

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #13M – Sonam Tso
April 7, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #13M
2. Interviewee: Sonam Tso
3. Age: 81
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Rong Shinglaykha
7. Province: Amdo (Dhoday)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 7, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 23 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Sonam Tso's family engaged in farming growing wheat, barley and peas. The surroundings of her village were abundant in various types of flowers and fruits, which grew wild in the forests. She talks about how the villagers helped each other during farming and constructing houses as there were no workers for hire. She describes the food of the people of her region, their way of building houses by using local materials, preserving the wild pear for the winter and an account of death rituals and sky burial.

The Chinese came to Sonam Tso's region when she was around 18 or 19 and she describes how the Tibetan people were first deceived and then subjected to torture and starvation. She reveals that all of the young men and women of her village were forcibly sterilized by the Chinese. Feeling unsafe there, Sonam Tso sold all her jewelry and fine clothes to travel to Lhasa with her husband. She also traveled to India on pilgrimage and returned to Tibet for only a year until Lhasa was occupied. After her husband joined the resistance army in Lhasa, Sonam Tso escaped to India and was fortunate to meet her husband later while working on a road construction crew.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, religious festivals, customs/traditions, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, oppression under Chinese, sterilization, pilgrimage, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #13M

Interviewee: Sonam Tso

Age: 81, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 7, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:20

Interviewee #13M: Sonam Tso.

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?

#13M: Yes, you can use it.

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

00:01:30

#13M: Okay.

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

#13M: Okay.

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

00:01:53

#13M: Okay.

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

#13M: There will be no problem because I came to India long ago. You can show it anywhere.

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

00:02:27

#13M: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ you are 81 years old this year and I would imagine you have some wonderful memories of what it was like to grow up in Tibet. Can you give us some picture of what your life was when you were a little girl in Tibet?

#13M: [Smiles] When I was small, we were farmers. All the people in our village were farmers. Even younger people did not go to trade but only worked in the fields. People were spiritual and worked with great happiness.

Q: Give us a picture of your village. What did it look like if we painted a picture?

00:03:45

#13M: There were forests, rivers, grasslands, cattle, farmers and nomads.

Q: Are there any particular fragrances that you remember from the land?

#13M: There were fragrances in my region in the plenty of fruits, flowers and other things to eat that we could collect in the forests. There were many things to eat that one did not have to buy. Such was the pleasant region.

Q: What kind of things would you get to eat in the forest? What would you get?

00:04:58

#13M: There were different types of fruits to eat.

Q: In the forest?

#13M: Yes, in the forest. There were many types of fruits. Perhaps there were 20-30 types of fruits.

Q: What seasons were the fruits growing?

00:05:28

#13M: They could be eaten in the summer time. There were none in winter because it snowed. You cannot find any to eat when it snowed, but in summer there was a variety [of fruits] to eat.

Then there was *dongya* in my region. When the *dongya* arrived, we did not have coolies in our region. There were no coolies at all and the work was done by the younger people in the family. The parents provided them with food to eat. There were no coolies whom you could pay to work. Each one had to work for himself and earn his livelihood.

Q: What is *dongya*?

#13M: *Dongya* means field work, working in the field.

Q: Was there any way to save the fruits so you could eat them in the winter; any way to preserve them?

00:06:43

#13M: You find this fruit called pear here. It's the yellowish one you find these days. We stored that in baskets for the winter, so that it could be eaten during Losar 'Tibetan New Year' and until the 2nd or 3rd lunar months. Other than that, there were none in the winter.

Q: They stored them in baskets. Where did you store them?

#13M: They were stored in baskets.

Q: Where were the baskets stored?

00:07:25

#13M: The baskets were stored on the top of the house. They were stored frozen. [The basket] was covered with a paste of mud.

Q: So when you opened the mud at the celebration, what were they like? What consistency?

#13M: The pears were cold and some were black in color. They were very juicy and sweet when we ate them. At the time of storage, when they were fresh, they tasted sour. They turned sweet and juicy after storage.

Q: Were there any fruits you had as a little girl that you had not seen since you were a girl in Tibet that you can't buy here?

00:09:03

#13M: Most [fruits] cannot be found here, but there is one that I saw, which was being sold in Camp Number 3 during last Losar. It looks like this [shows thumb]. I think it is used in cooking because I saw it in the picture of a food. I feel very happy when I see it. It was there in Camp Number 3 and I bought it last year. It cost 25 [rupees] and it was in a plastic package. I saw that [fruit] in this country.

Q: Was that a fruit which grew in Tibet?

#13M: Yes, that was a fruit which grew in Tibet. It grows near the ground. [Bends down] Actually it is a wild fruit, but I think you could also grow it in the fields.

Q: Was it small?

00:09:42

#13M: It was this big [shows thumb]. It is called *shiango*. I can see its pictures drawn on [touches blouse]. It is also on the television.

Q: Is it red in color? Is it somewhat lumpy?

#13M: It is somewhat rough.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Perhaps strawberry?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: In a can? Peaches?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was small.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Little small fruit.

Q: So it brought back memories of Tibet.

#13M: Yes, it brought back memories of Tibet and I purchased it this year. I saw it at Camp Number 3. The Indians were selling them. The Indian juice sellers were selling them.

Q: Tell us some other kinds of memories you have of Tibet and say the kinds of food that you ate as a child? What did you have in the morning?

00:11:13

#13M: The food that we ate in our region was *thukpa* 'noodle soup,' *momo* 'dumplings' and bread which we called *kori*. Dinner was *thukpa* and at times *momo* and at other times *ting momo* 'steamed bread.' That was our food. We ate a little *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' but not much.

Q: What was in the *thukpa*? Can you describe what you put in it?

#13M: In the *thukpa*, we added vegetables—very rarely did we eat meat as we were farmers—green leafy vegetables and potatoes. The *thukpa* [the main noodles] was prepared with hands because there were no machines to make it. Everything was hand-made in our region.

Q: What is *thukpa*? Noodles?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Noodles.

Q: If you did use meat, what animal would it be from?

00:13:01

#13M: It was the meat of sheep and yak. We did not eat the meat of oxen. It was eaten by the Muslims. There were Muslims in our region. The Muslims ate them while we did not eat the meat of oxen and goats much.

Q: When you made *momos*, tell us what did you like to put in the *momos*?

#13M: We used vegetables like *kyutse* 'chives' and pumpkins mixed with meat for the filling. We also ate boiled radish.

Q: How did you make the covering for the momo, the dough? What was that made of?

00:14:29

#13M: That was made of wheat flour.

Q: And then the *tsampa*. You said you didn't eat much *tsampa*. Why was that?

#13M: In the province of Amdo, the farmers did not eat much *tsampa*. They mostly ate bread. The nomads did not have farm lands, so they prepared *tsampa* and ate it. Wheat flour was plentiful in Amdo, so bread was eaten.

Q: What was their *tsampa* made of?

00:15:43

#13M: The *tsampa* was made from barley, which they had to come and buy from us, the farmers. They brought us meat and we gave them wheat and barley. They bought [exchanged] from us because they did not have farm lands.

Q: And then from your grains, they made the *tsampa*?

#13M: Yes, they roasted [the grains], made *tsampa* and ate it.

Q: How do you make *tsampa*?

00:16:26

#13M: You made a fire and roasted [the grains] in a utensil and ate it.

Q: You made a fire and...

#13M: There were water mills in our region while the nomads owned hand-driven grinders [shows rotating motion with hands]. They made flour with the hand grinders. The farmers used the water mills. Grinding of *tsampa* was not done by machines. At the time I was there, there were no machines. So the grinding was done either with hands or at the water mill.

Q: Do you store the ground barley? How do you store it or how long does it last?

00:17:30

#13M: There were wooden boxes to store it. The grinding at the water mill was done only twice in a year. That was enough to last the whole year. Grinding twice a year was enough to last the whole year. The [flour] was packed very tightly into the boxes by the children. It did not spoil at all.

Q: When you were ready to eat the *tsampa*, which you didn't eat very much but how did you prepare it to eat?

#13M: The people of Amdo mixed tea, powdered cheese and a big pat of butter in the *tsampa*. They did not eat *tsampa* without butter. They did not make the *tsampa* into gruel but kneaded it in a bowl into dough. They kneaded in it a bowl and ate it.

Q: Of these foods that you told us, the *tsampa*, the *thukpa* and the *momos*, did you have one that you liked?

00:19:25

#13M: [Laughs] I like *tsampa*.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I'm just curious why they didn't have it very much.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because they had plenty of flour available from wheat.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: To make bread?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: To make bread and they have the time to make bread because they were living in the house while the nomads did not have grains. So *tsampa* was like they stored it for a long time.

Q: *Ama-la*, we didn't hear how many people lived in your family, in your house?

#13M: When I was little, there were many family members. I had five siblings and my parents. There were also a paternal aunt, an uncle and my father's mother. There was a paternal uncle. My father had many relatives. The relatives lived separately. There were 8-9 members in my family.

Q: Where were you in that line up?

00:20:57

#13M: I was in the middle. There is a younger brother who lives in Tibet. My older sister passed away recently. Two other siblings have also expired. Now, only two of us survive, one in Tibet and I am here.

Q: When you think back of your family days, what kind of memories or pictures come to your mind about living in your house with your family?

#13M: When I left my village, I did not have any nieces and nephews as my siblings were not married then. Later two of them [married and] one of them has four sons and four daughters and the other has four sons and three daughters. I have many nieces and nephews. I remember my home very much.

Q: What did your house look like on the outside?

00:22:49

#13M: The walls of the house were not built of cement like the ones here. The walls were built by placing two wooden planks which were supported by pillars. Soil was poured between the two planks and it was beaten [shows beating motion]. This was repeated until the wall was raised high. Inside the house were wooden cupboards. The partitions were also made of wood. The house was *khanglep*. There were no upper floors.

Q: What's *khanglep*?

#13M: *Khanglep* means that the house was single storied. There were no floors above. In Amdo, there were rarely any houses with upper floors. All the houses were single storied.

Q: Can you tell us how thick or thin the walls were?

00:23:58

#13M: The width of the walls depended on the area of your site. If this [points outside] was your area, you could build a wall all around the boundary. You might leave some areas empty and build houses on other areas.

[Question is repeated.]

#13M: The walls were like these [points to walls of interview room.]

Q: The thickness of the walls?

#13M: Oh, the thickness? They were not very thick. They must be about so much [gesture not seen in video].

Q: When somebody needed to build a house, how did this happen? Did the people help or what happened?

00:24:41

#13M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] The roof was also made of soil. Wood was laid for the roof and *pema* [a plant?] or thorns [bushes?] spread over it. Then people carried soil in baskets and poured them over that. Then the soil was beaten. Cement was not necessary as no rain water seeped inside. When I think of it today, it sounds so strange the way those houses were built.

Q: Could you tell me what was laid for the roof before the soil was poured?

#13M: First thick logs were laid across [like a frame]. Upon that a layer of *pema* was spread. [To interpreter] Do you know what it is? [Laughs] In Lachen and Lachung [towns in Sikkim, India] they sell *pema* and *shukpa* [sweet smelling leaves used as incense by Tibetans.] It [*pema*] was used to block the holes. Then soil [bends down to show soil being poured] was spread in three layers over it, which was brought there in baskets. Then the three layers of soil was beaten and leveled. There was no seepage at all. All the expense [labor] for the construction of house was done by oneself.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Was the *pema* a paint?

Interpreter to interviewer]: No, *pema* was sort of a plant.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: A plant. It was actually a plant. I couldn't hear it. Then mud on top of that.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Who built the house, many people or the family?

00:27:12

#13M: [People] came to help. Two people from each family of the village came to help. In the same way, when they were building a house, two of our family members would have to go to help them. There were no coolies. There were no coolies you could hire like in India. You had to construct a house depending upon your ability.

Q: About how long did it take to build, at least the structure of the house?

#13M: The foundation and the walls took quite a long time. It might get over in a month or two. I do not know much because I did not see that when I was little. My parents built our house. When I went to my village later, that was how it was being done. They pooled in labor; all the people of the village worked together. Even when wood was required, people helped cut it. Nothing needed to be purchased as everything was available in our region itself.

Q: Would somebody's house last many generations or just, say, one generation?

00:29:14

#13M: It lasted for one or two generations. In case some houses were leaking, they repaired it with something like salt.

Q: Was it with mud?

#13M: It was not mud. [The house] was dismantled and the walls were built once again. The laborers had to be provided food, but there was no payment of wages because that was like helping each other.

Q: If you look at this room, *ama-la*, how big was your house in relation to this room we are in?

00:30:19

#13M: Each family's house was bigger than this room.

[Question is repeated.]

#13M: It was bigger than this. Each family owned an area as large as the boundary wall running around this area [points around the property outside].

Q: How big would you say this room is?

00:30:55

#13M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] Every family had individual space to plant pear trees and to grow vegetables. There were no markets where you could buy things. You

had to grow them yourself because there was nothing you could buy. You grew what you needed for yourself, like vegetables and everything.

Q: So you had to be very self sufficient.

#13M: Yes.

Q: So this house which we are guessing is maybe 50 or 60 feet by 80 or 100 feet. What was on the floor in the inside of the house?

00:32:09

#13M: There was no flooring. It was just the ground. What else?

Q: What was laid on the floor?

#13M: There were wooden boards on the floor of the rooms where the family lived.

Q: It was a one storied house. Were there room dividers for the sections?

00:32:52

#13M: Yes, they were [divided]. There were rooms for the son, the daughter, the parents, for the things and so on.

Q: Were there any rooms set aside for the altar?

#13M: Yes, of course, the prayer room was there. In those days the prayer room was large enough to hold 50-60 monks from the monastery, but it is not so these days.

Q: How often would the monks come during the year? How many times would 50-60 monks come and where were they coming from?

00:34:12

#13M: [Speaks before interpretation is complete] Not just for prayers, but they were received at home when someone died.

Question is repeated.

#13M: Normally only 15-20 monks were invited [to read prayers], but if someone in the family passed away, the whole monastery was invited. For about five days, food was given to all the people of the village in order to earn merit. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were provided for five days as a form of gaining merit. The monks of the monastery were offered food for five days and the people of the village for another five days.

Q: Could you tell us something about when a person died, *ama-la*, in the family? First of all if somebody got sick, would you send for help and where would you get help?

00:35:48

#13M: If someone became sick, as far as I know there were no doctors in our village. There might be someone who dispensed Tibetan medicine, but there were no hospitals. Prayers were offered and the men gathered in the evenings to read *dhukar* [a particular prayer]. *Dolma 'Tara'* prayers were recited. Except for offering prayers, there were no hospitals in my village. If someone broke a leg or hand, there was a person in the village who treated it by placing [a piece of] wood and tying it up [shows arm being tied]. There were no hospitals as far as I know.

Q: Did these people who had some skills, did they pass them on to their children or how did they get these special skills?

#13M: I do not know how [these people] learned the skills. In case of broken bones, a certain worm with a tail which lived among the stones near the rivers was caught. Its legs were cut off and the worm was eaten. This worm was said to have the power to re-join bones.

Q: Where was this worm?

00:37:44

#13M: It was in our village, near the rivers.

Q: The insect's tail was cut off...

#13M: Its legs were cut off and eaten alive. This was said to re-join the bones and the joints.

Q: To join your bones together?

00:38:32

#13M: [Laughs] My village was so primitive. There were so many resources available in my village, but we did not know how to do many things.

Q: Were there any other special remedies like that? One was an insect that you broke off the legs and sucked it and it would heal your bones, if you had a broken leg. Were there any other home remedies like that?

#13M: I heard that these days the worm is dried and sold. I heard it is being used. In the early days, people did not know to utilize [the natural resources]. Every type of spice and medicinal plant grew in my region, be it grass, flowers or any type of medicinal plant. However, it is only now that we know of such things. These are picked and sold.

Q: Would people in the village prepare these for medicines or did people come from far away to get the spices and plants?

00:40:22

#13M: These days all these plants are dug up, picked and sold.

Q: Did you do that during the old days?

#13M: [The plants are] sold these day and not in the old days.

Q: If somebody could not get better and they died, how was the preparation for death handled? And then what happened to the body?

00:41:02

#13M: The bodies are cremated. In the old days, they were fed to the birds. The vultures ate them.

Q: Tell me about the ceremony. If somebody died, how long would they stay in the home before the body is taken to the vultures?

#13M: Depending upon the astrological calculations, the body remained in the house for a day or two and in some cases, even for a week. Because of the cold climate, [the body] did not smell. The removal [of the body] was based on the astrological calculations.

Q: Where would the body be kept before it was taken to the mountain?

00:42:32

#13M: It was kept at a separate area in the house. The monks would sit here [points around the interview room] and it would be placed further away near the door. If this was the room [points to room], it was kept behind the door and partitioned by a curtain. It was kept there for the duration as revealed by the astrological chart. If a person died today, [the body] was not removed that very day.

Q: But before somebody died, would the lamas be called in to pray with the family?

#13M: Yes, a few [lamas] were invited to say prayers but not all of them. A divination was consulted and if it revealed that prayers have to be read, then [monks] were invited.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So there would be a divination at the time a person was dying and the monks would pick the prayer that was most appropriate?

Interpreter to interviewer]: And according to the prayer, the number of monks would arrive home.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: According to the amount of prayer that was needed?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes. Or the length of the prayer that was to be said.

Q: *Ama-la*, what would you say was sort of an average age that old people died in old Tibet?

00:44:35

#13M: They lived to be 80, 90 or 100. In those days, our people did not suffer from many diseases. The present day diseases were not there then. Neither were there diseases nor doctors in those days. It is very surprising. They lived to be very old.

Q: And what would you say was the average number of children in a family in your area?

#13M: My parents used to say that progeny was scarce in our region. Having seven or eight children was considered the largest. [Some families] had five or six children and others one or two. There were some who did not have any and adopted the children of uncles or aunts. Such were the cases.

Q: Just to go back to the end of a person's life, if a person died and they were going to have a sky burial, where was the burial place and who went with the body?

00:46:25

#13M: Your neighbors, friends and other young people accompanied it. They fed it to the vultures and burned the left over parts. I heard that there are some great sinners whose bodies the vultures did not devour. They [the people] minced [the body] and cleared everything. Five or six people stayed back to clear up.

Q: Did that happen very often that the vultures did not eat the bodies?

#13M: Yes, it happened. People used to say that if someone was a great sinner, the vultures did not eat [his body]. I heard that [the body of a] meritorious person was snatched away by the vultures. They ate up the bones after they were pounded. This is what I have heard.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you ever go to a sky burial when you were living in Tibet?

00:48:26

#13M: No, I have not. They [the bodies] were taken far away to the pasture. It was taken far away.

Q: Some relatives and neighbors actually go to the sky burial?

#13M: No, they did not. They did not go where the body was being given to the vultures.

Q: No, I mean the neighbors.

00:48:57

#13M: All the men went. Except for the men, women never went there.

Q: *Ama-la*, what do you think was the value of a sky burial? Why did the Tibetan people have such a ritual for the disposal of the bodies?

#13M: I do not know that. It is said that giving [the body] to the birds satiate their hunger, so it is a meritorious act. It is also said that if the body is cremated, the smoke spread to the

deities in the sky and that was sinful. Except from what I have heard people say, I do not have any experience of my own.

Q: And one final question about that. Who were the people who actually performed the dissection of the body?

00:50:48

#13M: I think they were their own people who did it. The Tibetans [people of central part of Tibet] have certain people who engaged in carrying away the dead and dissecting the bodies and who were considered low castes. However, in Amdo there were no such [people]. The friends and relatives of the [dead] person did it.

Q: If somebody died in the wintertime, wasn't the snow very deep in your region? So what did you do for a sky burial?

#13M: I suppose it was given [to the vultures] even if it was winter time. I heard that the snow was cleared and [the body] given to the vultures.

Q: Just return for a minute to inside your house. You said that there were wooden cabinets around the house. Were these decorated or painted? How were they made t look?

00:52:27

#13M: They were painted. You painted them in the color of your choice. All the rooms were painted. The cabinets and all the structures where you placed your articles were made of wood and painted.

Q: Was there flower decorations? I have seen cabinets with beautiful paintings and decorations on them.

#13M: There were carvings on the house as well as on the altar. There were beautiful carvings. I heard that if they were not painted, they would be attacked by termites. So they were painted. There were carvings of different designs.

Q: Did you have carvings like that in your house?

00:53:47

#13M: In my home [in Tibet]?

Q: Yes, in your home. We are talking about the time when you were small.

#13M: Yes, they were there in my home.

Q: Did you have altars and cabinets that had carvings on them?

00:53:58

#13M: Yes, we had those. One of my nephews is a very good wood carver. He works in our own village. There were carpenters and wood carvers.

Q: Can you describe what did the prayer room look like, *ama-la*, in your house?

#13M: The ceilings were painted. There were artists in my village. Of course, they had to be paid and they painted any of the deities of your choice.

Q: Are you referring to the prayer room in your home?

00:55:01

#13M: Yes, the prayer room in my home.

Q: There were paintings of deities on the ceilings. Were there painting on the walls?

#13M: They were not on the walls. The paintings were on wood in the prayer room. Except for the prayer room, there were no paintings of deities on the outside [of the house] or on the walls; pictures of deities were not drawn there.

Q: What else do you have in the prayer room?

00:55:20

#13M: There were the holy images and sacred texts in the prayer room.

Q: Could you explain if you had an altar in the prayer room?

#13M: In the prayer room were the sacred texts and holy images of Je Yapsay Sum, Dolma, Buddha and other deities, about whom I do not know much. There were many such things.

Q: *Ama-la*, could you tell us a little bit about what your responsibilities were when you were like 11, 12 years old?

00:56:27

#13M: The responsibilities were working in the fields or any other work. When I was a little child, I went to look for [fire] wood and cow dung. Then there was the job of hoeing the fields and such.

Q: What was the first age that you were old enough to go work in the fields?

#13M: [A child] over 15 can work in the fields. All the young boys and girls worked together. There were no coolies you could hire in my region. Everyone must do their work themselves.

Q: And what did you do before that?

00:57:34

#13M: When I was younger, I went to look for [fire] wood and dung and tended the animals. I used to graze the animals.

Q: Was there any schooling for you?

#13M: There were no schools [laughs].

Q: What were your mother and father doing when you were helping...

00:58:06

#13M: [Interrupts] There were no schools, so I do not know anything.

[Question is repeated.]

#13M: They engaged in field work.

Q: What did the field work involve, exactly what were your parents doing?

00:58:31

#13M: One must collect manure. The manure of animals was collected [in a pit]. [The family] did not answer nature's call anywhere but used the manure pit.

Q: Manure was applied onto the fields...

#13M: The manure contained human waste as well as the dung of animals.

Q: What other work did you do in the fields?

00:58:57

#13M: What other work does one do in the field? We owned the fields.

Q: Didn't you plow the field?

#13M: The men did the plowing. It was the boys who plowed the field. The women leveled the field.

Q: And then?

00:59:14

#13M: When the crops grew to this height [gesture not visible], the women hoed. Then hoeing was done again at this height and once more at this height. Hoeing was done three times. We cut grass and looked for [fire] wood. And one performed any other work that needed to be done because you could not hire anybody.

Q: What kind of things was your family growing in the field?

#13M: We grew wheat, barley, peas and [a plant] for extraction of oil.

Q: What was [the plant] from which you extracted oil? *Pekang*?

01:00:36

#13M: Yes. And then there was *serma*, which could also be eaten raw.

Q: What is it?

#13M: It has very tiny seeds. I saw that they grow this crop at a place in Bodh Gaya [Bihar, India]. It is called *serma* and has tiny seeds. There were three types of [plants] from which you could extract oil.

Q: *Pekang* and *serma*.

01:01:15

#13M: *Serma* has blue flowers.

Q: For the extraction of oil?

#13M: Yes, for the extraction of oil. One can eat it [*serma*] raw too. It was tasty with honey.

Q: How did you extract the oil?

01:01:27

#13M: You had to build a room like this. Two very thick and long logs were laid in it. A huge stone was placed over the logs. The stone was as heavy as a strong man could lift. Then someone pressed on it. The extraction was done by people, with the help of the stone. It [the seeds] was kept in-between like this [points between fingers] and pressed down and then [the seeds] kept here [points between other fingers] and pressed down. I remember the extraction process was like that long ago.

Q: What did you extract from the seed?

#13M: Grain was ground at the water mill.

Q: Did you extract oil from the seed of the *pekang*?

01:02:02:

#13M: Yes, oil was extracted. The seed with its husk was boiled in a vessel similar to the one we use to steam-cook. The seed with husk was poured into it and boiled. A fire was lit and it was steam cooked. Then there was [a plant] called *kerma* in our region which had blue flowers. The flat and long leaves of this plant were gathered and the [steamed grains] poured on it. The men stomped over it. This product was packed into the *kerma* [leaves]. Then they were placed in three layers in a circular shape like the wheels of a vehicle. Then they were pressed by the stone.

There was a pillar like this [gets up and goes near a pillar]. It had holes [points to three places of the pillar]. Then with the *tetha*, you pressed down or up. [Laughs]

Q: When the men were plowing the fields, what animals did they use?

#13M: *Dzo* and oxen.

Q: Explain what the *dzo* is?

01:04:03

#13M: That is not a yak. He might know a *dzo* [points to someone off camera]. *Dzo* has slender horns. Then there were *dzomo* 'female *dzo*.'

Q: How did the *dzo* and *dzomo* come about?

#13M: *Dzo* and *dzomo* are both *barara* [?] and *dri* 'female yak' and *drimo* are both *barara* [?]. They do not have long hair. The one which has short hair is called a *dzomo*.

Q: What animals do you cross to get *dzo* and *dzomo*?

01:04:30

#13M: If you cross a yak with a cow, you get a *dzomo*.

Q: Are *dzo* and *dzomo* born from a yak and a cow?

#13M: Yes. If you cross a cow and an ox, you get a calf. [Laughs] A *dzo* does not give birth. A *dzo* and a horse do not have offspring. If you cross [a cow] with a yak, a *dzomo* is born; either a *dzo* or a *dzomo* is born. [Laughs]

Q: You said that you were about 15 when you began working in the field, but at what age does a young Tibetan girl get married?

01:06:01

#13M: They get married about the age of 15. At the age of 15 she goes to someone's [husband's] home and then returns to her parents' home to live for about three years. And then she is given away. It was good to get married at a young age because your parents arranged the marriage by matching the astrological charts. In those days, love marriages were not considered well.

Q: What is the purpose of getting married at 15 and then, when you come back to your parents' home, does your husband come with you or do you come alone?

#13M: She does not come with her husband. The girl comes alone.

Q: And why is that so?

01:07:30

#13M: She was small and did not live with the husband for three years. There were some who stayed [in husband's home] and some who did not.

Q: So when the girl gets married at 15, there are no marital relations at that time until she is 18?

#13M: There might be some who have marital relations because they have children early, like 16 or 17.

Q: What does a girl want to find in a husband even if her parents pick him?

01:08:47

#13M: I wonder if they ever thought that in those days because they listened to whatever their parents said. It was better for the girl if she obeyed. It was not considered well of the marriage where a boy and girl meet themselves. There were different castes in our region and the boy's family might not accept her. So the marriages arranged by the parents were considered the best.

Q: Why is love marriage not considered a good thing?

#13M: I do not know why [laughs].

Q: Before the girl is going to be married, is she given any information about what happens between a man and a woman when they are married?

01:10:12

#13M: She would know she was getting married to the particular boy because it was arranged by both sets of parents and she obeyed them. The girl was aware of it. In those it was so arranged.

Q: Would she be taught about...

#13M: She is told that she would be marrying into that family.

Q: I don't mean that. The girl was aware that she was going there, but would her mother give her any information about the relations between the boy and the girl after marriage?

01:10:49

#13M: [Laughs] She would not teach such things. One would know that oneself. [Laughs]

Q: Why not? It is important information.

#13M: [Laughs] The mother would feel shy.

Q: So the girl has to find out for herself.

01:11:20

#13M: I do not know if anyone teaches her. I do not know about that. [Laughs]

Q: Does the boy get any information?

#13M: I do not think he gets any information. He might know about it. [Laughs]

Q: So where is this selection of mates coming from? Does the mother and father have to look only in the village or do they look far away?

01:12:00

#13M: They did not seek from very distant places. It was done in closer areas. The parents did everything. If they know a family with a girl, whose hand they wished to seek, they consulted the astrological charts and sought a divination. If the charts did not match and the marriage went ahead, I believe they will suffer many illnesses.

Q: How large was your village, *ama-la*? How big?

#13M: There were many families.

Q: How many?

01:13:01

#13M: There were about 50 people in the families. I do not know how it was in the old days but these days there are about 50 people. Some nephews and nieces were given away and some arrived.

Q: I don't mean the [number of people] in your family, but in your village. How many people were there in the village?

#13M: I did not count the number of families in the village. There might be 50-60 or 70-80. I heard there were 80 families in the village.

Q: That's a nice sized village. *Ama-la*, did you get married in Tibet?

01:14:02

#13M: I was married in Tibet. I married at the age of 18.

Q: How was the selection made for your husband?

#13M: He was from a village that was about half a day's journey away.

Q: Had you ever seen him before in your life?

01:14:50

#13M: Yes, we'd seen each other because we went to the monastery. There was the *cham* 'religious dance performed by monks' in the region and all the young boys and girls went to watch it. I knew him.

Q: Did you have any interest in this young man?

#13M: No, we did not meet [personally] or any such thing. It was not considered good for [boys and girls] to meet in my region.

Q: Do you have any idea why your parents might have thought that young man was a good match for you?

01:16:10

#13M: They will take into consideration the family's outlook and in a girl's case, they see to it that she has not had affairs.

Q: Did he come from a good family and what did he do for a living and his age?

#13M: He came from a good family. They were a big [rich] family. His work was the same as ours; farming. That was the only work.

Q: Do you remember what your wedding celebration was like?

01:17:16

#13M: [Laughs] Yes, I do but at that time the Chinese had already arrived and they did not consider grand celebration as a good thing. They would judge the family as rich. So the rich families did not have a grand celebration. We had a small affair. In the family I joined, there were three sons and there were three brides for the three sons. I was the youngest. The Chinese had arrived and we dare not hold a big celebration nor make incense offerings. There were restrictions then.

Q: So let's go back and catch up with the story then. When did the Chinese first come to your village?

#13M: They arrived when I was 18 or 19 years old. They appeared long back as we were on the border of China. The Chinese first arrived in my region.

Q: Can you remember seeing them with your own eyes when they first came?

01:19:13

#13M: Yes, they came to our very village. When they first arrived, they treated the people well. Two or three Chinese visited a family and ate with them and paid them. The next day they visited another family and so on. They were very gentle. When I think of it today, they were observing the situation of the families, how rich the family was and what they ate. Then they made the young men and women dance, wearing their best clothes. To those poor people who did not have clothes, they forced the rich people to provide them with clothes. They made the young men and women to dance, and in this way, they deceived the people for a number of years.

Q: In the social structure, where was your family, wealthy, middle or low class? What was your status?

#13M: The family where I was married was rich and so was my family. We were ones who had names.

Q: So you were among the rich.

01:21:05

#13M: My father had passed away when I was small. He died before the appearance of the Chinese. All my father's siblings were killed by the Chinese. The two older brothers of the family I married into were imprisoned and died in prison. We managed to escape.

Q: You said, initially the Chinese were there just eating, two of them, maybe left in the village, two or three. Were they eating with different families or all with your family?

#13M: They visited all the families of the village in turns, eating with them. They learned the status of the family. Later, when the liberation was implemented, they knew what we [owned]. Earlier we were free to keep guns. Now [they said that] this family owned this thing or that family was rich. They would not believe us when we said otherwise because they knew everything. They had assessed all the families. They gave money to the poor and learned from them what each family owned. We could not clarify anything by then.

Q: Were they dressed in soldier's uniforms or like ordinary people and what did they do during the day while you were working?

01:23:24

#13M: Yes, they were wearing [soldier's uniforms]. I do not know what they did in the evenings. We went to sleep but when the young people got up in the morning, we saw that they had surrounded our entire village. The village was surrounded and some of the rich families, who were able to, fled slowly into the forests. Those who could not flee were captured. That was how they caused suffering.

Q: What did the Chinese wear?

#13M: They wore something *kyariri*.

Q: What's *kyariri*?

01:24:05

#13M: It is the color of soil. It looked like that [points off camera. Interpreter interprets as military green]. All the soldiers looked *kyariri*. I have suffered so much when I lived in my village.

Q: The soldiers that were sort of assessing the village, was it like a year later your village was surrounded or in a few weeks, how fast did that happen?

#13M: [Speaks before interpretation of question is complete.] They [those who came to assess the village] were not soldiers. They did not wear the soldiers' uniform. They wore ordinary clothes and did not wear the soldiers' caps or anything.

[Question is repeated.]

01:25:16

#13M: It might have taken an hour. All those villagers who were able to do so, fled away and those that could not escape were caught.

[Question is repeated.]

#13M: They [the assessors] came to our village and stayed for many months. They stayed for many months in the village, ate [with them] and made observations. They lived for many months. Later, the Chinese [soldiers] arrived.

Q: Were they [the assessors] there when the Chinese soldiers arrived?

01:26:03

#13M: They were not there then. When the Chinese [soldiers] arrived, they were not there.

Q: How long after they left, a year or how many months later did the Chinese soldiers arrive?

#13M: It might have been a month or two later. They had an office. They went to and from the office.

Q: When they [the assessors] were there, did they tell you why they were all of a sudden in your village and staying many months?

01:26:57

#13M: They did not say anything. On being asked where they came from and if they had parents, they replied that they did not know and that they did not have parents and some of them even shed tears.

Q: Yes?

#13M: They were sad and shed tears. I heard that the Chinese take children from one village and leave them in another village and take the children from that village and leave them elsewhere. They [the Chinese assessors] were afraid and did not have parents. They did not know their parents. They were taken away when they were small and they did not know their parents.

Q: So that morning, do you remember what year it was and what month it was? What is the name of your village and what year and month was it surrounded?

01:28:00

#13M: My village was very small and it was called Manang Ringo Shinglaykha.

Q: What was the year that your village was surrounded and what month was it?

#13M: I do not know how to calculate the years. While the Chinese confiscated our farm lands and our animals, I think I lived ten years under the Chinese.

Q: Yes?

#13M: I lived with the Chinese for ten years. Then I escaped to Lhasa.

Q: You said you were 17 or 18 [when the Chinese first appeared] and then the Chinese distributed the farm lands...

01:29:04

#13M: They did not distribute the farm lands. They took it [from us] for the community. People worked in the commune. When we went to work, our parents did not receive any share nor did the small children. If the two of us worked, we were entitled to a share after the harvest was over. However, old people and small children were not entitled to any share. Later, the Chinese caused such immense suffering that everyone ate grass and weeds and many died of starvation.

Q: And the morning that the Chinese surrounded your village, were people killed? Did they shoot them because you said some people tried to run away? I'm trying to understand, was the village attacked or just surrounded?

#13M: They fired their guns because they were seizing the father of the family, so the mother and everyone pounced on them with axes and vegetable knives, the only things they possessed and screamed "We would not let our father be taken away." Parents cried and then they [the Chinese] fired from their guns. They would have killed countless numbers.

Q: Did they kill?

01:30:41

#13M: Yes, they killed. Those that fled into the forests were killed from above, from the airplanes. When the fathers resisted being taken away or if the children obstructed the arrest, every one of them was killed.

Q: So when the village was surrounded, airplanes were coming at the same time?

#13M: When some of the people fled into the forests, then they were fired from above. All of them were killed.

Q: What happened in your home, in your family home?

01:32:11

#13M: In my family, the men were not living in the house. They were staying in the forest and were not killed. They were not killed at that time. Later, two of my fathers siblings were...and the children in the prison.

Q: Are you talking about the family in which you got married or your own family?

#13M: I am talking about my family.

Q: Your father had already passed away...

01:32:35

#13M: My father had two siblings. Both of them and the rest were killed by the Chinese.

Q: Were they killed in the house by the Chinese?

#13M: [They were killed] later. Later they fled into the mountain and the Chinese surrounded them. They [the Chinese] knew about their presence and they were killed at the top of the mountain. The sons were imprisoned. All the surrounding villages were called to witness the prisoners. All the prisoners had wooden boards hanging over their necks on which were written, whether that prisoner was to be killed that day or not.

Some of them [the prisoners] kept their heads bowed like they were dead and they were pulled up like this [pulls head up by the hair] and pulled up again. One was forced to witness one's parents and relatives being shot in the head [points at the back of head] and killed. You were forced to look at your family members. I cannot say more on the suffering.

Q: And your own brother was shot in the village square?

01:34:29

#13M: A son of my uncle was killed. My older brother was able to escape to Lhasa. The Chinese could not kill him and he passed away here in India.

Q: Did you witness that with your own eyes?

#13M: I was in my village then. He had a sister and she was called to witness his death. At that time, I was in my husband's village.

Q: Was your husband's house in your family village or was it back in his own village?

01:35:36

#13M: It was half a day's journey.

Q: So you were not in your village the day it was attacked?

#13M: I was in my husband's village.

Q: Did your village where your husband and you lived, was that ever attacked or surrounded?

01:36:11

#13M: The Chinese arrived there.

Q: And then what happened?

#13M: In many villages like Amdo Tsongo, Amdo Shongkha, Karawindhu and others, people of my generation and older, people of two generations have been completely wiped out by the Chinese. When I visited my region recently, there were none. There were no men as they had all been killed. Except for the young, the elders of these regions like Amdo Ngawa, Amdo Tsogo have suffered terribly.

Q: When your village was attacked at first, was your mother still alive and what happened to her?

01:37:28

#13M: My mother was there. My mother was there and they came to capture my older brother, but my brother had fled and he was not at home. So they could not capture him. Later he was captured. They [the Chinese] deceived him by saying that if he surrendered to them, he would not face any problems. My brother was captured along with two others and they were taken to China and faced interrogations for about 15 days. We thought that he would never return but he was released.

He was able to stay home for three years after his release. I am talking about my older brother. During those three years, he was not permitted to go near other people. He was interrogated alone and was not allowed where people gathered. He was forced to work in the fields and perform other menial tasks for three years. Then I think he planned to fight because he did not stay back but escaped to Lhasa. He passed away in India. The Chinese were not able to kill him.

Q: Was he in the village for those three years?

#13M: He fled to Lhasa. He was in our home for those three years. He was forced to work. When there were meetings in the village, he was not allowed to attend. He had to stay separate, which meant that he was not a good man.

Q: What did he do all day long?

01:39:53

#13M: He was made to dig the fields. In the winter, he was made to gather waste matter as manure to be used for the crops.

Q: What happened to your mother, *ama-la*?

#13M: My mother, sister and I were at home. All the men had fled outside and were hiding in the forests. They could not come home.

Q: And so after this attack, you were living in another village with your new husband. What happens to you next?

01:40:56

#13M: I was not at my house, but living in my husband's house. I used to visit my home at times. My brother had fled to Lhasa. There were three brothers in my husband's family and his father. Since they were a rich family, we felt it was not safe. Fearing capture by the Chinese and since my brother was already in Lhasa, both of us fled to Lhasa, too.

Q: How long were you in Lhasa?

#13M: At that time Lhasa had not been attacked. Lhasa was left untouched.

Q: Did you bring anything with you to save from your family home?

01:42:09

#13M: Nothing at all, not even a cup. [Laughs] How could we bring anything when we fled in the night and it was snowing! There was a huge river called Machu [Yellow River, Hwang Ho]. We crossed it in a boat, rowed by a Tibetan and reached Amdo Silang, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's region. Vehicles were available there to go to Lhasa.

We did not have any money to go to Lhasa, so I sold my earrings, other jewelry and brocade dresses to friends and family and collected some money. We had a bag of *tsampa*, a bag of wheat flour and some meat. When we reached Amdo Silang, there were vehicles hired by traders and we came along with them. At that time, passes were not necessary.

Q: You crossed the river and reached a region. Did you say that that was the region of His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

#13M: Yes. There was a huge river between my region and the other. Once you crossed that river, you were in the direction of Amdo Tsongo.

Q: Were you able to get vehicles at Amdo Tsongo?

01:43:31

#13M: You did not get vehicles. We traveled in a *therka*.

Q: What's a *therka*?

#13M: *Therka* is [a cart pulled] by horses and mules. You find such in India, *therka* pulled by horses and mules.

Q: Where did you find the horse carts?

01:43:49

#13M: They were available at Amdo Silang. That is the region of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: And then did you travel in vehicles?

#13M: Until there we traveled in the horse cart. We reached there in one day. During that time, after suffering the misery in China, all the refugees from China had arrived in Silang. It was teeming with people. From Silang we journeyed to Lhasa in a vehicle for 15 days.

Q: In a horse cart?

01:44:37

#13M: No, not in a horse cart. We traveled in an army truck. It was a Chinese vehicle.

Q: Where could you find a Chinese vehicle?

#13M: Chinese vehicles were available at Amdo Silang. People and soldiers traveled back and forth to Lhasa. There were traders. At that time traders traded between Lhasa and Amdo. The traders had vehicles.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you have any children with you at that time?

01:45:46

#13M: We did not have children. There were just my husband and I. We did not have children.

Q: How long did you stay in Lhasa?

#13M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] We did not have children because the Chinese checked and rendered everybody of my age unable to bear children. We cannot have [children]. All the women were injected and then we were stretched out with our hands and legs tied. They touched our stomachs. At that time we did know what they were doing. There was a basin in which were scissors and other things. Chinese women with gloves on their hands put their hands into the opening at the end of women. All such things were done. [We were] rendered unable to conceive.

It was done to all the men. I heard that there was a vein which was cut. The men and the women were called separately. The women were very shy and we could not reveal our private parts to them. We did not go and the Chinese called us again and again. Then the leader of our village told us that it was imperative for us to go. So, all of us cried while showing our private parts.

Q: The whole village was sterilized?

01:47:43

#13M: Yes, everyone was injected and that was done.

Q: The village where you and your husband lived?

#13M: Yes, that was the village where I went after marriage. That was not my own village. Such was done to one whole group.

Q: Who were the Chinese who came in and did this?

01:48:22

#13M: They were proper Chinese. [Laughs]

Q: I mean, were they doctors? Did they bring in doctors or nurses or soldiers?

#13M: They must be doctors. I would not know if they were doctors. First, there was a person who tapped us here and here and here [shows joints of hands and legs] and checked everywhere. Then we were led to another person and then to a corner where there were four Chinese women, who looked into our private parts. Later we heard that we were rendered unable to have children. The men were taken separately. They laughed and they cried. Some of the women cried out of shyness.

Q: Did they sterilize the men as well?

01:49:53

#13M: Yes, I heard that there was a vein for the men. There was a vein near the thigh part that was cut.

Q: When the girls were sterilized, is there any way they could have been inserting a birth control, a permanent birth control device? Do you know if they actually tried to cut some of the tubes in the girl?

#13M: [Speaks before entire question is interpreted] It was painful and we cried out in pain. They were doing something, but I do not know what they were doing.

[Question is repeated.]

01:50:45

#13M: They did not insert anything. They might have cut [the tubes]. There was no device to insert. In a sort of small bowl, there were scissors and all other things. I do not know what they did because we were so scared.

Q: About how many girls were sterilized from the village?

#13M: That was done to everyone in my village. It was carried out on everyone in the village of the Panchen Lama and our village. I mean villages and not regions. I know it was done in two or three villages.

Q: So it might have been a couple of hundred girls or couple of thousand? A couple of hundred?

01:51:56

#13M: Of course, there must be 100 or 200. It must be more than 100 or 200. The villages were large. They did it to the women who were above 20 years old and below 40. It was not done to every woman.

Q: So even if a woman had had children, she was still sterilized?

#13M: Yes, they did it to women who had children. The age range was below 40 years and above 20, so they would [already] have children.

Q: What did the Chinese tell the girls they were doing and was there any resistance by the girls? Did they run away or hide or anything?

01:53:04

#13M: They did not give any explanation. What explanation would they give? They were forcing [us].

Q: Did some of the girls try to run away?

#13M: No one ran away. [They] were crying. They [the Chinese] did not tell us anything. They did not' say a word. Everyone was afraid.

Q: But why did they say they were bringing you in, to do what?

01:53:35

#13M: They said that we had to come to show our private parts. Since we could not show out private parts, the girls in the village refused to go. Then our leader said that if we refused to go, he would face problems. So we went out of fear. I had no knowledge what they were doing. Later I learned that we were made unable to conceive. At first I had no knowledge whatsoever.

Q: When this happened to the girls, it sounds like they knew afterwards they had been sterilized. So what effect did it have on your spirits and did anybody attempt suicide as a result of this sorrow?

#13M: Everyone was saddened. We thought we might have been made sterile.

Q: When did you learn of that?

01:55:00

#13M: We would realize it within that year.

Q: Were there cases of immense grief and suicides?

#13M: No, such things did not happen. We were ignorant [of the implications] because we did not see it with our eyes.

Q: Did they say why they were sterilizing you?

01:55:49

#13M: No, never. They did not tell us such things.

Q: What was the reaction of the village to knowing all of their young women and mothers were now sterilized?

#13M: The people could not do anything. They were not in a position to say anything [to the Chinese]. I think people did not know what actually happened. It was very much later that everyone pondered over it and understood it. [People] were not able to even think about it due to their misery.

Q: For you, this must have happened—this sterilization of the village happened—before your village was attacked or after?

01:57:04

#13M: It was very sudden when the Chinese surrounded [the village]. They swooped in but they were not there all the time. They left for the Chinese office. No one knew which village they would attack. When they arrived, it was like the rain. You never know when it will come.

Q: I'm trying to understand, was it before you were married or after you were married that this sterilization took place? *Ama-la*, when this sterilization happened, was it before or after you got married?

#13M: That happened after I was married.

Q: And was your husband sterilized as well?

01:58:22

#13M: Yes, the same thing was done to him.

Q: We are going to continue the story now because that's an important part but we left you in Lhasa. Right? You were in Lhasa and you had no money. What happens to you in Lhasa? Where do you live, where do you go next?

#13M: We could get work splitting stones in Lhasa. The stones were split using a tool and hammering on it. We worked as coolies there, but we could not continue it because we would hit our hands and our hands ached. Then we went to Shigatse and on to Dromo; the Chinese called it Yadong but we call it Dromo. In this region, we could gather wood and sell them. The *chang* 'home-brewed beer' sellers bought the wood. We earned our livelihood by selling wood. We did not stay long in Lhasa.

Q: You worked at Shigatse for a little while and then went to Dromo?

02:00:11

#13M: We lived in Shigatse for about a year.

Q: And at Lhasa?

#13M: We were just a month or two in Lhasa.

Q: So you were a year in Shigatse and then did you live in Dromo?

02:00:22

#13M: Then we went to Dromo. We worked there and were able to save some money. Then we came on a pilgrimage to India. We were stupid and thought that after the pilgrimage in India, we would get to go back to the village. But when we reached Shigatse after our pilgrimage to India, we learned that Lhasa was being defeated. Then all the men went to Lhasa to join the army, the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force].

Q: Where? In Shigatse?

#13M: All the women were left in Shigatse and the men went to Lhasa to fight.

Q: When you went to India on a pilgrimage, where did you go?

02:01:52

#13M: At that time there were only a few Tibetans in India.

[Question is repeated.]

#13M: We went to Dorji Den [Bodh Gaya, Bihar] and Varanasi [Uttar Pradesh]. It was in the 6th month and extremely hot.

Q: Did you go with other Tibetans or just the two of you?

02:02:29

#13M: There were five people, three men and two women.

Q: Why did you go to Varanasi and other places?

#13M: We went on a pilgrimage. At that time, the stupas of Varanasi and Dorji Den were in dust. There were no hotels or anything. It was only after the Tibetans arrived that there has been so much progress in Dorji Den and Varanasi. When we arrived, there was nothing. There were no guards too. On the night we arrived, we slept on the doorstep of [the stupa] at Dorji Den. We did not have much money and I could only make an offering of a hundred butter lamps. We begged as we journeyed during the pilgrimage.

Q: Did you beg in India?

02:03:41

#13M: We did not beg from the Indians, but begged from the few monks who were there in the temple at Dorji Den. We begged rice from them and boiled it in milk. Milk was very cheap then. They cost only a *paisa* or two. Money was scarce but provisions were cheap.

Q: You were six months in India?

#13M: It took us only one month.

Q: What was your experience of going to India after being in the Himalayas?

02:04:56

#13M: I felt extremely hot. It might have taken us about a month and then we went to Kalimpong, Darjeeling [West Bengal] and Gangtok. I stayed quite a long while in Gangtok in Sikkim. I lived by buying and selling *tsampa*.

Q: *Ama-la*, you lived in Kalimpong and Darjeeling after you escaped from Tibet.

#13M: Yes, [that was] after the escape.

Q: Did you return to Tibet after the pilgrimage?

02:05:28

#13M: Yes, and then we [women escaped] by ourselves. I heard that the men escaped through Bomdila [Arunachal Pradesh]. There were seven women and a small child when we made our escape. I have come twice to India.

Q: My question is then, when you were in India for one month and you come back to Tibet, what happens when you arrive in Tibet?

#13M: When we went back, we heard that Lhasa was being conquered and our husbands went to Lhasa, while we girls were left at Shigatse. So we escaped by ourselves. Some of the husbands were killed and some survived. Mine was not killed and I got to meet him.

Q: If Lhasa was lost, was it the same year that Lhasa was lost that you wound up returning or a couple of years later?

02:07:19

#13M: Yes. We left India and spent a year in Shigatse. Lhasa was conquered the following year.

Q: The very year because nobody told you that Lhasa had fallen.

#13M: We did not stay very long in India. We did not know that Tibet was being conquered. We learned in Shigatse that Tibet was being conquered and that Lhasa was being conquered. So the men went to join the army leaving us women behind. The women were forced to flee because people from other regions were caught and sent to their respective regions in vehicles. Only the people of Lhasa were allowed to live there, while those from outside were returned to their respective regions.

Q: So if you were not from Shigatse and you were from Amdo, from Dhoday, you would have to go back. The Chinese were forcing you to go back?

02:08:43

#13M: [People] were being sent back. Some had already been sent back. Then we made our escape. The reason we came to India was because I had gone to India on the pilgrimage. I believed that there was no other place to escape except India and so we fled [to India].

Q: Did you escape with your husband or did you meet him later?

#13M: My husband was in Lhasa and he was escorting His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He went to fight in Lhasa. He fought the Chinese but escaped death. They have killed countless number of people. It was his destiny that he was not killed. He was among those who escorted His Holiness [to India].

You can see it on the television of people carrying guns who are said to be the *Chushi Gangdrug*. It was like that as shown on the television.

Q: And when did you see him again? If he is in the *Chushi Gangdrug* and you are escaping to India, when did you meet again?

02:10:26

#13M: I was on the road construction crew in Sikkim when some of them arrived. The daughter of the King of Sikkim brought us to work on road construction from Missamari [Assam]. Some people were brought to Sikkim from Missamari and so I was working there. My husband called me and we met. He had survived. I did not know it until then. That is our karma. Our story happened just like it is being shown on the television.

Q: Perhaps we can meet your husband. He is living here with you?

#13M: Yes, he is living.

Q: Is he here in the Home for the Aged?

02:11:42

#13M: He is not here. He is in Dharamsala and I think he will be here tomorrow or the day after. He is 86 years old and he is mentally not well. We have two monks [relatives] in the monastery and one of them has gone to see him there.

Q: What is your husband doing there?

#13M: He lives in the Home for the Aged in Dharamsala.

Q: How is it that you are not living in the same place?

02:12:26

#13M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] We, the old man and the old woman, are not dead but we could not get along. I went back to my village [in Tibet] but he refused to go. He lives in the Home for the Aged in Dharamsala. I went to my village and I have not gone

to see him since then. We could not get along. He knows all about the war in Lhasa and about escorting His Holiness [to India]. But now he does not have his memory. He has lost his memory.

Q: Had you been back to Tibet again?

#13M: Yes, I went back.

Q: Where did you go?

02:13:43

#13M: Actually I wanted both of us to go to Tibet, but he refused and that was how our differences cropped up. Then I went [to Tibet]. After I returned, I have not been to see him since.

Q: But what did you see in Tibet?

#13M: There was a lot. [Laughs]

Q: We don't have a lot of time, but maybe another time we'll hear about that. But I think, *amala*, you've given us a very sad and wonderful, important story.

02:14:34

#13M: [Speaks before statement is interpreted] The Chinese have made [brought changes to] dancing, singing and wearing [fine] clothes for the young boys and girls. But there is no development in the practice of religion and the monasteries as compared to the earlier days, I feel. There are very few monks in the monasteries. All the monks of our monastery had left monkhood when they were not allowed to live in the monastery. There were more number of monks in the monasteries of Tashi Gomo and Kumbum. Very few monks were there in the smaller monasteries, maybe 60, 70 or less than a hundred.

Hardly any images have been commissioned inside the temples. Where playing and dancing are concerned, I was astounded [by the progress]. Later, many people from Tibet arrived here and His Holiness advised how sinful it was to use the pelt of tiger, leopard and otter [on their clothes] and I heard that these were burned. It happened after I left my village.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to make sure that we know about your life before we end this interview? Is there something that you wanted to tell us or we forgot to ask you?

#13M: There is nothing left. [Laughs] There is nothing left.

Q: I guess I do want to ask about what do you hope will be preserved about Tibet for future generations of Tibetans?

02:17:02

#13M: The children do not know the early customs. If they were to go to our village, they do not know farming. If one goes back to the village, farming is the only work.

Q: Since you have seen so much of the history, what do you think should have been done to help the people of Tibet?

#13M: Now-a-days, the young boys and girls have good education. Education will be helpful for us.

Q: What do you want the people around the world to know about Tibet?

02:18:14

#13M: If one has education, [he] will know everything. It is important to have an education and good industries. The foreigners are helping us and the boys and girls must study hard. Everything depends on education.

Q: What kind of feelings do you have about the Chinese these days?

#13M: Well, I detest them in my heart. I do not even want to look at them.

Q: I guess the last question, since you weren't able to have children, did you have another way have children in your life besides your own children?

02:19:28

#13M: I brought up a child of my relative.

Q: One of your sibling's children?

#13M: Not one of my sibling's children but a cousin's. He was like an older brother, who had escaped to India. He married in India and I brought up one of his children. He grew up and married. Two of his children are monks in the monastery here [Mundgod]. However, my adopted son passed away and his wife remarried. Their daughter is somewhere in Taiwan and the two sons are monks at the Samlo Khangtsen in Drepung Monastery. Their mother left to remarry when they were 4 and 10 respectively. My son passed away and I left them in the monastery. Now they are 21 and 26 respectively. Since they are here, I feel happy to be in the Home for the Aged.

Q: Since you couldn't go back to the farm in your village, what kind of work did you do during your life?

02:21:05

#13M: Like every Tibetan then, for three or four years, I worked as a coolie constructing roads. There were no roads for the vehicles in Sikkim. It was the Tibetans who constructed all the roads. We built bridges and blasted rocks. Many died and many survived. I worked as a coolie for three or four year, and then I ran a restaurant selling tea and bread.

Q: *Ama-la*, thank you very much for your story. And I want to ask in conclusion, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#13M: I'm sure there will be no problem. You can show it anywhere. We are in India, a free [country].

Q: Can we use your real name for this project?

02:22:30

#13M: Yes, you can.

Q: Thank you so much, *ama-la*, for sharing your wonderful story.

#13M: When you extend such help for us, we are very grateful. I must say thank you to you. You do not have to thank me. I feel very happy when we receive help for the cause of Tibet.

I feel so happy. Take my case, I do not have any siblings in India, except some monks who come from my village and my two children [adopted son's children].

Q: She made it possible.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Tell her she made it possible for us to help.

[Interviewer presents interviewee with a picture, which interviewee puts on her head in reverence.]

END OF INTERVIEW