

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #2M – Tenpa Chonphel
April 4, 2010**

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #2M
2. Interviewee: Tenpa Chonphel
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Manam
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1966
9. Date of Interview: April 4, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 59 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

At the young age of 7 or 8, Tenpa Chonphel herded lambs, yaks and sheep and protected the animals from wolves and tigers. Later he worked in the fields. Both his parents lived separately, not because they had divorced, but because they had different tax services to render. He tells how he, as a little child lived with his mother and from the age of 8, went to live with his father. His life gives us an insight into social customs prevalent at that time in Tibet.

A significant part of his narration details how administration was carried out in Tibet and the different tax systems imposed by the government and monasteries. Through his life story, Tenpa Chonphel gives us an understanding of the plight of the common Tibetan people and their feelings towards their tax obligations.

Tenpa Chonphel lived under Chinese occupation until 1966. He gives an account of how the Chinese came to his village and secured people's confidence by luring them with money and false promises. He also explains how the oppression came about gradually through the categorization of families, division of wealth and finally, by forcing the people to destroy their monasteries.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, herding, taxes, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, life under Chinese rule, oppression under Chinese, escape experiences.

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Interview #2M

Interviewee: Tenpa Chonphel

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 4, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:18

Interviewee #2M: Tenpa Chonphel.

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?

#2M: Yes, you can use it. Today I will tell you whatever was and truly occurred long ago and you can use it.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your...

00:01:37

#2M: [Interrupts] It [the story] will not hurt our people or the Chinese. This is not to target the Chinese. I will relate whatever happened in the old days. Later I will talk about the Cultural Revolution because that is what I saw with my eyes and they [the Chinese] were the ones who perpetrated it.

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

#2M: [Nods]

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

00:02:29

#2M: Okay. I am fine. I am fine now.

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

#2M: Okay.

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

00:02:59

#2M: There will be no problem at all.

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

#2M: Okay.

Q: You said you would like to share with us...[disturbances from outside]. It sounds like you have many wonderful memories to share with us about Tibet. What are some of the memories you want us to know about?

00:04:06

#2M: I wish to talk about what we did as little children and then as youngsters. I can recall my life in Tibet from the age of 8-9 to about 26. I will tell you what was there in my country and what we did—the type of work we did. Then when I was about 22 years old, the Cultural Revolution was implemented in Tibet and monasteries were destroyed. I want to talk about that later.

Q: So let us begin by hearing about your childhood in Tibet. What are some of your memories?

#2M: I can recall memories from when I was about 7-8 years old, but not prior to that. At that time there were both herders and farmers in my region. As a little child I used to look after the lambs and kids. I can remember that.

Then when I turned 12, 13 or 14 years old, I started to work in the fields. We sowed and during the sowing stage, the ploughing was done with the help of horses. There were no machineries.

Q: When you were a little boy and you worked with the lambs, did you have many animals?

00:06:43

#2M: We [the family] were tenants of a monastery. There was a monastery in my village and we were the herders of its animals. My family did not own many animals. There were about 400-500 sheep and about 100-150 lambs.

Q: What were the duties that you had to do when you looked after the lambs and sheep?

#2M: It is the same as looking after the cows here. You followed the lambs, keeping a watch out for wild animals and lead them where there is grass. Once the milking is done, you have to lead the lambs to their mothers. The sheep are taken care of by adults while the children herd the lambs. Once the adults have milked the sheep, the lambs must be led to their mothers.

Q: What kind of wild animals were you afraid would attack the lambs?

00:08:49

#2M: There was a wild animal called a wolf. Wolves had pointed ears and resembled dogs. There were also tigers, but these were not large in numbers. However, wolves were aplenty.

Q: Did you ever see any?

#2M: Yes, I have seen tigers.

Q: And when you saw them, what did you do?

00:09:22

#2M: In my region they did not harm humans. People say that the tigers in Tibet and here [India] are the same. They were of two different types: tigers and leopards. I think it is the tiger with stripes that we have in my region. It did not harm humans. It lived among the rocks in the hills.

Q: Were there many tigers?

#2M: I am not able to say if there were many. I have seen a few among the rocky mountains. Not only that, we killed an old tiger. I think it was an old one. The young boys rushed and threw stones and stabbed it to death.

I have not seen many. One can only see one or two among the rocks.

Q: What color were the tigers?

00:10:43

#2M: They were yellowish and striped—yellow with black stripes.

Q: And when you killed the tiger, the old tiger...

#2M: [Continues] The eyes were totally yellow. One could see the yellow eyes.

Q: Were you with the boys that killed the old tiger?

00:11:14

#2M: Yes, I was with them.

Q: How did you do that?

#2M: They [the tigers] walk among the rocks. This was an old one. It jumped among the rocks and when it jumped, we threw stones from below. It fell down. It almost fell on me. Then some threw stones and some used their knives. After that someone caught its tail and some hit it with sticks. That's how it was killed.

Q: Did they do anything with the tiger's skin?

00:12:16

#2M: The tiger was skinned and the skin was stuffed with hay. I do not know where the elders sold it or what they did with it later.

Q: What about the wolves? What color, what did the wolves look like that came after the sheep?

#2M: The wolves are like dogs. It is not easy to get them. They run away.

Q: Did they ever attack any of your sheep?

00:13:09

#2M: Yes, it happened once when I was very young. At that time my aunt was in the house and she gave me some food to take and sent me with the lambs. The lambs might have walked about the distance from here to that building [pointing a little further away] while I stood about here when the lambs came darting back. What I thought was a white goat came and snatched a black lamb in its mouth and fled.

The adults chased it. They scolded me saying I let the lamb be taken away by the wolf. At that time I had no knowledge whether it was a wolf or a goat. Later I learned that it was a wolf. It fled taking the lamb with it. The dogs pursued it up to a long distance. That was what I saw. The next time a wolf appeared it happened when I was much older. I was watching the flock when a wolf took away a goat. We chased it with slingshots and it sprinted away. We got the goat back but it was nearly dead.

Q: And about how old were you at that time?

#2M: I was about 9 or 10 years old then. Starting at the age of 7 or 8, I herded the lambs for about three years. I grazed yaks and sheep, too. I began working in the fields when I was 11, 12 or 13.

Q: How did you get the job to graze the lambs? How did you get that responsibility?

00:15:40

#2M: There were six or seven members in my family. We had a house in the village, but at the nomadic site there were only tents. We were given the duty of grazing the animals belonging to the monastery. So we must carry it out. When young, one would be sent out to graze the goats and sheep and when one grew older, he worked in the fields. That was how it was.

Q: Did the monastery pay the family to look after the lambs or was it an obligation?

#2M: The responsibility was required of us. There was no payment. The old system was bad. It was a sort of obligation. However, we could utilize the dairy products except butter and wool, which we had to hand over. The animal fur was given to the monastery and after churning the curd, butter of a certain quantity was handed over.

Q: Was the family accepting of this kind of tax or did they have other feelings about it?

00:18:01

#2M: It [the tax] was considered as serving the monastery.

Q: Did every family have this service or only your family in the village?

#2M: There were about three families who were in this type of service. Besides my family there were two others who had to herd the animals [of the monastery].

Q: What made those families have that kind of service?

00:18:55

#2M: There was this tax system in our community and each [family] was obliged with the tax. This had been going on for generations. For example, if the parents lived under this system, the children also had to.

Q: Why did not the other families in the village have to pay taxes like this, in this manner?

#2M: Each had their division of obligation. Some had obligation to the District Administration of the Tibetan government. There were many other forms of taxes, like providing a horse in service or an animal for transportation. All these many tasks were divided and each [family] had their own form of tax to carry out. If your work was given to me, I would not do it. Likewise you would not do my work. It was like that; each had his own tax.

Q: So the kinds of tax services involved taking care of the animals and transportation. What did transportation mean?

00:21:10

#2M: In our country, the Tibetan government did not have motor vehicles. Things had to be transported on yaks and horses for days. It was very far to travel from Ngari to Lhasa. If they [the officials] were sent to Lhasa, we were proportioned a certain distance, like a day's journey to transport them. We had to take them to that designated place.

Q: What type of things did you have to transport and whose things did you take?

#2M: The government collected taxes from the people, which had to be transported. That was the old system.

[Disturbances and then interpreter repeats question]

00:22:25

#2M: Some of the things were goods purchased by them.

Q: Did they belong to the government?

#2M: It was the officials of the government who claimed that they [the goods] belonged to the government. I do not know if they were theirs or perhaps a small part went to the government. Whatever they were, whether it was purchased butter or fabrics or *buram* 'brown sugar cubes,' they had to be transported to the designated place. These were our tax obligations. These were government taxes and then there were the taxes to the monastery. There were two types of taxes to be paid.

Q: What did the people get in return for paying these taxes to the monastery?

00:24:03

#2M: There was nothing. They did not give us anything except when the monks of the monastery had *mangja* 'tea offerings.' They did not give us anything.

Q: Did you also get the *mangja* along with the monks?

#2M: Yes, if there was a *mangja* offering, we took part. Also when the sheep and goats gave birth, if there were three births, it was compulsory to give two lambs to the monastery and they [the family] could keep one if all [the lambs] survived. In case one died, they [the family] had to substitute their share to the monastery.

Under this system called *ma-sum, bhu-nyi* 'three mothers, two offspring,' it was compulsory to offer two lambs to the monastery. Likewise from thirty lambs, twenty were offered to the monastery and one could keep ten. However, if there was a death or an animal got lost in the forest, one must produce the horns and pelt to the monastery, in which case one was excused [from making a replacement]. If one could not produce them, he was obliged to pay a penalty.

Q: What was the attitude of the people regarding paying these kinds of taxes?

00:26:48

#2M: At that time it used to be said that the land belonged to the Tibetan government and the Tibetan government imposed the taxes. The Tibetan government owned the land and it owned the skies. So whatever taxes were allotted, it had to be paid to the government. However, we did not have to offer our tax services beyond the fixed point. Each village had its own share of tax allocation. Take me for example, I may have to give transportation tax up to Camp Number 1 and those in Camp Number 1 will do so up to Camp Number 6 and so on.

Q: Did the people feel they received any benefit from having a government that they had to support?

#2M: The owner of the land is the Tibetan government and the benefit is that we can cultivate this land and utilize the products for ourselves. Even if we construct a house and live in it, we are doing so on the Tibetan government land. Therefore the Tibetan government collects a tax. The lands were divided and allotted to all the people of the village and each family has been cultivating its own share of land for years.

Q: When the Chinese came into Tibet, they said they were trying to liberate the country from the monastery and the government of Tibet to make the people free. Do you feel the people were oppressed?

00:30:00

#2M: The people became happy. I was happy because earlier we used to carry out tax services. I was really happy. I believed them [the Chinese]. However, later they turned worse and worse. First they spoke very sweetly.

Q: Had the people always felt they were paying too much tax for many generations or is that a recent change?

#2M: The taxes were there since long ago and each one paid his share of taxes. You are here today but you came in a vehicle. In the old days, we would have to send horses whether the requirement was for two or three horses. The next day we would bring you to Gaden Monastery [the next destination from the location of the interview] and then it was their turn to bring you to Camp Number 6 [the next village]. This did not occur everyday, but only at times.

Q: Why did the people want to support the monasteries?

00:32:40

#2M: It is the monastery where we take refuge. We take refuge and pray to God to grant happiness in this life and for a better life in the next. Tibetans consider the next life more important than the present life. We pray that we have a good next life and that was why we served [the monasteries].

Q: Did it feel important to have a monastery in your village and why?

#2M: Yes, since many generations very holy lamas have established monasteries for the wellbeing and good fortune of the villagers. In the event of sickness, we can perform prayers at the monastery. A monastery is the place where we seek refuge and pray for this life as well as the next. Our religious practice takes root from there.

Q: It sounds like the monasteries provided some support for your spirit and so you were happy to support it or were willing to support it. My question is what did the government provide that would want to make you support the government?

00:35:26

#2M: The Tibetan government did not provide anything. It had two divisions, which were the *Labrang* where the monks were based and the *Zong*, the district political administration. The *Dawa Zong* was at a distance of a day's journey from my village. The *Thoeling Labrang* was also located at a day's journey and our village was situated right in the center.

Q: If you had no government, if there was no *zong*, what would be different about your life?

#2M: If there was no government, there would be no one to lead. There must be someone to head [the people]. We elect a person who will work for the welfare of the community as a leader.

Q: What did the leaders do for the community?

00:36:56

#2M: They do not have anything to do except pass on the message to the people to do this or that according to the government's order. I do not know the quantity, but people had to pay a certain tax to the Tibetan government. The Central Tibetan Government was located at Lhasa and they had officials who work for the government and they needed to be paid.

There was a tax called *tamo tay* which everyone was obliged to pay irrespective of whether you were already paying tax to the monastery or elsewhere. This was a small tax for an individual but grouped together, it becomes a huge quantity.

Q: Did the people of your village like having a government in Lhasa and why?

#2M: Yes. Representatives [from the Tibetan government] came to serve in the Dawa *Zong* for three years. Two or three representatives arrived at the *Zong* and they were changed every three years; the previous ones left and new officials were instated. It was similar in the case of the *Zong* as well as the Monastery.

Q: How does somebody become a leader in your village?

00:39:44

#2M: There must be someone to lead [the people].

Q: How did he become a leader?

#2M: We make such a person a leader who is more intelligent and can work for the benefit of the people and the village.

Q: How many people or how many houses were in your village?

00:40:25

#2M: Ours was a small village and there were not many houses. There were about nine families and four monks in the monastery. It was not a vast region. The village was called Manam.

Q: How was the leader selected in your village?

#2M: We hold a meeting and tell a person, "You will be the one to lead us."

Q: What qualities did that leader have?

00:41:29

#2M: The people did not have to provide him with food or clothes because he was one of us. If our village had any appeals for the [District] leader, he was the one who had to approach him. And whatever the orders of the [district] leader, he had to relay them to the people. He was like a messenger.

Q: What would be some typical problem that the leader would have to handle in the village?

#2M: There were problems but he could not do much. Besides deciding whether we should hold a prayer or report to the [District] leader, there was nothing much that he could do.

Q: Was there ever any crime in the village—people breaking a law or being bad?

00:43:31

#2M: Yes, small crimes did occur. There were no big thefts or robberies in my village. Petty thefts did happen.

Q: Was there any punishment of any kind for petty thefts?

#2M: First the thief was taken to the District leader and his crime reported. The District leader awarded a punishment depending upon the scale of the crime. In our village lashing was a punishment.

Q: Who would do the lashing and how many lashes?

00:44:46

#2M: The District leader questioned the criminal and if he replied that he committed the theft due to desperation and under grave difficulties, his punishment was lenient. If otherwise, his punishment was more serious. So it [the punishment] depended on that.

[Question is repeated]

#2M: First we take the thief to the District leader and he questioned him as to why he committed the theft. He answered, "I stole because I have nothing to eat and out of desperation." A theft committed out of desperation had a lesser punishment.

Q: How many children were there in your family—mother, father and how many children?

00:46:18

#2M: My parents had separate residences. We [father and interviewee] worked in the service of the monastery. My mother was in the service tax for the District Administration. I am an only child. My father's sister, who was my aunt, had many sons and daughters. In my mother's home also I had many cousins.

Q: Didn't your parents live together in one house?

#2M: If it was arranged for either the bride or bridegroom to come and live with the family [of either the bride or bridegroom], they would live together. In my small village, individuals fall in love, but continue to live in their own homes. So I was born in such a situation.

Q: You said between the age of 12-13 you were taking care of the animals and then what happened to you at age 13?

00:47:57

#2M: At age 13 or 14, I started to work in the fields. First one must canal water and wet the fields. Next ploughing was done and then the sowing.

Q: How many years did you do that?

#2M: Cultivation had been going on since long ago. I started working in the fields from the age of 12 or 13.

[Question is repeated]

00:48:49

#2M: I continued to do the same work until the Chinese arrived. We sowed during spring and summer and cared for the crops. Harvesting was done in autumn. That was the kind of work.

Q: Can you tell us memories of those days when you were working in the fields?

#2M: I started working in the fields at age 13 or 14. My late mother also worked in the fields. First we dug the soil and made a canal for the water, which [channeling the water] was done twice or thrice. By then the soil was very moist. After four or five days, it was time to plough. If the soil was very wet, you could not plough it. So ploughing must be done at the right time. Ploughing when the field was dry was not favorable nor was it when it was very wet. It had to be done when the soil was of the right balance.

Sowing was done during spring and within 10-15 days, the plants germinated. Then there were the tasks of weeding and watering throughout summer. One must also guard the fields from wild animals. Once the ears of the crops matured in autumn, it was time to harvest. In my village while harvesting, we wore a sort of leather glove on our hands. The plants were cut and laid separately and the ears beaten.

Q: Where do you get the water and how do you bring the water to the fields?

00:52:22

#2M: There are many mountains nearby my village. In Tibet we have snow capped mountains from where water flows down. There are also many places where water springs out.

Q: Who did the land belong to and who helped you harvest plant and the grain?

#2M: The actual owner of the land is the Tibetan Government. After the lands have been divided among the people, then you became its owner; you took care of your land and I took care of mine.

Q: What happens to the products that you grow?

00:53:45

#2M: You consumed it yourself or used it to purchase things that you required.

Q: Did all the land in Tibet belong to the Tibetan government?

#2M: Yes.

Q: Did the monastery own land as well or only the government?

00:54:24

#2M: Lands were divided and some belonged to the government, and the monasteries also had separate lands of their own. The monasteries cultivated their land and used the produce. As our monastery did not have many monks, the people helped them.

Q: The Chinese claimed that the Tibetans were serfs who worked on the land. Was this how it felt to you and your family?

#2M: Yes, that's how it was. Yes, the people were like servants. I told you earlier why we carried out [labor] taxes. By carrying out the taxes, I say that you were like a servant.

Q: Did no individual owned any land in Tibet, only the government and the monastery?

00:56:13

#2M: The real owner of the land is the Tibetan government. All the land belonged to the Tibetan government. The Tibetan government had divided and given the rights to the monasteries, the District administrations and the people.

Q: When you look back on your life as a farmer, do you feel it was a happy life or did it feel like a very difficult life or what did it feel like?

#2M: In one way it was difficult, but on the other hand, it was a very happy life. You had the freedom to do what you liked in your own country.

Q: What made you happy?

00:57:34

#2M: [Continues without waiting for question to be interpreted.] We used to complain that it was difficult carrying out the taxes, but we were happy within our hearts. There was no one to make you suffer.

Q: What made you happy about living in Tibet?

#2M: You were happy because you were living in your own country. You can call your house your own and your land your own and utilize them. We are living as guests in India, thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but this land cannot be passed on from father to son. Earlier we were living in our own country and there were no such doubts in Tibet except now under the Chinese oppression. We had the right to the land for generations. If I constructed a house, it could be passed on to my son and his son and so on.

Q: So in Tibet did the father pass on his home and land to his children?

00:59:18

#2M: Yes. It was similar in the case of taxes, too. Whatever taxes the father paid, the son had to do the same.

Q: How many generations of your family lived on that land?

#2M: [Shakes his head] I will not be able to count the number of generations. I do not know. It must be more than thousands of years considering the age of the monastery. We could see the old monastery close to the hill. It is more than a thousand years since the formation of the present monastery. It is more than a thousand years, but I do not know more. At that time the lama who built our monastery was called Jangchup.

Q: Can you please tell us something about when you were growing up you lived just with your mother and your father lived with another wife and a family? Can you explain that?

01:01:08

#2M: No, no. My father did not have another wife. My mother was a servant to another family. They met each other very late in their lives. I was born when my mother was 40 years old and my father 50.

Q: Was it not possible for your father to marry your mother?

#2M: They could not because they had different tax services to render. The custom in my region was such that if it was a daughter, she went to [live at] the mother's home and a son to the father's. My mother took care of me until I was 7 years old. From the age of 8, I came to live with my father.

Q: How did the village accept your relationship with your mother and father? Was it acceptable that you lived separately?

01:03:09

#2M: People did not think badly [of the relationship]. I have not seen but heard that there are people who come between a couple, which is bad. My father did not have another wife or other children. My mother also did not have another husband.

Q: If your mother worked as a servant, what kind of family was that in such a small village that would have servants?

#2M: The [head of the] family was known as Manam Jola. There's the Manam Yul, Manam Jola and Manam Dakla. In the central Tibetan dialect they say Chuyul and Junglu. In our region we say Ladhe and Dakla.

Q: What is Dakla?

01:04:37

#2M: That is the name of the family; Manam Dakla. My father's family was Ladhe. The village was called Manam Chusar.

Q: What was the difference between living with your mother and father?

#2M: That was a tradition that was there since long ago—the son living with the father and daughter with the mother. My mother cared for me when I was very young because I had to be breastfed. A father's tax was passed on to his son and the mother's to the daughter.

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' you said you wanted to talk about how your life changed with the Chinese. Can you tell us when did you first notice the Chinese in your village?

01:06:21

#2M: When I was about 18 or 19 years old, the Chinese had come not to my village, but I heard that they had come to the next village called Ngari Ga. The Chinese came to my village when I was about 19 or 20 but they did not stay there. They stayed the summer in Dawa (District headquarter) and left in the winter. Many of them had settled at Ngari Ga.

Q: When they came to your village what did they look like? What were they driving or carrying? How did they get there?

#2M: They were dressed in the Chinese military uniform. The officials wore blue and the soldiers were in yellow. At that time they lied to us. The soldiers were called *Mesay Dolma*.

Q: What does *Mesay Dolma* mean?

01:08:00

#2M: That is the Chinese word for soldiers. We would call them *makmi* 'soldiers' in Tibetan and they called them *Mesay Dolma*. They arrived riding on horses and mules. We went to help transport their provisions to Dawa for which they paid us well. At that time they paid us. The currency was *dhayen* 'silver coins' and they paid us two or three *dhayen*.

Q: What was the understanding of yourself and the other villagers about why was the Chinese coming to your village?

#2M: They came to Ngari Ga and from there to Thoeling. There is a large river at Thoeling and a bridge over it. The only way to get across was through this bridge. From there they had to get to Dawa and our village was on the way. So we had to render tax service by bringing them to Dawa and we did that.

Q: What did the people feel when they saw these Chinese for the first time? What did they think? What did they feel?

01:10:10

#2M: People said, "They are the Chinese. The Chinese have come. The Chinese have come." But I do not know what they felt in their hearts.

We just watched them arrive but did not say anything and neither did they, as they went their way. They had an interpreter who spoke. They did not say anything.

We went to a house which was rented to the Chinese and saw them cook their food. They had brought huge utensils with them and cooked together. Each one served himself and started eating. We looked at the strange way they ate. They ate out of each others' plate and did not seem to practice cleanliness. We spoke among ourselves saying, "The Chinese are doing such things." Each one came, served himself and went about his way.

Q: When is the next time you saw the Chinese?

#2M: It was at Shangtse. I think it was in the winter of the year 1956 or '57 that they [the Chinese] established the committee called "*U-yon* Tari Lekhang" at Shangtse. Then the members of Dawa District, Tsapra District, Thoeling Monastery, the heads of the families and villagers were assembled there for propaganda lessons.

Q: That was not your village, Shangtse?

01:12:46

#2M: Shangtse was situated two days' journey by horse from my village.

Q: Did the people from your village have to go?

#2M: I did not have to go. Someone from my village went. The headman of the village went there. And two or three people from Dawa District.

Q: When did your life begin to change and how did it change because of the Chinese?

01:13:30

#2M: The change happened in 1959 when Tibet was defeated. The *Monlam* 'religious festival' was to be held at Thoeling Monastery. However in '59, all the monks of Thoeling Monastery fled. They were the first to flee. Those from Thoeling Monastery fled in 1959. Then we said, "They have fled. What shall we do?"

At that time they [the Chinese] spoke very sweetly, "From now on, you have your own freedom. Whatever land and house you own are yours. From now you do not have to pay tax or repay your loans." To the monastery they said, "You have the right to practice your religion. If you wish to offer a hundred or a thousand butter lamps, we shall not say anything but neither can you order someone to do so." That's what they said.

Q: What did you think when you heard this kind of change and invitation from the Chinese? What did you think about that?

#2M: When we heard that, we discussed among ourselves and thought, "It's good if they do not cause us suffering. If we can practice our religion at the monastery, we can remain here and pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is better if we do not have to leave." That's what we thought and discussed with our family and others.

Q: And then what happened?

01:16:08

#2M: My colleague Lobsang Yeshe, who is presently in Camp Number 4 [Mundgod, India], and I discussed, "If the Chinese cause us trouble we should flee and if they do not, let's remain." We lived just a mountain pass away. If we crossed the snow covered mountain pass, we were in India. Two days and you were in India. Then in 1960, they began the "Revolution of Democracy."

The reformation happened like this—I told you about the animals that belonged to the Monastery, which were taken care of by the people who were obliged to pay a small number [of animals] back—these animals of the monastery were given to the herders saying, "These are for your livelihood. You must give back a small number. What percentage do you want to return?" Later I think they [the Chinese] took back 5 or 6 percent, which they gave to the very poor who did not own any animals. That was the so called Revolution of Democracy that they carried out.

Q: How did the people feel about this kind of distribution?

#2M: I do not know. They [the Chinese] said that revolution of democracy would be implemented and that was what we thought it was. They distributed the whole agricultural land among the farmers. They classified [the community] into two divisions, a farmers' division, which was further sub-divided into wealthy farmers, medium farmers and poor farmers. They took from the wealthy farmers to give to the poor farmers while the medium farmers were left untouched. The medium farmers did not give nor receive. That was what they did.

Q: What group were you in?

01:20:03

#2M: I was among the poor group.

Q: You had such a small village of only nine families. How many of the families were in the rich category, how many in medium and how many in poor?

#2M: Among the rich was a monk of the monastery. He was the richest and was given the title *Ngadhak Letsab* 'substitute leader.' The family of Jola that my mother worked for was grouped in the medium category. Three families were in the medium farmers' category. Five families were identified as poor. The wealthy one was told, "You have to give up your animals and sell them and the Chinese Government will pay you." Later he [the wealthy monk] gave up two horses and two yaks. Those were divided among the poor with two people sharing a horse or a yak. That was what they [the Chinese] said was the so-called reformation.

Q: When the poor families received these yaks and horses, what was their reaction? What was your reaction?

01:22:40

#2M: What can we think? [Smiles] My neighbor and I were given a horse. Earlier we were poor and under tax obligation and I felt that they [the Chinese] were helping us by implementing the Revolution of Democracy.

Q: It sounds like you liked the Revolution of Democracy?

#2M: Yes, I felt happy then and thus stayed back for six years. Tibet was defeated in '59. However, we did not hear about the defeat of Lhasa until the winter of '60. They [the Chinese] spoke about it when they came to our village to implement the Revolution of Democracy that winter.

Q: How did you find out that Lhasa was lost?

01:23:54

#2M: We heard that Tibet was lost to the Chinese and that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left for India. We heard that much later. The monks of Thoeling Monastery had fled by the third month or spring of '59. Then in the summer the people belonging to Thoeling had fled. We wondered where they had taken flight and then finally we heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left for India and that Tibet was defeated.

Q: What meaning did it have to you that Lhasa was lost and His Holiness had left? What did it mean about this revolution?

#2M: I told you about my discussion with the man [colleague, Lobsang Yeshe]. If they [the Chinese] left us alone, that was good. Unlike here, in Tibet we could never have a glimpse of His Holiness. There was no way we could go to Lhasa. From my village of Thoe Ngari to Lhasa, the journey took three months on horse and yak. It took three months to go and three months to return. We could not travel that far and there was no way to see [His Holiness]. There was no other way but to pray to him.

Even if we went to India, we had no knowledge if we would have the chance to see His Holiness. At that time we did not believe it [the chance to see His Holiness]. We stayed back and prayed at the monastery. They [the Chinese] had told us that we could practice religion but not force others to do so.

Q: Did anything change between you and the rich family or the medium families? Did any attitude change? Were the Chinese there? What was going on?

01:27:28

#2M: Initially there was no change. Everything was good. There was a wealthy monk who later became blind and whose servants were fired. He was forced to stay alone. Nobody was allowed to meet him. He was made to plant saplings and water them. We, the common people, were allowed to interact with each other and work together. We could not meet the *Ngadhak Letsab*.

Q: Were there Chinese watching that you did not talk to this rich monk?

#2M: Yes, they were watching. Among the poor people, some were given leadership posts and they were alerted by them [the Chinese to report to them]. There was a lot of suspicion. While working in the fields, we [the common people and the wealthy monk] did meet but they [the Chinese] did not say anything. They were just suspicious.

Q: You were still in your village from 1960 to '66. How did your life change in those six years?

01:30:12

#2M: The change was terrible. For about four or five years, from 1960 to about 1965, we continued to do our own work and they [the Chinese] did not interfere at all. We cut trees in the winter and raised our crops in summer and they did not say a thing to us. We harvested our crops and used the products from our animals. I felt we were somewhat happy. Then in the first lunar month or February of 1966, they called us for a meeting. They gathered the poor for a meeting and kept them for six to seven days giving them [propaganda] lessons. Then the destruction of monasteries began. That was in the year 1966.

Q: And then what happened?

#2M: We were told that the people of the village must bring down the local monastery. We held a meeting and did not do so, but requested for a postponement of a week or two, which was granted. Then when we did not destroy [the monastery], around nine people from two different villages near Thoeling Monastery arrived. These poor people had been instructed.

At that time a few of us went and stayed at the nomadic camp. Twice messengers came asking us to return and that Chinese officials had arrived. We knew it was to destroy the monastery and were trying to avoid it. We refused to go back twice giving the excuse that we had lost our yaks or *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow' or some mishap had occurred. Later when we came back, the monastery was already demolished.

From the nine people that had arrived, seven were common Tibetans, one was a Chinese interpreter and the other a Chinese. He [the interpreter] said that he was there to watch and hear but did not have any say in the matter.

Q: Was the monastery destroyed when you came back from the nomadic camp?

01:34:17

#2M: Yes, it was. We reached there three days after the destruction. There was smoke in the foreground of the monastery. The smoke did not clear even four or five days later. All the idols, prayer flags, *thanka* 'painted scrolls' and scriptures that were in the monastery were set on fire.

Q: What was the reaction of yourself...

#2M: [Continues] A meeting was held the night we returned. There was a woman named Ngawang Lhamo from Tsaprang Village who berated us, "We have demolished your monastery. What can you do about it? Come and do it to us. It is the monastery that was oppressing us. I know it used to be said that because of the protective deity of Manam, if anybody harmed the monastery, he would vomit blood and die. Look, I am not dead." We had nothing to tell her as we could not fight with her. We kept quiet. The next day we went to the monastery and picked up the broken idols and removed the...

Q: What did the people in your village think and feel when they heard this statement?

01:37:26

#2M: There was nothing for the people to do but to cry. I heard that some older women, who were in the village when the monastery was being destroyed, tried to run away but were brought back. Most of the people of the village were crying.

Q: The old women from where were trying to flee away?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...of the village where the monastery was being destroyed.

#2M: I was not there, but I heard that one old woman fled two to three kilometers away. Her son went and brought her back.

Q: Why do you think the people from the other village came and agreed to destroy your monastery?

01:39:00

#2M: They were sent by the Chinese as we [the villages] were considered to be in the same locality. The areas were regrouped and called *shang*, like Dawa Shang, Dhongpo Shang, etc. Since Thoeling and Tsaprang had few families, three villages were grouped as one *shang*. So these people came as we belonged to the same *shang*.

Q: Do you think that they were pressured or threatened by the Chinese to destroy the monasteries?

#2M: First they [the Chinese] gave them lessons that they must dismantle and destroy [the monasteries]. They were instructed to and that was why they came. Earlier they were very poor and now they were given power.

Q: Can you describe your monastery; was it very large or small? What kind of objects were inside the monastery?

01:41:25

#2M: The monastery was fairly large. It was larger than this hall [where the interview is taking place]. There were two prayer halls; one was larger than this hall and the other was about this size. Besides that there were three or four quarters for the monks, which were double storied.

Q: How many monks were in this monastery?

#2M: At the time of the Revolution of Democracy, there were six or seven monks. Later some left monkhood and some died. Then there were two left. When the Chinese arrived most of the monks were there.

Q: Six to seven monks in a large monastery?

01:42:53

#2M: There were not many monks. In order to hold a large congregation of monks, offerings did not arrive everyday. The offerings received were only at times. The monks had to work at cultivating their farm.

Q: What happens next? After the monastery is destroyed, the people are crying; they are very sad. And then what happens to the village next?

#2M: The monastery was destroyed in the first month. For about three to four months after that, we lived our usual life, cultivating our lands. We fled in the fifth month.

We farmed our land as we normally did to give the impression that we were staying back. Then one night in the fifth month, we made our escape.

Q: And about how many people left with you?

01:44:34

#2M: Together with us were around 56 people. We were about 52 or 53 including the children.

Q: What was behind the decision to leave because now you had the animals which were given to the poor—you had your own life. You could still live your life. Why did you decide to leave?

#2M: We were around 50 odd people when we made our escape, while 30 odd stayed back. The reason why we fled was because now we were left with nothing to hold onto. There was nowhere to prostrate and pray. We were not permitted to practice our religion. So we could not remain under them [the Chinese]. We also heard that it was possible to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama [in India]. That's why we fled.

Q: Why did you not live under the Chinese?

01:46:22

#2M: They became worse. First they said that we were free to practice our religion and that we should protect the monastery. Later they said we must destroy it! Why should we remain under them?

Q: Initially they told you that there was going to be freedom of religion and that changed?

#2M: They later took away the freedom of religion. We no longer had faith in them.

Q: Was anyone arrested by the Chinese or taken into prison by the Chinese in your village?

01:47:26

#2M: No, that did not happen. The wealthy monk whom I told you about was interrogated. Since he was questioned individually, I do not know what they asked him. The monk later committed suicide by jumping off a cliff. I have no knowledge whether they [the Chinese] made life difficult for him. Nobody was allowed to interact with him. He committed suicide by jumping off a cliff.

Q: What did the people think when they heard that he committed suicide?

#2M: I wonder what they thought. Some of us went in search of him. He was home the previous evening. The Chinese had told us that we were to start sowing the next day and that the *Ngadhak Letsab* [the wealthy monk] would provide us the seeds. We were to claim virgin land and cultivate them. When we went to collect the seeds, he was not there.

That day we went in search of him along with two Chinese officials and a female interpreter. A few of us went to search while the rest engaged in sowing. Four or five people searched the whole day. Towards evening we found that he had jumped off the cliff.

Q: I want to ask you just briefly what your journey was like when you left with the 52 people. What was the journey like?

01:50:07

#2M: It was not bad on the journey. There was a lot of snow then and for about three days we traveled in the snow. Many of our yaks and sheep died. We handed over the rest of the animals to the Indian soldiers. From the border, the Indian soldiers escorted us up to...

Q: I understand that you returned to Tibet in 1986. Can you tell me what was that experience like to go back?

#2M: Then it was about 20 years since I came here [to India]. A few people from my village in Tibet came here. That was during the *Kalachakra* [religious initiation by His Holiness the Dalai Lama] in Bodh Gaya [Bihar, India] when two or three people from my village arrived. They told me that my relatives were alive. So I went to visit my relatives.

Q: What did you see? What was the same and what was different about your village?

01:51:58

#2M: Many things were changed. What used to be there earlier, was not there anymore but new construction had been made.

Q: What did you feel in your heart when you saw these changes?

#2M: The situation of those living there was not too bad. I thought they were somewhat happy.

Q: I want to thank you for sharing your story with us...

01:52:53

#2M: [Continues] What is really sad is that they [the Tibetans living in Tibet] do not have religion. They do not know even to recite the '*mani*' mantra [of Avalokiteshvara]. An elder female cousin of mine had five sons and three daughters of whom the oldest is here. The two younger daughters and the five sons are left behind in Tibet. Now the elder sister is dead and also one of the sons. I was able to meet the rest.

Q: What advice would you like to give the next generation of Tibetan children?

#2M: What advice can I, a person who does not have much intelligence and poor memory give? Besides, these days my speech is slurred and my hearing is bad. My memory is poor and I am not in a position to give much advice. However, one must strive hard as in the past our country was such and such [independent].

The Chinese oppressed us and we had to come to a foreign land. Here, thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama we are happy but one's country is precious. That is what I would say. Do not forget your culture and your language. One's country has a culture, be it songs, attire, language and most importantly, religion. One should not lose one's culture.

Q: What is it about the religion of Tibet that you think is so important for the children to know?

01:55:34

#2M: The Buddhist dharma is important for both this life and the next. The lamas teach us about its importance. I would not be able to say much. The lamas and in particular His Holiness the Dalai Lama teach us from the scriptures and it is important to listen to them. Now-a-days everyone is literate and they must read and learn from the scriptures. It is useless to just glance over the scriptures; one must think over it.

Q: We are now completing our interview. How was it for you to share this story of your life with us? How was that experience?

#2M: It has been good. Now through your work, our stories will live from generation to generation. I might live for a year or two, but of course, every generation must pass away. However, your work is very beneficial for us and I would like to thank you.

You need have no doubt on the story I told you. You can broadcast it or show it in Tibet or India or anywhere. I am certain of my story. It is the truth and there is no untruth in it nor was it something I heard. I have told you what I saw with my eyes. Other than that I have nothing much to say.

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

01:58:07

#2M: No, there will be no problem.

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

#2M: No, there is no need to change. You can use my name. The name of the local monastery was called Manam Jangchupling.

Q: Thank you so much.

01:58:40

#2M: Thank you. You have taken so much trouble to come here for the cause of Tibet, which will be beneficial for Tibetans for generations. I thank you for that.

Q: It is our pleasure and honor.

[Interpreter presents an envelope and picture of Buddha which the interviewee places on his head in reverence.]

END OF INTERVIEW