

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #24U – Pasang  
March 30, 2017

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #24U
2. Interviewee: Pasang
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1944
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Geji Zakarnag
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: March 30, 2017
10. Place of Interview: Gepheling Old People's Home, Rajpur, Uttarakhand, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 31 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tenzin Choenyi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Pasang was born in Geji Zakarnag in Kham to a nomadic family that raised yaks, *dri* 'female yaks,' sheep and goats. As a young girl she assisted her mother with milking the *dri* and making butter, cheese and curd. Meat and dairy products were the main part of their diet. They exchanged their dairy products, meat and wool for grains in Jekundo and Nagchuka.

Pasang's family lived in a tent and relocated whenever they needed to find greener pastures. The only fuel available in her region was dung. Pasang describes in detail how dung was flattened, dried and stored in covered heaps to be used when it rained in summertime. Water was easily accessible during the summer, but during winter ice had to be melted. Pasang describes the nomads' cookware, tea, clothing, jewels and medicine.

The Chinese appeared when Pasang was 8 years old and she was unable to become a nun as she had hoped to. Her family spent many months on their escape journey until being caught at Thoe Bawa. Her father and brother were taken away to China and Pasang, her mother and her sister were forced to tend sheep for the Chinese. After seven months, they escaped again but Pasang's mother died on the journey. Pasang and her sister continued on to reach a settlement in Nepal.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Kham, nomadic life, customs/tradition, environment/wildlife, first appearance of Chinese, forced labor, escape experiences, life as a refugee in Nepal.

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**Interview #24U**

**Interviewee: Pasang**

**Age: 73, Sex: Female**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: March 30, 2017**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:09

**Interviewee #24U: It is Pasang.**

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?

**#24U: Yes.**

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know.

**#24U: Okay.**

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

**#24U: Okay. Okay.**

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

00:02:18

**#24U: Okay.**

Q: Do you have any problem?

**#24U: I will have no problem.**

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

**#24U: Okay.**

Q: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ when we were just meeting each other, you told me that you made some special offerings for this project. What did you do and why do you think this project is important?

**#24U: We in Tibet have suffered a lot, which those born in India do not know—like what happened in Tibet and how it was. We know about it. Children born in India do not know what happened in Tibet while we do. So in order to remind [them]—it is my opinion though I do not have much knowledge—what you are doing is incredibly good. [I] am sorry if there is any mistake.**

Q: Your story is exactly what we want to hear, your personal story.

**#24U: Okay.**

Q: *Ama-la*, when were you born, what year?

00:04:07

**#24U: I was [born] in the year 1944.**

Q: Where are you from in Tibet? Was there a name for your village?

**#24U: The name of our village?**

Q: Yes, the name of the village.

**#24U: Geji Zakarnag.**

Q: Yes?

**#24U: Geji Zakarnag.**

[Interpreter interprets as: Geji Zakarma.]

**#24U: Zakarnag. It means the white and black rocky mountains located between the Mekong and Yangtze Rivers. That is the Kham dialect of Tibet.**

Q: Zakarnag?

**#24U: Zakarnag. There are two mountains. Geji Zakarnag.**

Q: *Ama-la*, how big was your village? How many families in your village?

**#24U: I cannot recall much about the village except about my family, about my siblings and parents. I cannot recall much about the village. The Chinese appeared when I was 8 and at the age of 11 or 12, I fled. I do not have much to say about the village because I left as a child and it has been so many years. It has been many years.**

Q: I see. When you were still in Tibet, what kind of work did your family do?

**#24U: Our work was taking care of animals—animals. There were many yaks, goats and sheep. My two elder brothers used to herd the animals—herd the yaks, goats and sheep. I was little and my [younger] sibling was not yet born. She was born in the year '52 when the Chinese came. I was 8 years old then. My two elder brothers used to herd the animals. We owned horses, yaks, goats and sheep. There was not any other work but taking care of the animals.**

Q: How many children were in your family altogether?

00:06:44

**#24U: Four: two sons and two daughters.**

Q: When you were...if you can think back when you were a little girl, 8 years old before you left Tibet, what kind of duties or things did you do for your parents?

**#24U: The work I did as a little one was...in Kham we used to get up in the night. [I] had to get up to help mother milk the *dri* 'female yaks.' Then there was the dung of animals like cows and yaks. In our region it was only cow dung that was available to use as fuel. All the dung had to be dried. Before daybreak I had to help mother dry the dung. Then the women dried cheese. There was a lot of cheese in Tibet.**

Q: Cheese.

**#24U: Cheese for consumption. These must be dried and then during the day milk was churned to make butter. We nomads have a lot of work.**

Q: When mother milked the *dri*, how much quantity of milk was there and where did you store it?

00:08:23

**#24U: We used part of the milk to make butter, a part of it to make cheese and a part of it to make curd. We only had curd and meat to eat in our region. Sometimes *thukpa* 'noodle soup' was made and there is something called turnip in Kham that was used in the *thukpa*. There was just *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' cheese and meat and nothing else because we were nomads. There was no bread made from wheat flour and such.**

Q: For cooking, where did your family get the water from?

**#24U: For water we...in the summertime it was from the rivers. Rivers flowed in Tibet. During winter it froze. One must get ice and melt it. There was just ice and nothing else. The ice has to be broken with a spade, then melted and used for cooking. In Tibet it was not necessary to bathe because of the cold weather. [Laughs] Tibetans only had fur coats, so how would they bathe! Even to wash the face, water must be heated. Wintertime was just ice. Everything was frozen for three months. During summertime one could get water from the rivers that were pristine. There were no taps.**

Q: Where did...you mentioned that your family ate meat, what animals did you eat and who killed the animals for food?

00:10:50

**#24U: Yaks and sheep.**

Q: Who killed the animals, *ama-la*?

**#24U: There was a certain person in the region to whom we gave the head, the limbs and the innards. He did it. There were different regions and among these was one particular person who killed animals. He did the slaughtering. He had to be paid the limbs and the innards of the animals.**

Q: What parts of the animal was given to him? The head?

**#24U: The one that did the slaughtering was given the head, limbs and innards like the intestines, lungs, liver and such. Our family members did not do the killing.**

Q: Was there any difficulty for a person who slaughtered animals given the Buddhist tradition of not harming animals?

00:12:13

**#24U: Yes?**

Q: We feel compassion for an animal that is slaughtered...

**#24U: There is compassion, but there were no farmlands in our region. If a sheep was slaughtered, it was packed in hide and if a yak was slaughtered it was packed in hide and dried. Then it was taken to the place called Jekundo and we got our grains. There were no farmlands in our region. Wool was also sold at Jekundo and these were also taken to Nagchuka in the north towards Lhasa for trade. In our region there were no grains and such. There was no wheat and barley. So the wool and meat was bartered.**

Q: Which places were visited? Nagchuka and...?

**#24U: To Nagchuka in the north and down to Jekundo. Meat was dried in hide.**

Q: About how often was your family, did they have meat as part of their meals like every day or once a week?

**#24U: It was not like that. We did not have much else to eat but meat because if *tsampa* was available, one ate *tsampa* in the morning for breakfast; at times it was either *thukpa* or meat in the morning and evening. Sometimes it was curd in the morning. During the day it was meat and *pa* 'dough made from *tsampa* and tea.' Nomads did not have anything else. Wheat was very scarce.**

Q: When you said you took the meat and packaged it to trade for grain, where did you take it?

00:14:30

**#24U: It was at Jekundo.**

Q: Jekundo and...?

**#24U: Nagchuka in the north.**

Q: Is that inside of Tibet?

**#24U: It is in Tibet. Nagchuka is towards the north in the direction of Lhasa while Jekundo is down towards Kham. We went on a great many business trips driving yaks laden with wool. Since there was a large number of sheep, wool was transported.**

Q: So it was wool that you took to be traded?

**#24U: Yes, large bales of wool were transported. The sheep were sheared once in a year in summertime and the wool transported.**

Q: About how many sheep were in your family, *ama-la*?

**#24U: Oh, there was a large number of sheep, at least 200-300. There were many sheep and also goats. However, we did not drink goat's milk or eat its meat. [Goats] were not used much, except sheep and yaks.**

Q: Why not [drink goat's milk and eat its meat]?

00:16:23

**#24U: [Goat's meat] smells of goat and we did not eat cow's meat either. In our region there were not many cows but *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and cow.' We did not eat the meat of cows except yak and sheep. [Goat] meat was not used much as it smelt of goat. [Laughs]**

Q: Do you remember having any preference? Did you like yak meat or sheep meat?

**#24U: The meat of yak and sheep are similar, are similar.**

Q: To cook all this meat, you needed utensils. Where did the family get these big utensils from for cooking?

**#24U: There were utensils made of copper and bronze found in Tibet. There were not any aluminum utensils, but it became available in our region after the Chinese appeared. Long ago in Tibet there were only brass, bronze and copper. [I] do not know what copper and brass are known in English. In Tibet we only had copper, bronze and such. Aluminum became available after the Chinese appeared.**

Q: *Ama-la*, where did the family get fuel to do all the cooking?

00:18:23

**#24U: Yes?**

Q: The fuel for cooking...

**#24U: I mentioned earlier that dung has to be dried for fuel, dung. Dung is kneaded with the hands and flattened. During summertime the dried dung is piled and then plastered with wet dung and covered with hay. Oh, dung was in plenty.**

Q: So these were like sheets?

**#24U: They were about this size [gestures off camera].**

Q: About 9 x 12 [inches]?

**#24U: Yes, about this size.**

Q: *Ama-la*, why did they dry one layer and then they put another layer on top and then grass on top? But when you burnt them, was the whole thing dry?

00:20:05

**#24U: It was like this: When the stock of dung grew large—there was a large amount of dung because of the large number of yaks. For use during summertime, a heap was made of all the [dried] dung. Then wet dung was plastered on top as was a layer of hay. So during summertime one can find many such heaps just as in India. It is exactly the same. [To interpreter] You would have seen these.**

Q: Was this to be used during wintertime?

**#24U: No, no—when it rained in summer. That was the fuel when it rained in summer. Dried dung was used in wintertime, too. When it snowed in the winter, a large amount of dung was required. We called it *chopa*—*chopa*.**

Q: *Chopa*?

**#24U: *Chopa*. The heaps were huge like tents, the heap of dungs.**

Q: Were the heaps of dung to be used when it rained in summer? Were the heaps made during winter?

**#24U: Yes.**

Q: Was that the only thing you used for fuel?

**#24U: Yes, that was the only thing. We built large stoves that were long and could accommodate 3-4 large pots. Dung was placed below in a niche. A fire continued to burn**

**because the elders in Tibet kept drinking tea. A fire continued to burn and there was an endless supply of dung.**

Q: They had to drink tea, was it to stay warm or to have liquid? What was the...?

00:22:34

**#24U: No, no. [I] do not know why elders in Tibet always had a full teapot. However, we children were not given any tea except watered milk. It was said that [childrens'] ears dried [if they drank tea]. So it was just boiled water with some milk. Children were not given any tea. The elders had tea in large teapots.**

Q: What was in the tea that the elders drank? What was inside?

**#24U: The tea had butter and salt in it similar to what we drink. There was the *bagchen* 'large brick-shaped compressed tealeaves' that were brought from China. In India there is the *bagchung* 'small brick-shaped compressed tealeaves,' while in Tibet it was the large tea box. There are the *bagchen* and *bagchung*. The *bagchen* was used [in Tibet]. If tea was being prepared in the home, one could smell it outside. The tea was very tasty. The elders drank that tea.**

Q: Was it brought from China?

**#24U: It came from China, transported on mules and horses, these tea boxes. The tea boxes were extremely large and a mule could carry just two of these.**

Q: *Ama-la*, you said your family were nomads. So did they have a house that was permanent or did they move around and take their tents with them?

00:24:43

**#24U: There was no permanent [house]. We had *ba* 'tent made from yak hair' that was made from the hair of yak. A *ba* is like this [gestures off camera] and when migrating from one place to another as grass wore out in a month or two—when the grass was not good, being nomads we moved to another place—the *ba* can be divided into two parts and loaded on a yak. One yak can carry one *ba*. There were *ba* that could be divided into four or six parts. We moved to where there was grass for the animals.**

Q: When you moved, *ama-la*, how many people were in your family who moved to each new grazing land?

**#24U: During the migration there were just our family members and no one else.**

Q: Who were the people in your family?

**#24U: [Speaks before translation] The belongings were loaded on the many yaks and there were horses, too.**

Q: Who were the people in your family?

**#24U: In my family were my father, mother and two elder brothers.**

Q: Were you the only girl?

00:26:29

**#24U: There is one younger to me who lives in Delhi [India] presently.**

Q: Were girls treated differently than boys in a nomad family?

**#24U: There was no difference. In our region if there were two sons, one became a monk and if there were two daughters one became a nun. That was the practice. They were not treated differently. There was no difference.**

Q: So your family had two daughters, but did your sister become a nun or you?

**#24U: There was no time to become a nun because the Chinese chased us. I was to become a nun, but fled from the Chinese at the age of 11. The other one was younger than me, just 5 years old. There was a difference of 8 years between us. The younger of my elder brothers was a monk.**

Q: Do you think you would have liked to have been a nun, *ama-la*?

**#24U: Yes, I used to throw tantrums wishing to become a nun. However, there was no time to become a nun for the Chinese came and [we] fled from the hometown.**

Q: When you moved your *ba* from one area to another, were there any special treasures, things that were of value, material value or spiritual value that you always took with you?

00:28:41

**#24U: The main things of value in my region were *dzi* ‘special beads made of agate stone,’ turquoise and coral. Other than these there was no gold. There was not any gold in Tibet. One never even thought of gold. In our hometown it was turquoise, coral and *dzi*. These were considered the most valuable. Others were not considered of any value. These were small items and could be carried easily. These were small items and one took good care. In Kham mothers and daughters wore a lot of jewelry on the neck. Really...but now the Chinese have...**

Q: Was there anything that your family made, I guess it was besides the wool that you traded? Anything else that you traded so you could get grains back?

**#24U: There was not anything else to sell but wool. We had wool, dried meat, cheese and butter. Boxes of butter were taken to Jekundo as also wool: wool, meat and butter. Boxes of butter were loaded on horses and mules and taken there.**

Q: Were these traded with other nomads or what other regions?

00:30:46

**#24U: Jekundo is a city.**

Q: Jekundo?

**#24U: Yes, Jekundo where there is a nunnery called...[not discernible]. [The goods] were taken there. We lived in a remote region in the north while Jekundo...For instance Delhi is a city. It was taken there.**

Q: You mentioned there were two mountains. When you said your village, I guess that's where your house was temporarily? And then there were two mountains. Do you remember the names of the two mountains?

**#24U: There was a large river close by us on one side. The reason for the name Geji Zakarnag is because of the two rivers called Mekong and Yangtze. During summertime the mountain near the Mekong is lush with grass and flowers. We went there during summertime. [The area near] the Yangtze is remote with plenty of grass. The area is flat. Those are the Mekong and Yangtze rivers. We lived between the Mekong and Yangtze rivers.**

Q: Mekong and...?

00:32:02

**#24U: Mekong is the largest river in Tibet, and then there is the Brahmaputra.**

Q: You mentioned in the winter it was too cold to take a bath. What happened when the sun came out and it was warmer. Did people like to swim in the river or change or wash clothes? What was that like in the summertime?

**#24U: We heated water to bathe.**

Q: One needs to heat water during summertime?

**#24U: Yes, one needs to heat water in the summer. Otherwise, it was impossible. Summer is very cold. Oh, one needs to heat water to wash face. The water was too cold.**

Q: Both winter and summer?

**#24U: One cannot even find water during the winter. At times one cannot see any water in the winter. It is difficult to wash hair because of the cold. Everything gets frozen in our region.**

Q: *Ama-la*, what happened if somebody got sick? How was illness treated? How was illness treated and what were some typical kinds of illness that people would get?

00:33:52

**#24U: The illnesses we had...cold is common everywhere. There used to be small pox and measles. These illnesses were quite common. I described earlier [during the pre-interview] about the Chinese giving inoculations. The two illnesses were small pox and measles. Otherwise, there were not many illnesses because there were Tibetan doctors. The medicines were herbal, herbal medicines. There were no tablets and such. Medicinal plants were gathered from the mountains.**

[To interpreter] Perhaps you are too young to understand. There were small Tibetan medicines of this size [gestures off camera] that contained different kinds of medicines. Tibetan medicine was like that. These days Tibetan medicine is in the form of pills. It was not so then. The medicines were powdered plants, in the form of powder that was taken along with water.

Q: Did anybody in your family ever become seriously ill?

**#24U: No.**

Q: When you mentioned the animals and how you use some for food, were there... You were in a very beautiful region, did you ever see wild animals up in the mountains and what did you see?

00:36:04

**#24U: Wild animals in my region? I did not go to herd much because [I] was small but used to tag along with elder brother. Like the bear in India, in our region a wild animal was the one called Tibetan brown bear that attacked people. There were no tigers and leopards. In our region there was one called otter and then wolf that attacked [domestic] animals, and the Tibetan brown bear. Besides Tibetan brown bears and wolves, there were not many wild animals. There was one called blue sheep and Tibetan argali sheep on the mountains. These were present at very high altitude. Wolves attacked goats and sheep and Tibetan brown bears attacked humans. There are Tibetan brown bears in Tibet while there are bears in India.**

Q: Were these sheep ever captured and killed for their meat or were they allowed to be free?

**#24U: There were some people that killed and ate [the meat]. There were some that ate [the meat] and some that did not.**

Q: I know you said you would move with the seasons for the grasslands, for green...to feed the animals. Were you the only family, *ama-la*, or did you move with a group of families?

00:38:12

**#24U: You could move anywhere you liked. It was not necessary to move with the neighbors. If the grass had depleted, you could move anywhere you liked. It was not necessary to move in a group.**

Q: Were there special religious festivals that your family celebrated?

**#24U: Yes, there were.**

Q: Can you tell us about some of them?

**#24U: By religious, what does it mean, like what?**

Q: Like visiting the monasteries and such.

**#24U: I see. There were many empowerments bestowed during summertime. One went there dressed in the best of clothes for three days. The empowerments took place for three days and there were many lamas. There were many empowerments during summertime each lasting three days. It took place during summer. Being nomads, one went riding horses. There were no vehicles. One wore the best of clothes and went to receive the empowerments.**

Q: Did you do a lot of horseback riding?

**#24U: Yes, I used to ride.**

Q: You rode?

**#24U: Yes.**

Q: Did you like it?

00:40:01

**#24U: [I] loved riding horses. Because I was small and could not get on to it, [I] took the horse to a ridge and then got on it.**

Q: What are some of your other favorite memories of Tibet when you were a little girl?

**#24U: A happy memory I can recall was going to receive the empowerments about which I mentioned earlier. We used to take ingredients to make tea and food—that I remember a lot. Then during Losar ‘Tibetan New Year’ the children used to have a party. We went there twice, once for the Lochung [pre-Losar?] in the 12<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month and then again on Losar. The children used to go on picnics. I remember these a lot. We took food and went to the pastures up on the hill. Many children went together.**

Q: How many people would come for these picnics?

**#24U: All the children in the neighborhood went together, whether there were 4-5 or 8-9. Each one brought something to eat.**

Q: *Ama-la*, where did your family get your clothing from? Did you make it or purchase it from other people?

00:42:13

**#24U: We had to make clothes by curing lambskin and sheepskin. For special occasions, lambskin is cured, covered with fabric and lined with a border of this size [gestures off camera] using the skin of otters. Leopard skin was also used as border of this size [gestures off camera] for clothes worn on special occasions. The everyday clothes did not have that. Since it was cold, everyday wear was cured sheepskin covered with another kind of fabric. This type [of clothing] did not have the border of otter and leopard skin. That was the everyday wear. One also wore lambskin.**

Q: What would you say were the major challenges of a life of being a nomad in a nomad family? What would be considered difficult times for a nomad family?

**#24U: Some poorer families that owned few animals faced a little bit of difficulty. Otherwise, there were not many problems. We did not have a lot of work. Except for taking care of the animals, there were no other difficulties.**

Q: *Ama-la*, I was going to ask you, did your family own...did your family, besides owning animals, did they have, did you have servants helping your family?

00:44:18

**#24U: Wealthy families that owned a large number of animals like 100-200 or 500-600 had servants and maids. There were servants.**

Q: But you said your family had like 200 sheep. Is that considered rich or moderate?

**#24U: We were considered among the moderate. [We] were neither paupers nor wealthy with servants. [We] were considered moderate.**

Q: Were there many poor people in your area?

**#24U: There were not many poor people in Tibet. Those that belonged to the low caste did not have to pay tax to the Tibetan Government. There were animals like Tibetan wild asses and marmots. They did not need to pay taxes, they that were from the low caste.**

Q: Didn't need to pay taxes?

**#24U: Did not need to pay taxes and they ate Tibetan wild asses and marmots. Tibetans call them *yaplung*—*yaplung*, *yaplung*. There were those that ate them.**

Q: Those that killed animals?

**#24U: Yes, killed and ate wild animals. There were those people that did not own any animals. They were poor and did not have to pay taxes. In India there is [the tribe] called *banjari*, those that move from place to place as blacksmiths. In Tibet too, there were *banjari*. Indians call them *banjari* and in Tibetan it is *yaplung*.**

Q: Were they poor because of something they did wrong or life family circumstances? What made them poor?

00:46:37

**#24U: [I] do not know that. There were such groups and [I] do not know why. There were groups like that from the beginning. I do not know much.**

Q: *Ama-la*, I'd like to talk a little bit about your life as a young girl. So did you think that you were going to become a nun? You said people did or were you planning to get married?

**#24U: [I] never thought about marriage then being a little child. I used to tell my elder brother that I wanted to become a nun, but the Chinese came. Nothing about marriage because [I] was a child then.**

Q: Why did you want to become a nun?

**#24U: Religion played a big part in my region. I wished to become a nun and practice the dharma. I knew a bit about the dharma as a little child though not the scriptures. I know the Dolma 'Praises to the 21 Taras' and other prayer recitations and presently can chant the prayers with anybody.**

Q: I see. I see. What stopped you from becoming a nun?

00:48:31

**#24U: The reason was that we lost Tibet. So how could one become a nun? My elder bother and father had been arrested at the place called Thoe Bawa and taken away by the Chinese. As I told you earlier, we were alone with mother and served the Chinese for around seven months. After serving the Chinese for seven months, we crossed the Martsang River and fled from the Thoe region towards the border of Nepal. How can one become a nun when your country is lost?**

Q: You did mention that before the interview, but I want to get it in more time detail now, when you were planning this interview. So let me go back to when you were 9 or 10, did you stay in your homeland or did you go on pilgrimage?

**#24U: No, [we] were on the escape journey. I was in the Thoe region at the age of 9 or 10. We had just been captured by the Chinese and were serving them then by taking care of animals.**

Q: Who were you with?

00:50:20

**#24U: My mother had not passed away at that time. So [I] was with mother. My mother, younger sister and I were made to graze goats and sheep by the Chinese.**

Q: When you said in the region of Thoe was that in your vicinity or far away?

**#24U: Oh, one has to journey for many days, many months. Thoe is this side while Kham is very far away.**

Q: How did you get so far away from your region?

**#24U: We fled at night, halted during the day and fled at night and escaped in this manner. The Chinese pursued and caught up at the place called Thoe Bawa. My elder brother and father were captured there.**

Q: Maybe we should go back and try to understand, when did you first see the Chinese as a little girl?

**#24U: I saw the Chinese at the age of 8. The Chinese appeared when I was 8 years old.**

Q: What did you see with your own eyes?

**#24U: Yes?**

Q: The Chinese appeared [when you were] 8 years old. What did you see then?

**#24U: The Chinese?**

Q: What did [you] see?

00:52:12

**#24U: [Laughs] The Chinese at that time...we did not go there where the Chinese were staying. I saw the Chinese. One had to go and get inoculated [points to left arm]. I spoke about getting the inoculation for the small pox illness [points to face]. [I] saw the Chinese then. I was a child. The Chinese had pitched many tents, but we did not go there normally. The Chinese were already in Kham. Three years after coming to Kham the Chinese demanded boys and horses, and we fled in the night.**

Q: Boys and horses, so the family had to give their young son to the Chinese? What did they do with them?

**#24U: Yes, all the sons had to be given. Whether one owned swords or guns or sons, all had to be given to the Chinese.**

Q: So did everybody flee that you know of or did some people give them horses and sons?

**#24U: No, everybody fled. There was not anyone who would do that. If one succeeded in fleeing, that was it, but who knows who succeeded or not? Everyone fled in the night. We were nomads in the Kham area and there was no light. It was dark. So who knows who got left behind and who escaped? We fled day and night.**

Q: How many people, maybe fled with you, one other family or many families?

00:54:40

**#24U: There was not anyone because we were nomads and if one family lived here, another lived way out there. [We] lived separately. Everybody did not live together. [Laughs] Families were spread around singly. It was very funny.**

Q: Do you remember what you were feeling in your heart?

**#24U: [I] cannot remember about any feeling. I was sleepy that night and clung to the tail of a yak. My younger sibling was atop a yak. I was so very sleepy and clung to the tail of an animal.**

Q: Were [you] sitting on the top of the yak?

**#24U: No, no. [I] held onto the tail of the yak and was on foot. Oh, [we] fled for many days and nights.**

Q: Before the family fled, did you actually get an inoculation for small pox?

00:56:07

**#24U: Yes, [I] got the inoculation. Initially when the Chinese came to our region, they stayed relaxed for three years. There were many poor people as mentioned earlier that were given animals from those that owned many. They said they were going to bring about socialism to the families that owned large numbers of animals. [The Chinese said they] were going to bring about equality and that there should not be any disparity in wealth, that there should not be any difference in wealth. They did this for around three years. From the fourth year, they began to do bad things. They gradually began to deceive and wanted to collect all the boys, guns and horses.**

Q: Why do you think they gave inoculations? Was there any other reason than health reasons? Were they trying to count the people or something?

**#24U: That was really for small pox because later when we were to get inoculation in India...[not discernible]. That was for real.**

Q: Did people get small pox in your area?

00:58:00

**#24U: Yes, that illness was prevalent. In Tibet there were many people with smallpox spots, so [they] were sick. The reason for the illness in Tibet is because a lot of meat was consumed. As I look back that is the case. There were many that had this illness. Earlier it was prevalent in India, but now it has been eradicated.**

Q: The night that you fled, how old were you when your family and you left your area?

**#24U: [I] was 11 years old then. I told you earlier.**

Q: Who was in your escape with you, escaping? Who was with you?

**#24U: Father, Mother and all of our family members were together. When our family fled, the animals...the Chinese were not near us for the Chinese military camp was located in another area. The families were spread all over and if they [the Chinese] ordered [the nomads] to come during the day, [they] went but [the Chinese] did not ask to come at night. They [the Chinese] were good during the three years. We fled secretly in the night. So there were just our family members and none else. One fled secretly.**

Q: How far away, how many days did you walk to get away and where did you land?

00:01:11

**#24U: We did not know what places we were passing through in the Thoe region, but there were the ones called Hor Bondha and Hor Boshu. Then we reached Thoe Bawa and then somewhere around Nyenchen Thanglha [mountain range]. [I] was young and did not know where, but that was the route of the escape journey. These were away from the Kham region and formed part of Thoe region.**

Q: Was that like after a week of walking or a month of walking?

**#24U: That was after many months of walking, many months of walking. It happened like this for us. For instance, there were many from Derge that were fleeing with us. We had met up with many from Derge on the journey—Derge in Kham. Then there were people from our region. There was a great many people escaping along the way. It was not just us. There were a great many fleeing from Kham.**

**From a group of 10, 15 or 20 families, 2-3 people were sent to spy on the Chinese, sent to find out if the Chinese were coming. [We] camped for five, six, seven or eight days, spies were sent and if it was reported that the Chinese were coming, [we] fled. That was how [we] came.**

Q: And then what happened?

01:02:24

**#24U: It was like that. [Laughs]**

Q: [You] reached Thoe Bawa and...?

**#24U: [We] reached Thoe Bawa and then at night the Chinese appeared. We were on flight. There is a river called Martsang Tsangpo in the region of Thoe Bawa.**

Q: What's its name?

**#24U: Martsang Tsangpo, Martsang Tsangpo is a very large river. It had frozen and we were going to cross it. [We] were to spend the night in Thoe Bawa, which is at the border of Nepal. We had managed to bring all our horses and yaks until the Nepal border. We slept that night with the horses saddled and the yaks laden, and the Nepal border...[not discernible]. One could not see the way for there was no electricity in Tibet. There was no**

electricity and no good roads in Tibet. The Chinese attacked at around 1 o'clock in the night. The Chinese had come in pursuit. [We] were caught by the Chinese there.

My mother, sibling and I went one way while my elder brother and the others who were armed resisted the Chinese. We fled away and they fought with guns. A translator that spoke Tibetan arrived and said, "Do not flee. Do not flee. Do not flee. The Chinese will shoot. Do not flee. Do not flee." We moved away and then became separated for six days. After six days in the hills, the Chinese caught us.

Among those arrested were my father and elder brothers. The Chinese had not killed them then. Oh my, there were 18 people or something! The Chinese brought them there. [We] had been hiding in the hills. They [the Chinese] have some sort of a wireless [points to right ear]. It seems the Chinese know from a great distance—the Chinese know that the Tibetan rebels are in this place and then go there. That was how the Chinese caught us.

Q: And then what happened when you were caught?

01:05:32

#24U: Yes, the Chinese caught [us]. I explained earlier that in this region of Bawa there was a large fort. In Tibet it is called *dzong*, but here it is like some sort of an office. There was a large monastery, which was the Chinese military camp. My elder brother and the rest of the prisoners were taken there and kept for around two months.

We were assigned to take care of yaks, assigned as yak herders...No, no assigned as shepherders. [We] served the Chinese for seven months that was mentioned earlier. [We] served the Chinese for seven months and then they [male prisoners] were taken to China. They were taken on the pretext of being given patriotic education.

"You should stay here and herd the animals. We will give you yaks, goats and sheep," the Chinese deceivingly said. We were left there while the Chinese took them away. Poor things, they were killed. The people of Kham were killed.

Q: I'm so sorry to hear that, the loss of your brother and father.

01:07:25

#24U: [Nods] We became separated then and never met again. Mother...I've suffered a lot at a young age. My sibling was 5 years old and I was around 15 when my mother passed away at Dhoporong. Oh my, I have suffered so much, and the Chinese had taken away the elder brothers.

Q: Was your mother ill?

#24U: After coming to a new place, mother suffered from diarrhea and passed away. It was at the pilgrim site of Dhoporong and [Mother] passed away at a monastery.

Q: Were you with her when she died?

**#24U: Yes.**

Q: Did she give you any advice about what you should do if she was able to talk?

**#24U: What advice would she give when she was sick? She was suffering from a bad case of diarrhea. I had dug a pit and mother was lying there; [she] could not get up due to the diarrhea. I was nearby. We were at a pilgrim site and mother passed away near a monastery. The monastery was called Dak Gonpa and was a highly revered monastery. Mother passed away there. I woke up in the night to take a look and mother had passed away. There was a revered lama and [I] called out to [his] wife in the night, "Please perform *phowa* 'purification practice' for my mother." "You go back to sleep and the lama will perform the *phowa*," [she] replied.**

Q: That must've been a very sad time for you, *ama-la*.

01:09:53

**#24U: I was sad and afraid to beg for fear of being attacked by dogs. [I] was shivering for [I] had never begged before. I had a necklace of coral. The rest including *dzi* had gone to the Chinese. It was a nice big *dzi* but now gone. [I] had a necklace of small corals which was sold on the way but did not fetch a good price. Begging meant being attacked by dogs. Oh, mother passed away on the way and I suffered a lot.**

Q: Were you all by yourself?

**#24U: My sibling and I were alone after mother passed away.**

Q: Younger sibling?

**#24U: Younger sibling.**

Q: A sister?

**#24U: Yes, a sister. I sent her to a school in Mussoorie [India] and then got married. [She] is very well settled now [shows thumb up].**

Q: Your mother dies and you are by yourself with your little...how old is your sister? Is she a couple of years younger?

01:11:28

**#24U: The younger sibling might have been 6, 7 or 8, but [I] am not sure. I was 14 or 15 years old then. Along the way, we would halt and then re-start the escape journey.**

Q: You became a mother very soon.

**#24U: Yes, I was like a mother. [Laughs]**

Q: You said the Chinese made you take care of the animals, you know, before this happened, right? Your father and brother were taken by the Chinese; you and your mother had to take care of the animals. Then your mother got sick and died and then did you run away and not take care of the animals?

**#24U: The Chinese drove us right across the large river in a boat. As per present calculation, [our escape] was around October as the river had frozen—the river had frozen. The Chinese drove [us] to the other side in a boat.**

Q: In a boat?

**#24U: [The Chinese] caught and took us to the other side of the river in a boat. Then when the river froze, we fled in the night.**

Q: Was it just you and your sister?

01:13:46

**#24U: My mother was there then. Mother passed away in Dhoporong. [She] passed away after we had fled [from the Chinese].**

Q: And then before you sent your sister to Mussoorie, what did you do next before she went to school? You're 14, 15 and your mother's gone. What happens? How do you survive?

**#24U: On the escape journey, we met a lama in the region of Dhoporong. The lama was a *tulku* 'reincarnation' from Nangchen. The tulku was accompanied by his mother and a nun. He said [they] were going on pilgrimage to Dhoporong. It is believed that Dhoposhey Dugdak [a mountain] is a relative of Mount Kailash. If one started at 3 o'clock in the night, one could complete one circumambulation by morning. [We] went on this pilgrimage and mother passed away there. The lama—I take refuge in him—had gone towards the tribal region; the people of Dhoporong invited him everywhere to read prayers. The region belonged to the Kagyu sect and the lama went to read prayers everywhere.**

**One day my mother passed away. This is what we did: [We] begged for butter and *tsampa* and for one week I performed *sur* 'offering of smoke [as ritual for the dead]' for mother. By then the lama had left. He used to visit here and there to read prayers and then he was gone. I ran and ran searching for the lama and learned he was leaving for Nepal that day. The lama had already left for Lotsam.**

**There was a large river and a bridge. The bridge was made of ropes and shaking, and my sibling and I were so scared. They were making tea there. [We] had caught up with the lama. After catching up with the lama, we had tea and then left in the evening. At Lotsam was a unit of the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force].**

01:15:40

**At the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp, their guerrillas caught our lama accusing him of being a Chinese spy. He was accompanied by a sibling, who was a nun and mother. The lama was caught and we were stopped there. It was a large unit of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. It seems**

nobody was allowed to enter the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp. I took along my sister—[we] did not know anything about this place—and entered the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp. Those at the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp were shocked, wondering where [we] were from.

I explained that my hometown was Geji Zakarnag and there was a boy that hailed from my hometown. The boy started to cry, feeling pity. They provided food and tea and took us to Zong Sarpa, which is in Nepal near Mustang. There was another unit of the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Zong Sarpa where [we] were sent. The guerrillas provided us with food and everything. And then [we] went to Nepal and then here.

Q: That's quite...did the lama, was he able to prove that he wasn't a spy?

01:18:48

#24U: [I] do not know. They caught [him] and then the lama and we became separated. They put the lama in another tent and did not let [him] come out and we could not go inside. We were provided with food supplies like *tsampa*, meat and cheese and two guerrillas took [us] to Zong Sarpa. There was nothing at Zong Sarpa and [the inhabitants] were involved in combing wool that seems to have been sponsored by foreigners. [We] worked there—it was an organization from the United States and [we] stayed here for a short while doing wool work but did not like it. You know stale cheese? One was given a mug of stale cheese and nothing else. Then on the way I met an old man and woman that were carrying *zumo*. [Laughs]

Q: Yes?

#24U: [Mine] is such a strange story. *Zumo*—*zumo* that is edible. *Zumo* is a kind of grass. [To interpreter] You do not know, but *zumo* is a kind of grass that can be added to food. The old man and woman were carrying two bags of such. [I] asked them, “Where are you going?” [We] had met on the road. They said they were going to Nepal. “Please take me with you.” Oh my, we came with such people on the escape journey. I carried a bag of *zumo* because we did not have anything. They provided food and then [we] reached Nepal. Then I lived in the settlement in Nepal for two years.

Q: That sounds like a very wonderful miracle. It's like this old couple, you help them and they helped you.

01:21:21

#24U: [Nods] They provided food. We had nothing—nothing and were almost naked.

Q: But they needed your help too and you gave it to them.

#24U: They benefitted and we benefitted from them because [we] could not go to Nepal not knowing the region. Then [we] went to the settlement in Nepal.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q:...courage to endure all these hardships? How did you find the strength to do that?

**#24U: I did not have any thought about strength but that...I had the chance of seeing His Holiness, the previous reincarnation of the Karmapa in Nepal. [I] was two years in the settlement in Nepal weaving carpets—stayed two years in a factory in Nepal and then was enlisted to go to Switzerland. I was a child and instead of going to Switzerland, I fled from there.**

**Shall [I] talk about how [I] fled? [I thought], “[I] will not get to see the Chenrezig ‘deity whom each Dalai Lama manifests in human form.’ [I] have not had the chance to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and will not get to see [him]. My younger sister must get to Dharamsala.” Then I fled from Nepal. [Laughs]**

**[I] was two years in Nepal weaving carpets, really. There was a couple from Amdo that was going to India. Instead of staying in Nepal I fled with them. Otherwise, I was enlisted to go to Switzerland and could have gone to Switzerland. “Oh, if I stay here in this fearful country, I will never see the Chenrezig. What will [I] do if I do not get the chance to see the Chenrezig? By going there, [I] may get married to a person of another faith and that will be a disaster.”**

**I fled from there and then I got to see the Chenrezig so many times. My younger son has offered flowers to the Chenrezig in Delhi. He is [my] younger son that works here presently. The Chenrezig patted him like this [pats cheek] and I was overjoyed. When I die I have the satisfaction of having seen the Chenrezig many times. Thinking of this, I fled here from Nepal.**

Q: Was there anything about the Buddhist teaching that helped you endure these kinds of sufferings?

01:25:02

**#24U: Yes? How?**

Q: How did the Buddhist teaching help you endure the difficulties?

**#24U: It has helped. I have two children, two sons who could be educated by the grace of the God. Otherwise, [I] came with nothing, totally naked. However, I worked hard and gave a good education to the two children. The two children are well educated as also the younger sibling; I am uneducated. However, all this is due to the benevolence of the Buddha and the Chenrezig. It is good. I feel that way. I feel happy now.**

Q: *Ama-la*, what do you think about the Chinese these days given that they did do a lot of things that harmed your family and hurt your family? What are your thoughts about the Chinese?

**#24U: What should one think these days when we have become old now? There is nothing to think and do. [Laughs] What we think in the mind, the body cannot perform. In addition to that, I do not know to read and write, am uneducated. What to do? [I] am incapable. Earlier when in Delhi I used to be the first person to participate in any activity and was very enthusiastic. Pasang was known to be one among the enthusiastic ones. Presently the**

**body is not healthy, and I have undergone surgery in both the eyes. When one is not healthy, there is nothing to be done. Otherwise, I was quite enthusiastic.**

Q: What do you think...what are your wishes for your children and their future? What do you hope happens to their life?

01:27:36

**#24U: There is not any hope, but that the children should do well. I do not have any hope except the wish to see the Chenrezig once more at this time of near-death. There is nothing else; [I] do not think of anything. It is impossible that I will get the chance to return to Tibet. If independence is gained during the time of the children, that is good. But except for the children, it is impossible that we will get to return to Tibet. There is no knowing whether [we] will die tomorrow or the day after, really.**

Q: *Ama-la*, you've given a very beautiful and sad and important story about the history of Tibet.

**#24U: [Nods and joins palms] Thank you.**

Q: Thank you. What was it like to tell your story?

**#24U: Yes?**

Q: What did it feel like to tell us your story?

**#24U: Feeling...About the suffering I have undergone long ago which stays in the mind and about the suffering caused by the Chinese, and [now this story] will reach the hands of the Chenrezig. We have a story to tell [His Holiness the Dalai Lama], but do not know how to say it. One does not have the education and the ability to relate it. If one has the education, we can narrate it nicely. However, [I] do not and speak straight away, and also because I am a Khampa and do not know the honorific language.**

Q: His Holiness will be very happy to have your story. So with that I think we'd like to thank you very much for your participation today.

01:30:04

**#24U: [Joins palms] This has been very good for me today being able to narrate this to the Chenrezig. [I] am very fortunate. [Becomes emotional]**

Q: *Ama-la*, can we use your real name for this project?

**#24U: Yes, of course.**

Q: Well, thank you for sharing...

**#24U: [Interrupts] You are doing such great work, of course.**

Q: Okay, thank you for sharing your story.

**#24U: [Speaks before translation] With this reaching the hands of the Chenrezig, what better work than this do I need?**

Q: That's a very nice blessing. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW