

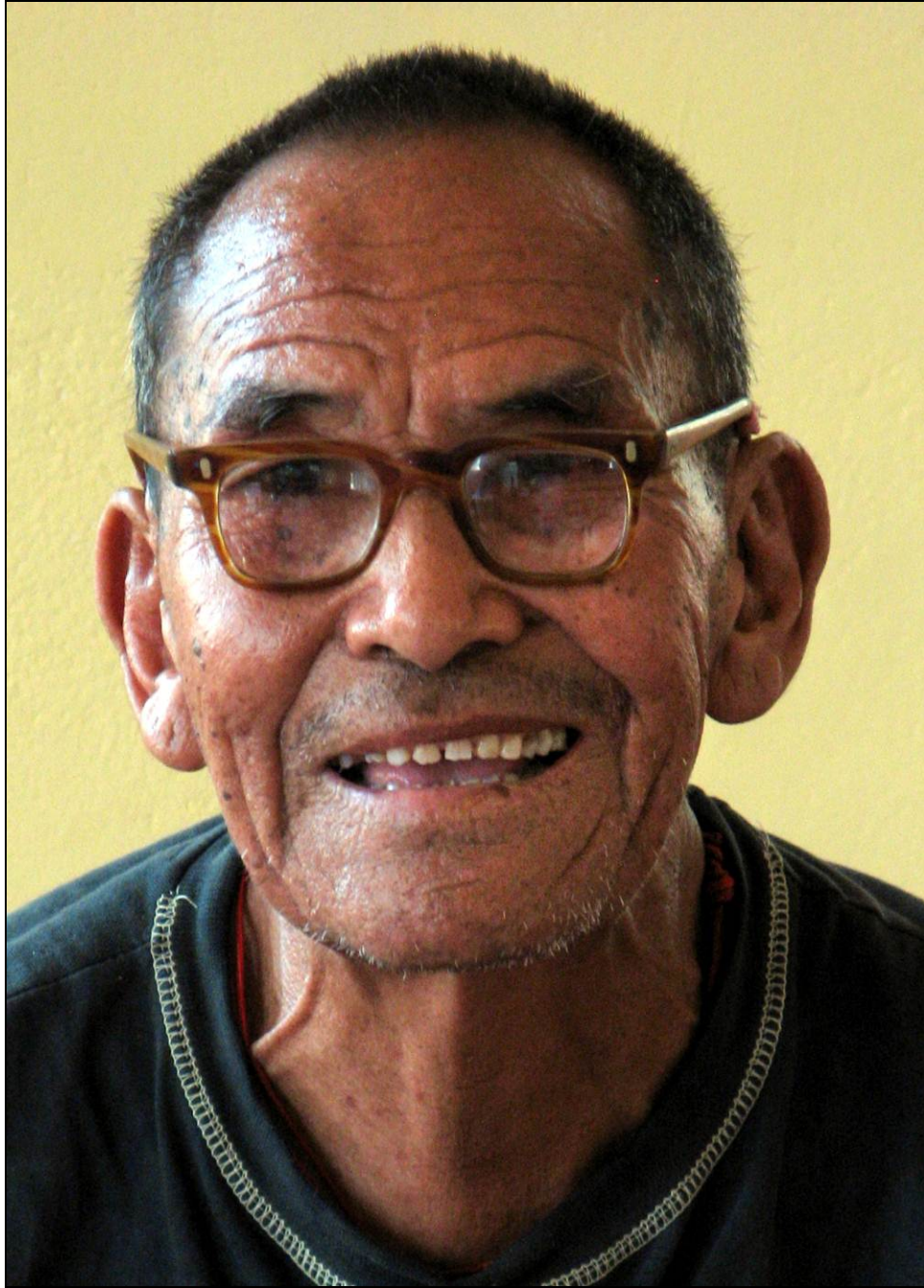
Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #3M – Migmar (alias)
April 6, 2010**

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #3M
2. Interviewee: Migmar (alias)
3. Age: 81
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Kala
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 6, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 02 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Migmar was born in a large family of 11 members. His parents died when he was very young and he was brought up by his maternal uncles. Migmar's family owned donkeys and he transported seeds and manure to towns like Phari. He tells about his life as a transporter. According to Migmar, all the land belonged to the government of Tibet. There were rich families called *trelpa* 'tax payers' from whom the poor people leased lands for cultivation. Migmar's family grew barley, but transporting goods was their main source of income.

Migmar provides a detailed account of how the Chinese divided the Tibetan society into the wealthy, the farmers and the poor and how they created animosity amongst them. The Chinese redistributed some of the wealth amongst the poor families, but kept much of the jewelry and furs for themselves. Migmar describes his concern about the new roads the Chinese began to build using Tibetans as laborers.

Migmar witnessed *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' and explains how the fathers from the wealthy families were publicly humiliated and imprisoned. Migmar's brother was secretly informed that he would be subjected to *thamzing*, and the family chose to escape to India.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, oppression under Chinese, *thamzing*, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #3M

Interviewee: Migmar [alias]

Age: 81, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 6, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:23

Interviewee #3M: My name is Migmar.

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?

#3M: Yes.

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

00:01:35

#3M: Okay.

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

#3M: Okay.

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

00:02:04

#3M: Okay.

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

#3M: It does not matter if you show it.

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

00:02:33

#3M: [Smiles] Okay.

Q: Can you please tell us where you grew up in Tibet?

#3M: Kala. It is Kala.

Q: Can you describe your village to us? How many houses, how many people?

00:03:09

#3M: There were 11 big houses [wealthy families]. They were what we call *trepa* 'tax payers' in Tibet. Besides the 11, there were 50 other houses belonging to smaller families.

Q: As we listen to your story, are there certain subjects that you want us to be sure to cover?

#3M: I told you about it the last time [during the pre-interview].

Q: Fifty small families and was your family among the small families?

00:04:32

#3M: My family was one of the economically better ones among the smaller families. I told you earlier about the *thamzing* 'struggle session' and the sufferings caused by them [the Chinese].

Q: Can you please describe what did your village look like?

#3M: Close to it was a lake and nearby were hills. There were two Kala, one in the west and the other in the east. They belonged to different *chues*.

Q: Which village did you live in?

00:05:47

#3M: West Kala.

Q: When you were born, how many people were in your family?

#3M: My parents died when I was very young. I had paternal and maternal uncles, so in all there were about 10 to 11 members in the family.

Q: When your parents died, who took care of you?

00:06:35

#3M: My parents died when I was very young and it was my maternal uncles who took care of me.

Q: Can you tell us some memories of your childhood; how your days were spent; what you enjoyed doing?

#3M: Until around the age of 5 or 6, I used to spend my days playing. Children played in the dust. In those days we did not get any education.

Q: What kind of things did you play?

00:07:39

#3M: Children played in the mud making small pots and cooking food in them. We also played in the dust. That was it.

Q: What did you make?

#3M: We made small pots from mud and cut green leaves and playfully cooked them, pretending they were vegetables.

Q: What kind of a little boy were you?

00:08:15

#3M: I was like what I am now; small in stature because my mother passed away when I was very young.

Q: What happened when you became a teenager? Did your life change when you were 12 or 13, 14?

#3M: We owned donkeys which I cared for. I transported seeds and manure on the donkeys. I was basically someone who led the donkeys.

Q: Where did you go with the donkeys?

00:09:07

#3M: I used to travel to Phari with the donkeys for transportation. *Salue* was also carried on the donkey.

Q: What's *salue*?

#3M: That's the manure we used during farming.

Q: Animal manure?

00:09:23

#3M: Yes.

Q: How many donkeys did you have?

#3M: About six.

Q: You said that in your family, even though your parents died young, there were about 20 people...10 people? Did they all live in the same house?

00:10:08

#3M: Yes, we lived together.

Q: Who were they?

#3M: My grandfather, maternal uncle and his children.

Q: What was life like in your village and in your home? What was the atmosphere in those days?

00:10:52

#3M: When one is young, they allot you a job and you have to carry it out. They tell you to do it and you have to perform the task.

Q: Who [allots the job]?

#3M: My maternal uncle and the others. They tell you that you must perform the task. We [the youngsters] cannot tell them our thoughts.

Q: Was there enough food to eat and enough time to relax and enjoy your life?

00:11:41

#3M: The elders worked hard and we had enough to eat.

Q: What was your life like?

#3M: We were happy as we lived in our own country. We felt happy in our hearts. You had your country and your parents and relatives. Everybody was happy and there was nobody who oppressed us.

Q: You said that there were 11 big families and 50 small families. Your family was a little bit better than some of the poor families. What made your family a little bit better off?

00:11:52

#3M: We earned a better livelihood due to our hard work.

Q: Was it because you worked harder that you were better off?

#3M: Yes, that is right. It depends on how you work.

Q: What was the relationship between the big families and the small families?

00:13:41

#3M: The bigger families made the smaller families work for them. In my region, the small families did not own any land. We used to work for the big families in various capacities.

Q: Did you work for a big family?

#3M: I did not have to go to work [for a big family] as my family worked hard together and planned well. In my region, we had to buy [lease] the land [we tilled]. We had to buy [lease] them from the *trelpa*. We did not possess any land.

Q: What were the conditions of the lease?

00:15:16

#3M: We did not buy the lands outright. We paid a lease amount every year.

Q: How much lease amount did you pay?

#3M: In Tibet the paper currency was called *dotse*. We paid about 30 *dotse* and some [lands] cost 20 *dotse*.

Q: How large was the area?

00:15:38

#3M: The area was about one *dukay* or a little more than a *dukay*.

Q: *Dukay*?

#3M: *Dukay* is a cylindrical container. [Interviewee is referring to the quantity of seeds sown on the area of leased land.] Its volume is about one *moe*.

Q: How much lease amount did you pay to the big families for the land for one year?

00:16:05

#3M: We did not pay them.

Q: But you had to pay the lease for the land.

#3M: Yes, we had to pay the lease amount.

Q: What did you pay them?

00:16:10

#3M: We paid them money.

Q: How much did you pay them?

#3M: I told you earlier that we paid about 30 *dotse*. It was equal to 1,500 [Tibetan] currency notes.

Q: What was the area of land you received for 30 *dotse*?

00:16:28

#3M: [The area of land] consumed a little more than one *dukay*. In Tibet the currency unit was called *dotse*. Fifty *ngu-sang* 'a denomination' equaled one *dotse*.

Q: You paid and you leased the land and what happened to the land after you leased it? What could you do with it?

#3M: We sowed grains on it. Only barley grew in my region.

Q: In all the farms you all grew barley?

00:17:21

#3M: In all the fields. Only barley grew in that region.

Q: Did you have to pay the 30 to 20 *dotse* in a year or just one time?

#3M: At times they [the rich families] did not give us the land, in which case we need not pay the lease amount. However, we had to pay the lease amount when they gave us the land. That was how it was.

Q: Did you have to pay the sum of 20-30 *dotse* every time you leased the land?

00:18:21

#3M: Yes, you had to pay once a year.

Q: What percentage of one's income is 20-30 *dotse*?

#3M: One can reap a harvest of nine *dukay* for every one *dukay* [of seeds sown] in a good year.

Q: That [*dukay*] is different than the *dotse*?

[Interpreter to interviewer: *Dotse* is the currency.]

Q: How many *dotse* does one *dukay* of grain cost?

00:19:43

#3M: It was cheap at that time when we were very young. The prices spiraled when the bandits [meaning the Chinese] arrived. It was cheap during our times. A *dukay* costs about three to four *dotse*. It was not much.

Q: Was the arrangement every year when you harvested your crop, was there enough money to pay for the next year's lease?

#3M: For that one must make whatever arrangements. We would have enough left.

Q: If you did not have a good crop and you couldn't pay the lease, what kind of arrangements did you make?

00:21:07

#3M: [Continues before question is interpreted] Our main source of income was the revenue from transporting goods on our donkeys. That was our livelihood. We traveled from Phari to Gyangtse. There were about six places we went to. Some people went to Nangatse, which was the furthest point. After deducting our expenses, we saved the balance amount. That was our only source of revenue.

Q: Was the relationship between the big family and your own family; was it an amicable or friendly relationship or not?

#3M: The relationship was amicable. There was no animosity. Those that were in the position gave work and there was no feeling of resentment.

Q: So it worked well for both sides?

00:22:48

#3M: That is right.

Q: Later the Chinese said that the big families took advantage of the small families. Was that true in your situation?

#3M: They [the wealthy families] did not oppress us. They [the Chinese] instigated us. They wrongly taught us [to say that the big families took advantage of and oppressed the people]. We were forced to say so because they were on our backs. So some small families did that.

Q: Why did they do that?

00:24:01

#3M: They [the Chinese] were lying. They said, "Their [the rich families'] wealth is gathered through you [the small families' hard work]." They [the Chinese] taught us to say that. We had no wish to say so but they were oppressing us.

[Interpreter is confused with the words *gyu* 'wealth' and *du* meaning 'grain' and seeks clarification.]

3#M: They [the Chinese] said, "The results of your hard work are taken away by the big families. You are the ones who do the hard work." They were advising and deceiving us.

Q: You were one of those poor families and you didn't feel...Did you feel that your work was being utilized by the big families?

00:25:22

#3M: We did not feel that way, but they [the Chinese] said that. They made it seem that way. They were the thieves and they called us rebels. They were the bandits and rebels. It was a matter of might and ours was a small country and they overpowered it.

Q: The Chinese? Who?

#3M: The Chinese said that. They used their might and forced us to say it. They said, "You must say it and do it. If not, you will be punished." We had to say so because they were more powerful.

Q: When did that kind of behavior by the Chinese begin in your village?

00:26:32

#3M: It was about three years since they [the Chinese] arrived. Earlier they were very gentle. They built roads and gradually made their way in. That's how they began.

Q: Can you remember which year it was?

#3M: I think I was about 27 years old then, when they first started to oppress.

Q: Can you tell me what happened when that began?

00:27:25

#3M: They began by telling the poor, "We will bring about liberation. Everyone will be equal. [You are] liberated." They spoke about equality and liberation at that time.

Q: What did the people think when they heard that? What did you think?

#3M: I felt numb and had fear in my heart. I thought my country was going to be occupied by them [the Chinese]. I had no other thoughts besides that.

Q: What begins to happen? How do the Chinese tell you...You are in your village and where did the Chinese come from?

00:29:06

#3M: They came from Lhasa through Shigatse and Gyangtse to our village. The village was a main thoroughfare for travelers traveling from Lhasa and India.

Q: From Lhasa to India?

#3M: It was located on the main road between Lhasa, Gyangtse and India.

Q: How long had they been in Gyangtse before they came to your village?

00:29:55

#3M: They were not there for very long. They were very humble and did not stay long [at one place] but occupied the land bit by bit. They constructed the roads and then they became strong and tightened their grip.

Q: Did they arrive in Kala without staying too long in Gyangtse?

#3M: They steadily arrived from there. In order to come to my village, they had to pass through Gyangtse from Lhasa.

Q: Did they show up in one particular day or come in slowly?

00:30:42

#3M: The first time when they appeared, they were few in number. Then they gradually increased.

Q: When they first arrived, how did they come—in vehicles or horses or on foot? How did they show up?

#3M: They came on foot. At that time they were on foot. They came in humbly then, so as to deceive the people.

Q: What did they tell you when they came to your village?

00:31:40

#3M: What can they say when we did not understand their language? They stayed by themselves. They did not ask us to provide them with houses but camped beside the walls.

Q: They did not ask you for houses?

#3M: No, they did not.

Q: Did they just start to stay around?

00:31:58

#3M: There were walls we had built and they camped beside these walls.

Q: How long did that casual presence last and when did it change?

#3M: That did not last for very long, maybe two or three years. Then they started constructing drivable roads. And once the vehicles started rolling in, they became strong. Slowly they began to tighten their grip.

Q: How did the vehicle roads get constructed?

00:33:22

#3M: The roads were constructed by them as well as the poor people who were ordered to do so. They were deceiving the poor people. When told to come to construct roads, some poor people did not go and some did.

Q: How did they deceive the poor people?

#3M: They said that the people would be paid for constructing the roads. However, it was left to our choice whether one wished to go on the road gang or not. My family did not go and nor did we need to [for the money]. There were some people who went as road crew. They [the Chinese] said that road workers would be paid a salary of one or two *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coin' per day. Some people joined and some did not.

Q: The people who worked, were they from the small families in your village?

00:34:42

#3M: Yes, they were but some did not go. Mine did not.

Q: I just wonder, if people are busy farming how would they have time to take off from their farms and go build roads?

#3M: The farming schedule was like this. In the third month [of the Tibetan lunar calendar], we dug out the manure [from the pits]. Sowing was carried out in the fourth month and by the middle of the seventh month, the crops were harvested. After the thrashing in the 10th and 11th months, work was over.

Q: That's when the people went?

00:36:09

#3M: Some people went on the road crew in winter.

Q: Why did you choose not to go?

#3M: We did not go. We did not have to go and we had no desire to go.

Q: Why not?

00:36:35

#3M: We had doubts in our hearts as to what they [the Chinese] might do. We were not happy and wondered if constructing roads was really good. We did not have roads earlier and I doubted if making roads was good.

Since historical times we had not constructed roads and when they began to build them, I thought that might be harmful to us. And that is what happened.

Q: What kind of things did you suspect or imagine was the reason?

#3M: I suspected that they might oppress us. Since historical times, Tibet was known as a land of religion. There were no roads and we only plied our donkeys. We never had any vehicles. I felt building the roads would be a source of sadness for us. That was the reason for not going to work on the road gang.

Q: Did the people wonder who was letting the Chinese come into Tibet? There were no forces or government officials stopping them when they were coming into your country?

00:38:32

#3M: There was no one to stop them. There was no one responsible to look into that. They [Tibetans] did try to resist them in Kham, but they failed. After they [the Chinese] entered Lhasa, there was no one in U-tsang [central Tibet region] to stop them. There were no officials to stop them. They were free to do what they liked.

Q: Tell me what happens to you and your family as the Chinese begins to build the roads and invade your country? What happens next?

#3M: The Chinese arrived and then they started the *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.' People were classified into three groups, *chugdhak* 'the wealthy,' *shingpa* 'the farmers' and *yulpong* 'the poor.' They [the Chinese] deceived the poor and started *thamzing* sessions. The wealthy were subjected to *thamzing*. [The poor] were forced to admit that they were beaten [by the wealthy], which they were not. They were forced to say so due to fear. The people, not being animals, wondered in fear as to what the consequences for not admitting might be. That was their thought for doing so.

Q: What did the poor have to say the wealthy did to them?

00:40:29

#3M: They [the Chinese] said, "The results of your hard work are gobbled by them [the wealthy]. So you have to subject them to *thamzing*. We have given you liberation. Everyone is equal."

Q: What did the poor people do?

#3M: They [the Chinese] carried out the *thamzing* and the reformation, the so-called reformation.

[Question is repeated.]

00:42:03

#3M: They told the poor that they must say thus to the wealthy, "You are the ones who made us poor. You have sucked our blood and pus. The Chinese have liberated us and we have the right to say so." The Chinese forced the people accordingly.

[Question is repeated.]

#3M: Then the poor had to subject the wealthy to *thamzing*. They had to repeat what they [the Chinese] had taught them, "You did this and you did that to us." Eleven people were arrested and subjected to *thamzing*. They were given a week during which to ponder. The following week the person was taken away not to be seen again.

Q: Can you please describe what the *thamzing* was...

00:43:54

#3M: [Continues] Then the reformation began and the wealth of the rich was to be distributed among the poor. However, in order to bring about equality in wealth, they [the Chinese] distributed only the articles of low quality while collecting the gold, silver, copper and metal items [for themselves]. They divided the knick knacks, but did not give away the good things.

Q: What were the good things?

#3M: The good things were those that were made of gold, silver, copper and metal; things we had saved for many years like gold ornaments, coral, turquoise and the many kinds of jewelry that Tibetans normally have. Dividing the useless items; the jewelry, brocade and fur clothing were packed in boxes and loaded in their vehicles. They distributed the worthless and took away the valuable goods. They were the main bandits and the liberation was just empty words.

Q: Where were the rich people when they were taking away these goods?

00:45:40

#3M: They were already in prison. The liberation [distribution of goods] was implemented when they had already been captured and imprisoned.

Q: Where was the prison?

#3M: They were kept for a week in our village and then taken away towards Gyangtse or Shigatse. We did not know where they were taken and they [the Chinese] did not reveal it to us. People were not allowed to visit them.

Q: Who was left in the village if the wealthy people were taken away? Were these the big families? Was the whole family taken away?

00:46:54

#3M: The entire family was not taken away. It was only the fathers of the families.

Q: Before the father was taken away, was there any *thamzing* that went on in the village?

#3M: No, they were not subjected to *thamzing*.

Q: Was there any *thamzing* that happened in the village?

00:47:50

#3M: Not since then.

Q: When did the *thamzing* take place?

#3M: They [the fathers] were captured, subjected to *thamzing* and then taken away. After they were captured and imprisoned, they [the Chinese] began the reformation. During the reformation, when the wealth was removed [from the family homes] they [fathers] were not present.

Q: Did *thamzing* take place in your village? Were the fathers *thamzinged* before they were imprisoned?

00:48:16

#3M: My elder brother was subjected to *thamzing*. He underwent *thamzing* for a week and then we fled one night.

Q: Were the fathers of the eleven wealthy families *thamzinged*?

#3M: They were not.

Q: Then who was *thamzinged*?

00:48:58

#3M: The fathers of the wealthy families were to be subjected to *thamzing* as directed by them [the Chinese]. After the *thamzing* they were captured.

Q: Were they subjected to *thamzing*?

#3M: Yes, they were. I did not attend it. My elder brother was one of the last to undergo *thamzing*. There were three men who were the last. We were able to escape the night before he was to be subjected to *thamzing*.

Q: Can you describe what they did [during a *thamzing* session]?

00:49:35

#3M: The *thamzing* entailed hurling accusations at them [the rich fathers]. They [the poor] had to say things like [smiles] "you oppressed us and took away the results of our efforts" and all that they had been taught by them [the Chinese].

Q: Were there anything else?

#3M: There was not.

Q: There were no beatings?

00:49:48

#3M: They were not beaten. Much beating took place at places like Samada. Nobody was beaten in our village.

Q: What would happen if the poor people did not want to do that? What would happen to them?

#3M: They would not let you off. They would make you suffer.

Q: Who will?

00:50:43

#3M: The Chinese. They will demand the reason for not accusing [the wealthy].

Q: Was anybody in your family *thamzinged*?

#3M: Yes, one of my elder brothers was. He is deceased now. He was subjected to *thamzing* for one day. Then he is entitled to a week of rest, which is a time to reflect. Once one is arrested again after the completion of the week, he is taken away for good. So we fled on the night of the sixth day of the week to India.

Q: Why was your brother *thamzinged*?

00:51:45

#3M: Because he was a little richer. He earned a better livelihood and the Chinese did not like it and he was subjected to *thamzing*.

Q: He was not one of the wealthy 11 families?

#3M: No.

Q: Who decided to escape in your family?

00:52:40

#3M: Someone gave us the idea. There was a farmer's *u-yon* 'leader.' They [the Chinese] had installed leaders like *u-yon* and *tsukdung*. The old farmer [*u-yon*] secretly told [my brother], "If you do not flee tonight, you are going to be captured tomorrow." There were three men [who were to be captured]: one was Khamtu, a short Khampa [a person from Kham province] and the other who was called Shika. These three men were to be captured the next day. My family and Shika were able to flee while Khamtu could not. He must have been captured, poor thing. He was not rich, but he was captured on account of being a Khampa.

Q: Were the *u-yons* poor people installed as leaders by the Chinese?

#3M: Yes.

Q: How many escaped in your party?

00:54:42

#3M: When we made our escape, my brother's old mother was left behind.

Q: Your mother?

#3M: No. I did not have my mother. I told you earlier that my mother had died and I was brought up by my uncles, who were my mother's brothers. When my mother died, they brought me up. When we fled, we left behind my late uncle's mother and two little girls. Around six of us managed to escape.

Q: Your uncle died?

00:55:31

#3M: Yes. Now I am the only one [from the family] surviving in exile in India.

Q: Did your brother manage to flee?

#3M: Yes, he did. Now he is no more.

Q: At that time did you have any children or were you married?

00:56:21

#3M: At the time we fled, it was a year since I married.

Q: Did you have children?

#3M: We had a child here [India] when we worked on the road gang.

Q: How was the journey of the escape?

00:56:32

#3M: We did not get anything to eat for one day during the journey. We took the route through Bhutan.

Q: How many days did it take you?

#3M: It took about three days to reach the border of Bhutan from Kala.

Q: Did you travel on foot or with animals?

00:57:33

#3M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] We were stopped for about five days in Bhutan.

Q: Did you travel on foot or with animals?

#3M: We only had a small horse as the bigger horse was seized by him.

Q: By whom?

00:57:46

#3M: The *u-yon* took it. We loaded the small horse with our belongings and fled.

Q: Did you walk?

#3M: Yes, we walked.

Q: When you get to the border of Bhutan, what is the reception like?

00:58:25

#3M: At the border were Bhutanese soldiers who kept us in a temple for five days. On the sixth day, they allowed us to go to Buxa in India. The next day we were sent to Missamari, Assam.

Q: What happened in Missamari?

#3M: At Missamari we were given the option of joining a settlement or working as road crew in Mon Tawang. We went to work at Mon Tawang.

Q: Why did you choose the road crew instead of settlement?

00:59:58

#3M: There were not many settlements then. We thought it was better making roads in a cooler climate. Many people died due to heat. Six, seven or eight people died everyday at Missamari due to the intense heat. I was in Tawang for three years constructing roads.

Q: Thank you for your interview. We appreciate your story.

#3M: [Smiles]

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

01:01:16

#3M: I hope that it would help the cause of Tibet. I am very grateful to you.

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

#3M: Yes, use the alias.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

01:01:54

#3M: Thank you. I am very grateful to you for your work and I will pray that you [interviewer] have a long life.

[Interviewer presents interviewee with an envelope and a picture of Buddha which interviewee places on head with reverence.]

END OF INTERVIEW