

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #18D – Namdol
May 23, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #18D
2. Interviewee: Namdol
3. Age: 74
4. Date of Birth: 1938
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Sakha Kocha
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1963
9. Date of Interview: May 23, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 26 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Namdol comes from a large family, which owned a vast tract of land on which they grew crops. As part of the land tax, she was sent to be a servant for a private estate called Mapcha Shikha. Namdol describes her arduous task of making compost, how the owner mistreated her and other servants, and the poor food and housing they were given. After 12 years of work she ran away to Shigatse because the estate owner would not release her from servitude.

In Shigatse Namdol met her husband, who was a personal attendant to the Panchen Lama. She talks about his responsibilities and most importantly about Panchen Rinpoche's personality, his concern for the Tibetan people, dislike of the Chinese army, and his arrest and imprisonment.

Namdol witnessed the early appearance of the Chinese, who provided assistance to the Tibetans and presented many musical shows where they declared that the Communist Party was coming and would bring food and clothing for the Tibetans. Then Shigatse was taken over by the Chinese army and Namdol witnessed the beating and arrest of many monks and leaders. When the Chinese collected all the paper money from Tibetans and set fire to it, Namdol protested and was herself imprisoned for one week in a government storehouse. She recalls how she and her husband concocted a false story to obtain a travel permit in order to escape from Tibet which was then heavily guarded throughout by the Chinese army.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, servitude, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, Panchen Lama, brutality/torture, imprisonment, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #18D

Interviewee: Namdol

Age: 74, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 23, 2012

Question: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ could you tell us your name?

00:00:12

Interviewee #18D: Namdol.

Q: Where are you from in Tibet?

#18D: I told you about coming through the forest to a place called Thingay.

Q: Not that one. Could you please say the name of your place in Tibet?

#18D: The name of the place is Kocha.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, Chinese and the rest of the world.

#18D: Thank you.

Q: Your memories are going to help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#18D: Yes, yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#18D: Okay.

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break at anytime, please let us know.

00:01:45

#18D: I do not want any breaks except to [talk about] the sufferings inflicted by the Chinese.

Q: We are filming this and if you need it to stop, we can stop.

#18D: There is no need to stop. You can decide.

Q: If you don't wish to answer a question, that's fine.

#18D: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la*, we have to ask you if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else, would this create a problem for you?

#18D: No. This is what I want for them [the Chinese].

Q: We are very honored to record your story and really appreciate your participation.

#18D: That is okay.

Q: *Ama-la*, first I want to ask you a little bit about your family background.

#18D: Okay.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your family?

00:03:01

#18D: At that time [we] owned a vast tract of land and there were many family members. From the large family, one son must be sent to the army, another to the monastery and many hands were needed to work on the farm. Hence, with a large area of land and paying taxes to the Tibetan Government, one could earn a living happily without any worries. There were successive reincarnations [of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] and until the Chinese appeared, [we] continued to work on the farm. We were 13 members in total in the family.

Q: You said that your family owned vast area of land. How much land did your family own?

#18D: If [we] estimate by the Indian measurement, it's about eight acres. It is a large area. It is called *kana* and [we] owned about eight. It is a large area, like being located in the Changthang 'Northern Plateau.'

Q: Your family actually owned the land or leased it?

#18D: The government had distributed it. [We] had owned it since many generations, since the time of [my] grandparents.

Q: What did you farm on this land?

00:05:21

#18D: Everything grew on this land like peas, wheat, barley, mustard and vegetables. One need not purchase anything. Fruits and radishes, everything grew on it.

Q: Were your parents involved in any kinds of trade?

#18D: No. The entire family, irrespective of age depended on farming. There was not any trade at all.

Q: If you were to compare your situation with your neighbors, how would you put your situation?

#18D: Compared to the neighbors, I was among the well off. My grandfather was the representative of the village. He helped all the people and was exceptionally good. [He] was considered one of the best and helped everybody—helping those that did not have food and bringing about cordial relations among disputing parties. [He] was not the leader but sort of a representative of the village. [He] was among the best [people] until the occupation of Tibet.

Q: Did your family have any employees?

00:07:29

#18D: There were not. We did not work for others nor employed others. The family members did all the work. The little children herded goats, sheep, yaks and *dzoo* ‘animal bred from a yak and a cow.’

Q: How large was your family?

#18D: There were 13 members.

Q: Your grandfather used to help people. In what ways did he help people?

#18D: When people in the village suffered sickness or when the rich deprived poor people of lands, grandfather treated everyone equally during [his] lifetime and did not allow for greed or desire. I was aware of that.

Q: Did you have any kind of education?

#18D: Not a drop! When the Chinese appeared, land and all the family members scattered. Two paternal uncles and a brother were imprisoned. Three members were executed because [ours] was a wealthy family. [The Chinese] claimed, “You have made a lot of wealth. The land belongs to the people.”

One of the paternal uncles was a Commander in the Drapchi Army [Tibetan Government Army]. He was killed by [Chinese] shelling during the year of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s escape. Another paternal uncle was a district administrator of an estate at Thoe Shekar District. He was killed. Two [of them] were killed. I had a brother who was a monk and an accountant for the Sakya government. He was killed. Three were executed. Three people [from the family] were killed. Then the whole family got scattered.

Q: The people in your area, were they going back and forth to India on pilgrimage at all or for other reasons? Or Nepal?

00:10:27

#18D: [They] did not go. [They] immersed themselves in the fields. They went to Sakya once annually. People were occupied in their fields, as it was a village. Nobody could go as tourists. We were like nomads.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Let's just ask, first of all how the situation came about that *ama-la* went to work for this family.

Q: You said that you went to work for a family at the age of 12. Why did you have to go to work there?

#18D: I told you just now that the area [we farmed] was a large one and a tax must be paid. So money as well as labor must be given [as tax]. I became a servant since the age of 12. That was it. It was on account of the land. The land was large. There were many land taxes for the Tibetans. There were many taxes.

Q: Who were this family?

#18D: The *shikha* 'estate' was called the Mapcha Shikha.

Q: Yes?

#18D: ...the District's estate holder.

Q: Maptha?

#18D: Mapcha Shikha. It lay close to Sakya. Mapcha Shikha was very famous.

Q: Which district was it?

00:12:32

#18D: The Shigatse District.

Q: When you say popular, do you mean influential or the people liked them?

#18D: Yes?

Q: Did you say that the Mapcha Shikha was popular?

#18D: Yes, very famous.

Q: By popular, do [you] mean in general or...

#18D: ...in ill-treating the subjects, ill-treating the subjects. That is the gist of [their] fame. [The family] oppressed the people and later the Chinese executed her. The Chinese bound and took her to Lhasa. *Kungoe* 'Your Presence,' [a title of address for government officials] committed suicide by hanging. The family caused misery to its subjects.

Q: Who was the one that was taken to Lhasa? The wife?

#18D: That was the one called Mapcha Shikha.

Q: Shikha was the one who hung...

00:13:26

#18D: The one that hung himself was the husband and his wife was the one that oppressed the people. The Chinese finished both the husband and wife.

Q: Was [she] taken to Lhasa?

#18D: To Lhasa and then to the depths of China.

Q: How was it decided that you would be the member of your family to go and work for them?

#18D: I was a hard worker. Lots used to be drawn in our village. Lots were drawn among the large landholders to go to work as servants to the [wealthy] family and I was the loser. You could not excuse yourself from work then. Lots were drawn in various villages.

Q: How many other people did this family have working for them?

#18D: In my home?

Q: No.

#18D: Then?

Q: In the estate.

00:15:14

#18D: There were over 30 servants in the estate from various [villages]. Some did the cooking but most of them were field hands. There were more than 30 servants. Except for food, there were no wages. [Our] dresses had patches upon patches. There were no shoes on [our] feet, whether in summer or winter. [They] worked [us] day and night, which is why [my] body has suffered much damage.

Q: What kind of work did you have to do?

#18D: I was given the task of making compost. Fertilizer was needed for the fields. [I] must collect materials from the ground, hill or anywhere [and carry them] on my back and fill a small room of this size for the compost. Then add water to the compost, transport sod and work with dung day and night. It is impossible to describe. Crops will not grow without fertilizers. The farmland was vast. The area cultivated by the estate was like the Changthang. [I] engaged in preparing compost. It was hard labor. That was the most difficult job. The work related to transporting sod and digging. Compost making involved a great deal of work.

Q: How many hours a day did you work?

#18D: There were no hours as such. The work continued for 24 hours. All the servants slept for around 2-3 hours a night. One must start work half asleep before daylight; else you would be hit. There was not much time to sleep. Slaves were like that.

Q: What was your living situation, your sleeping situation? Where did you sleep?

00:18:13

#18D: It was like a kennel. One was made to sleep near the door. One used sacks as a mattress. There were sacks in Tibet that we brought from home and were not provided [at the workplace]. It is impossible to talk about it. Work continued until 11 o'clock and then 12, 1, 2, 3 and by 4 o'clock one must be up. If one was not up by 4 o'clock, you would get slapped on the cheek. There was a thing called *khocha* that was used. All the servants would get struck. The husband was okay but the wife was awfully bad.

Q: You said that you didn't get any food. So what did you do for food?

#18D: For food there was just plain *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and *thukpa* 'noodle soup,' which contained no meat or radishes but salt.

Q: What did you say was there in the *thukpa*?

#18D: There was nothing in the *thukpa* except salt. It was *tsampa* and *thukpa* alternately. Since there were a number of servants, there was *chang* 'home-brewed beer' that we used to make *pa* 'dough made from *tsampa* and tea/water/*chang*.' The tea was just black tea. There were five days off in a year during a festival. That was five days in a year for all the servants during a big festival season. Otherwise we just about had a full stomach. One could eat *pa* to one's content. There was absolutely nothing except for *tsampa*, no vegetables, meat, nothing. During the time of sowing, since one had to lift heavy fertilizers, little quantities of innards of goats would be provided but otherwise, there was no butter or tea to be seen.

Q: What parts of goats were you given?

00:20:37

#18D: There were innards of goats, meats of little quantities that were given.

Q: What kind of interaction did you have with the family?

#18D: We did not have any power. [We] did not have the authority to talk to them. They could give any orders but [we] could not talk back. There was no interaction. They gave the orders through selected leaders, "Give this work to the servants, have this collected, fetch this thing." The orders came from the appointed people. One could not talk [back]. It was similar to the Chinese. There were no interactions; one was not allowed to.

Q: How far away was your home from this place?

#18D: It was half a day's [walk].

Q: Half a day?

#18D: Half a day. It was close by, just half a day. We were a huge number of subjects. When my time was up, somebody else would arrive and when that person's time was up, someone else came. Tasks were assigned in an orderly way.

Q: How long did you serve with this family?

00:23:05

#18D: For 12 years. I was 12 years old.

Q: [You] joined at age 12.

#18D: I had to serve for 12 years.

Q: [You] joined at 12 and served for 12 years?

18D: I served for 12 years and then ran away to Shigatse.

Q: Did you run away?

#18D: I ran away. Then [someone] from another family would be called. [The employer] did not relieve [me] and so I ran away. I had a relative in Shigatse. [He] was a monk. I fled to Shigatse because [I] could not go back home. The Chinese appeared when [I] lived at Shigatse.

Q: Why did you decide to flee at that time after 12 years?

#18D: He was so authoritative and would not relieve [me] even after repeated requests. [The employer] would not relieve [me] even after requests, but said that [I] would be paid wages and given clothes. The work was so hard that a person could not endure it. It was physically draining due to which my body is presently weakened. Besides that [I] was assaulted by the Chinese. The slaves' bodies could not endure [the work load]. There were cases of [slaves] leaping into rivers and others committing suicide. It was the worst *shikha* in the district. It was the worst *shikha* in the whole of Tibet.

Q: There were many suicides among your fellow workers?

00:25:29

#18D: Yes, [they were fellow workers] who were all girls. [It occurred] prior to my joining.

Q: How old were you when you ran to Shigatse?

#18D: I was around 23-24, having been a servant since young. [I] was 23 or 24. The Chinese had already appeared then.

Q: What year was this?

#18D: I cannot recall. My husband was the real attendant of the Panchen Lama. [He] was from Amdo. He would tell me this and this but I cannot recall due to *lung* ‘illness of the assembly of wind, bile and phlegm.’ [I] remember that a flag was hoisted on the fort and then Shigatse fell.

Q: Were you already married when you ran away?

#18D: After running away, [I] met my husband who was from Amdo. [He] was the true attendant of the Panchen Lama.

Q: Before you ran away to Shigatse, had you heard that Gyalwa Rinpoche [the Dalai Lama] had gone to India?

00:27:26

#18D: When I was in Shigatse there was the attack and His Holiness the Dalai Lama left. When the riot took place there [in Lhasa], I was there.

Q: In Shigatse?

#18D: Yes, yes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: We got some problems with some dates here. We can try and figure them out later. It says she was born in 1938. Fleeing to Shigatse puts it to 1962.

Q: *Ama-la*, how old are [you] now?

#18D: 74.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So it puts her fleeing to Shigatse three years after His Holiness and the fall of Lhasa. Let's just maybe find out.

Q: So when you got to Shigatse, what happened then? What did you do?

00:28:21

#18D: At Shigatse my husband was an attendant at the *ladang* ‘grand lama’s residence.’ So [I] could spend a few happy years. There was good food and I was free and spent a few years in this way. Then the Chinese...After His Holiness the Dalai Lama left, the Chinese stirred up trouble. When that happened, we protested and fought. [The Chinese] arrested and put me in prison. It was only for a week. [I] was interrogated and assaulted a great deal.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

#18D: Yes?

Q: How did [you] meet your husband?

#18D: I was in Shigatse and he was from Amdo. [He] had come as attendant to the Panchen Lama from there and did not have a wife. Panchen Lama had brought along 600 troops. There were many soldiers that were all from Amdo. [My husband] did not return to the village. [He] asked about [my] family background. People of Amdo gave great attention to caste. [He] asked about my family background but did not care for wealth and beauty. After asking about these things, [he] accepted me. [I] was in Tibet until the year '63, hoping that things would get better for the Panchen Lama. In this way I got left behind. I suffered a lot of beatings, hard labor and was put in prison.

Q: Did you meet with Panchen Rinpoche during that time?

00:31:13

#18D: Oh, countless. [He] was very busy and my husband could not stay home much in the night as he had to be present at the palace. There was a great deal of danger. We received many audiences. [Panchen Lama] was very hot-tempered. [He] was hot-tempered with the attendants and everyone. [My] husband had to be present day and night. [Panchen Lama] was very hot-tempered. When angry, he would hit [moves right hand in slapping motion] at the Chinese. [He] slapped the Chinese, the Chinese officials. [He] was violent.

Q: What was your husband's responsibilities with Panchen Rinpoche?

#18D: [He] was an attendant in the private quarters. There was danger to [the Panchen Lama's] life and [husband] had been in service in Amdo since the age of 13.

Q: Since who was 13? [Your] husband?

#18D: Since the Panchen Lama was 13. [Husband] was an old attendant.

Q: Was he like a bodyguard?

#18D: Yes, [he] was a bodyguard. There were many types of bodyguards, some who were posted outside and five, six or seven posted within [the palace]. He [husband] was an old hand, having served since [the Panchen Lama] was 13 years old.

Q: Was he among those that were posted inside?

#18D: Yes, he was among those posted inside the palace.

Q: The Chinese officials, what was their attitude towards Panchen Rinpoche? How did they treat him?

00:33:42

#18D: Though there were our soldiers and many aristocrats present, they forcefully entered the palace and claimed that they were the security guards.

Q: Who? The Chinese?

#18D: Yes, the Chinese. They were there to deceive and the Panchen Lama did not like them and said, “Why have you dog meat eaters entered my monastery and palace? Go out.” And he got them out. Our security guards, including my husband almost came to blows with them. It happened like that. They [the Chinese] went to flatter [the Panchen Lama]. Chinese leaders pressed in when [the Panchen Lama] was teaching, when [he] was on a stroll and even inside the palace. The guards expelled [them], but one or two squeezed in. [They] were not let in and the situation was overcast in gloom. There was no happiness.

Q: But still Panchen Rinpoche was able to give public teachings to the ordinary people?

#18D: Yes, he was but as soon as the teachings began, they [the Chinese] would say, “Please come here” or “Please come there”. The teachings could be held for only half a day and then [the Panchen Lama] became angry. [The Chinese] would say that there would be a feast that evening and invited [the Panchen Lama]. At the Chinese party, [the Panchen Lama] would kick at the table and say, “You disturbed my giving empowerments and teachings to the people. Now bring me what you have to.” [He] was very hot-tempered.

Q: During the teachings, did Panchen Rinpoche ever speak on political matters?

00:36:47

#18D: [He] did not. [He] never did and only gave teachings. [He] told the people, “Maintain good relations. Demons are entering the country. Maintain good relations. Maintain good relations. All the people must be kind-hearted. Maintain good relations, otherwise I am not happy.” He used to say that he was not happy [becomes emotional] and that demons had entered the country.

Q: Just going back a little bit, *ama-la*, to your situation with the aristocratic family. At what point did you notice the Chinese in Tibet?

#18D: [I] cannot recall much. [I] was overcome by *lung*. When talks about [the Chinese’] appearance first began, a few of them came to Sakya to give performances. That was the period of deception. [I] did not take much notice. I was already under pressure from the servitude. I cannot recall much. Then [we] fled to India and the Chinese got [us] separated from Panchen Lama. Tibetan currencies were burned and I was jailed for a week and assaulted. I do not have much recollection due to the *lung*.

Q: Can you tell us about what kind of Chinese activity you saw before you got to Shigatse?

#18D: I was at Thoe at the estate. The Chinese came many times to give performances. [They] did not cause suffering. [They] helped people harvest crops and returned once the work was done. [They] did not need to be paid nor provided with food. They left. In bigger areas like Sakya, they gave performances every night.

Q: What performances?

00:39:48

#18D: [They] performed dances. [They] went to different regions to give performances. When I was at Shigatse, [they] went to various villages. It was to entice [the people]. That was the objective.

Q: And the performances, what kind of performances were they?

#18D: We have the dance shows here these days. It was similar to that. There were songs. And musical instruments playing and dancing over there [on one side of the stage]. [The Chinese] lectured, “The show is being given for your enjoyment. Later we shall give you money and clothes. You shall no longer have to wear the poor quality Tibetan woolen clothes. The Chinese will let you wear fabrics that shine. [You] will be given fabrics and shoes. There will be no need to wear the poor Tibetan ones.” They droned such advice to the old people. They said that something called the Communist Party was arriving.

Q: In these performances, were there any kinds of political messages in these performances?

#18D: [The Chinese] were deceiving through the shows. My husband understood that and said, “There is no need to go. There is no need to go. They are deceiving [us]. They are deceiving [us]. They are deceiving [us] to occupy [our] country.” He used to say that. [The Chinese] did not talk of politics but showed concern to the aged ones [saying], “The Communist Party will provide you with food and drinks without having to work, clothes and everything. The Tang ‘Communist Party’ will arrive.” The old mothers would say, “What does the Tang look like? How high is it?” “You are stupid. You have no brains and do not know politics. The Communist Party will rise like the sun rises in the east.” They called meetings and kept on repeating it until people became desperate. These are all treachery.

Q: The aristocratic house and land holding where you worked, by the time that you ran away from there, was everything pretty much running the same? I mean had the Chinese affected the situation at all or was it pretty much running the same as it always had run?

#18D: After I ran away to Shigatse?

Q: Before you’d run away.

00:44:39

#18D: They [the wealthy family] had not faced any problems before I ran away. They were arrested around two years after I left. Chinese army vehicles arrived to take away their possessions to China, which could not be completed even after a month.

Q: I see.

#18D: There were things in their private estate; the grain stock was enormous. It runs into millions and billions. And then there was stuff that they had grabbed from the subjects. The Chinese rendered the house completely empty. I was at Shigatse at that time. The wife...the husband hung himself with a rope in the house and committed suicide. He was

an aristocrat. The wife was bound and taken away to Lhasa and China. All [their] assets were carted away by the Chinese. Seventy to 80 Chinese army vehicles plied in a day and the house was left empty. I was in Shigatse and do not know what happened to the lands. The subjects might have taken the lands. The Chinese seized everything.

Q: How were the Chinese affecting the lives of Tibetans in Shigatse?

#18D: When the Chinese arrived in Shigatse, [they] initially observed the Tibetans. The Tibetans celebrated festivals as usual, practiced religion and carried out trade. There was not much [undeveloped] land [in Shigatse] as it was a city. Numerous [Chinese troops] arrived. One could not see the vehicles during daytime. Vehicles arrived in droves in the night. When dawn began there were no vehicles in sight. Then [they] set up army camps and gradually increased in number. They were large in number and went this way and that way but did not mistreat [the Tibetans]. Hundreds and thousands walked about in the market but did not do anything. The Tibetans were innocent and continued their way as usual, enjoying, eating, working if there was work, feasting, listening to teachings and celebrating festivals. [The Chinese] were enticing everyone in their trap.

00:47:51

Then what they did later was...at 8 o'clock in the morning...there was the fort in Shigatse. I was ill at that time, having given birth to [my] child. [The Chinese] brought down the flag, the flag of Shigatse, the flag at the fort. There were many soldiers of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the army camp where the fort with the Tibetan flag was. [I] saw it from my house. The flag was brought down and there were a great number of [Chinese] soldiers. The flag was thrown down from the fort. As [I] looked on, the bazaar and the streets were overrun with soldiers. Three to four soldiers stood at the windows of the homes of aristocrat and wealthy families. All the authorities at the fort were captured and bound with chains and ropes. The leaders and prominent people were brought to the huge open ground in Shigatse where shows used to be held. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left for India by then. It was at that time. [The Chinese] were angry and destroyed everything. That was the first day.

Q: What happened to the officials?

#18D: [They] were all imprisoned. There were huge bungalows called *karkhang* that belonged to the Tibetan Government and was used during the trips of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The things inside the storehouses were taken away in vehicles during the night. There were storehouses belonging to the Tibetan Government from where things were taken away by vehicles. The houses were emptied and the leaders and husbands and wives and traders were put in like goats and sheep. There were numerous empty bungalows belonging to the Tibetan Government from where things were transported to China in the night and people locked up in them. The windows were closed and one could only see so much [makes a tiny hole with left thumb and index finger]. People were brought in army vehicles from everywhere in the night and interned, as many as possible.

The prisoners were carrying 5-6 bricks of this size [gestures off camera] and given building tasks. The bricks in Tibet were very big. There were sores all over [touches around head

and face] and leaking noses and dribbling mouths. Lamas, *geshe* ‘monks with degrees in Buddhist philosophy,’ and *khenpo* ‘abbots’ were assaulted and people died. Dogs brought bodies into the marketplace. [I] have witnessed a lot of suffering.

Q: The lamas and the *geshes* and the *khenpos*, were they being beaten publicly?

00:53:28

#18D: Yes, [they] were. [The Chinese] entered monasteries and brought out the revered and aged *geshe* and *khenpo*. [They] were beaten in the huge open ground. After the terrible beating, [they] were once again locked up in the prison. When the prison filled up, [the inmates] were taken away in vehicles in the night to Kongpo, Amdo, Lhasa and to the depths of Kham. And once again [the prisons] were filled by bringing [people] from various regions. [Prisoners] were sent away and replaced by others; there was no end to prisoners. People died and the dead were buried in the sand behind the fort. Dogs dug [them] out and brought heads into the marketplace. It makes me feel sad to relate these things. [Becomes emotional]. [I] have witnessed a lot of suffering.

Q: What did you learn about what happened to Panchen Rinpoche?

#18D: [The Chinese] gave an order, “His Holiness the Dalai Lama has escaped to a foreign country. So the Panchen Lama must live in the Potala Palace.” My husband was there then. Panchen Lama replied, “I will live there.”

Q: Yes?

#18D: “I will live in the palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I will come there,” said the Panchen Lama. There was a big bridge called Zampa Sha. The Panchen Lama had to go to Lhasa, to the Potala Palace from [his] palace. The Chinese did not allow any attendants of the Panchen Lama except for themselves. There were soldiers and bodyguards but not one was allowed to accompany [him]. [The Chinese said,] “You do not have to come. We will serve [him]. You do not have to come.”

Then there was a clash; the soldiers of the Panchen Lama, those like my husband and the Chinese soldiers had a clash. Even then, [they] were not allowed. Panchen Lama said, “Nothing will happen. Do not worry. Even if you are not allowed, nothing will happen to me. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left and the Potala Palace is in darkness. I will go to the Potala Palace. Do not worry.” When [the Chinese] took the Panchen Lama, not one Tibetan was allowed to accompany [him]—no bodyguards, no attendants, no steward; he was escorted alone by [Chinese] soldiers and Chinese leaders.

Then we dared not remain and fled here [India]. That is the end. One could not stay when there was so much suffering. Our people are being captured now.

Q: What did you learn happened to Panchen Lama after that?

00:58:11

#18D: Yes, then the Panchen Lama once again came to Tashi Lhunpo. There were two *dzasag* ‘district magistrates,’ Lhamo Dzasag and Tsi Dzasag. They were big leaders. The Panchen Lama came back from Lhasa, but by then I had already fled and I heard about it. Panchen Lama was not allowed to remain in the palace, but was called to attend a meeting at a huge open ground where dance shows used to be held. Panchen Lama replied, “You carry on with the meeting. What do I have to attend the meeting for?” He was stubborn. However, he was repeatedly told to come to the meeting. At the meeting Panchen Lama beat his breast and said, “What do you want to do to me, do it. What do you want to do to me, do it.” There and then Panchen Lama was arrested and put in prison.

There was a big house without a roof. It was a huge house without a roof and the monks rushed there when the Panchen Lama was interned in it. Many thousands of monks rushed into the prison. Then they [the Chinese] became violent and bound Panchen Lama with electric wires in the prison. I do not know whether [he] was taken to Amdo or Shigatse as I had already escaped by then. My husband became mentally unstable on account of [hearing] this. [He] was mentally ill for three years and six months. [He] was not mentally well. We had already left because attendants were not allowed. When [I] recall those stories... They [the Chinese] killed the *dzasag*. *Dzasag* means minister. They were like the Tibetan Prime Minister and members of the cabinet.

Q: Were they killed?

01:00:25

#18D: They [the Chinese] killed all of them and took Panchen Lama to prison.

Q: When you said that the lamas and *geshes* and the *khenpos* were being beaten publicly, how were the crowd reacting?

#18D: The people had to sit quietly. They [the Chinese] had paid money, thousands of *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins’ to some of the people who were taught to say, “The *geshe* is a fake. The *khenpo* is corrupt and a fake. [He] has loaned money to people charging high interest rates.” [People] were forced to make charges when there were no wrongdoings. The people were forced to slap [the prisoners] on the cheeks. Some of our Tibetan people are without substance. Most of the people sat silently, crying and praying to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Nobody could utter a word. They [the Chinese] too struck [the prisoners]. You know the vagabonds around here? Similar people were made to do the beating. The good ones would not do it, as [they] were fair. The vagabonds were made to do the beating. The Chinese needed no rhyme or reason or politics or anything.

Q: *Ama-la*, why were you arrested?

#18D: I raised [my] voice. You know our 100-note currency, the Tibetan 100-notes? They could fill a house. [The Chinese] doused kerosene oil and set fire to the pile of notes that looked like a tent. So we shouted, “May His Holiness the Dalai Lama live for thousands of years. May all these notes be able to escape to India.” People shouted and then we were arrested. Besides, three of my relatives had been killed and I used to bad-mouth the

Chinese [saying], “Kill me.” [They] killed two paternal uncles and a brother of mine. I have a son who was sent to prison but now he is in India. We screamed because of the sufferings. That was the reason I was put in jail. It was on account of the notes, the Tibetan notes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: This is the denomination.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right.

Q: So it was a single 100 note or...

#18D: It was paper currency of 100 units.

Q: I’m sorry. Who did this belong to?

#18D: The money was seized from houses. The leaders were rendered unable to use them. [The money] was seized from houses. For instance, if it was Dharamsala, [the money] was seized from every family and piled in the open ground. It was like a police ground. [The notes] were heaped there. The families were told that they would be paid in *dhayen*. “Bring out whatever money you own. [We] are not going to use them but give [you] *dhayen*.” Everybody had to bring out [all their money] from their homes. There was nowhere one could throw them—not even in the river because there were soldiers spread out. The pile of currency notes resembled a tent. There were 50 unit notes and 100 unit notes but most of those were 100 notes. The *tanka karmo*, *zhogang*, *zhosum* and all the coins that were made of copper and silver were taken away to China. The paper notes were burned. There was a protest by the people then.

Q: Why did you get so upset about this?

01:07:27

#18D: One was desperate. It was not one region or two regions, but everywhere that vehicles drove to collect money; people were subjected to extreme misery; lama, monks and buddhas were assaulted; people did not have anything to eat; possessions were being confiscated and one’s relatives and parents were killed. We were desperate just like the self-immolations that are taking place these days. The food one got to eat from morning until evening was just a mug-full of *tsampa*. People did not have food to eat. They [the Chinese] took everything to China.

Q: What happened when you protested this act?

#18D: [We] were immediately arrested, “They must be given [indoctrination] lessons. They have no knowledge. [You] must go to attend lessons.” [The Chinese] said [we] must go to study but all us women were packed in a room. There was a melee during the arrest but the Chinese were armed with guns, so everyone was forced to follow. [We] were shut in a room.

The next or the following day [the prisoners] were sent to build a barrier across a river, carrying big rocks in the middle of the water. Away from Dechen Palace of Tashi Lhunpo was a place where the Panchen Lama resided during summertime like Norbulingka

‘Summer Palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.’ There the Chinese planned to build a dam across the river and [I] was taken there for forced labor and such.

Q: And what happened?

01:10:09

#18D: And then there is nothing much to say as I escaped. By the time [I] came here my body was weak.

Q: Can you talk about your escape?

#18D: The escape...I had a son, a small child. My village was at quite a distance from Shigatse. [We] wished to go there. I was allowed but my husband was not. He was fluent in Chinese language. “I wish to go to my wife’s house for a holiday. Give me a permit for 30 days.” There were numerous Chinese authorities posted everywhere. They were there until the border and we would get caught on the way [without a permit]. It was like a fence made of soldiers. There were hundred of thousands of troops along the Indian border and military camps and authorities in every district. The entire three regions of Thoe, Ngari and Kor extending from Darjeeling to Nepal were covered with hundreds of thousands of soldiers. [We] would never be able to pass through. So my husband said, “I am going on *shikor*. Presently the Panchen Lama has been escorted to China. So, I am going on a *shikor*.”

Q: What’s shikor?

#18D: *Shikor* means “going to my [wife’s] home to meet her parents.” [He] was lying to them [the Chinese]. “You cannot go. The Panchen Lama will return from China and you must attend to him. Let the wife go. Let the wife and child go,” they said. A Chinese woman refused to issue a “visa.” My husband said, “Please issue [the permit]. You love your children. I know how it is in China. I have only one child and there is snow and it is extremely cold on the way to Thoe. What will you do if my wife and child perish?”

He was fluent in Chinese and smart. “If you like, issue [the permit] and if not, I shall take this matter to higher authorities.” Another official said, “Give it. He will return in a month.” Then the permit was issued. It was needed because one had to present it to an official at [for instance] Dharamsala and then from Dharamsala to an official at Delhi and then from Delhi to an official at Nepal and so on. When questioned, “How can you leave?” We can say, “We can go because we have [a permit with] a signature.” That is how [we] managed to escape. [We] would be caught without the document. [We] fled day and night.

Q: You said that you were arrested and put into a house with some other women. So how long were you imprisoned in this house?

01:14:32

#18D: All of us were in for a week. We had not been involved in any political activities. When the notes were being burned [we] felt a great loss and anguish, as the money was [the symbol] of the Tibetan Government. And they were being burned. Kerosene oil was poured

and [the pile] was sifted using a stick. When the notes flew up in the sky, we clapped and screamed, “Go to India. Go wherever His Holiness the Dalai Lama is living.” [We] created a racket out of desperation. [I] was arrested on account of that.

Q: So there was a group of women who did this? How many women?

#18D: [Speaks before question is translated] The notes flew up high. However much they [the Chinese] struck [the pile] with a stick and poured kerosene oil, the notes flew high up among the mountains and covered the region.

Q: How many women were with you in this protest?

#18D: There were 12 or 13. There were a larger number of women from Kham. We were the more aggressive ones that protested.

Q: So you were put in a house and not a prison, right?

01:16:26

#18D: It was a prison. Aristocrats, lay people, lamas and everyone were... The house was not small. It was the Tibetan Government’s house. It was where [the people] were incarcerated. Once the door and windows were shut, there was just a tiny hole to peep out.

Q: So this was a prison that had been built by the Chinese for the purpose of being a prison, right? It wasn’t something that was used as a prison.

#18D: No. It was a *bangzoe* ‘storehouse’ of the Tibetan Government.

Q: *Bangzoe* meaning where arms are kept?

#18D: *Bangzoe* is where things are stored. At the time of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s visit to India, [he] said, “Everything will be distributed among the people. The house should be emptied, as there is no need for it. Times are not good.” It was emptied when His Holiness visited India. Most of the things stored there were grains. The grains were distributed to the 3,800 monks of Tashi Lhunpo [Monastery]. Numerous boxes containing thousands of *dhayen* were distributed. All the grains were distributed among the poorer people and the monks.

That was during the year His Holiness went abroad, went to India. You might know of it that His Holiness went on a pilgrimage to India. Panchen Lama and His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited India long ago. It was emptied during that year. The reformation began the following year.

Q: How many other prisoners were there?

01:18:54

#18D: There were not many prisoners left because prisoners were sent away during the night.

Q: Where?

#18D: I told you earlier. To Kham, Amdo, Lhasa, China and everywhere. One hundred to 200 army vehicles transported [prisoners] throughout the night. [Fresh prisoners] were brought from the three regions of Thoe, Ngari and Kor. Prisoners were brought in the night and prisoners were sent away in the night. Prisoners continued to be sent away, mainly towards the direction of Kongpo, [I] heard.

Q: How did your experience in prison compare to the way that you have been treated by the aristocratic family?

#18D: [I] had to serve there for a lifetime, but there was no anger like with the Chinese. It was a lot of hard work but there was no panic. [I] was livid with the Chinese such that I felt “Let [me] be killed now.” And there was nothing to eat though it was not a long time, just a week. I cannot say much because it has been suffering all the way. Wherever [I] go it is suffering, even now. However, presently if one has food enough to satiate, there is no one to cause misery. One can remain devout and pray.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your life here in Dharamsala now.

01:21:34

#18D: There is nothing much to talk about Dharamsala. If [I] were to talk about Dharamsala...His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that the old people must be given their monthly food. [Former] Cabinet Minister Samdhong Rinpoche...and [I] do not know what Lobsang Sangay-*la* [incumbent Prime Minister, Tibetan Government-in-exile] will do. Since the time of arriving here, [I] have spent my life working as a coolie and brewing *chang* ‘home-brewed beer’ and led a hand to mouth existence. Our government provides [us] a sum of 500 *rupees* per month to pay house rent. That is the only help, and besides that there is never any concern.

If you can, please give this interview into the hands of the cabinet. I swear on His Holiness the Dalai Lama that I have not spoken any lies. What [I] have said is a true story from the time of my birth until now. It is what [I] have experienced and witnessed. [I] cannot keep on speaking. One can ask me questions [regarding this story] anytime and my answer will be the same.

Presently [I] receive 500 *rupees* a month, and this is paid only once in 5-6 months forcing [me] to borrow here and there. Sometimes people give me presents [of money]. [I] have nothing else. [I] have a son who was in prison and nobody cares. The Security Department does not support [us] and one cannot keep on requesting. The [Prime] Minister is the only person who can make the decision. Since the time of coming to India in the year ‘63 there has been no support. It is only the 500 *rupees* that [I] receive and no other support. It is a shame. His Holiness would not be aware. When His Holiness asks, “How do the old people feed themselves?” Perhaps the answer given is “We are providing for them.” That is the end. This is the fact.

Q: *Ama-la*, thank you so much for sharing your story with us today. It was really an honor.

#18D: [Joins palms]

Q: *Ama-la*, we have to ask you one more time, if this was shown in Tibet, China or anywhere else, would it create a problem for you?

01:24:35

#18D: That is what I need [for the interview to be shown]. They [the Chinese] have caused such sufferings. I have suffered a lot. My husband became ill and I witnessed much suffering. [I] am now left in an alien land. My story does not contain even one word of mistake. I had to leave behind such a precious Buddha.

I cannot reach the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If [I] were to speak [about the current situation], the Buddha will get angry. If it is possible, please see that this interview reaches the hands of the Prime Minister. I am grateful if it can be shown to different countries. There is not one lapse in my [story]. Some people might fabricate. I have suffered until the age of 74. I have tried to recall though you do forget sometimes, having suffered so much.

END OF INTERVIEW