

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #11M – Lhamo
April 4, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #11M
2. Interviewee: Lhamo
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1935
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Reting
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 4, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 30 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Lhamo was born in a nomadic family. As a child she grazed lambs and spent her time playing with other children. She recalls life as happy with plenty of good food to eat. She explains how the villagers elect their leader and the leader's responsibilities to the community. Marriages in those days were arranged by the parents and there was strict division of labor between men and women. Lhamo tells about nomadic village life including birthing, birth control, education and taxes.

Lhamo goes on to describe the sudden appearance in her village of Chinese on horseback, who "fired indiscriminately killing people and dogs." Then the village received the alarming news about children in Lhasa being taken away by the Chinese in vehicles. Subsequently the children of her village fled to the hills and were hidden there in bears' dens.

Fearing capture, a large group of people from the village escaped and struggled to reach Mustang in Nepal. Later they were taken to Dharamsala where she describes in detail her experience of her first audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She constructed roads in Manali, Himachal Pradesh as a refugee and later was sent to Mundgod.

Topics Discussed

Childhood memories, herding, customs/traditions, first appearance of Chinese, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #11M

Interviewee: Lhamo

Age: 75, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 4, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:21

Interviewee #11M: Lhamo

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?

#11M: Yes, you can use it if it is beneficial.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story.

00:01:46

#11M: Okay.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know.

#11M: [Nods]

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

00:02:13

#11M: Okay.

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

#11M: I do not know if there will be any problem.

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

00:02:59

#11M: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ we wish to learn something about your own story. What are the subjects that you would like to talk about today?

#11M: Okay.

Q: What things do you want to make sure we know about your story?

00:03:52

#11M: Should I tell you the story about China or Tibet?

Q: I would like to hear about both, but first I would like to hear about your story growing up in Tibet.

#11M: When I was a child we were nomads, owners of animals. We were herders of sheep and goats. At that time I was a small child. Our region was a happy place and we had good food to eat. Then as I grew older, there was a *lama* ‘a spiritual teacher’ in my village called Reting Lama. He used to stay in retreat. One day, it was around lunch time when the region seemed to fill with horses. The older people remarked to each other, “What is happening?” and each one answered, “I do not know.” and then they were there.

Innumerable gunshots were fired indiscriminately, killing people and dogs. Everyone was killed. Then they piled them [the corpses] in a heap, poured kerosene oil over it and set it on fire. Then they disappeared. We could see them far away and then they were gone. That’s how the oppression began.

Q: Who were the people on horseback?

00:06:36

#11M: They were the Chinese. All those that arrived riding on horses were Chinese.

Q: How old were you then, *ama-la*?

#11M: I think I was about 10 years old then. I was quite young.

Q: Was that the first time that you saw the Chinese?

00:07:13

#11M: That was the first time. The second time was when my brother left for Lhasa and returned. He said, “All the children [in Lhasa] were put in vehicles by the Chinese. We cannot stay here as we are bound to be killed. We have to either run away or hide in the hills.”

So, all the children were hidden in the hills. We were put in bears’ dens and the openings were closed. The elders stayed for a day or two and then we all fled in the night. As we journeyed for 10-15 days, the Chinese were once again upon us. They killed people and dogs and were gone.

Q: Were you being pursued by the Chinese?

#11M: We were being pursued by the Chinese. We were fleeing. We could not remain in our region. We continued to flee. We became tired and exhausted; our animals were exhausted. We were hungry and suffering a great deal. We fled for a year under such conditions. We were fleeing on foot.

Q: Where did you run if you were in Utsang, right? It took a year to get from Utsang to where?

00:09:30

#11M: We did not know the regions, but we finally reached Mustang [in Nepal]. We fled for about a year, but I do not know the areas we covered. We were hungry and ate mud as we had nothing to eat. We drank water and ate bits of bricks. We traveled in the night and fell down from hunger. When we woke up, it would be daylight. Once again people and dogs were killed. The rest would continue to flee and finally we limped into Mustang.

Q: How many people were in your group?

#11M: We were 180 people. It was the whole village, which fled together. I heard the elders say that we were 180 in number.

Q: So I can understand who was in the group, I would like to go back to the beginning of the story.

00:11:33

#11M: You want to ask about Tibet?

Q: No, I want to go back when you were a little girl and your family was nomads. How many people were in your family when you were a little girl?

#11M: There were two older brothers and two daughters, one of whom is me and the other my older sister. My father was killed by the Chinese. My mother was there. There were five members in the family.

Q: How was he killed?

00:12:30

#11M: My father was killed in Reting. I told you about the huge number of horsemen who arrived there. Father was killed at that time.

Q: When you were a little girl, did the family travel with the stock and take them to different locations?

#11M: We did not move from place to place. The yaks grazed separately and the *dri* 'female yaks' grazed nearer the house. Servants took the yaks to the hills and brought them down in the evening. Other than that, we did not drive them anywhere.

Q: As a little girl, what were your duties?

00:13:46

#11M: I did not have any work except herding the lambs. I spent my time playing, as there was no work. At that time my parents were there and so were my siblings. I was the youngest. I grazed the lambs while I played.

Q: Did you graze the lambs by yourself? Were you allowed to do that?

#11M: There were many other children. There were children of the neighbors, too. We would be four or five children herding the lambs.

Q: How many lambs were there typically?

00:14:50

#11M: I have not counted them, but there were many sheep as well as lambs.

Q: Did you enjoy grazing the lambs?

#11M: I was very happy. There was plenty of food, as much as you wanted to eat. I was a child then and very happy.

Q: What kind of food did you like to eat as a child?

00:15:28

#11M: I ate curd, drank milk and ate *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' That was it. There was tea to drink, but the children did not drink much. There was no need to because we could drink curd and milk. We grew fat.

Q: What kind of games did the children play?

#11M: We used to line up pebbles and name them as yak, sheep and goat. Then we hit them with another pebble and whiled away the time.

Q: Were you very good at that game?

00:16:50

#11M: When I was a child, I played it well.

Q: Did the boys and girls play together?

#11M: We played together. There was no division between boys and girls. We also ate together. We sat in a circle—those of us engaged in grazing the lambs—and ate together. We ate *pa* 'dough made from *tsampa* and tea,' curd and drank milk. All the children became fat. We gave away the surplus to the animals.

Q: When you came home, was your home in a village and how many houses were in the village?

00:17:59

#11M: There were no houses; there were only *ba* 'tents.' *Ba* is woven from the hair of yak. Many such villages dotted the region.

Q: Can you tell me what did the tent look like on the outside? What was it like?

#11M: It was black and huge. The wealthier families owned larger *ba* while the smaller families had smaller *ba*. There were [families of] different economic statuses.

Q: What were they made of, if they were black?

00:19:05

#11M: They were made from the hair of yak. The hair was spun and then woven.

Q: You lived in them in the summer and winter time?

#11M: We lived in them [throughout].

Q: Your whole life?

00:19:34

#11M: The whole life.

Q: Were there many tents nearby or were people separated?

#11M: Tents were set up not too far apart or too close together.

Q: Did people live in the tents because they could afford the tents or did they prefer the tents to houses? Did they want to build houses if they had the money?

00:20:29

#11M: We could not build houses. We did not know how to build houses nor could we afford to build them. There were wealthy people as well as poor people, but what could one do when they did not know how to build houses? We were forced to live in the *ba*.

Q: Was there a community leader among the nomads?

#11M: Yes, there was a leader. He was the one who differentiates between those who do wrong and right. He also advised the people on their work, which they must adhere to. If one did not obey him, what was the good of having a leader?

Q: How did the people select the leader?

00:21:43

#11M: The people find the leader. Each village will hold a meeting and discuss among themselves who could be a probable leader and then they point to him. They point to him

and tell him that he must be the leader. When person after person point to him, who could be the leader if not him!

Q: What kind of qualities did they want to have in a leader?

#11M: Preparations had to be made at first. *Chang* ‘home-brewed beer’ and tea must be readied before the meeting.

[Question is repeated.]

00:22:50

#11M: When the leader was to be selected, the people must make preparations. A tent had to be erected for the leader to stay and speak to the people. He was feted with tea and *chang*. He will ask the people about the problems they were facing and give his advice, which we must obey.

Q: Would they ever select a woman for a leadership position?

#11M: Women were never selected as leaders. That will never happen. I never heard of a woman being a leader in my region. Women were considered gentle. In this country [India] women are very domineering. They speak more than the men and that is not proper. What is the use of a man then? The merit of being born a man is incomparable. In this country, they [the women] raise their hands on their husbands, argue and tell lies. Such things did not happen in my village.

Q: What were the jobs of the women and what were the jobs of the men in the nomad life?

00:25:11

#11M: The men did the trading, transported grains and salt. Those were the duties of a man. The women milked the *dri*, made cheese and butter, and cleaned and dusted the place. Depending upon the families’ tidiness, some were very clean while others were not so neat. Therefore, women and men had different jobs to do. Men were not allowed to cook.

When a man came home, he was made to sit down and given food and not ordered “get up and do this or do that.” No woman ever said that or was allowed to say so. If he got up to do something, that was fine. If he did not, no one ever told him to do something nor was it allowed since he was a man and had come home after doing his job.

Q: Did the women give birth to their babies in their own tent or did they go to another special doctor’s tent or midwife’s?

#11M: There were no doctors. A bed was made for the birthing to take place in the shed, where animals were tethered. There were no doctors, nothing whatsoever. It was either the mother or elder sister who helped during the birth. She rested there for two or three days and then came home. She must have a wash before the monks arrived to perform the *pooja* ‘rituals of worship.’ Then the son or daughter was given a name. There were no doctors.

Q: How old are the nomad girls when they get married?

00:28:06

#11M: That depends on the parents and the daughters. Some marry at the age of 20 and some at 18 or 19. It depended on the parents and children as there was no age level.

Q: How does the marriage partner get selected?

#11M: There were instances of love marriages. If a family wished to ask for a boy's hand in marriage [for their daughter], the parents will discuss between them. They will request their neighbors' help in acquiring the boy's hand. If they [the neighbors] agree, they will approach [the family to seek the hand] and bring home the boy or girl, whichever the case may be. Then the marriage was solemnized.

Q: If the parents pick a bridegroom, a husband for the girl, do they give her much notice?

00:30:05

#11M: They told her about a week in advance because preparations had to be made. The parents advised her, "You must not treat him badly. We have asked him to come to live in our house. You must not fight with him." She will obey them as she is not stupid. Then the boy is brought home and the marriage solemnized.

Q: If she does not want to get married, is she still obliged to get married?

#11M: If the girl does not want to, it is not compulsory for the marriage to go ahead. If she voices her dislike over the parents' decision, it is her opinion that counts and not the parents. Then the plan is dropped.

Q: If the girl decides to get married, what kind of preparation does her mother give her about married life and about having babies and pregnancies? What kind of education, if any?

00:32:13

#11M: By the mother? Yes, she will give her advice. "Do not argue. You must be amicable. Either do not get married or do not argue with your husband once you are married. Do not be domineering. A wife should not be domineering. The husband should be the one to dominate. Do not fight. Do not flirt with other men. You cannot do that." Though the mother controls the daughter thus, there are some girls who associate with other men.

Q: Is there any attempt to practice birth control?

#11M: Birth control was not allowed in my village. Such things were not allowed. For example, if I was pregnant and you gave me the medicine [to abort the child]—if I took the medicine, I am killing the child. One cannot kill one's child. Whether you give birth to one child or two children, it is in your destiny that you will have enough to eat. Here I have heard a few instances of [girls] taking medicines to control birth. That should never be practiced in one's life. Taking this human form will become worthless.

Q: How many children did women have? What would be the range of children in families?

00:34:33

#11M: There are cases of women having ten children; some have two, three or four. The number of children you have is your fate. I cannot say whether having more children is good or having fewer is good.

Q: What about the children? Were there many children that died before they grew up; that died young?

#11M: There were instances of children dying young. Not many died but a few breast feeding babies died. Though we did not have any doctors in my village, it was a very clean place. Perhaps it is due to the purity of the water that not many diseases were common. In this country [India], however you try to keep yourself clean, it is full of diseases.

Q: What was the relation of the nomad community in which you lived, what was the relation of that community to the monastery?

00:36:26

#11M: The monastery was the place where people went to make offerings, circumambulate and do prostrations. One must go to the monastery to offer prayers. Some went to Lhasa to make offerings, do prostrations and prayers. It was a very happy place.

Q: Did the nomads have to pay any taxes to the monastery?

#11M: We did not have to pay taxes. We did not have to pay taxes or anything to the monastery. If you had butter or cheese, you could make an offering of those to the monastery and say your prayers and light butter lamps. Why should one pay tax [to the monastery]? Taxes must be paid to the government.

Q: What kind of taxes did you pay to the government?

00:37:40

#11M: We paid taxes in the form of horses and yaks to the government and those who were not wealthy, paid in goats and sheep. Those were the taxes we paid to the government.

Q: What did you get from the government? What was useful to you that came to the nomads because you had a government?

#11M: The government has allotted lands to us. The lands were allotted by the government or else from where would we get lands? They gave us the lands, so in return the rich families were taxed more and the poorer families paid lesser taxes.

Q: Did the nomads feel that they were oppressed by the government or by rich families? Was there ever that sentiment or feeling among the nomads?

00:39:46

#11M: There were different types even among the people of Tibet. There were powerful people who were extremely wealthy that they admitted their children in schools. Children of poor families were not admitted to schools. Whether it is because these people did not observe the law of karma or whatever, the six million Tibetans had to suffer. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that if the six million Tibetans do not observe the law of karma, good things would not come about and that we must offer our prayers.

Q: Were there some nomads who were rich and some who were poor?

#11M: Yes, there were. There were some who were rich and some who were poor.

Q: Where did the rich nomads send their children to school?

00:41:14

#11M: They were sent to Tibetan government schools. I told you just now those children of the rich were admitted, while the poor could not go to school because they had no money. That was the cause of lack of education [among the poor]. The schools here admit children, irrespective of their rich or poor backgrounds, which is why all children are very well educated. That was not how it was done [in Tibet].

Q: Did anybody in your family go to school?

#11M: No, no one could go.

Q: When you were a little girl, what did you want to do when you grew up?

00:42:26

#11M: I used to think that I should get a good job; otherwise it [life] was not good. I thought I must get a good job or get an education in a school. Without education, one cannot move among people, that's what I felt but what was the use?

Q: Do you feel that way now?

#11M: Now I do not feel that way.

Q: Did you feel that way when you were a little child?

00:42:57

#11M: Yes, I did.

Q: What kind of job would you want to do?

#11M: I would love a job at the school.

Q: What kind of job?

00:43:19

#11M: I love to learn.

Q: Where did you study?

#11M: I did not get to study. I did not have my father or my mother. From where would I get an education?

Q: Yes, it was hard. If we go back to your life as a nomad, [it was] very peaceful until that day the Chinese soldiers came on horses. Is that correct?

00:44:06

#11M: Yes, we were living happily until then.

Q: I'm sorry if I forgot but how old were you the day that the soldiers came?

#11M: I must have been about 10 years old. I was not more than that; I was quite young then.

Q: That might have been 1945 if you were 10. So there were Chinese soldiers coming with guns to Utsang in 1945?

00:45:06

#11M: I was very young then and do not know the dates. It is just an approximate guess.

Q: Your age now is 75?

#11M: I am 75 years old now.

Q: So the soldiers came over the hill and they had guns. Is that correct?

00:45:49

#11M: They carried guns and killed people.

Q: Which people did they kill, the nomads?

#11M: They killed the people of the nomadic villages. They shot them dead. Then they piled the corpses: the corpses of dogs, people and horses. They [the Chinese soldiers] were huge in number, not just a few. They were innumerable like ants emerging out of the ground, killing people and dogs. Then they piled the corpses, poured kerosene oil over it and struck a match. The fire burned and we could hardly look.

Q: This was right near Reting?

00:47:14

#11M: Yes. After killing the Reting *lama*, they killed our people.

Q: Was the *lama* killed during that attack?

#11M: The *lama* was killed then. He was an extremely holy *lama*. Had he not been killed, the Chinese would not be able to cause us so much destruction. However, the *lama* was killed at the beginning.

Q: Had Lhasa fallen yet?

00:47:58

#11M: Lhasa had not fallen at that time.

Q: Was the Dalai Lama still in Lhasa?

#11M: The Dalai Lama was in Lhasa. My brother who had been to Lhasa told us that the Chinese had packed [Tibetan] children in two vehicles and that they were to be taken away. Hearing this, all the children of our village were hidden underground in the mountains. Stashed away in the pits without food, the children were bound to die. Fearing for our safety, the parents carried provisions on their backs and taking us along, we fled. We did not know the way and walked aimlessly in the dark.

Q: So you escaped even before the Dalai Lama left Tibet?

00:49:28

#11M: No, we did not. When we were on the verge of escape, His Holiness had left.

Q: So the parents went and got the children in the hills and then you traveled in the dark for, you said a long time, like a year?

#11M: We fled the whole time on our foot. In a month or so, there would be flashes of light and people got killed. Their bodies were heaped and burned. We had three or four such encounters. We did not have anything to eat or drink. For about a month, we survived drinking stagnant muddy water.

Q: When the people were killed, were they killed with guns by the Chinese?

00:51:13

#11M: They were killed with guns. All the dogs and people were killed with guns. Then they disappeared.

Q: Were the people in your group, *ama-la*, were they all nomads?

#11M: Yes, they were. They were the people from the villages.

Q: What was the plan? Were you planning to go to India or to go somewhere else?

00:52:01

#11M: We said we would try to get to where His Holiness the Dalai Lama had gone. We did not know the Indian language and had nothing to eat. In the deserted regions we just drank water, the children cried out of hunger, the elders and the children could hardly walk. Due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we reached Mustang [in Nepal]. We begged food from the security people but could not eat, as our throats were parched. They gave us water.

Later, a red vehicle arrived and we saw that the occupants were Tibetans. We wondered what the reason could be. They came towards us and said, "Come with us. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is reaching Dharamsala [Himachal Pradesh] tomorrow and is giving a teaching. We heard you are here and His Holiness has asked for you. You have to come. Bring your belongings." What belongings did we have? [Swears] We did not even have proper clothes, not to speak of belongings! Our clothes were patched here and there and I was filled with anguish. I have suffered so much. It brings tears to my eyes to remember.

[Gets emotional] Then we were taken to Dharamsala. We reached Amritsar [Punjab] at night and they provided us with bread. We traveled in a vehicle. We did not have proper clothes and I was so sad. Then halfway through the night, we were told that we had reached Mcleod Ganj [Dharamsala], which we did not know. It was bright with light and there were innumerable tents. Thanks to God, they were all Tibetans.

Our accommodation was very well made. [The room] was laid with hay and gunny sacks and it was quite warm. There were members of the Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan Women's Association. Members of the Tibetan Women's Association assured us, "Do not cry. Be happy. You must not cry. It is no use crying. You will receive His Holiness' teachings. Do not cry." Even though they told us not to cry, I was very sad as we did not have proper clothes to wear. I was overcome with anguish. They provided us with food and tea, which we ate and drank.

At around dusk, the Tibetan Women's Association members arrived and said, "Change your clothes and wash them. Tomorrow you will go to see His Holiness." How can we wash our clothes when we had nothing better than the ones we wore? They were informed that we had no [other] clothes. They remarked, "How sad. Perhaps we might be able to get some people to donate, as they are not many in number. They are only about 50 people. Let's go elsewhere and ask some people. If they donate, that will be very kind. If not, it is very sad, as tomorrow you will be seeing His Holiness." The women discussed among themselves that we really did not have anything to wear or eat. However, they could not give us clothes.

00:55:54

The next morning we washed and ate and then were told that we had to leave for the audience. I felt terribly sad. The monks lined up on one side, the men on another, the women and then us. I was filled with misery and tears rolled down. [Gets emotional] And then His Holiness arrived. I just cried uncontrollably. His Holiness asked me the reason and I replied, "I am sad. I do not have clothes to wear when I come to see His Holiness. I

have no clothes to wear. The Chinese took away everything.” “Do not cry. I will give you clothes,” His Holiness said.

My mother and I were taken to His Holiness’ sister’s room and were given a *chupa* ‘traditional dress’ and a blouse each. I was ecstatic. I felt happier than if I was given a house-full of money! What can one do with money? [Swears] I was so happy that I got to wear good clothes when I went to see His Holiness. I thanked the *semo kusho* ‘princess’ [His Holiness’ sister] and stopped crying. The *semo kusho* told me not to cry. Then certain people started murmuring, “They must be Chinese spies.” So some monks told them, “Keep quite or you will be led away. How can these people be Chinese spies? Tibet lost her freedom because of such inane talk. Are you going to keep quiet or not?” They kept quiet. We were called spies by people standing in the lay people’s queue.

Q: You got some new clothes and then you met His Holiness?

01:01:30

#11M: Then I saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We received blessed pills from him. My mother was with me. We did not know that she was going to pass away that night. His Holiness gave some blessed pills to my mother saying, “Take these pills if you feel sick tonight. Do not take them if you are not ill.” We received the pills and then he added, “You will need money as you do not have any. The Chinese have made you paupers. How much do you want?” My mother replied, “We do not need much. We do not want money. We will get paid when we work on the road construction.” His Holiness insisted that we needed money and told us to take two, three, four or 5,000 and then gave us a fistful of money. I do not know how much it was.

We took the money, the blessed pills and came back. Then His Holiness gave teachings. That night, my mother suffered terrible pains and I gave her the blessed pills. After taking the pills, my mother passed away.

Q: Did His Holiness give the pills right to your mother, directly to your mother?

#11M: He did. He gave them into my mother’s hands. She was a little ill at that time. That night when she had the pain, I gave her the pills and then she passed away.

Q: I am sorry. What was that like for you to see His Holiness for the first time?

01:04:28

#11M: In my heart I felt, “I have no regrets if I die now as I have seen His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is wonderful and I am so happy. My struggle has not been wasted.” I do not know what the others felt.

Q: Was your mother equally happy to see His Holiness like you were?

#11M: Yes, my mother and my relatives felt the same way. Of course they would, for our struggle had not gone to waste by seeing His Holiness. By the grace of God, we were gifted [this opportunity] and what was better than that?

Q: When you were crying and sad because you looked so poor. Was it His Holiness' real sister who took you out and gave you some clothing?

01:06:06

#11M: That was the older sister of His Holiness.

Q: What kind of clothing did she give you?

#11M: I was given a brand new *chupa*, a blouse and a pair of *zompa* 'hand-made boots.' My mother received similar gifts. I was ecstatic. I bowed and thanked her and she said, "That's okay. You must be happy. You have the chance to see His Holiness and wear good clothes."

Q: What color was the *chupa*?

00:07:09

#11M: The one given to me was in *mukpo* color. My mother's was light colored with stripes.

Q: Which is the color *mukpo*?

#11M: [Points to particular color in apron interviewee is wearing] This color here in the apron is *mukpo* 'brown.' This color is called *mukpo*.

Q: At that meeting, about how old were you?

01:07:50

#11M: I cannot remember much. I was not very old. I cried day and night when my mother passed away. I cannot recall much.

Q: So you saw the Dalai Lama when you lost your mother.

#11M: Yes. My mother must have had her prayers answered. She died the same day that she saw His Holiness. This could not have happened to anyone. She had her prayers answered. His Holiness gave a call over the telephone, "Take the body to a clean place. Tell the children not to cry." I went out and cried so much. Perhaps His Holiness knew for he said, "Tell the children not to cry. They should not cry because everyone who is born is bound to die." But I continued to cry.

Q: So you lost your mother and a few years earlier your father was killed.

01:09:35

#11M: Yes, my father was shot dead.

Q: Was there a burial for your father or was he just cremated in a pile?

#11M: We did not allow it [father's body] to be heaped on the pile. My two older brothers could take charge of the body.

Q: After you meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama, what happens next in your life?

01:10:40

#11M: Then the people were separated into groups and 180 of us were sent to Kulu Manali [Himachal Pradesh] on road construction work. The men dug with pick-axes, while the women cleared the stones.

Q: How was that work for you?

#11M: The work was not very hard, but there was a lot of dust. I was depressed as everything was strange. I did not feel happy. Right from the morning there was dust everywhere. I lamented that Tibet was lost and now I was in a foreign land, which was full of dust and what could be in store for me? I do not know what the other people felt, but that was how I felt.

Q: Your mother was gone, so who were you staying with?

01:12:20

#11M: I was living with my older sister and brother.

Q: Were you a little girl or a teenager when you had to do the shoveling?

#11M: I must be about 15 or 16. I could do the shoveling. The wage was very low. It was a *rupee* per day. We left for work early in the morning and stopped at 5 p.m. We shoveled dust the whole day.

Q: Did many people get sick from this hard work?

01:13:41

#11M: There were people who fell sick and there were people who died. People, young and old were crippled, irrespective of their ages.

Q: How was the food? What did you eat?

#11M: We ate our own food. We purchased flour, onion, potato and other vegetables. We did not know the names and at the Indian shop, just pointed at them like dumb people. We cooked the vegetables and made bread. We did not have *tsampa*.

Q: Did you have to buy the food with the one *rupee* a day?

01:15:02

#11M: We must save the wage as one cannot buy anything from one *rupee*. We saved the *rupee* we earned for 10-15 days and then we could buy a bag full [of provisions]. These days, even if you spent 100 *rupees*, you cannot get a bagful.

Q: Where were you living at night?

#11M: We lived in tents. The Indian government provided us with tents.

Q: Was this in the area of Amritsar?

01:16:05

#11M: That was in Kulu Manali.

Q: How long did you live in Kulu Manali?

#11M: I was there for about a year and a half working on the road crew.

Q: And then what happened?

01:16:36

#11M: Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama sent the people in groups to the settlements in different places. His Holiness said that his people were suffering in the dust and sent them to the settlements.

Q: Did you come here to Mundgod?

#11M: That is right.

Q: Do you remember what year you came?

01:17:26

#11M: I do not know the months or the dates. I do not know an alphabet, so how would I know? I was not even a bright child. I do not know.

Q: So when you came to Mundgod, what did you do here?

#11M: People were sent to the settlement in Mundgod, while six or seven of us stayed back for lack of a seat in the vehicle. While all other people were in their respective groups, ours got scattered; some were sent to Kollegal [Karnataka] and some to Hunsur [Karnataka]. I could not go. So when they asked me where I wanted to go, I requested of the Indian official that I be sent where there was a large number of Tibetans and monks. I did not have my parents and my group had broken up, so I requested to be sent where there were Tibetans and monks and where I could earn a livelihood.

The interpreter told the Indian official my request and he said that I would be sent where I would get food and that I should get ready to leave the next day. I was brought in a vehicle and dropped at the door of the office here [Mundgod]. The person in charge was Mr. Tethong. He asked where we had come from. Mr. Wangchen was not a good man. He took my pass and went away.

Q: Who?

01:19:43

#11M: Mr. Wangchen. He belonged to Camp Number 5. He wanted to be spiteful and not give me my food ration. Otherwise, what was the use in taking my pass? I asked him why he took my pass, which was given to me by the Indian government. He said he would return it the next day but did not. I approached the office and was told, "Speak to the one who took your pass. Why do you tell us?" I explained, "I do not know the man [who took the pass]. It was a pock-marked man who took it."

They recognized him and asked him why he took my pass. He claimed that I had money with me. I demanded, "From where can I acquire money working as a coolie? Do not talk so shamelessly. Are you not ashamed? Are all the six million Tibetans not equal? I am one of the people of His Holiness the Dalai Lama." He said, "This woman must be a *Khamo* [a Khampa woman]. She talks so much." "What did I do as a *Khamo*? Did I rob or steal from you? What did the *Khamo* do?"

Then Mr. Tethong called him in and told him, "Do not talk too much. Return her pass. She will need food rations. Why do not you give her the food rations, which are provided by the Indian government? Are you the one who is providing it?" He had no answer and then he was expelled. I felt so happy. It was my good fortune. He was lying on no account. Then I received my pass back and was given a house.

At that time the houses were not good as they are now. They were temporary structures. These days the monasteries have sponsors and the Sakya Monastery has built houses [for the Home for the Aged] which are fit enough for the aristocrats. However, people are not satisfied. However much one has, one wants more. Where can we find a happier place than this? Even the monasteries do not have such houses. When I joined the Home for the Aged, there were only five residents. I joined the Home for the Aged.

Q: Did you join the Home for the Aged right from the beginning [when you arrived here]?

01:22:20

#11M: I lived at the Home for the Aged right from the start. I never lived in the Settlement camps. Right there [in Kulu Manali], I was told that I would be placed where I would be taken care of and I was put in the Home for the Aged.

Q: Until then you lived at Kulu Manali?

#11M: Yes, I lived at Kulu Manali.

Q: How old were you when you joined the Home for the Aged?

01:22:40

#11M: I do not know how old I was. It's been quite a long while here.

Q: You are 75 now. How long have you lived at the Home for the Aged?

#11M: I am not certain, but I will tell you approximately. I guess I have been here for about 30 years.

Q: So when you first arrived, *ama-la*, you came to the Home for the Aged?

01:23:40

#11M: I came to the Home for the Aged.

Q: So this was not a home for old people because you weren't very old at that time.

#11M: Even though I was young, I was very poor. I did not have parents or relatives, which was why I was sent here. I was sent by the Indian government.

Q: Did you ever get married or have children?

01:24:26

#11M: I was married when I was at the road construction site.

Q: And your husband and children?

#11M: My child is here but my husband passed away.

Q: Did he pass away in Kulu Manali?

01:24:43

#11M: Yes.

Q: Where is your child?

#11M: He lives in the monastery.

Q: Is he a monk?

01:24:51

#11M: Yes, he is.

Q: *Ama-la*, is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your history, your experiences before we conclude our interview?

#11M: I do not have anything left to say.

Q: Maybe you could tell us what advice or message you would like to give the next generation of Tibetans who are living in Tibet or living in exile?

01:25:52

#11M: If I speak for those in Tibet, how will it reach them?

Q: If you speak, someone or the other will hear it.

#11M: I see. I will talk to those in Tibet who are suffering. I support them. We are six million Tibetans. Though all the six million are not here, for those who are here I request that they pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and stand united. I shall thank you for that.

Q: Do you see your son who is a monk? Do you get to visit with him sometimes?

01:26:54

#11M: Yes, I do.

Q: Where [in which monastery] is he a monk?

#11M: At Gaden Monastery.

Q: Would you go back to Tibet if it was possible to return?

01:27:20

#11M: [Gives a thumbs up sign] Yes, if I get the chance to return, I am very fortunate. If my bones could lie there, I have no regret in dying. I pray to the Gods and His Holiness the Dalai Lama that I die there where my bones can lie in Tibet. God only knows why the Tibetans had to suffer so much.

Q: I hope your prayers will be answered.

#11M: Thank you.

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

01:28:23

#11M: It will not be a problem. If they [Tibetans living in Tibet] hear about it, they will be happy. If they like it, that is enough for us. All the six million Tibetans are the same. We are living in India and they are living in Tibet. Though they are economically fine, they have to live in fear. Thanks to His Holiness, we have no fear here. So everybody must pray to His Holiness and the three monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden that all Tibetans not be separated from living under His Holiness.

Q: Can we use your real name or do you want to use an alias?

#11M: You do not have to use an alias. You can use my name.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#11M: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW