

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #35N – Tsering Kyima
April 13, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #35N
2. Interviewee: Tsering Kyima
3. Age: 83
4. Date of Birth: 1932
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Jang Namtso
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 13, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Tashiling Tibetan Refugee Settlement, Chhorepatan, Pokhara, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 12 min
12. Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway
13. Interpreter: Palden Tsering
14. Videographer: Henry Tenenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tsering Kyima hails from Utsang Province and is the eldest of four children. Her father, a former monk, spent his time reading scriptures for the family and others. Since the age of 6 Tsering Kyima grazed yaks and sheep in the mountains. She left each morning and returned at 5 o'clock each evening for dinner. She also helped her mother to milk the animals. She expresses her love for the animals and the sadness for not seeing them after escaping from the Chinese into Nepal.

Tsering Kyima explains how people in her region lived in *ba* 'tents made from yak hair' rather than houses. Six people lived in her family's *ba*, which had space for storing grains and milk and a mud stove for the fire. She also talks about another type of tent that the nomads take with them when they moved in search of fresh grasslands while the *ba* remained the permanent home.

After returning home one evening from grazing the animals Tsering Kyima learned that the Chinese had reached the other side of the mountain pass and it would be dangerous for the nomads to remain. She describes the panic and helplessness among the people and animals when Chinese horsemen began to fire at them with cannons and machine guns. She attempted to save the frightened cattle but had to abandon all the animals only to save her own life as the Chinese got closer. She and many others lost all the belongings they had hastily saddled onto yaks during the escape. She suffered thirst and hunger through the long, arduous journey to Nepal.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, nomadic life, escape experiences.

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Interview #35N

Interviewee: Tsering Kyima

Age: 83, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway

Interview Date: April 13, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:08

Interviewee #35N: [My] name is Tsingkyi, Tsering Kyima. [You] can write it down as Tsingkyi.

Q: Thank you. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has 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 permission for the Tibet Oral History Project for which we're working to use this interview?

#35N: [Nods]

Q: Thank you. During the interview if you need to go...if you need to take a break or stop at any time, please let us know.

#35N: Okay.

Q: If there's anything that you do not want to talk about or if there's a question you do not wish to answer, please let us know.

#35: Okay.

Q: If your interview were to be shown in Tibet or China, would there be a problem for you or your family?

00:02:13

#35N: There will be no problems, right? There will be no problems as I am old. Now it is difficult for me to set eyes on Tibet. One might face problems if one goes to Tibet but it is difficult for [me] to go to Tibet because I am old. It is difficult to go to Tibet.

Q: At the end of the interview I'll come back and ask you a couple of questions that I just asked you but we'll continue now to talk about your life as a child in Tibet.

#35N: Okay.

Q: So before we talk about your life in Tibet I just wanted to ask, are you one of the weavers of these beautiful rugs?

#35N: I have never woven rugs. [I] have not woven rugs because I used to spin wool and prepare tea at 10 in the morning and 3 in the evening for the office staff upstairs for 30-odd years. In the morning [I] dusted and cleaned the office and then spun wool. [I] did such duties.

Q: So you spun the wool with a spinning stick?

#35N: First the wool has to be combed and then spun like it is being done here. I did that but did not weave rugs.

00:04:51

[I] have pain in the knees. For 30-odd years I climbed the stairs to prepare tea for the office staff but now I have pain in the knees. So I resigned from the office.

Q: How long have you lived in the settlement camp?

#35N: It has been around 52 years since [I] came to the camp here. Last year we celebrated the 50th anniversary. It must have been 52 or 53 years. I came here as a 27-year old. Now [I] am this old.

Q: How long did you say you've lived in the camp? So 50 years? Over 50 years? Thank you. Let's go back to when you lived in Tibet. When you were married...I mean when you were 27, did you have a husband and children?

#35N: [I] was sort of married to [my] son's father but we did not live together under one roof. However, [we] were like a married couple and then I became pregnant. I was not married while in Tibet.

Q: It happened after coming here?

00:06:41

#35N: I met the child's father after coming here, after coming to Pokhara. I was never married in Tibet.

Q: You said earlier that you would like to share your early years in Tibet. What are some of those experiences you'd like to share?

#35N: While [I] lived in Tibet as a little child, there were no schools like there are here. From daybreak one passed time grazing animals as I mentioned earlier. One cleaned the snot like this [moves right hand across nose] and did not know to clean it the other way at the age of 5, 6 or 7. Yet one went along with adults to graze animals. While grazing animals

one did not know how to clean the snot and it dried here [points to cheek] and burned here [gestures off camera]. In this way I continued to herd animals until bad times happened.

My parents had four children. I was the eldest among the four children. I engaged in herding animals, grazing animals until bad times happened. When bad times happened [I] was chased here and there and got separated from the parents. After being separated from the parents, I came along with a paternal uncle. When [I] became separated from the parents, all the siblings got separated as well. [I] came with a paternal uncle and moved here and there hoping to meet father and mother but did not. [I] never met the parents and do not know what happened. Everybody came fleeing. There were nomads and people from Kham. Everybody was on flight but none came from my region and I was alone.

Q: There are a lot of very interesting things that you have just mentioned and I'd like to talk with you about each one separately. I hope that's okay.

00:10:18

#35N: It is okay.

Q: Thank you. You were the eldest child of four, is that correct?

#35N: Yes, I am the eldest.

Q: I imagine as the eldest child you might have some special responsibilities. What did you have to do as the eldest child?

#35N: The responsibility was grazing animals, herding yaks and sheep and then in the mornings and evenings, helping mother by churning milk. There was a lot of milk in Tibet. So [I] helped churn milk. After daybreak it was just herding animals. [I] was with the animals from morning when they were let out until they returned in the evening. That was the regular duty.

Mother used to say, "When my daughter gets married one day, the [new] family will not like it. She does not know any household duties being out in the mountains all the time." My kind mother used to worry so. From a young age [I] was always out with the animals and except in the mornings and evenings, I never did any household duties. [I] was with the animals and spun wool at the same time. [My] work was herding sheep and yaks.

Q: Did you enjoy looking after the animals?

00:12:52

#35N: [I] liked it very much. I am now old and near death and feel pain in the heart that I have not been able to see the animals. [I] herded animals as a little child and now nearing death [I] have this pain in the heart that [I] have not been able to see the animals.

When I sleep at night, I...

Q: So you miss your animals?

#35N: I feel sad that [I] cannot see the animals now.

Q: How far away...how long did you have to walk to get to the grasslands?

#35N: One must go up on top of the mountains. My hometown is very far away. It took a year to reach Dolpa Tarab during our escape journey.

Q: A year?

#35N: Yes, a year as [we] were driving animals. In the second lunar month, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa left for India.

Q: That isn't the question...

#35N: [We] were driving animals. [We] came driving animals. The yaks were loaded and [we] came driving the animals. [We] encountered the Chinese today, encountered the Chinese the next day, continued to encounter the Chinese and we tried to flee. It took a year to reach Dolpa Tarab.

Q: To reach Nepal?

00:14:49

#35N: Yes, it took a year. It took a year, and at Dolpa Tarab we stayed at the place, which belonged to the Bapa group...[not discernible] and spent the summer there. It was a nice place and there was good grass for the animals. The Chinese had taken away everything and we arrived at Dolpa Tarab with absolutely nothing. Now [we] went begging; one was forced to for *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.'

Q: I'd very much like to come back to this and talk about when you came to Nepal. Let's talk a little bit more about your experiences herding the animals. When you went to herd the animals did you leave home for many, many days or did you go to the grassland and come back from, you know, in one day?

#35N: The animals left for the mountains in the morning and returned home at 5 o'clock in the evening. The animals returned home at 5 o'clock and then I ate at home in the night, tethered the cattle, did what was needed for the sheep and ate. In the morning the animals left for the mountains at 4 or 5 o'clock. [I] had food and left with them for the mountains. One went to the mountaintops but did not spend the night there. [We] returned in the evening and left in the morning.

Q: Did you go with anybody else on the grassland or were you completely on your own?

00:17:49

#35N: I would go alone and sometimes meet other people, other herders. I would go alone with my yaks and sheep and during the day there are many others and [I] would meet them. [We] spent the day together and in the evening one must return home. You do meet other herders but you went alone.

Q: How old were you when you first got to do this?

#35N: [I] could not have been that old then, perhaps 7 or 8 years old. There is the one called wolf in the northern plains that eat sheep. At that time [I] could not differentiate between a dog and a wolf. One day my mother's younger sibling and I were watching the sheep. Maternal aunt said, "The sheep are moving towards the pass. Go and bring them back else the wolves will eat them." "Okay," [I] said.

One could sprint as a child. [I] rushed towards the pass that was not very steep. The startled sheep came running. I looked at the top of the pass. A red dog was eating a sheep. It was not a dog but a wolf! [I] shouted to maternal aunt, "Maternal aunt, a dog is eating a sheep, eating a sheep." The sheep's intestines were out though it was not dead. Maternal aunt said, "What dog? This is a wolf!" [I] did not know a sheep from a wolf then.

Q: So when you saw this wolf attacking the sheep, what did you do?

00:20:53

#35N: [I] screamed, "A dog is eating a sheep!" A red dog was eating the sheep dragging the intestines at a distance. The sheep was looking up with bright eyes with its intestines being dragged at a distance. "Maternal aunt, a dog is eating a sheep!" [I] screamed. "What dog? It is a wolf." [Maternal aunt] said that it was a wolf. Only then did [I] realize that the reddish [animal] was a wolf. I was small and could not distinguish between a dog and a wolf. [I] might have been 6 or 7 then, not more than that.

[I] did not know how to wipe [my] nose and did like this [moves back of right hand across nose] and all this part [points to back of hand] became cracked and the cheek [indicates right cheek] as well. These days thanks to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama the children have a good time. In Tibet there was not anyone that taught or a school for the young and when one became a little older, [he/she] looked after animals. Looking after animals was the duty of the young ones. These days due to the benevolence of the Buddha [Dalai Lama], it is nice.

Q: Yes, I can see. When you say that at that tender age you didn't even know how to wipe your nose, if you had a cold what would you do?

00:23:35

#35N: In case of a cold there were no medicines but the land is very good. You cough and spit out the phlegm, cough and spit out the phlegm. In a bowl of water you dropped nine pieces of brightly lit fire [coal]. It made a hissing sound and then the water is left for around 15 minutes under the bright shining stars in the night. Then you drink the water

along with the ash. The ash is applied here [points to neck] and then the cough gets better in the morning and the cold is cured. There were no medicines for cold in Tibet.

Q: What did your family do for a living...

#35N: What work [we] do?

Q: ...at the time [you] were in the hometown?

#35N: While in the hometown, it seems my father was a monk when younger and engaged in reading prayers, reading the scriptures. Mother milked the animals and made milk products. Mother did this kind of work. It seems father used to be some sort of a monk and then left monkhood. [He] was occupied in reading prayers. Then there were mother's siblings, my maternal uncles. In Tibet nobody brought provisions to your doorstep and you had to load the yaks with butter, cheese and sheep wool to trade at a distance of around two months and acquired *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' There was plenty of meat—[recites prayer] *om mani padme hum* 'hail the jewel in the lotus'—from the animals. That was the kind of work in Tibet but now...

Q: The trader was your maternal uncle?

#35N: Yes, the maternal uncle did this. It seems father left monkhood earlier and was engaged in reading prayers, reading prayers at home and for others and did not engage in trade.

Q: So was your family a nomadic family or did it stay in one place?

00:27:30

#35N: To be called Khampa [people from Kham Province], [we] were a little bit like the nomads but compared to the nomads of Thoe, [we] were a little bit like the Khampa. Our hometown is...Thoe is quite close from here and can be reached in four, five, six or seven days. The Thoe area is close by. My mother's hometown is very far. During the escape journey I came driving the yaks, resting for a day or two where there was good grass and leaving behind the weak animals. So it took a while. If one were to go directly from here through Lhasa it takes around 12 days in a vehicle. My hometown is that far.

Q: That isn't the question. Were your family members nomads or...?

#35N: Nomads. One can call [us] nomad. One can call [us] nomad but [we] were not like the real nomads, sort of in the middle. [We] were not totally like the Khampa, not like the Khampa that live in the lower regions. However, compared to the Thoe region people, [we] were a little bit like the Khampa.

Q: So did you have a home, a house? Did you have a tent that you took around with you?

00:29:47

#35N: It was a tent, a tent. [We] did not have a house; it was a tent.

Q: How often in the year did you move everything, your tent and your household goods to another place?

#35N: If there was not grass for the animals, one must go on *chuprang*, move to another place where there was good grass. There was the *ba* ‘tent made from yak hair’ that remained [our] permanent home. While going on *chuprang* when there was no grass for the animals, one took another tent. There were other tents as well. The *ba* remained permanent where it had been pitched.

Q: So when you took the temporary tents, did somebody stay with your main tent?

#35N: Who stayed there when [we] went on *chuprang*?

Q: When [you] went on *chuprang*...

#35N: When [we] went on *chuprang* there were many members at home. The parents stayed home while many others like servants, daughters, *nama* ‘daughters-in-law/sisters-in-law’ and such went on *chuprang*. The parents stayed home permanently. The actual home did not move. In the Changthang ‘Northern Plateau,’ food...here they become stale in a month or two, but in the Changthang region, sacks of grains were stacked in huge black *ba* that did not become bad for years. The home remained where it was pitched. In a family there would be many servants, maids, *nama* and daughters that went on *chuprang*.

Q: The permanent tent is called...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Ba*

Q: ...*ba* and the temporary one is called the *chuprang*?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Chuprang*

Q: *Chuprang*, *chuprang*...and your parents stayed with the *ba*. How big was the *ba*? About how big was the *ba*?

00:33:47

#35N: There are *ba* of various sizes, big ones and small ones. There are some huge ones too. A material is required to make a *ba*. The material is solely yaks’ hair. Yak hair is spun and woven. A *ba* is created once in two years. Some have extremely huge *ba* while some are small. Just as there are big and small houses, so is it with *ba*. There are some extremely wealthy families that have a *ba* with four columns like the size of this building while poor families have small ones. There are various sizes.

Q: When you look at this big hall, how many of your *ba* would fit into it?

[Interpreter interprets as: As you look around, it's a big one. How many people could your family's *ba* accommodate?]

#35N: In my home were father, mother and four siblings that include my two brothers and two sisters. So that is six including the parents. The *ba* was not very large. My family was not an extremely rich one nor did [we] have to rely on other people or was very poor. The *ba* was not very large.

Q: How many people lived in your *ba*?

00:36:15

#35N: There was space for stocking grains and various kinds of stuff and sleeping and sitting areas for the six family members. Here one has [separate] kitchens and many such but it was not so in Tibet. There were no [separate] kitchens. In a wealthy family, a person at one corner cannot hear when spoken to from another corner. Such was the huge size of the *ba*. A mud stove is created in which fire burns strongly. In our family...even the wealthy do not have a [separate] kitchen in Tibet. Here one has a kitchen, a TV room and many such. [We] did not have such in Tibet. However, my family had enough space. There was a sleeping area, a sitting area, enough for everyone. [We] were not amazingly rich.

Q: Did everyone sleep in the *ba*, cook in the *ba* and store your grain and your salt?

#35N: Yes, [everything] in one.

Q: Tell us all that would go into your *ba*. What else would go into your *ba*? You've got the grain, you've got the cooking area, you got the sleeping area, what else?

00:38:39

#35N: [We] cooked and kept the belongings inside. Since [we] produced milk, there was a large quantity of milk inside and [we] engaged in doing such work. There was not anything much to do at home. There was a lot of work for the women during summertime. The work outside entailed milking the animals, then coming home and churning the curd and making whey. The cheese was left to dry there. These were women's responsibilities.

Q: What other belongings did [you] keep inside?

#35N: [Laughs] There were not many things like here in Tibet.

Let me say something.

Q: And did you do...?

#35N: The wealthy, those families that were incredibly wealthy possessed carved tables like the ones on sale in Nepal. There were cushions, and carpets laid upon the cushions and

elaborate cups. The inside of a wealthy family's [ba] was incomparable while those in the lower class did not have much.

Q: Did your family have any furniture inside?

00:40:56

#35N: There were no tables in our home. [We] did not have grand tables to keep the cups. Since father was a dharma practitioner there was a shrine for the [gods'] pictures and to burn incense but no tables to keep cups.

The land was the best. No cleanliness and hygiene was maintained in Tibet like it is done here. After getting up in the morning, food...during winter except for snow there was not any water to be seen. Washing the face was out of question. One can wash the face during summertime. Otherwise, there was no washing the face, brushing teeth or applying creams. Yet no one became sick. There never was any kind of sickness.

There was no practice of washing dishes. One did not wash the bowls but licked it after eating food and left it there. The next day you ate from it, licked it and left it there. Nevertheless, there were no illnesses whatsoever. The water of Tibet is stronger than the food of this country. The land was so good. [I] never took any medicine. Here, one takes medicines continuously, but see the illnesses around. Hygiene is better maintained here.

Q: It sounds like you really liked your early life, your nomadic life. What did you like about it especially? You mentioned you liked the...how healthy life was there. What else did you enjoy about being in Tibet?

00:44:19

#35N: Yes?

Q: What else do you remember of life in the hometown as a child?

#35M: [I] remember that the land was good and [I] enjoyed herding the animals. Even now [I] remember how happy it used to be. However, [I] cannot remember everything due to old age.

Q: You mentioned here that you would like to talk about your escape, meeting the Chinese during and before your escape. Would you still like to tell us about that?

#35N: [I] had never seen Chinese when we went to...[not discernible]. It used to be said that times will become bad but one had no idea of it as a child. One day it was said that His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa had left for India and that we must also. The Chinese arrived gradually from the lower regions. At times [people] mentioned that there were Chinese on the other side of the mountain pass. We went to the region of the Bapa and stayed three months during summertime. Had [we] come directly to the valley we would not have lost our assets to the Chinese but we did not. The region of Bapa is very

close. It was a very beautiful place in summertime and stayed there for three months. [We] stayed for three months in this lovely place.

00:46:15

In the evening when we returned home from grazing the cattle—I had three or four neighbors—all the neighbors had folded the *ba*, the tents and packed them. I asked my companion who was a young girl called Ashi, “Ashi.” “What?” “What could the matter be? All the tents are folded and packed. What could the matter be?” “What can it be?” Then we reached home and asked, “What are you doing?” [We] were told, “The Chinese have appeared on the other side of the mountain pass. Unless we leave tomorrow morning, the Chinese are close by. The Chinese are on the other side of the pass. We have to leave early in the morning tomorrow.”

There was an open ground where a great number of groups had come. A great number of groups of people [we] did not recognize had arrived there, who had all escaped. Around midnight it was said that the Chinese had arrived. [We] had to drive the animals. The packs had to be loaded onto the animals, the yaks, but the animals were frightened and bolted to the right and bolted to the left, and [we] lost them. [I] used the slingshot, which is normally used on animals.

[I] was young and could run. [I] ran and used the slingshot. [I] ran to the right and ran to the left and managed to bring back the yaks of the 3-4 families. However, the cattle escaped towards a marsh. The cattle escaped there and [I] was forced to let them go because it was dark. [We] loaded the yaks and also all the items from the house. It was said that if [we] did not leave early the Chinese would arrive.

00:48:05

When dawn broke the next morning and I looked around, all the groups of people had left. A little ways away in the Bapa region was a valley where there were a large number of cattle, sheep and laden animals. The valley was filled with them. We were delayed. We loaded the packs on the yaks and let the others leave while my companion called Ashi and I...All the cattle had scattered in the marsh, which was full of mud. We went to drive the cattle out. [The neighbors] said, “You must drive out the cattle and do it quickly. Do not let them make any noise. [You] might encounter the Chinese near the pass and they might stop [you].” “Okay,” [we] replied.

Around 6-7 horsemen belonging to our 5-6 neighboring families fled saying, “The Chinese will be arriving from there and we want to flee. You should keep going.” They left and we two girls went towards the cattle. There were 6-7 cattle stuck in the mud with the horns sticking out. You had never seen such [things] as a young child. The animals were stuck in the mud and moved about *bak, bak* swaying the horns. The cattle were stuck in the mud, in the slush. [We] were helpless. We ran to the right and to the left of the cattle and drove them out. Then the cattle moved to the plain. Up on the pass were some people driving sheep. At a distance some horsemen galloped.

00:49:44

“Ashi,” [I] said. “What?” [she] replied. “What are those galloping horsemen?” “What could it be?” [she] said. “What could it be? This is not good. Are they not Chinese?” Among the horsemen was a white horse. The man wore something yellowish. It was moving ahead at a distance from here to that building [points finger]. Up there was a hillock where it climbed. The white horse reached there. The yellowish figure got down immediately and shots rang out. “Karmapa *khyen!*” ‘Karmapa, think [of me]’

Shots rang out *thak, thak, thak, thak*. Then rest of the horsemen appeared. Horses and men...[not discernible]. There was a lot of shooting. The Chinese have two kinds of guns. One kind is said to be a cannon and the other a machine gun. The machine gun goes *thak, thak, thak, thak*, while the cannon shots went *bak, bak, bak, bak*. All those that had left began to return. “Karmapa *khyen!*” All the people looking like dark spots came back with their sheep.

“Ashi, they are Chinese. Karmapa *khyen!* The Chinese will kill us today,” [I] exclaimed. There were the cattle and even today I feel the loss. “There is nothing we can do. We cannot drive them today. Let us leave the cattle and try to save ourselves.” “Okay,” [she] said. We left the cattle there and saw that the others were coming back. All the yaks that were laden had their saddles hanging. The cattle were frightened and bolted here and there. There was a house we managed to enter. Our horsemen had escaped and some of the people said that the Chinese would kill them. All of us entered the house. Then the gunshots subsided. My heart was pounding *dhig, dhig, dhig*. [I] could hardly walk.

00:52:24

As [I] looked back the ground was filled with cattle and sheep. There were yaks, sheep and cattle. There were many nomads in the region and all their animals were lost that day. Then [we] managed to escape from that place. [We] continued walking with only 6-7 cattle. That was it, while the rest had been lost to the Chinese. The packs were no longer on the animals because when the shots rang out the frightened yaks had dropped the loads and the saddles were hanging. They [people in the house] said, “The Chinese will kill [us]. We will not be able to escape.”

[We] managed to leave the place and the sound of gunfire receded *thak, thak, thak* and then a *bung* rang out. We walked up a slope. Our 6-7 horsemen—there were many nomads and one of their horses had bolted—had stayed atop a hill and said [they] could hear the sound of gunfire and knew the Chinese had come and they fled. [They] moved around the slope at the Bapa region and found a frightened horse. They had caught this horse and said, “If the owner of this horse is found, it has to be returned. If the owner is not found...the animal has bolted and we have found it. We heard the sound of gunfire. We have been shot at but thank GSod nothing happened to us.”

Then [we] advanced through the valley and no longer heard the sound of gunfire. I could not walk being young of age. [My] heart pounded *dhig, dhig, dhig, dhig*; the calf [muscles] stiffened and [I] could not throw out the spit from the mouth. [I] said, “Oh, I cannot walk. What do [I] do? I am not able to walk. What do [I] do?” There was a horse that...[not

discernible]. [I] was used to riding a horse. A man said, “Tsingkyi, you ride the horse that has a *chupa* ‘traditional coat/dress’ for a saddle.” “Okay,” I replied. [I] rode the horse that night. The horse had been affected by the gunshots and she kept jumping and I fell off three times.

They said, “Normally Tsingkyi rides well but poor thing, today the horse is frightened. Are you in pain?” “No,” [I] replied. Then there was a male horse that was saddled. I was asked to ride the male horse. Poor thing, it trotted slowly. We continued and around noon came upon a river. The others had pots to boil tea while we had lost everything; [we] had nothing. They prepared tea near the river. It was noontime and we drank black tea and ate *tsampa*. They had cups while [we] did not even have that. Then we drank the tea.

Q: You heard the Chinese, you heard the sound of their artillery and you were so scared that you couldn’t pack everything. So then what did you do?

00:59:15

#35N: Everybody was on flight. Those that fled managed to escape but the animals were left behind. There might have been 60-70 families all of whom were left behind. The Chinese got all of them. We managed to reach Dolpa Tarab. From then [I] have no knowledge of what happened to the other people because [we] did not get to meet. We had found a horse that belonged to someone else. Later the owner arrived who said, “I lost my horse, which has fallen into good hands. It was the day the Chinese caused much suffering. There were many people killed and many yaks killed as well. My horse has fallen into your grateful hands.” The horse was returned to the owner whom [we] met later. [He] said, “We just about managed to escape while all our belongings are lost to the Chinese.” There were some that did not flee but remained on the mountains and watched. They said that the ground was filled with yaks, sheep, pack animals, the Chinese and many of our people. The ground was filled.

We managed to escape but did not have anything to eat that whole day and night. [I] suffered a great deal. That was the day I was so thirsty. That whole day there was nothing to eat and when night fell—I was leading the male horse that I rode—darkness fell—the Chinese might come if [we] stayed there. So [we] kept moving. It was dark and the ground uneven. Then it was around 10 o’clock. There were some youth with us that said, “Tonight we will...” [We] had come close to a pass. “Let’s rest here tonight. Let’s pray to god; pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and spend the night here. Otherwise, we will become separated in the dark. If [we] make any noise the Chinese will come to know.”

Q: This was during the escape journey?

01:01:42

#35N: Yes, that is when [we] fled from the Chinese. They fired in the morning. [We] trudged the whole day and reached the top of the pass when night fell. There was nothing to eat the whole day. It was around 10 o’clock when [someone suggested], “Let’s stay here tonight. We will become separated in the darkness of the night. If [we] call out, the Chinese might come. So let’s sleep here.”

Q: Which place was this?

#35N: It was at night.

Q: It was during the journey, right?

#35N: Yes. [We] fled the whole day and it was night then, around 10 o'clock at night.

Q: Which place was this?

#35N: It was the place called Marim before reaching Dolpa Tarab. It was located atop a mountain pass.

Q: Where was it?

#35N: Marim. After journeying for a long time [we] reached Marim on top of a pass. It is a nomadic site.

Q: Was it in Nepal?

#35N: [We] had not yet reached Dolpa Tarab.

Q: Do you need to go?

#35N: What?

Q: You haven't yet reached Nepal. You were with people some of whom had seen the atrocities the Chinese committed. Then what happened?

01:04:20

#35N: [We] were not in Nepal.

Q: Then what happened?

#35N: Initially, [we] fled...

Q: ...then reached the place called Marim.

#35N: Yes, our animals were lost and [we] had reached another place. The animals were lost and taken by the Chinese. [We] escaped but had not yet reached Dolpa Tarab.

Q: Dolpa.

#35N: [We] had not yet reached the place called Dolpa Tarab. [We] were yet to reach it. We trudged that whole day.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Please wait while I interpret this.

Q: What happened then?

01:05:14

#35N: Then [we] spent the night atop the hill before reaching Dolpa Tarab. At daybreak...Everybody slept but I was dying from thirst. I asked a neighbor called Apo who was from Kham. “Apo, I am dying from thirst. What do [I] do?” “As I went about in the dark, [I] noticed a water source.” It was wintertime. “There could be water. I will take you there. Come. Come, Tsingkyi.” [I] could hardly walk from having suffered the Chinese bombardment the whole day. [My] heart was pounding *dhig, dhig, dhig, dhig*.

[I] followed him slowly in the dark. There was a water source. “There is a stream, drink from it while I cut some ice. Everybody will die from thirst. Never mind food everybody will die from thirst. I will cut some ice.” Kham people carry knives. “I will cut some ice with the knife.” He was wearing a *chupa*, which is not like what is worn here now. “I will bring some ice in the pouch while you drink.” I stooped and drank the water that was very tasty. I cleared the stones and sand and drank the water and poured some over the head. [I] drank and filled [my] stomach. “Are you done?” “Yes, I am.” “Let us go back. Come.” [We] went back slowly and reached where the others were sleeping.

Everybody was sleeping, sleeping, hungry. “Do you want to chew some ice?” “Yes, benevolent Apo. I want to chew ice. I have a headache.” Of course, everybody was hungry the whole day. “Tsingkyi, put a piece of ice on your head.” Then everybody lay down and went to sleep. I could not sleep at all. When [I] closed my eyes it felt like being stabbed and [I] was bleeding. Everybody slept. After a while once again [I] tried to sleep but my eyes burned. I could not shut [my] eyes. I could not sleep while everybody slept through the night. [I] did not know the Dolma ‘Praises to the 21 Taras’ then. So I sat up and looked around for the Chinese. The Chinese may appear in the dark. Once again [I] tried to close [my] eyes but they burned and it was impossible, the whole night.

Q: What kind of atrocities did you see the Chinese do? What did you see with your eyes?

01:09:59

#35N: That was a problem that the Chinese caused. Then we reached Dolpa Tarab. The Chinese could not come beyond Dolpa Tarab. Then [we] no more saw the Chinese and stayed at Dolpa Tarab begging for *tsampa* because [we] had nothing to eat. [Laughs] [We] begged for *tsampa* and then came over here.

Q: Thank you very much for telling us your story. Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about your life in Tibet?

#35N: [I] cannot recall anything else.

Q: Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

#35N: [Silent]

Q: If your interview...I'm asking the same question...If your interview was shown in Tibet or China, will there be a problem for you or your family?

01:11:29

#35N: There will not be. My father and mother—I am so old—have expired. I am in my 80s. So it is impossible that my parents...my relatives I never heard about them. There will be no problems, no problems whatsoever.

Q: Thank you. So can we use your real name?

#35N: Yes, you can.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW