Where the Tibetans found it?

#11D: The white conch?

Q: Yes.

#11D: I do not know from where it was brought. The monastery possessed four white conches; two for use during the winter and two for the summer. [I] do not know from where they were brought long back.

Q: Was it hard to learn how to sound a conch, blow a conch?

00:25:47

#11D: The small one was not difficult but the long one was a bit difficult to learn.

Q: What was difficult about it, the volume or...?

#11D: Initially when one learned to blow it, it was difficult to blow a lot of air and the lips got swollen.

Q: Took a lot of work. What about the long horn? What do they call it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Long horn, yeah.

Q: What about the long horn?

#11D: That was the long one I told you about it being difficult.

Q: [You] didn't mean the white one?

#11D: There was no problem with the white one.

Q: Oh, you meant the long one. That is a very...

#11D: They were very big and long in Tibet. Here even the long ones are short.

Q: They must have been in Tibetan ceremonies for many many, years. Do you know how long?

00:27:35

#11D: When I was there [at the monastery], there were 5-6 pairs of the long horns. One [pair] that was used regularly was a bit shorter but the finer ones were made of copper and of superior quality. They must be many years old. When I joined the monastery as a small child, they were there.

Q: So what were your other duties? You had kitchen duty as well as blowing the horn. Was your time divided between those and did you have any studies as well?

#11D: Most of the practice was on the conch. One had to learn conch [blowing] whereas in the kitchen, one just gave orders and there were other [people] that did the cooking. That was the kitchen where tea was made for the monks. There were not many monks in our monastery, perhaps around 150. They must be served with tea three times and *thukpa* ‘noodle soup’ twice in the morning. There were three prayer assembles a day. Did you get that? Tea, three times and *thukpa*, twice in the morning.

Q: What’s tea, thrice in the morning?

#11D: The large cup must be served three times [with tea]. [A monk] could drink three [cups of] tea.

Q: And two *thukpa*. What kind of *thukpa* was it?

#11D: The *thukpa* was gruel made from *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley.’ Similarly, [monks were] served three [cups] of tea and two [bowls] of *thukpa* during noontime. That was regular. In the evening around 6 o’clock a similar [meal] was served. There were three sessions of prayer assemblies in a day. The monastery provided the tea but the *tsampa* came from one’s home. One’s parents brought the *tsampa*. The *tsampa* for making *pa* ‘dough made from *tsampa* and tea’ must come from home.

Q: Was *tsampa* the only contribution that the family of the monks made to the support of the monks?

00:31:13

#11D: For instance, I am a monk at the monastery. So, my parents supplied *tsampa* for me. [They] did not have to supply anything besides that.

Q: How much *tsampa* would be needed by a son, depending on the age, for a whole year? And was that a hardship on the families?

#11D: Well, [he] must be supplied throughout the year. [I] cannot say exactly how much is required. Whatever it maybe, the parents continued to supply *tsampa*. [Laughs] In case the parents did not bring, you went to get it. When your stock of *tsampa* got depleted, you went home to get it.

Q: How much *tsampa* do you eat a day? A cupful or three cups or what?

#11D: On an average one ate *pa* three times a day, once in the morning, noon and evening. Some [monks] ate in their quarters at night. Whatever you ate in the quarters, whether it was tea or butter, they were supplied from home. You were not entitled to that from the monastery.

Q: You said that you would like to tell us a little bit about monastic life. So I invite you to tell me a story, describe whatever you think would be interesting for people who've never been to a monastery, who don't know about Buddhist monks. Tell us some of your experiences and memories.

00:33:58

#11D: When one joins a monastery, one must follow the necessary practice. Through rotation [a monk] would be assigned the responsibility of maintaining the temple. In our monastery women were not allowed [in the night]; [they] must leave in the evening. [They] could stay only during the day while men could stay back. That was the custom.

Q: Monks maintained the temple in rotation.

#11D: The responsibility of *kunyer* 'temple caretaker' rotated once a year. There were three bigger [temples] and each one took the responsibility of *kunyer* for three years. The monastery provided [material] for offerings and butter lamps. The monastery provided...

Q: ...for lighting butter lamps.

#11D: ...for lighting butter lamps and the monks performed the task. There were two monks each to perform the task.

Q: What did the monastery provide? Butter?

#11D: It was butter.

Q: For lighting butter lamps?

#11D: Yes, for lighting butter lamps.

Q: What are some of your happiest memories in the monastery?

#11D: [Laughs] There were not many happy times because monks must live under rules. One must be mindful of what the superior would say. However, when you grew up, you did not have to follow every rule and could have your own living quarter. As a little one, one

must live together with the teacher and had to follow whatever the teacher said. There was not much flexibility. One must study the scriptures a great deal. We had to study the scriptures a great deal. Our monastery was affiliated to Drepung Loselling [Monastery]. The abbot came from Loselling.

Q: If you weren't happy, rules were very strict, did you ever think of going home and leaving?

00:37:20

#11D: [I] did not think like that because if I went home, [my] parents would not let [me] stay. [They] would send me back in a day or two. [Laughs]

Q: Was there any advantage for your parents to have a son who was a monk?

#11D: There was no benefit [for the parents].

Q: Even spiritually?

#11D: If [a son] became well versed in the scriptures, it was something. Otherwise, those like us who did not know the scriptures there was nothing advantageous. Those of us that did not know the scriptures had to make tea offerings to the monastery.

Q: What did you do that they had to make these special offerings of tea?

#11D: I could not study the scriptures. So, [I] had to make an offering of tea on account of [my] lack of knowledge in the scriptures. It was like that.

[I] think that was a good practice because studying the scriptures would benefit everybody. The monastery making it obligatory for those that could not learn the scriptures to make a tea offering encouraged the majority to study the texts. Those like me that was careless and treated lovingly by the parents did not study and the parents had to make the tea offering.

Q: *Gen-la*, can you remember what was hard for you because people learn in different ways and have different abilities? What was hard for you about the studies? Was it memorizing them or understanding them? What part was hard?

00:40:27

#11D: It was a little bit of not understanding [the texts]. And then one had to regularly memorize each day. For instance, you [interpreter] are the teacher. You will give me a portion saying, "Memorize up to this part by tomorrow." I must memorize it and recite it from memory the next day. You will hold the scripture and I will sit here and recite. I found it very difficult to recite from memory. Hence, it was not possible. One did not have intellect. It depends on a person's intellect. It was [hard] when one lacks intellect.

Q: That's not a sign of intelligence; it's the sign of the way people learn. People learn differently than memory.

Did you stay with your teacher or did you just, could be... kitchen worker? Did you continue to have a teacher?

#11D: Later I had learned until a higher stage. [I] told you earlier that one must take the probationary monk's vows at the age of 8 and when you reached the age of 20, you must take the *gelong* 'fully-ordained monk observing 253 vows' vows. When you reached the age of 20, you could have a separate quarter and live in it by yourself.

If you had become learned in the scriptures, [you] could keep a student and teach [him]. I was not like this but could live by myself. Once you had reached the age of 20, you did not have to depend on a teacher.

Q: Is that what happened to you?

#11D: You had your own quarter, attended prayer assemblies and there was not anything much. There were no risks. As long as you performed your tasks, there was nothing.

Q: What work did you do in the monastery? Was it the kitchen duty?

00:43:08

#11D: Initially I worked in the kitchen.

Q: At the age of 20?

#11D: No, not at the age of 20. [I] performed kitchen duty once before the age of 20 and once after 20.

Q: What was the task after 20?

#11D: It was once again kitchen work. There were two monks in the kitchen and the rest of the work like preparing tea and *thukpa* was done by lay people.

Q: Initially when you worked in the kitchen, you were small and worked under somebody. After the age of 20, you were a senior, one of the two monks.

#11D: Yes, we [the other monk and I] had to work together. One of the monks worked in the kitchen and the other in the *datsang* 'section in a monastery' where monk officials worked. [We] were like overseers. The biggest problem [we] faced in our monastery was water. Water had to be fetched from right below. The monastery was located atop a mountain and water had to be fetched from the valley. That was the biggest problem.

Q: Seeing that the water was difficult to obtain, how high was the monastery and where was the water and how did you fetch it?

00:45:08

#11D: At a guess, the distance [between the monastery and the water source] was definitely 4 kilometers. Here one uses kilometers to measure [distance]. It was either uphill or downhill. The subjects were paid to bring water. Monks did not need to do it.

Q: The people...

#11D: The people were paid to bring [water].

Q: Were you very near Mount Kailash? Was the monastery...so that people could...were they ever stop at your monastery or people from the monastery go to Mount Kailash?

#11D: Yes, [pilgrims] did come. [They] came to our monastery. First [the pilgrims] visited Mount Kailash and then Lake Mansrover. And on the way back [they] visited our monastery and then the Khocha Jowo.

Q: Khocha Jowo?

#11D: There was a Jowo 'image of Buddha Sakyamuni' called Khocha.

Q: Was there anything that was very special about your monastery that pilgrims would come to visit?

00:47:09

#11D: They came to see the monastery, but there was nothing special about it. They came, saw the monastery and then left. And there was not anyone to serve tea or anything. They came, saw and left. Except a few, most of [the pilgrims] could not come because of the steep climb. Presently a drivable road is constructed.

Q: To the monastery?

#11D: Yes. I have been there twice.

Q: I'll ask you about that a little bit. So you said that...were there any famous teachers at your monastery or people that were considered very holy among your 150 monks?

#11D: Long ago there was a famous lama called Chimi Ringpo. Then there was one called Phuntsok.

Q: Yes?

#11D: Phuntsok. Kushap Phuntsok.

Q: Phuntsok?

#11D: Phuntsok. Then there was Jamyang Chonjor. After him there was one called Jigme Chogyal. These were the famous lamas of our region.

Q: Belonging to the monastery?

#11D: From this monastery and hailing from our region. The abbot was changed every three years and [he] came from Loselling [Monastery].

Q: Can you explain to the person who is not familiar how does Drepung Monastery differ from the other two great monasteries?

#11D: How?

Q: We have the three great monasteries of Drepung, Sera and Gaden. Is Drepung different from Sera and Gaden in anyway?

00:50:27

#11D: I cannot explain that.

Q: *Gen-la*, you said that two things that you wanted to mention. One was that you went on a pilgrimage. You left the monastery to go on a pilgrimage. Can you tell us about why you did that and where you went?

#11D: Long ago I went through Nepal to Lhasa on a pilgrimage. [I] went like a beggar at that time, begging for *tsampa* along the way and without any place to stay. [I] stayed two days in Lhasa during the Monlam ‘Prayer Festival’ and then came back. The present incarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was very young then. We could not get an audience. However, [I] caught a glimpse [of His Holiness] at the Potala Palace on the 28th and 29th day of the 12th Tibetan lunar month when the monks of Namgyal Monastery performed a *cham* and [His Holiness] looked down from [his] quarters. Besides that, [I] could not get an audience.

Q: Which quarters?

#11D: The eastern quarters at the Potala. It was the present incarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and that was during the time I ran away to go on the pilgrimage.

Q: From the quarters of the Potala...

#11D: The monks were performing *cham* below.

Q: Was it the Potala or which palace was it?

#11D: It was the Potala Palace. The Namgyal Monastery [monks] performed a *cham* on the 29th day of the 12th Tibetan lunar month. [I] saw [His Holiness] then. The Chinese had just appeared then. It was around 2 years since the Chinese had appeared.

Q: Did you run away to go on the pilgrimage?

00:52:18

#11D: [I] ran away. Since [I] had run away, when I returned to the monastery [I] had to seek permission to be readmitted. If permission was granted, one could rejoin and if not, one could not.

Q: Why didn't you ask permission before you went?

#11D: If one sought permission from the monastery, it was not granted easily. One would have to give a lot of explanations. Instead if you ran away, you could take off for 4-5 months. It was like that.

Q: Why do you think you wanted to go so badly that you sort of went away without permission?

#11D: I told you earlier that there were three older brothers at home. One of the older brothers was going on pilgrimage. So, before he could leave to go on the pilgrimage, I ran away. He would not have taken [me] had [I] asked. [Laughs]

Q: But the older brothers were living in the monastery or with your mother?

#11D: They were living in the parents' home.

Q: So you wanted to be the first one to escape to go on a pilgrimage?

00:55:22

#11D: I ran away first. Earlier my older brother had made preparations to go. He would not take me if I asked. So thinking of that I ran away ahead to Indian territory.

Q: Nepal?

#11D: No, Indian territory. One could reach India within a night's journey from our region. It was right on the border.

Q: I see. And then?

#11D: After reaching Indian territory, [I] stayed there until older brother and the others arrived and then I left with them. That was how it happened. We went through India, visited Bodh Gaya [Bihar] and then left for Nepal and then through Nyelam.

Q: Wow! Bodh Gaya. All the way down into India. No wonder you needed three months.

#11D: [We] went to Bodh Gaya. [We] traveled in a train then and did not go on foot.

Q: Yeah, but it's still a long way.

#11D: We had to go on foot from Nepal to Lhasa.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So he met his brother near India and then he went to Bodh Gaya.

Q: Walking from Nepal to Lhasa...

#11D: There is this place in India called Chenakpur, Mainagar. [We] had to walk from here.

Q: To Nepal?

#11D: To Nepalese territory. [We] went on foot until Nepal and also walking throughout Nepal. There were no vehicles in Nepal when we were there. [We] went through Dam. It was very difficult at Dam because one had to go across mountains. Then [we] continued through Nyelam. One reached Shigatse and other places.

Q: When you went to Lhasa, that was the first time you saw the Potala Palace? Can you tell us what were your reactions to seeing Lhasa and the city of Lhasa?

#11D: There was an opportunity for me to join a monastery then but did not. [I] was a monk then and could join Loselling.

Q: Where?

#11D: When [I] reached Lhasa [I] could join Loselling [Monastery] but did not. [I] stayed a day or two for the *monlam*. [I] felt greatly blessed then as [I] saw a multitude of monks and the *monlam* in Lhasa. I was two days there for the *monlam*. During Losar 'Tibetan New Year' we reached Lhasa, in the 1st month. To be honest, we did not spend a lot of money but continued to beg throughout. It was good because there were many that gave *tsampa*. Upon reaching Lhasa, even on the 1st day of Losar, [we] went to beg in Lhasa. [Laughs] Otherwise, money was scarce and there were a lot of expenses if [we] did not beg. While returning, [we] took the route through Kalimpong in India.

Q: That was a big adventure for you to be away for the first time from your monastery and how many years...20 years? How old were you?

01:00:59

#11D: There was older brother and another companion. We were three people.

Q: How old were you then?

#11D: I was almost 21 or 22 years old then. The Chinese had just appeared in Tibet. [I] do not know which year the Chinese appeared in Tibet. There were a few Chinese in Tibet then.

Q: Did [you] hear anything?

#11D: [The Chinese] had appeared.

Q: Did [you] hear anything in Lhasa then?

#11D: Chinese? Yes, [they] were in Lhasa. Not just Lhasa, [they] had also arrived in our village when we left. We left after the Chinese appeared; my running away...

Q: However, [you] didn't run away because the Chinese appeared and gave problems?

#11D: It was not because the Chinese arrived. It was just around the time the Chinese entered Tibet that we went on the pilgrimage.

Q: Before you left the monastery for that pilgrimage, did you know that the Chinese were coming into Tibet or did you only learn that when you got to Lhasa?

01:02:11

#11D: It is like this: The Chinese had already appeared in Tibet before I left for the pilgrimage. They were not only in Lhasa but in our village too. There was no need to fear them then. They were keeping to themselves then. [I] heard that when they arrived in Lhasa, the costs of grains rose. A...[not discernible] of grains costs about 20 *ngulsang* 'currency unit' and it was said that the costs had increased.

Q: There was nothing else?

#11D: There was nothing else. At that time there was no fear.

Q: The Chinese who were in your village prior to pilgrimage, were they people who'd always lived there or were they soldiers who'd come in quietly?

#11D: They were there when the Chinese first appeared in Tibet. [They] were not there since long ago. They had just arrived then. The Chinese had just arrived in Tibet then.

Q: Were they soldiers?

#11D: They were soldiers along with their leaders and everyone. I told you earlier that the Chinese were living in the residence of the Chogyal Norsang. They had arrived then in our village.

Q: Were they living in the residence of Chogyal Norsang then?

#11D: They stayed in the palace. Actually the palace was in ruins and they made it their army camp.

Q: The palace was in ruins?

#11D: Yes, the palace was in ruins.

Q: So when you come back, how long are you at the monastery before you flee?

01:04:50

#11D: [I] lived [there] until '59.

Q: How many years was it after returning to the monastery from the pilgrimage and the time you fled?

#11D: Age? I told you earlier that [I] escaped at the age of 25. The escape was in '59 and [I] was 24 or 25. And since then [I] have been here in India.

Q: When you came back from your pilgrimage, you were at the monastery for a few years before you had to leave?

#11D: Yes. [I] fled for good in '59.

Q: What precipitated the need for you to escape?

#11D: It happened like this. I escaped because they occupied in '59. The Chinese occupied after '59. Once [they] occupied, only one prayer assembly was allowed in the monastery. People like us were to subject other people to physical struggle. For instance, subject this person to physical struggle and do this and that, which I did not want to do to other people. That was the reason I escaped.

Q: When you say people like you, what does that mean?

01:07:21

#11D: For instance, I was not knowledgeable and my family was poor. If I were to stay back...[for instance] you [interpreter] were a leader earlier. They said that it was imperative [for me] to inflict physical struggle on you. However, in order to subject [you] to physical struggle, I did not have any charges against you. So, I was not happy and that was the reason I fled, the reason for my sudden escape in '59. Otherwise, there was not the need to escape since my parents and relatives were living there then. [I] did not feel like staying after seeing that. Besides, religious practice in the monastery was banned. They restricted prayer assemblies to only once a day.

Q: When you said you came from a poor family, were they making you do that back in your village or were you being forced to do that as a monk in the monastery?

#11D: [I] was in the monastery.

Q: In the monastery?

#11D: Yes, in the monastery. Everyone in the monastery was called [to gather] and they [the Chinese] ordered, "You must do this to this person. You must do this."

Q: In the monastery?

#11D: Yes, in the monastery. When the first meeting took place in the monastery, [we] had to subject the dead officials of the monastery to *thamzing* 'struggle session.'

Q: How can you subject a dead person to *thamzing*?

01:09:22

#11D: For instance, [points to someone] he was an official of the monastery. [He] had passed away earlier. Saying that he caused me suffering, [we] were forced to subject the dead person to *thamzing*. It happened like that. Later it gradually increased and it was not good.

Q: [Increased] to what?

#11D: Then they ordered, “You must do [*thamzing*] to this person and to this person.”

Q: To real people?

#11D: Yes, to real living people. “You must lie and do such things.” It was not said just to me but to many people. Numerous people fled on account of that.

Q: Why were these people dead?

[Interpreter interprets as]: About subjecting dead people to *thamzing*, had these people passed away on account of natural causes?

#11D: That is right. They had passed away earlier. [The Chinese] ordered, “If there are dead people that caused you suffering, [they] can be subjected to *thamzing*.” They initially said that. Majority of us people subjected dead people to *thamzing* saying, “He caused me suffering. He treated me badly.” Later it was not just that but [we] were to do it to living people that had no faults.

Q: How were the dead people subjected to *thamzing*?

#11D: Even though [they] were dead, [we] had to speak aloud about what [they had] done in front of them [the Chinese].

Q: But the monks that they had to do it on were dead. Were they killed by the Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They had died naturally.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They had died naturally. I see.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: As a starter...As a starter to the other *thamzing* of the real people.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They had died naturally.

Q: What kind of pressure was put? Were you told...What were you told would happen to you if you didn't do *thamzing* on the living teachers?

01:12:30

#11D: If we did not do it, it was certain that they would cause some harm later. They would certainly cause suffering later though they did not then. If you had to do something

to someone without any reason, it makes you unhappy. So, on account of that 6-7 of us escaped together. [We] were all monks.

Q: What happened to the rest of the monks? Did they stay?

#11D: Some of them were subjected to suffering later. We learned of it. There were cases of some who were unable to endure the suffering and leaped into the waters. It happened like that.

[We] heard that a group of them were taken to Lhasa, towards Ponchoe but did not reach there. [I] do not know where they were interned or whether taken to China. [They] did not reach there [Lhasa].

Q: You were with six monks and you...Did you sneak out in the middle of the night? How did you get away and how long did it take you to reach the border?

#11D: It was at night. In the monastery we indicated to each other that we should escape, as there was no one else to talk to. We sneaked out of the monastery at night. As I told you earlier, we could reach Indian territory in a night's [journey]. One group left for Nepal and we reached Indian territory in the night. The Indians did not let us stay and immediately sent us [to the plains]. Finally, the six of us assembled and lived at the Sendhiwu camp for a year or two.

Q: Where is this?

01:15:13

#11D: It is in Uttar Pradesh.

Q: What's the name? Sen...

#11D: Sendhiwu.

Q: Sendhiwu?

#11D: Yes. All the Tibetans that came from our region settled there. A camp was set up because numerous escapees arrived later. [They] are now in Bylakuppe and mostly in Mundgod [Tibetan Settlements in south India].

Q: Did you leave the monastery for good then or did you try to join again?

#11D: [I] left monkhood. [I] left monkhood then. [I] left monkhood and lived at Sendhiwu and then joined the military at Dehradun [Uttaranchal].

Q: From Sendhiwu?

#11D: Yes. [I] joined the army. [I] joined the Tibetan Government army at Dehradun.

Q: Was that in the year '59?

#11D: No, it was later. We arrived in the year '59 and worked as road crew for a year or two. [I] joined the army in '63 or '64. Earlier [I] worked at road construction.

Q: So [you] left the monastery for good at this time?

01:16:48

#11D: [I] left the monastery for good then. [I] left the monastery for good and [I] told you that we were six monks. A small house had been built in Sendhiwu where we had been sent to conduct religious duties. There I did the cooking for them.

Q: At Sendhiwu?

#11D: Yes, at Sendhiwu. The monastery is [relocated] in 1st Camp in Mundgod. There is only one monk left now who was my colleague.

Q: From the six?

#11D: Yes.

Q: Did you marry?

#11D: [I] told you that [I] did it in Tibet long ago.

Q: But [you] were a monk in Tibet.

#11D: When the Chinese were there...[I] did not get married upon reaching here. There are some children living in my home. Their mother's husband passed away and I happened to meet [her].

Q: Where?

01:18:08

#11D: Right here in Dharamsala. There is a lady from my village.

Q: Oh, here?

#11D: Yes, here.

Q: [You] were a monk earlier.

#11D: Her husband passed away and I joined [her]. Earlier it did happen once. [Laughs] There was a child that I told [you] lives in Tibet.

Q: Were you not a monk in Tibet?

#11D: [I] was not a monk in Tibet when I left in '59 as I told you earlier.

Q: So you met a lady when you left?

#11D: Yes. Now he must be around 50-odd years old. There was a child.

Q: Was it during your escape journey?

#11D: It was during the escape. [Laughs] [We] met. [She] had become pregnant. [Laughs] Here my family consisted of the woman whose husband passed away. [She] has three sons.

Q: Is [she] the owner of the house where you live?

01:19:13

#11D: Yes. We lived together for a long time and then she passed away in the year when the Kalachakra was bestowed in Mundgod. The children are here but I am not their father.

Q: I guess I would like to conclude by thanking you very much for this interview and for your ideas and insights about monastic life and we appreciate your time today.

#11D: I would also like to say thank you. [Joins palms] It brought back memories of my village when [you] asked questions.

Q: Do you think that was true when they said you were going to be a stubborn child and you even left the monastery as a stubborn child, stubborn monk?

#11D: [Laughs]

Q: Right? I think there was a good prediction. I also think, maybe...Did your journey leaving once to go on the pilgrimage; did it give you courage to leave again because you had traveled those roads?

#11D: Yes, it did.

Q: Thank you again and we'll end. Did you turn it off? Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW