

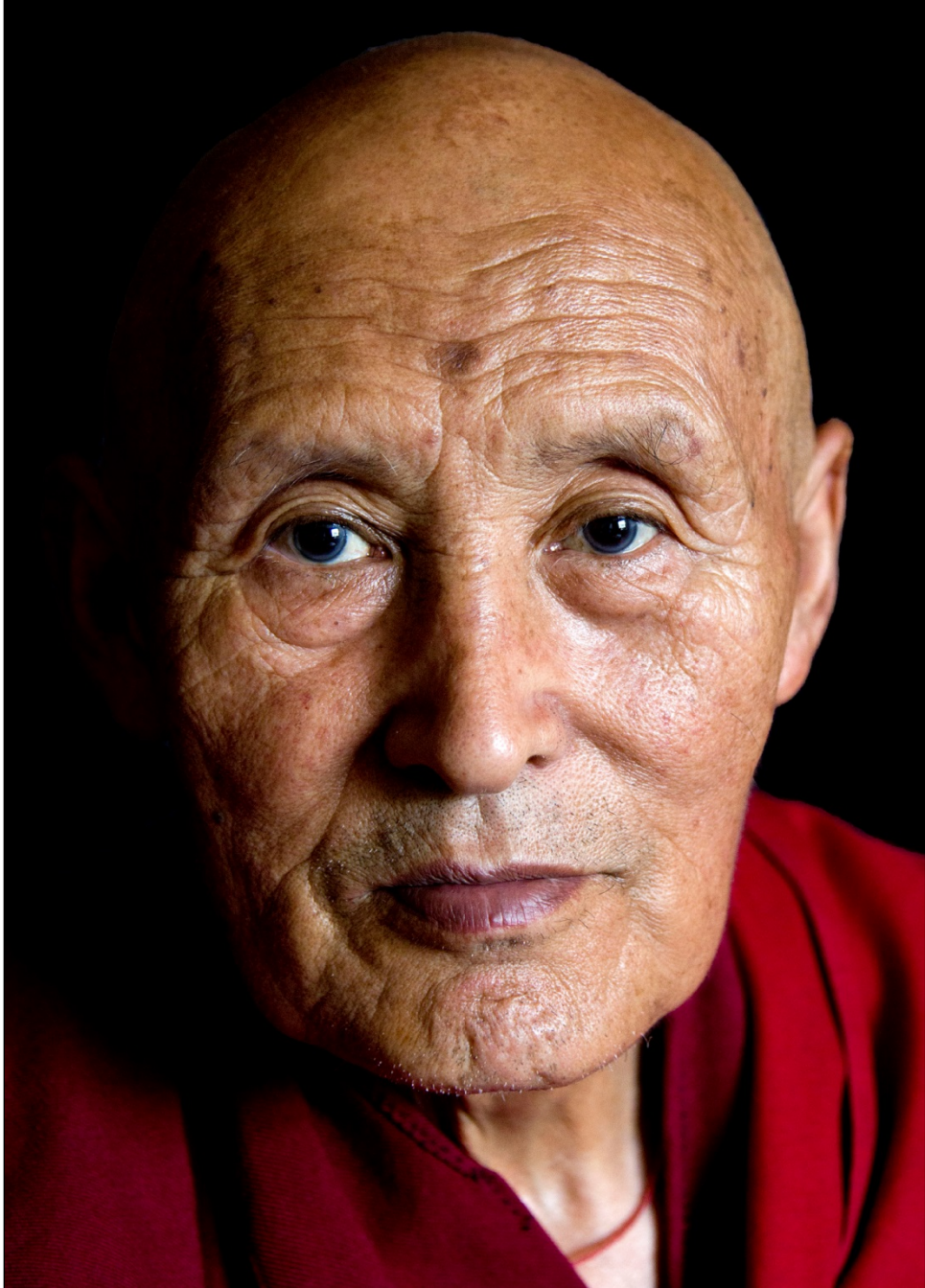
# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #46D – Phuntsok Topchu  
May 21, 2012

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #46D
2. Interviewee: Phuntsok Topchu
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Zokong
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1988
9. Date of Interview: May 21, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 03 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Phuntsok Topchu's family of nine members engaged in farming and herding animals in Zokong. He became a monk at the age of 14 years and recalls that many boys from his village joined the local monastery. Phuntsok Topchu tells us about how the monks in his region lived both at the monastery and at home. He describes the vows a monk must undertake and the different prayers sessions at the monastery. The monks went 7-8 times in a year to the monastery to take part in prayer assemblies, while spending the other days helping the family with farming and herding.

After the Chinese invaded and the monastery was destroyed, Phuntsok Topchu stayed in his village. He recounts the Ngogor Chenpo 'Great Revolt' against the three *ngadak* 'leaders' started by the Chinese. He talks about how the ruling class of monasteries, leaders and wealthy people were targeted and accused of false charges. He further recounts how his family's animals were confiscated by the Chinese and life was made unbearable when they imposed heavy taxation. He explains the various kinds of taxes that the people were forced to pay and how the rates increased rapidly over the years.

Phuntsok Topchu embarked on a pilgrimage to Lhasa. He completed 26 circumambulations of the sacred Mount Kailash and then escaped to India in 1987 through Nepal.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Kham, childhood memories, monastic life, religious festivals, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, destruction of monasteries, oppression under Chinese, taxes, pilgrimage.

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## **Interview #46D**

**Interviewee: Phuntsok Topchu**

**Age: 73, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: May 21, 2012**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:11

**Interviewee #46D: Phuntsok Topchu.**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experience, 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?

**#46D: [Nods] Of course.**

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

**#46D: Okay.**

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

**#46D: Okay.**

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

00:01:51

**#46D: There will be no problems.**

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

**#46D: Okay.**

Q: *Gen-la* 'respectful term for teacher,' please tell me where were you born and what did your family do for a living?

**#46D: [The birthplace] was Zokong.**

Q: What did your family do for a living in Tibet?

**#46D: [I] had lived around four years in a monastery. Other than that, [we] were both farmers and nomads. There were farmers and there were nomads. [I] went to herd animals and worked in the fields when [I] was young in the village.**

Q: How many people were in your family, *gen-la*, and where were you in that order of children?

**#46D: There were around nine family members.**

Q: Where were you in that order of children?

**#46D: There were four brothers and I was among the older ones. Actually there were around nine people, with three sisters.**

Q: You mentioned that you became a monk. At what age did you become a monk?

00:03:57

**#46D: [I] think it was around the age of 14.**

Q: Before you became a monk, what was life like growing up in your community and on your farm?

**#46D: Even when you were small, you went to herd animals. There were *dri* ‘female yak,’ yaks, goats and sheep. There were cows on the farm. That was the type of work.**

Q: Was your childhood an enjoyable one or difficult one? Can you talk to us a little bit about it?

**#46D: [I] must say it was a happy one. There were no problems with food.**

Q: Was there enough to eat because your family were well off or were they average income? What was the economic circumstance?

**#46D: [The family] was among the well off in the village.**

Q: Did you go to any local monasteries for services, for prayers, for festivals and can you tell us about that?

00:06:34

**#46D: We did not because the monastery was located far away. It was so far away that little ones could not walk the distance. There were 2-3 mountain passes that needed to be crossed to reach the monastery. You could reach it in a day but it was far away. Hence, the young ones did not go. During festivals like the *guthor* ‘offerings on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month’ at the monastery, one or two people might go but for the whole family to attend, there were no time for such.**

Q: What was the name of the monastery, *gen-la*?

**#46D: The monastery was Gotsogon.**

Q: Yes?

**#46D: Gotsogon.**

Q: How did you happen to become a monk at 14 if you were so far away from the local monastery? What influenced you or how did that happen?

**#46D: Many became monks in my region. If there were two or three boys in a family, except for one the rest became monks.**

Q: What was the reason why boys became monks?

00:08:56

**#46D: ...[not discernible]. Each family had two or three monks.**

Q: Why did [they] become monks?

**#46D: Yes?**

Q: Why did so many boys become monks?

**#46D: What should [I] say? [Becoming a] monk was considered a good thing.**

Q: How did your family manage the farm and the animals if three out of four brothers became monks?

**#46D: In my region there were instances of two brothers living with one wife.**

Q: The practice was that many boys were made monks. There were fields and animals to take care of at home and a lot of work to do. So, when children were made monks, there wouldn't be anyone to work at home.

**#46D: The monks worked after the prayer assemblies got over.**

Q: Did the monks live at home?

00:10:22

**#46D: It was not like here where you live permanently at the monastery. [The monks] lived in the monastery for a month during big prayer assemblies and then there would be no prayer assemblies for a month. Again there would be prayer assemblies for 10-15 days and none for 20 days. It was like that. Prayer assembly sessions lasted an hour or so and at times there were only four or five sessions. There were prayer assemblies with names like *ngachoe* 'anniversary of the passing away of Tsongkhapa' [25<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month] and *guthor*; it was like that.**

Q: Did you choose to become a monk or was that a suggestion by your parents?

**#46D: [I] was young then and the parents used to teach, “[I] am a monk. [I] am a monk.” [I] liked that as a child.**

Q: When you went home to help your family, did you still dress as a monk? Did you still keep your head shaven? How would people know you were a monk when you were back with your family?

**#46D: Those who had not been to Lhasa [to one of the great monasteries of Sera, Gaden or Drepung], those who had not taken the *gelong* ‘fully-ordained monk observing 253 vows’ vows dressed in ordinary clothes.**

Q: That’s when [you] returned home?

**#46D: Yes. Those who had been to Lhasa earlier and had taken monk vows, [dressed in monks’ robes]. There was work to do at the [local] monastery. [Monks] must work in the fields. For around three years, monks must plow the fields, harvest barley and do everything. It was obligatory for three years. Until then one could not and did not take the *getsul* ‘novice monk observing 36 vows’ vows.**

Q: Tell us about you. You went to the monastery at age 12, and then you would come home to help with work as needed and go back. So in one year’s time, about how much time would you be living in the monastery and how much time at home?

00:13:53

**#46D: There was [a prayer assembly] for a month during the *yarnay* [one of three principal ceremonies performed in order to purify the Pratimoksa precepts.] There was one during *guthor*, then during *garcho*, *ngachoe*, *donchoe*; one went 7-8 times [in a year].**

Q: To the monastery?

**#46D: Yes, 7-8 times.**

Q: Was it 7-8 months or 7-8 times?

**#46D: Times.**

Q: Would that be for a month or few days, what would be the amount of time?

**#46D: At times it was for a month during the *yarnay*. The shorter ones were only for around five days.**

Q: Was this the monastery that took three days to get to? Three days?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: A day.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: One day.

Q: Okay, was it the monastery that took one day?

**#46D: It was a long way for a day. Yes.**

Q: Was that the monastery?

**#46D: Yes.**

Q: *Gen-la*, you had four brothers. How many sisters did you have?

**#46D: There were three.**

Q: Did you ever hear that your sisters wanted to become nuns and if they did was that possible?

00:15:48

**#46D: There were no nunneries nearby, none in [my] region.**

Q: How long does your life continue like this where you are in the monastery; you come home, you go back? How many years does this situation continue?

**#46D: I lived around four years. However, [I] did not perform the obligation of working in the monastery's fields. From a young age I was not a capable person. The [monastery] officials selected the field hands, those that could work hard and were capable. They selected such [monks] who were then obliged to work for three years. I never did it. The best workers were [selected]. I was a person from *rongpa*. People from *rongpa* were more capable and assigned more work. However, the nomads and semi-nomads were not very capable of doing field works.**

Q: Where's *rongpa*?

**#46D: *Rongpa* means the lower regions where [people] engaged in two different forms of livelihood, one in summer and another in winter. Some families were like that.**

Q: What happens after those four years in the monastery?

**#46D: After four years the Chinese established the one called Ngogor Chenpo 'Great Revolt.'**

Q: What was established?

00:18:16

**#46D: [The Chinese] established the Ngogor Chenpo, which was revolting against the three great *ngadak* 'leaders.' The categorization had begun. For instance, the monasteries, leaders and the lamas were the great *ngadak*. There were three great *ngadak* that were**



**classified and then the movement was established. One could not go to the monastery as the monastery was destroyed. The Ngogor Chenpo was started in the year '59.**

Q: Did you see the monastery being destroyed or did you just hear about it?

**#46D: [I] heard it. It was too far away. Those villages that were close to the monastery destroyed it. Those that were far away were not there. The monastery was set on fire. The temple was set on fire.**

Q: By those villagers that lived close to the monastery?

**#46D: Yes. There were activists. There were officials known as activists that had been appointed and it was like that.**

Q: How were the officials appointed?

00:20:06

**#46D: What should [I] say? From among the poor, activists...[not discernible]...**

Q: Were the poor appointed as leaders?

**#46D: Yes, [they] were given responsibilities, salaries and promotions. [They] were actually Tibetans, but were possessed by demons during that time.**

Q: Did they destroy the monastery that you had been going to completely? How damaged was it and did you see that?

**#46D: [I] did not see it afterwards.**

Q: I see. The monastery...

**#46D: [Interrupts] Well, not exactly. The walls...**

Q: Did you see the walls?

**#46D: [I] did see it once.**

Q: Did you see it?

00:21:33

**#46D: The walls were high. I went through the region once. The region was in the plains and I went to seek grains there.**

Q: Was there any warning? Did you happen to be home when that was happening? Did you know that was going to happen? Did you stay away from the monastery at that time?

**#46D: [I] was home and did not go to see the monastery. What was the use of going? There would be no prayer assemblies and the things that were there were stolen. The situation was like that.**

Q: When the monastery was set on fire, did you know of it and leave for home?

**#46D: No, no. There were no prayer assemblies earlier and [I] had not gone there.**

Q: Prayer assemblies weren't being held earlier to that?

**#46D: There were no prayer assemblies.**

Q: Why were there no ceremonies held?

00:23:20

**#46D: After the Chinese started the great revolt, how could [prayer assemblies] be held? [The Chinese] considered religion as poison saying, "It [religion] is useless." [They] were against religion—religion and lamas. [The Chinese] used to call the lamas and monks as 'Junior Dalai' and 'Junior Panchen.'**

Q: Taking His Holiness the Dalai Lama's name?

**#46D: Yes. 'Junior Panchen' and 'Junior Dalai.' The 'Senior Dalai' would be the Dalai Lama. The others in the monastery were called 'Junior Dalai' and 'Junior Panchen.'**

Q: To all the monks?

**#46D: Not to all the monks. Those in the higher class were called that. [The Chinese] said like that.**

Q: Did you ever see anything happen at the monastery when you actually were there before it was burned? Did you ever see the Chinese do anything?

00:24:58

**#46D: Earlier [I] went there only if there were prayer assemblies.**

Q: [You] went there when there were prayer assemblies.

**#46D: Yes.**

Q: During such times did the Chinese come to the monastery and do anything...?

**#46D: [They] did not come much. [It] was an isolated region, an isolated region. The Chinese did not come much. Officials did after the movement came into being. After the establishment of the *shen* 'county,' *chue* 'prefecture,' and *shang* 'village,' then officials visited every day. Until the start of the movement, [they] did not come. After the movement began, many officials arrived and some stayed permanently.**

Q: What did you see when they began to live there?

**#46D: When the Ngogor Chenpo started initially, [I] was classified among the rich farmers. Later, [I] was put in the *ngadak* category.**

Q: Yes?

**#46D: Later, [I] was put in the *ngadak* category. Initially [I] was in the rich farmers category.**

Q: Your family was associated with the rich and the powerful of the community. And what happened to your family?

00:27:06

**#46D: My paternal uncle...Actually there were two paternal uncles and father, but the older paternal uncle was taken to prison during the Ngogor Chenpo.**

Q: The older paternal uncle?

**#46D: Yes, the older paternal uncle.**

Q: Anything else happened to your family?

**#46D: It was okay for a few years while [we] were classified among the rich.**

Q: And then?

**#46D: Later [we] were classified in the *ngadak* category.**

Q: What happened after [you] were classified as an *ngadak*?

**#46D: [We] were not many years in the *ngadak* category. How many years was it? ...Perhaps it was a little over 10 years. [I] think it was a little over 10 years that [we] were in the *ngadak* category.**

Q: What happened to you then when you were classified among the leaders class?

00:29:00

**#46D: During the 10 years...there were not many animals, nearly 80 *zonak* 'yaks and *dri*' and only 10-15 sheep. Then [we] were removed from the *ngadak* category and received that many [animals]. Some people in our region talked about starting a commune and such things. They [the Chinese] had formed communes.**

Q: You said [you] owned 80 animals. What were those?

**#46D: [We] only owned that many.**

Q: What animals were they? Yaks and *dri*?

**#46D: There were only around 80, including all the sizes of yaks and *dri*.**

Q: [You] were in the *ngadak* category for 10 years. What did the Chinese do to your family during that time?

**#46D: All [our] animals including horses were seized.**

Q: So, the horses, 80 yaks and *dri* and the 10-15 goats and sheep that [you] possessed were all...

**#46D: [We] owned around 40 goats and only 10-15 sheep.**

Q: Were all these seized?

00:30:15

**#46D: Yes, [they] were taken. [We] got back two *dri* and two yaks to plow the land. [We] did not get any of the horses back. [We] did not get the cows or anything else. [We] got back two yaks, two *dri* and around 10 goats. That was it.**

Q: The rest were confiscated?

**#46D: The rest were confiscated.**

Q: What was your family's reaction to having these family possessions taken away in such an unfair way?

**#46D: What do [we] do? [We] must do whatever [the Chinese] ordered. [We] were helpless. There was nowhere to flee and nowhere to hide. What do [we] do? [We] were helpless. One must stay even if one died of starvation. [Laughs]**

Q: Staying even if [you] died of starvation?

**#46D: Yes, one must stay on. What else to do? There was nowhere to escape and no one to turn to. It was very pathetic.**

00:32:04

**[We] had to follow whatever the orders. One must perform *zhopo* once in around five days.**

Q: What's *zhopo*?

**#46D: *Zhopo* is—young people had come there as militia—one did whatever [they] ordered, gave [them] presents, carried out [their] biddings, bowed [our] heads and prostrated. One must do such things that were unthinkable. One admitted to doing things that were not done. One must accept everything. One was labeled with "the hat."**

Q: Please just describe what you mean by...

**#46D: [Interrupts] The situation became such that one had to accept having revolted against the Chinese. Their policy said that there would be clemency if one accepted [the charges] and if not, one would be violently overcome. [Laughs] It was like that. It was unacceptable. Chinese ways are not likable.**

Q: Can you describe what you mean by label with “a cap”? What does that mean?

**#46D: It meant that [you] were an *ngadak*. It identified you as an *ngadak* and you were charged with having revolted against the Chinese, which you were forced to accept. [The Chinese] made accusations of your having done this or that in the village and gave you “the hat.” Someone’s “hat” would be removed and someone would be given “a hat.” [They] just made accusations.**

00:34:46

**The charges would be having provided supplies to bandits. The “bandits” arrived. They were escapees coming through [our region] from Dege and were the likes of the Gongka group and such. The “bandits” were those that were fleeing from the Chinese. There were people [in our village] that had given [supplies to them]. It was natural for those that had, to give them a little. And [those that gave were] accused of having given supplies to bandits. The Chinese] were just building up to create allegations. The Chinese made countless [such allegations].**

**Those people could not remain in their regions and had come fleeing. Some of them surrendered and some were killed. Such things happened.**

Q: Did the people in your village really believe that your family was a criminal or were they just doing that so they wouldn’t have any repercussions?

**#46D: There were a few that really did it while most of the people were forced to say so. It was possible that there were a few that did not [like us]. The majority was forced to do so.**

Q: Can you tell us what was your experience? What happened to you in this situation? What did you do? What did you say? How were you feeling?

00:37:26

**#46D: [I] did some farming. What do [I] do if not farming? The area of land was not large and there were not many animals. [I] claimed new farm land from pastures. That is how [I] made a living. Earlier when we owned a large area of land and possessed numerous animals, the taxes that were collected were immense. Those with animals paid most of the butter and cheese in tax. Different names were given to grains like *shungdu* ‘government grain’, *tsongdu* ‘grain for sale’ and *mindu* and they were collected as tax.**

**It was somewhere in the year 1960s that taxes began to be collected. [I] was taxed only around a 100 *gyama* [50 kilograms] during the first year. [I] think it was only around 70 *gyama*. Then it increased year by year and in 20 years, the grain [tax] reached 5,000!**

Q: *Gyama*?

**#46D: Yes.**

Q: Tax?

**#46D: Yes. 5,000 [*gyama*] were 50 huge sacks that even yaks could not carry. A sack containing 100 *gyama* is huge. You should not load a sack of 100 *gyama* on a yak. You could load around 70 *gyama* on a yak. Such were the taxes imposed. What can one say about the Chinese? That they do not know how to behave like a leader or a king? Does it not seem like that? [They] put the subjects to suffering, force work on [them] and various other things. Then [we] started to work together, working together in the fields. Some years were not good and [we] suffered. Finally, whatever grains the wealthier *ngadak* families owned came to the commune.**

Q: Yes?

00:39:46

**#46D: The commune took away the grains. It was claimed that a year was good when it was not. These were unacceptable things. Is it not shocking when [the tax] is 1000 *gyama*? The grain, wool, meat and butter taxes were impossible to pay. However, one had to pay it.**

Q: You paid a sheep and wool tax?

**#46D: Of course, one had to pay wool tax, butter tax, *khulu* ‘pashmina wool’ [points near arm] tax and different kinds of taxes. There was a fur tax on animals. The Tibetans did not use it [*khulu*] long ago; it was a smooth fur near the neck of goats. There were taxes and taxes such that you could not say what was a tax and what was not.**

Q: When people were forced to give taxes that they didn’t have the money or goods, were they driven to desperation and what did they do?

**#46D: What can [they] do? The people could not do anything. They [the Chinese] increased [taxes] year by year and in around 20 years the grain [tax] ran into thousands, though it was not for every family. It was for only a few families. [The tax] was many thousand [*gyama*] but that was not for a long time because it was being increased year by year. I was [taxed] 50,000.**

Q: Did it increase during the 20 years?

00:43:25

**#46D: Yes, initially it was not even a hundred. The first time tax was only around 70 [*gyama*]. Then it increased year by year. The grain [tax] collection was like this. There was the *shungdu* that was the main tax. It was called *shungdu*. Then there was the *tsongdu* for which a small price was paid. Another one was the *dulha* ‘surplus grain.’ It was the surplus**

grain after taking away your consumption grain. The *dulha* was paid a slightly higher price. In this way, there were three types of [grains that were] collected.

Q: Was *shungdu* the actual tax?

**#46D: Yes, it was the actual tax. You had to sell the *tsongdu*. *Dulha* was also sold but it fetched a higher price. There were three types and those were the terms that were used. [Laughs]**

Q: This is now in 1970 and you are 31 years old. Is that when this is happening now, *gen-la*?

**#46D: It was in the '70s. Yes, it was in the '70s. When it was the '80s, [I] do not know when in the '80s that the *ngadak* "hat" was removed. There was a tax exemption for three years. Taxes were not collected then. Taxes were abolished.**

Q: Which year was this?

00:46:31

**#46D: It was in the '80s. [I] think it was in the '80s. [The Chinese] said it was tax exemption but taxes were abolished. The exemption was for three years but later it continued for more than three years. [I] do not know what is being collected now. It has been many years since I came here. It has been almost 25 years now.**

Q: How did you leave your area? How did that come about?

**#46D: I came on a pilgrimage.**

Q: From your village?

**#46D: Yes, from [my] village to Lhasa.**

Q: In what year was that?

**#46D: When was it? [Tries to recollect]**

Q: It was in the '80s, right?

**#46D: I came to India in the '80s but when exactly was it in the '80s? Someone did a calculation earlier. I am 73 years old now. It has been 25 years in India. What is the figure after deduction?**

Q: Okay, so that would have been...you would have been 48. When you were 48 years old you left for India.

00:48:42

**#46D: Yes, [I] was exactly 48.**

Q: *Gen-la*, before you left for India were you just working—before you went on the pilgrimage, were you working on the farm with your family? Who was left in your family even after they removed...?

**#46D: [Interrupts] Which year was it?**

Q: In 1973 you went to India. No, date of leaving Tibet was 1988.

**#46D: What year is it now?**

Q: It is 2012.

**#46D: Remove 25 years from that. When is it?**

Q: It's '87.

**#46D: It was in '87 that I came to India.**

00:49:48

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay. I thought he said '88. 1987 he came to India and he's been here 25 years. So, in 1962 he left for India from Tibet.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 1987.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I mean in 1987.

Q: When you were living there—before leaving for India—[you] were living in the village and working in the fields. Who were there in the family during that time?

**#46D: Initially [my] parents were there. The older paternal uncle was not there. He was taken to Chamdo and had passed away. The younger paternal uncle was there but all three of them are no more.**

Q: You decided to go on pilgrimage to Lhasa and did you go by yourself or with other people?

00:51:23

**#46D: [I] was alone. [I] went to Lhoda from Lhasa and then from Lhoda to Mount Kailash. Then [I] came through Nepal from Mount Kailash.**

Q: That is a very long way to go on your own.

**#46D: It is very far but Tibetan [drivers] would take me along in [their] vehicles. There were many Tibetan drivers. Traveling in a vehicle made it easier. The policy was a bit lenient then. The Chinese had relations with foreign countries, with everyone and gave tax and other reductions. What they told us was, "The Dalai Lama did not wish to go but was forced to do so." That is what they told us, "The Dalai Lama did not wish to go to India. The government forced him to do so."**



Q: They said that?

**#46D: Yes, the Chinese said so. [They] hoped that he would come back. It was a great deception.**

Q: Before you left for your pilgrimage and came to India, were you practicing your prayers or were you just doing farm work? Were you trying to be a monk on your own or were you just working as a layperson?

00:53:32

**#46D: One chanted secretly, otherwise there was a time when one was not even allowed to move the lips. One would be chided for moving the lips.**

Q: How would you practice secretly?

**#46D: [I] could not do much. [I] just chanted a little of those [prayers] that [I] knew from memory because there were no scriptures. Being caught [with scriptures] would be terrible. And there were not any.**

Q: Were all the rosaries taken away from people or hidden?

**#46D: There were no rosaries. Where would there be rosaries? There were no rosaries to be seen. Some may have hidden a few but there were not anyone with rosaries in hand.**

Q: Do you know if people tried to hide their religious images or statues or things like that? Did they try to hide them places?

00:55:16

**#46D: There were those that hid. There were many that hid. [I] do not know if they had places to hide in the houses. Perhaps they did in Tibet because the houses were different from here. There might be small places behind trees and such. However, there were many places to hide in the mountains, among the forests and rocks.**

Q: *Gen-la*, when you left Mount Kailash, what did you do after that?

**#46D: [I] spent a summer season at Mount Kailash. [I] made 26 circumambulations. One could cover once each day.**

Q: One circumambulation a day?

**#46D: Yes. [I] did not do it every day. [I] rested on alternate days and made 26 [circumambulations]. Then when winter set in, [I] entered into Nepali territory. [I] sought the help of guides. There were many other pilgrims then. There were around 10.**

Q: Twenty-six times around Mount Kailash?

**#46D: Yes.**

Q: How long did that take...?

**#46D: [Interrupts] [I] made 26 circumambulations. Thirteen circumambulations are considered as one set. Thirteen circumambulations are considered one set. After performing two sets of circumambulations, [I] wanted to embark on the third. The Chinese were collecting 60 currency units per set of circumambulations. [I] wished to go but could not.**

Q: [You] wished to embark on the third but could not?

00:57:30

**#46D: Twenty-six circumambulations were two sets. There was the third and final one left. The Chinese charged 60 currency units. I wished to perform one set but could not.**

Q: Because of the money?

**#46D: Yes. [The Chinese] would charge for the circumambulations. [I] circumambulated Tso Rinpoche three times.**

Q: Tso Mapham 'Lake Mansrover'?

**#46D: Yes, Tso Mapham.**

Q: What is the benefit of circumambulating?

**#46D: Tibetans think highly of [going on a] pilgrimage. What should [I] say? It is beneficial for this life as well as the next.**

Q: How was it good?

**#46D: Well, one must take birth in the next life; take birth among the *dowa riduk* 'sentient beings of the six realms.' Buddhists believe that, right? The Chinese say that grains grow by sowing grains, wheat grow by sowing wheat, peas grow by sowing peas and humans take birth after humans die. They do not believe in *tendel* 'coming into being through interdependent connection' while Tibetans do, Buddhists do. If you do good, you will benefit later and if you do not, you will go to hell.**

Q: *Gen-la*, what do you think is the most important teaching of the Buddha for the next generation of Tibetans to practice?

01:00:35

**#46D: They [the younger generation] have education. Having education, and together with that His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches Buddha dharma, so there cannot be anything more than that. [They] must have belief in the Buddha dharma. Since [they] are educated,**

it is very easy for them to learn. They know the script and possess a keen sense of awareness. His Holiness is doing a lot presently through the schoolteachers.

Once you know the dharma, it is very important to have faith. Without faith, you cannot be taught nor would you understand. Knowledge is useless without faith. So faith is needed. You must know the cause clearly, not just because someone says so. You should be totally convinced that doing good is beneficial and sinning is harmful. If one is not aware, then it is difficult. There is a lot to learn in the Buddha dharma.

Q: What is the Buddha dharma that you want them to believe in? What do you want them to believe?

**#46D:** [The younger generation] must question when the elders talk about belief and the *kunchok sum* ‘the three jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha’ and what is the consequence of believing in the *kunchok sum* and the consequence of not believing in them. The root cause of belief in the dharma is you. It is about you, your next life and knowing the consequences of your actions. Dharma is interdependent origination and nothing else. Though it is about emptiness, emptiness is also interdependent origination.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has begun detailed studies. Most of the old people like me go by faith. [We] do not know to read, have no education but have deep faith. [We] go totally by faith. Going by faith is not stable. His Holiness says that one must understand and have faith. Of course, that is right. In the Buddha dharma one must know the consequence of believing in the *kunchok sum* and not believing in them.

Q: If you could talk to the Chinese people, what would you want to tell them about Tibet?

01:05:54

**#46D:** What to tell the Chinese? There is nothing to tell. Those earlier Chinese and the present Chinese are different people. Those people are no more. If you went to your village, people of those days are no longer there. So, is there any use telling? If [they] were there, one could say everything but the people are different. The people these days are different from those days. Presently the Chinese Government...[not discernible]. There is no use telling when it is a matter of the powerful and the powerless.

Q: What do you hope happens for Tibet?

**#46D:** What should happen for Tibet is being separate [from China] and gaining independence as it was earlier but that is not happening. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said earlier that it is good if they [the Chinese] give it and fine if [we] receive it. What is it called? The Middle Way. His Holiness said that it would be good if [the Chinese] gave it and [His Holiness] was right. They are not giving it. [His Holiness] said it would be good if they gave it.

I used to think then, “If we do not gain independence but just this [the Middle Way], then we are in their hands. And the Chinese are Chinese.” [I] thought so but it is not right. What

**His Holiness says is right. They [the Chinese] are not giving it, but if [we] could get that initially it should be enough. [His Holiness] has said that.**

Q: That, *gen-la*, is a good wish maybe for us to end on. I want to thank you very much for this interview and for sharing your story and your experiences with us. We appreciate your contribution.

**#46D: [Nods] [I] thank you for spending [your] money and working for the cause of Tibet.**

Q: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW