

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #47M – Jigme Paljor
April 8, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

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1. Interview Number: #47M
2. Interviewee: Jigme Paljor
3. Age: 69
4. Date of Birth: 1941
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Jorgay
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 8, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 02 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Jigme Paljor's village of Panam is located between Shigatse and Gyantse in Utsang Province. At the age of 6 he joined Narongshar, which was the biggest school in Lhasa. He was among one of the lucky few who got the opportunity to go to school. He fondly talks about his school life and the overall education system of that time. Reading and writing were taught in school, but other subjects such as math required private tutors. He describes the kite flying festival that was popular with the children in Lhasa.

Jigme Paljor's father had been educated in a British school in Lhasa and served as District Administrator of Gyantse. They also owned farmland in Shigatse. Jigme Paljor left school at age 16 and went to help on the family's farm. The Chinese entered the region and handed out coins and gifts, but Jigme Paljor's father was suspicious of their motives. Promoted as the Chief Minister of Lhoka in 1959, his father could not take charge of office on account of the fighting between the Chinese and Tibetan resistance.

Jigme Paljor's family escaped to India as soon as they heard about His Holiness the Dalai Lama's escape in 1959. They reached India after a 10-day journey along with thousands of other soldiers, monks, and government officials. Jigme Paljor was selected as one of the first batch of 50 students to study at a Tibetan school in Mussoorie. He then served as a teacher for 30 years.

Topics Discussed:

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

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Interview #47M

Interviewee: Jigme Paljor

Age: 69, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 8, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:21

Interviewee #47M: My name is Jigme Paljor.

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

#47M: [Laughs] Of course, you can. How can it not be permitted?

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

00:01:30

#47M: In return I would like to thank you from the depth of my heart for your interest in the stories of Tibet.

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

#47M: Okay.

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

00:02:13

#47M: [I am sure] there will not be such [questions]. However, if there are questions that I do not know the answer or am unable to answer, I will say sorry.

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

#47M: In my heart I feel that there will be not be any problem.

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

00:02:58

#47M: Okay.

Q: *Gen-la* ‘respectful term for teacher,’ you are 69 years of age. Is that correct?

#47M: Correct.

Q: And you have a big life story. So perhaps before we go into detail you could tell me, are there certain subjects that you want to be sure that we cover?

00:03:36

#47M: [I] wish to tell [you] a lot, but my memory has become poor and [I] am unable to recall clearly what happened long ago.

Q: We will work on remembering together.

#47M: Okay.

Q: Perhaps you can start by telling us where you were born and how many people were in your family?

00:04:21

#47M: I think I was born in Lhasa. Yes, [I] was born in Lhasa.

Q: How many family members were there?

#47M: Do you mean now or earlier?

Q: Earlier in Lhasa when you were small.

00:04:37

#47M: There were my parents, two brothers and...sisters. [I think] there were seven or eight.

Q: When you think of your childhood, what kind of memories come to mind? What do you remember about your childhood?

#47M: I cannot recall the time when I was about 5 years old. At about 6, I started school. I went to school and it was a very happy time in Lhasa. Your family gave you whatever food you wanted to eat. Your only responsibility was to study and attend [school].

Q: Can you tell us about that school? What kind of school was it and how many children were there?

00:06:23

#47M: The name of the school, as I told you [interpreter] last time [during the pre-interview] was Narongshar. It was the biggest school in Lhasa. It was like a public school. There were other government schools, too. However, I think the objective in sending [the children] to the government school was to become an official. Besides Narongshar, there

was Phale School and some other schools. However, it was considered the biggest and the best then.

Q: And in your school...

#47M: [Interrupts] I cannot say exactly, but perhaps there were 500 students, both boys and girls.

Q: So girls were encouraged and invited to go to school as well as the boys?

00:07:58

#47M: [They had] exactly the same [opportunity]. Besides, there were some girls who were very good at studies. They became prefects.

Q: *Gen-la*, when you first went to school, could you tell us some of the subjects that you studied?

#47M: The subject one studied was only Tibetan and nothing else. One spent the [school] life writing and reading Tibetan. At intervals a teacher arrived and orally taught grammar. There was no system [of writing] on the blackboard.

Q: You went to school starting at 6 years of age. How many years did you go to the school—6, 7, 8, how long?

00:09:34

#47M: [I] spent a long time. It took a year learning the alphabet and then the next lessons. [I] spent almost 10 years.

Q: And in every class, everything, was it only Tibetan that was the only subject ever taught?

#47M: Yes, only Tibetan.

Q: Only Tibetan and reading and writing?

#47M: Yes, mostly.

Q: You said no blackboards. So explain to me the process, how would it go? What did the teacher do and what did the students do?

00:10:25

#47M: Orally.

Q: So what would the teacher do?

#47M: There was only one teacher for 500 children.

Q: Were all the students in one room?

00:10:46

#47M: [Speaks in English] Divided by according to the letter writing [knowledge]. [There was an] alphabet group, *tsugring* [type of Tibetan handwriting] group, *tsugchung* [type of Tibetan handwriting] group, *khyugyik* ‘running handwriting’ group—group-wise.

Q: If the teacher wanted to teach students the alphabet, what did she do?

#47M: When one first joined the school...[I] cannot recall. For most of the groups, each group had two or three prefects as substitutes for the teacher. They were from among the students and they held your hand and taught you the alphabet. It happened that way. You did not often see the teacher. Our teacher was not only a teacher, but a highly skilled doctor. Many patients consulted him. He was highly skilled.

Q: During the school day?

00:12:47

#47M: Yes, they [the patients] came during school hours.

Q: So his attention was on the patients and sometimes on the students?

#47M: Yes, correct.

Q: If you were going to be government leaders, when were you going to learn arithmetic, mathematics and how to compose a letter? When were you going to learn these subjects?

00:13:31

#47M: After you learned handwriting in the school, your family sought teachers for you: grammar teacher, history teacher and mathematics teacher. It [the learning] had to be done separately. If one aspired to be an official of the government, one would be called to appear for a test and if you passed the test, you would become a government official. Other than that, there was no facility for such [subjects] to be taught in the school.

Q: So if you went to school, how long did you go to the school? You started at age 6 and you learned Tibetan language and Tibetan writing. How many years were you in this school?

#47M: I was there until 15 or 16.

Q: Were you studying at home with the teacher any other subjects during this time?

00:15:15

#47M: Yes, I was studying. My father was a government official and was well versed and he used to teach mathematics and everything.

Q: When you went to school, how many hours each day did you go to that Tibetan school—in the morning, afternoon, when?

#47M: [Speaks in English] At that time no hour question is there. According to the sunrise and sunset, we had to stay in the...

Q: You had to stay at school?

00:15:59

#47M: Yes.

Q: From sunrise to sunset, learning Tibetan?

#47M: Yes.

Q: Writing and language?

#47M: Yes.

Q: Was Tibetan a very difficult language to learn?

00:16:14

#47M: It was not difficult at all. Actually it is very easy. If you knew a page of Tibetan grammar, you would know to write without any errors. There was the *lekshay jonpay wangpo* and if you studied this, you would know the spellings as well as how to write. It is very good. I feel that such a grammar is present only in Tibetan.

Q: So why I'm asking is—to go to school for 10 years from early in the morning until the sun sets, for 8-10 hours a day learning to write Tibetan—it seems like you would have learned that.

#47M: [I] am somewhat [learned]. After arriving in India, I again studied *nyengag* 'poetry' and *sumtak* 'grammar.' As far as poetry and grammar are concerned, [I am] proficient. However, age is a deterrent now.

Q: The grammar and literature learning did that come in this school or was that private lessons that your father taught you, from teachers he hired?

00:18:37

#47M: Just as I told you earlier, the teacher came to school only at certain times, like once in a month and orally taught grammar, [*lekshay*] *jonpay wangpo* and such. And that was supposed to be the end. Once he described it, one was supposed to know it. So my father taught me at home as well as the hired teachers.

Q: This is the teacher from the school? I'm getting confused. This is the teacher from the school or outside teacher that comes to the home?

#47M: No, he was not [the school teacher that came home]. It was impossible for him to come. I think most of the teachers were *geshe* 'monks with degrees in Buddhist philosophy' though I did not know at that time as I was a child. They were monks that came and taught [at home].

Q: So they would come to your family home maybe once a month and give a lesson and then you had to study that the whole month?

00:20:16

#47M: Correct. That is correct.

Q: Tell me about the school. Did the children wear uniforms in school, anything special?

#47M: No uniform.

Q: Nothing special?

00:20:29

#47M: Nothing special.

Q: They wore their own clothing.

#47M: But festivals like *Saka Dawa* ‘4th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar’ and such were very enjoyable at school. Really it seemed like you had reached heaven. On the 8th day of the 4th Tibetan lunar month, [the students] were taken to circumambulate the whole of Lhasa after a picnic. The groups I mentioned earlier made a list of the names and took great care to make covers for the registers [name cards?] which were hung [indicates neck] with strings. The teacher also came to circumambulate. There were beautiful picnic spots on the outskirts of Lhasa and we spent the whole day there. It was incredibly enjoyable.

Q: Where did you go on the picnic and what did you do when you got there?

00:21:42

#47M: There were beautiful picnic spots beside the Potala Palace of Lhasa called Dickeylinka and so on, where formerly the Indian and British Ambassadors used to live long ago. We stayed there the whole day and it was up to you what you wished to play. Some played ball, some played wrestling, and some leaped around and did various things.

Q: Sounds wonderful! Did you bring a special food to eat?

#47M: The food was very grand. All the Tibetans did not eat meat during the *Saka Dawa*. Some brought sweet dumplings and some brought rice and milk from home. Whatever [dish] it was, one brought vegetarian fare.

Q: Could you explain the tradition why didn’t people eat meat in the 4th lunar calendar? What is that tradition?

00:23:35

#47M: The reason is very simple. Lord Buddha took birth in the 4th month. He passed away in the 4th month and was born in the 4th month. What is the other one?

Q: He attained enlightenment.

#47M: Yes, he attained enlightenment. Three events took place [in the 4th month] which is why we do that [abstain from eating meat].

Q: And so by not eating meat, was that honoring these holidays, or what was the reason that meat was not eaten?

00:24:46

#47M: Yes, it was to honor the events.

Q: Is there something about eating meat that was considered dishonorable or un-honorable?

#47M: Now-a-days it is considered so. If we were to go by our history, our father was a monkey and our mother, a demon who lived among the rocks. Since humans originated from them, those that took after the mother—actually she was the manifestation of Goddess Tara but had taken the form of the demon—so because of that those that took after the mother loved to eat meat. That’s what’s normally said. They that took after the father who was the manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of love and compassion, did not like meat. That’s what we normally say.

Q: This is interesting for us to hear if you could tell us. What is the story of the beginning of the Tibetan people? Could you elaborate a little more and tell us that story? For people who have never heard it, help them understand.

00:26:47

#47M: That is a long story. It is said that at the time the Buddha lived, Avalokitesvara took a vow before the Buddha that he would take care of the northern snowbound country in the future. Avalokitesvara said that.

Q: Avalokitesvara said that to the Buddha?

#47M: Yes, he took an oath before the Buddha. Since humans were needed in Tibet... That mountain and such can still be seen in Tibet and I have seen it. Towards the south of Lhasa and close to the Yarlung River is a high mountain which is called Tsethang Gonpori. So there Avalokitesvara took the form of a monkey and Goddess Tara took the body of a demon. And six children were born from their union. That is what’s being told.

From the six children, one was a deity in his earlier life that died and was reborn [as a child]. Another child was a *lhamayin* ‘demigod’ that existed somewhere in-between. I think in English they call it the netherworld or something. They are very quarrelsome, angry and scary. One such [demigod] died and a child was born.

Humans inhabited other parts of the world like India. Someone died there and was reborn [as one of the children]. Another [child] used to be an animal that died and was reborn. One was a *yidhak* ‘spirits condemned to suffer torments of hunger and thirst in the ghost world’ which died and was reborn. *Yidhak* means hungry world. Someone died in the hungry world and was reborn. Another [child] was from hell who became a human. So six

beings came about but I do not have knowledge about how many of them were boys and girls.

00:28:51

At that time, they did not care about the sibling relationship and made contact among themselves. Then monkey-like beings began to multiply until there were about 500 monkeys. There were 500 tail-less and strange monkeys. The 500 monkeys could not get along and started fighting and formed six groups. I am finding it difficult to name each of the groups. I think then the actual realm of human beings began from the six groups. That's how we say so orally.

Q: These are the human beings that populated the whole earth or just the Tibet part?

#47M: If it was today, they would have spread [to other parts of the earth], but at that time they did not. They were the people of Tibet.

Q: Do you remember when you first heard this story? Was it in school or in your family life?

00:32:35

#47M: All these are family stories told by the parents. Such stories were never told in school.

Q: I want to go back to school and ask a few more to understand more about the school, like in the school, did the children sit at desk or were they on the floor?

#47M: All sat on the floor.

Q: How did they learn to write, by...in their hands or with paper?

00:33:15

#47M: [Reaches out for a paper] Like this...I only need one sheet.

Q: You can write on that paper.

#47M: I am not going to write. [I want to] show the way it's done. Like this [holds paper between forefinger and little finger of left hand] and sit on the ground. [Sits cross legged] Place it over your right knee, hold the pen and write like this [scribbles on paper]. There was nothing else.

Q: So there was an actual form of learning how to write.

00:34:07

#47M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] All the pens were made from bamboo. They were bamboo pens. You dipped it in ink and then wrote.

Q: And did children start writing at as early as 6 years old or did they have to...

#47M: They started on wooden boards. One spent many years [writing] on a wooden board.

Q: What did you write with on a wooden board?

00:34:52

#47M: That was the same pen, the bamboo pen. The wooden board had to be washed frequently because it would become full. Once it dried, there was a chalk powder to tap over it. Limestone powder which you use to whitewash this [points to wall] was stuffed in a piece of cloth and tapped on it [wooden board]. There was a string used to [help] draw a line. One [drew lines] according to measurement and wrote within that.

Q: This was very economical to use it over and over again.

#47M: [Laughs]

Q: Were all the children, did you say, in one room or were there many rooms?

00:36:14

#47M: One big room, about the size of this hall [points to interview room]. Five hundred children sat in this room.

Q: It's about 50 by 80 feet?

#47M: Yes. [They sat] group-wise: alphabet group, *tsugring* group, *tsugchung* group and so on.

Q: With so many, with 500 students, and it was a little bit older student took care of each section, is that correct?

00:36:49

#47M: Yes, that is correct.

Q: How did they handle discipline because children can be naughty sometimes?

#47M: That was taken care of by each group's leader. All the children were well behaved. During the time of admission, they consider the background of the child. Unless the parents were genteel, admission was not granted.

Q: What will they look at in your family background to see if you qualify to go to the school?

00:37:55

#47M: In general the families were government officials or highly skilled people. They gave admission to those from genteel families.

Q: Was it difficult to get into this school? Was there much competition?

#47M: There were no other problems. No fees needed to be paid. At times, like a sort of fee, some offerings were made to the teacher by my family and others might be doing the same, like bags of *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and such things. There were no other fees.

Q: Did any of the children in your school decide to become monks from that group of 500?

00:39:22

#47M: Oh, there were plenty. There was no restriction if one wanted to become a monk. In fact everyone was overjoyed. The school immediately gave permission to leave. There was no problem whatsoever.

Q: Why do you think a child would want to leave that school and become a monk?

#47M: The most important thing was the parents’ advice. When one is always told about the Buddha dharma, [he] might feel the desire to become [a monk]. As for me, though I did not particularly have the desire to become a monk, I liked monks very much. Everyday when I left home, in order to buy treats I received three *sho*—here you would call it as three *paisa*. It was three paisa but at that time money had great value. One could get a lot for three *sho*, like two or three large breads and potatoes or whatever one wished to eat.

When I took that with me, I would meet an old monk on the way. I do not know who he was. He was very old and used to circumambulate the Bakor. Whenever I met this monk, I gave him one *sho* from the three that I had. The monk was very good and he would pray, “May you be able to learn well. May you become highly educated.”

Q: So you had a special place in your heart for the monks.

#47M: Yes.

Q: If you went to school early in the morning until sunset, when did you learn other things? Your father hired teachers you said to come one time a month to your home and did you study at night these other subjects?

00:42:38

#47M: No, that [hiring teachers] was after I had completed 10 years of schooling. I did not get to learn much after that because it was ’59 and the escape to India began.

Q: I wanted to ask in the school was there any teaching of the dharma to the children?

#47M: There was no particular dharma lessons taught, but when we reached [school] in the morning, similar to dharma lessons, there was chanting of prayers for at least an hour.

Q: What kind of prayers did you say?

00:43:55

#47M: There were many prayers. It began with the *kyabdo* ‘refuge practice,’ and then *dolma* ‘Tara prayer.’ Then there was the *gangloma*, which is a [prayer] requirement for schools. All the multiplication tables were read aloud in Tibetan—“two times one is two, two times two is four.” These were recited and they are still in [my] memory.

Q: So besides writing and reading Tibetan, you also learned some multiplication.

#47M: [Laughs] Yes.

Q: Did you learn division and subtraction?

00:45:10

#47M: Father used to teach that at home.

Q: You said you didn’t have much time to study when you finished school because you had to leave. You said in 1969...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 1959.

Q: You said ‘59? I thought I heard ‘69. I thought it was ‘59 that you left.

#47M: ‘59 with [the] Dalai Lama.

Q: We’re going to come to that. While you were...One last thing. Did the children in school, did they learn any Tibetan opera or Tibetan songs or things like that?

00:45:57

#47M: There were never such things in school. However, it was akin to it because there were opera and songs and dances throughout the year in Lhasa. Since such [performances] occurred, everyone went to watch the shows during the holidays.

Q: One last question about school. What is your memory of school? Was it a happy time? Did it get boring? You have to go everyday for 10 years and keep learning the Tibetan alphabet? I’m interested, was there enough to engage your mind for those 10 years?

#47M: At that time there was no talk of boredom. It was a happy time as there were no other schools; no modern schools to be seen. It was considered the best school and it was very enjoyable. Walking to [school] and back...winter was extremely enjoyable. It was cold in winter and there are many small lakes in Lhasa. They became completely frozen. There was no need to make skateboards. A nail was positioned in the sole of your shoes and if you sprinted, you could slide a distance from here to that hospital over there [points off camera]. It was called *khyagshur* ‘snow slide’ and children loved to do that.

Then there was the kite-flying festival in the 7th and 8th months. Kite-flying was very popular in Lhasa. Perhaps it originated from India. It continued for about a month. These were the two most enjoyable [times].

Q: Can you tell me what happened in the kite-flying festival? I've heard about this.

00:49:27

#47M: The kites you find in India are useless. They are nothing; you just pulled a string. We wound the string on a big roll and made the kite. The kite was big, about this size [makes a circle by joining arms] and tied the string to it. The string was not ordinary. There was a certain paste that was applied to the string. [The kites] were flown in the sky and they fought. One spent the whole day with eyes focused on the sky. Once I almost became blind for a month due to excessive kite-flying. It gradually became better. It was very enjoyable.

Q: It sounds like it was a very beautiful scene. Were there many kites in the sky at the same time?

#47M: Yes, thousands and thousands.

Q: And that was in the 8th or 9th month of the Tibetan year. What was the fabric of the kites? What were they made of?

00:51:29

#47M: There was a kind of Tibetan paper that came from Dhakpo. It was very tough. Indian papers like newspapers tear easily, but that did not tear unless you pulled hard at it. [The kites] were made from it and were expensive. A kite cost five *sho* or a *sang* or about 10 *sho* at that time. When children did not have money, they stole from the wallets of their parents and purchased [kites]. What else to do?

Q: Where did they fly the kites, in Lhasa or right outside? How?

#47M: It was right in Lhasa. [I] do not think it was popular in other parts of Tibet. It was popular in Lhasa.

Q: Was there enough wind in Lhasa in that 8th or 9th month we are talking about?

00:53:17

#47M: There was very good wind.

Q: Were there any particular pictures or designs painted on the kites or colors?

#47M: Drawings. There were various [drawings]. There was one called *gyawu*, a bearded man, and it was painted. And then there was one with two eyes called *miklo* with one [eye] painted red and the other black. Most [of the kites] were as they were, white.

Q: If you're going to have a kite fight, what was the purpose or what was the aim of the fight?

00:54:31

#47M: One must try to cut the string of the other one. As soon as the fight began, one must let loose the string with force. The one who managed to loosen the string cut the string of the one who did not let loose [his string]. It immediately broke and fell. If one was careful with the string, you would not succeed.

Q: Would you cut it with your string?

#47M: Yes, that's right.

Q: So the string had paste. It didn't have glass in it or something sharp?

00:55:22

#47M: Yes, yes. Glass and china were powdered and mixed in the paste and then applied to the string.

Q: What kind of a kite flier were you?

#47M: Oh, I was an expert kite flier. That's why my eyes are damaged.

Q: Really? You think from looking up too much?

00:55:59

#47M: Yes, whole day [from] sunrise to sunset.

Q: You didn't go to school?

#47M: During the school holiday time.

Q: So this was holiday time, 8th and 9th months?

00:56:23

#47M: There were quite a number of holidays during the 7th month, like *shoton* 'summer opera festival of Lhasa' and so on.

Q: The school would have vacations like a week or a month, something like that a couple of times?

#47M: No, there were no such [vacations] for the school.

Q: Were the vacations short ones?

00:56:48

#47M: There were three or four days off during the 4th month.

Q: Did the children go to school all year long?

#47M: Yes, the whole year long.

Q: Did all the children in your family go to school?

00:57:23

#47M: My younger brother, who has now passed away, and I attended school. My actual home was in Tsang near Shigatse. We lived there and went to school in Shigatse.

Q: If your family lived in Shigatse and you went to school in Lhasa, where did you go at night when school was finished?

#47M: My father and mother lived in Lhasa. We owned a house in Lhasa, but it was not a big house; it was a small one. I went to eat lunch there and slept there in the night.

Q: Did your father go to the same school as you or what kind of education did your father have?

00:59:00

#47M: Father did not attend that [school]. Father went to [school] in Gyangtse. There was a town called Gyangtse. It was during the time of the 13th Dalai Lama. A school was established there by the British and he attended that school. He knew English well. He also loved sports like [foot]ball and such. Father knew everything: singing, dancing and playing the guitar.

Q: Your father sounded like he was a lot of fun.

#47M: [Laughs]

Q: *Gen-la*, let us continue to hear now what happens to you after school. You say you go to school from 6 to 16 and then what happens when you finish school? What happens next in your life?

01:00:36

#47M: There was nothing else but that the escape began.

Q: That would have been...but if you were 16 and...if you were 16...

[Interpreter: 1941 plus 16...1957]

Q: 1957 you were ready to flee India, that early? His Holiness did not leave until 1959. But before 1959, in 1957 what was happening in Lhasa? Two years before His Holiness fled.

#47M: The Chinese had arrived in Lhasa by then. They'd arrived by '49. They established schools and did many things. They started Chinese schools. They said that we had to go to China and that it would be good to go to school there. They came to say that many times, but I had no desire to go nor did my parents wish to send me. So [I] did not go. Then I went home for a short while. [I] went home and lived there for about a year.

Q: By home do you mean Gyangtse?

01:02:21

#47M: Yes, Gyangtse. My actual home was in Shigatse. At that time my father was working as the District Administrator of Gyangtse and [I] went to Gyangtse. And then it was the time to escape. It was '58.

Q: What is the job of a District Administrator?

#47M: It was similar to the District Collector that we have here in India. It was similar to that.

Q: And what does he collect? Taxes?

01:03:54

#47M: No such collection was made. The most important part of the administration was to maintain law and order.

Q: *Gen-la*, you said the Chinese started many schools in Lhasa. Who went to these schools?

#47M: All the children of Lhasa attended. [The Chinese] set up a sort of modern school and all the children thought it was fun. There were singing, dancing, learning...

Q: Did your parents ever consider sending you to this school or was there a reason why they did not?

01:05:19

#47M: Basically, even at that time [we] did not like the Chinese and on my part, I did not wish to attend. [I] never even thought of going there. [I] returned home where there was a lot of work. We were farm owners and there was cultivation to do and [I] lived at home.

Q: By home you mean...

#47M: Shigatse. There was a [place] called Panam. It [home] was there between Shigatse and Gyangtse. There was a *zong* 'district' called Panam Zong. My family name was Jorgay. [We] were called Panam Jorgay.

Q: Can you say why you did not like the Chinese at that time?

01:06:53

#47M: The reason for not liking the Chinese was that father and the others used to tell [me] a lot. They were Communists and were not the earlier Chinese. Basically, Tibetans did not like the Chinese, whether it was then or now. Without any rhyme or reason the Chinese thought only about occupying Tibet and did not come to Tibet with good intentions. Therefore, even at that time—the Chinese used deceptive ways—[I] did not like the Chinese. Older people used to tell a story that Chinese policy was like a wet leather cap. When it was initially worn over the head, it sat loose because it was wet. Then it gradually

began to tighten and when it was dry, it constricted. That was it. So when I thought of these things, I did not like the Chinese even then.

Q: So when you were still going to school, what did you see happening in the streets of Lhasa if the Chinese were there? You were about 16, do you remember seeing with your own eyes any particular treatment of the Tibetans by the Chinese or vice versa?

#47M: The Chinese were being deceitful at that time. [They] were doing so much for the Tibetans. They brought in huge amounts of *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins.’ The *dhayen* were said to have come from Siling. If one performed a small task, excessive *dhayen* were paid. Tibetan dramas depicted it and His Holiness the Dalai Lama also says, “We were lured by *dhayen* and that did us in.” Therefore, the Chinese were like that then, cunning and sweet.

Q: How much is a *dhayen* worth in Tibetan money?

01:11:04

#47M: [I think] it was 15 *ngusang*. It was 15 *sang*. Was it not 150 *sho*?

Q: One hundred fifty *sho*. That’s a lot. Today, like how many *rupees* would a *dhayen* equal?

#47M: When we arrived from Tibet, we received five Indian *rupees* for a *dhayen*. I do not know what it is like now.

Q: During this time you were working on the farm. What kind of work were you doing?

01:12:22

#47M: In Tibet we mainly grew barley, wheat and *tema*. What do you call *tema* [in English]?

Q: Peas.

#47M: Yes, those were the three main [crops] and there were many others besides them.

Q: And what kind of work did you do?

01:12:56

#47M: I did not do anything else in Tibet except look after the fields. Most of the work was done with the help of others. One helped each other.

Q: Was that a very different experience for a boy who grew up in the city and then to go live on the farm?

#47M: Yes.

Q: How did you feel about that change?

01:14:03

#47M: I was very happy. My family owned good lands and there was a river that ran nearby. One could swim and there were picnic spots and Shigatse was very close. There were no vehicles then and if one rode a horse, one could reach it in two or three hours. I used to visit Shigatse for a few days. Shigatse was a very happy place. The Panchen Lama's palace and everything was located there.

Q: What was Shigatse like in the sense, were the Chinese in Shigatse as well?

#47M: Yes, they were. They'd already reached everywhere. Not only that, the Chinese came to our house when they traveled up and down. The Chinese came and at that time they were deceiving the richer families by giving presents like towels, soaps and photographs of Mao Zedong. They were doing such things.

Q: How did your family...did your father talk to them? Was he the person and how did he treat the Chinese?

01:16:16

#47M: Father was living at Gyangtse then and he never told [us] anything about it. On our part, we rented them [the Chinese] a house to stay during their travels. That was it. [We] did not make any other contacts.

Q: Did they say why they were coming to...Shigatse, right? No, in Gyangtse?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was a town called Panam between Shigatse and Gyangtse.

Q: When they came to your house, did they say why they were in Tibet? What did they say the reason was?

#47M: That was there at the tip of their tongue. "We have come to help the Tibetans in Tibet. When you've made good [progress], we will go back," they said that on one hand and on the other...There was a red flag of the Chinese that you can see here these days, with five stars on it. They asked, "Do you know these five stars? These are the five continents of the world. Later all these five continents will become Communists. They will come under Mao Zedong." It looked like even at that time they had such things on their mind. It was like that.

Q: What did your family think when they heard such statements?

01:18:48

#47M: [I] was a child then, but I knew since long that the Chinese were bad. [We] knew they were deceiving us, but no one directly confronted them as such.

Q: Did it feel intimidating to oppose them? Did it feel dangerous, like why didn't you say "Go home"?

#47M: That was never said. [No one understood the situation] to say that. [No one] knew much of politics. That was it and later when [I] went to Shigatse... Well, it does not mean that all Chinese are bad. Some were good. I had a friend, but I have forgotten his name. He used to say, "You will face difficulties later on. Once Chinese rules over you, you would not get to live like you do now."

They themselves faced severe problems. We were not the only ones, the Chinese did too. The Chinese had food restrictions. We had no limitations and could eat until satiated. It was said that for them a normal person received a quota of 25 *gyama* 'half a kilogram.' The Chinese [friend] told me. And those that performed hard labor received 30 *gyama*. Each *gyama* is almost 50 [?] grams, though I am not able to say exactly. So 25 of that had to last a month.

One day he and I went to Shigatse together. He took me to a Chinese restaurant. I was asked what I wished to eat and was served the amount I wanted to eat at that time. I asked him if he did not want to eat. He said, "I have to refer to this book and eat accordingly." He had a small book which he gave to the manager [of the restaurant]. The manager wrote something. Perhaps he made a deduction and calculated how much he had eaten and how much he could eat now.

01:22:26

A small sized *tingmo* 'steamed bread' was brought for him. I was given two or three *tingmo*, as many as I wanted to eat. I asked him, "What is this? Why is that I am given many *tingmo* while you have only one?" "If I eat more than this, I will be left with no food later. I will not get any wherever I go. Once the 25 *gyama* is over, there's nothing left." I was shocked! Whether one was satiated with a small *tingmo* or not, that was it. [He] took a little vegetable [curry] and ate it. That was the custom. If we lived under the red Chinese in the future, that is how it will be, is not it? "There is no other way," said the friend.

Q: Was that shop in what city?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Shigatse.

Q: It was in Shigatse.

#47M: Chinese government shop.

Q: So even at that point the Chinese... Was this friend of yours, was he from China or newly from China or had he been in Tibet a long time?

01:25:44

#47M: Yes, yes [he was from China]. He was a Communist Chinese.

Q: So he was newly arrived.

#47M: [Nods]

Q: Even he was given a ration book.

#47M: Yes.

Q: And he had to go to only eat in Chinese restaurants?

01:25:59

#47M: Yes. No other way to get food.

Q: But could he come to your house and eat?

#47M: Yes, but he can eat if he is there alone. But with others he cannot eat because they [the Chinese] watched each other a lot.

Q: What happens next in your life story? You are living on the farm. You are seeing problems with the Chinese. What happens next to you?

01:26:58

#47M: After that my father received a promotion and was deputed to Lhoka as *chikhyab* by the government. Lhoka Chikhyab means the ‘Chief Minister of the Southern part.’ So we moved to Lhoka. When we went to Lhoka, the Chinese and the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] had already clashed—our Khampas [people from Kham province]. [Father] could not take charge. There was no time to take office of the Chief Ministership. And soon His Holiness the Dalai Lama left and [we] fled to India. That is the end [of the story].

Q: Where is Lhoka in relation to Shigatse?

#47M: Lhoka is towards the south of Gyantse. [I] heard that there were 18 districts in Lhoka though I do not know much about it.

Q: Do you remember, were you going to move with your father? Is that what happened? You were going to go live with him?

01:28:55

#47M: Yes, I and my younger brother, who’s since passed away, were going there. We went there while all the rest was left at home.

Q: You’re saying before you could go with your father, Lhasa was attacked?

#47M: It had not been, but it was on the verge of happening. There were just a few days left.

Q: Tell me what do you and your father and your brother and mother do? What do you do instead of going to Lhoka?

01:29:45

#47M: My mother had passed away long ago.

Q: Then what did you, your father and younger brother do?

#47M: [We] reached Lhoka, but [father] could not take charge as there was a war. So [we] stayed at the district house for a few days. Soon the attack happened in Lhasa and it was said that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was leaving. Then we too left along with His Holiness.

Q: How did you hear that His Holiness was leaving because I thought it was a secret?

01:31:03

#47M: Well, my father held quite a high position and I suppose messages arrived through people who traveled to and from Lhasa, but we were children.

Q: So what kind of preparation did you and your father and your brother make to leave Lhoka?

#47M: There was no time to make any preparations. We left our possessions at the monastery of Ling Rinpoche, which is located in Yarlung. Then the three of us rode on horses and mules and left. There was nothing we could bring. We had nothing. When [we] arrived in India, we were practically beggars.

Q: How long did it take you to travel by horseback to India?

01:32:50

#47M: It might have taken 10 days. We could travel only short distances. The winter snow had not melted and the horses had to be led through the snow. It took about 10 days.

Q: How many were in your party?

#47M: There were many people. There were many soldiers of the Tibetan Government. Everyone was fleeing as the Chinese had already arrived in Lhoka. The Chinese were being so disdainful that it was funny. The interviewer might laugh or might not believe it. When we were passing through Yarlung, Chinese aircraft arrived. At that time there were only the transport aircrafts in Tibet and there existed only one airport called Dham Airport.

While we were fleeing, the Chinese knew of our situation. Actually it might have sufficed to just drop a bomb from the sky as people were walking. Instead—I do not know how they loaded such huge rocks that were bigger than this table [points off camera] into the airplanes—they dropped these from the airplanes. Rocks - hard rocks. That is being disdainful. They did such things.

Q: Did they hit anybody?

01:35:25

#47M: It did not hit people, but when they hit houses, the houses crumbled.

Q: Do you think there was a reason why they didn't use any bombs?

#47M: I do not see any other reason except that they were being disdainful to the Tibetans. We did not possess any arms.

Q: What was the feeling? You said many people were with you. Was it hundreds or thousands and were you walking on a road? How was the exodus going?

01:36:32

#47M: Oh my, there might have been 5,000 to 6,000 with us. Soldiers, monks, government officials—one cannot mention all; everybody was taking off.

Q: Did anyone think it was unusual that the soldiers were fleeing because they were supposed to be the soldiers defending Tibet?

#47M: There was nothing left to think. For example, there might have been at the most 300-400 soldiers with us while around 10,000 Chinese were in pursuit. Thousands and thousands were coming. How could they be overcome? [The soldiers] were forced to flee.

Q: How were you being pursued by tens of thousands of Chinese? Were they coming through Tibet?

01:38:16

#47M: Yes.

Q: What would you say was the feeling in the hearts of the people who were leaving including yourself, of course? Start with you, what was your feeling?

#47M: [I] did not think of anything else then except for the thought of from where would I get something to eat and drink and that if we reached India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama would be there and that we would get our independence back soon. I never ever thought and nor [I think] did the others that we would live here for such a long time.

Q: Did you have any kind of idea about how long it would take to go back to Tibet?

01:39:43

#47M: At that time I thought in my heart that we would get to go back soon. I thought we would be back perhaps in a month or two or within a year. It never ever occurred to me that it would be this long.

Q: The journey with these 5 or 6,000 people, how many days did it take?

#47M: I told you earlier that it took about 10 days. It took us that many days.

Q: Among the people, there's many people, high officials and monks. Were there different attitudes about the country and should people have done a better job, government officials or soldiers? Were people angry or upset at their own government for not protecting them?

01:41:21

#47M: There might have been some people who may have had such thoughts, but I did not feel that way. The government officials endeavored to escort out His Holiness the Dalai Lama and because of that [I] think they did well. On their part, the soldiers did whatever they could. They fought and they died. Though I did not see it with my eyes, it used to be said that one Tibetan [soldier] killed 12 Chinese [soldiers].

After reaching India, thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the soldiers were formed into groups and dispatched to Gangtok [Sikkim] and various other places. The monks were collected and sent to Buxa [West Bengal, India] where a religious establishment was set up. And those of us who were younger and educated—50 children were picked and taken to Mussoorie [Uttaranchal, India]. That was the group called the “Mussoorie School 50.” [I] was among them.

Q: Did you know any families who had sent their children to China to be educated?

#47M: Oh, there were many such [families]. [I] cannot remember them now. There were many who returned after their studies in China—many who returned to India.

Q: Do you remember them telling you what happened in China?

01:44:15

#47M: [Laughs] I do not remember having had many of such talks. Since those were the days when the deception was going on, [I think] it was a happy time [for them]. The Tibetan children were provided with special food and special accommodation and it was said that whatever they desired was brought to them in their rooms. [I believe] they could just place an order for whatever they wished to eat, “I want to eat this. I want to eat this.” That was the period the deception was going on.

Q: So when you and your father arrive, where is the first place you arrived in India?

#47M: We arrived first at Tawang and then Bomdila [Arunachal Pradesh], and then at Assam.

Q: What was your experience of arriving in India? How was that for you? You had led a rather nice life in many ways, school and nice farm, and so what was that like to be a refugee for a man of your culture and background?

01:46:22

#47M: There was nothing else that [we] could do at that time. Father and we discussed, “Let's go to Kalimpong or Darjeeling where we might get the chance to work as servants to rich families.” That was the extent of our objective. There was no other job that we would

get and as we were in the process of discussing about working as servants, [I] was dispatched to Mussoorie.

Q: Who selected you to go?

#47M: It was our government. At that time His Holiness the Dalai Lama was living in Mussoorie. The Tibetan Government was based in Mussoorie then. [I] was selected from there.

Q: I was curious what would your father and brother and you have done in Kalimpong or Darjeeling? What kind of work would you have done for wealthy families? And were these Tibetan families or Indian families?

01:48:17

#47M: We would have sought [work] anywhere as there was nothing else we could do. However, we did not have to do that. Earlier father was a government official and he was appointed as the principal of the school that was immediately started in Kalimpong by the government while the two of us left for Mussoorie.

Q: What kind of school was it for little or big children; what kind?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean the school in Mussoorie?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...that his father went.

#47M: There were not many little children in the schools in Mussoorie and Kalimpong then. They were older children. All [the students] in Mussoorie were older children. We were among the younger ones. All the rest were older.

Q: Do you know why were you selected to go to Mussoorie?

01:49:59

#47M: I already knew Tibetan right from Tibet. I do not know if I was a little smarter as I was selected. I could stay for only two years in Mussoorie. I studied very hard while at Mussoorie and learned English very well. I was told that in those two years, I gained the knowledge of a 7th or 8th grader. Later many schools were established and I was deputed as a teacher.

Q: Wow! How did you like being a teacher?

#47M: The stint as teacher was very good as all the children at that time were good. They were not like the present [students] who looked with up-turned eyes at the teachers. [The students] were very good. We too worked very hard unlike the teachers of today. [I] was initially deputed as a teacher to Simla [Himachal Pradesh]. Many children arrived from the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala. It was an extremely poor situation then. There was only one bed and a big blanket or quilt for about 16 children. All the children

were ill. So instead of teaching, for a month of two [we] were busy ferrying the children on our backs to the hospital. [We] underwent such struggles.

Q: So many children were ill.

01:52:50

#47M: Yes.

Q: Were these children who had escaped?

#47M: Yes, yes with their parents.

Q: And were these children also ill because of the climate conditions or problems like that?

01:53:04

#47M: It could be the climate and there was no hygiene maintained at that time.

Q: Did any of the children die?

#47M: One died; a good little girl died. She suffered from tuberculosis and I took her many times on my back to the hospital, but she could not be saved. The rest did so-so.

Q: How long did it take? You continued to teach at Simla for a while?

01:53:59

#47M: [I] was there for three years—in Simla for three years.

Q: Were you ever able to teach the children when they got little bit better in more better conditions?

#47M: Oh yes, I got the opportunity to teach very well and the children were good at that time. Many from among them became cabinet members later.

Q: You must be very proud.

01:54:53

#47M: Yes, yes.

Q: I think, *gen-la*, you never got out of school.

#47M: [Laughs] Yes, [my] life was spent at school. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama visits here and [I] am standing in a row, he immediately recognizes me. “Were not you among the Mussoorie School 50?” [His Holiness] pats me on the head and immediately recognizes me.

Q: After Simla, did you continue teaching or did your career change?

01:55:42

#47M: No, I continued as a teacher until 1998, for about thirty odd years.

Q: That's a long time. So you have a career in teaching.

#47M: Yes.

Q: As you think about your life and your experiences, is there anything else that you think it would be important for Tibetan children and their children and their children to know about Tibet? You're a teacher so you know the importance of learning. So what are the information could you impart or tell them about Tibet?

01:56:52

#47M: I feel that education in general is being taught in schools, but the most important is the history of Tibet that should be taught well to the children and they should take an interest in it. I think they should know well the history of Tibet and they must know it. If one does not know it, what the Chinese say these days is that...the Chinese are aware that historically Tibet was an independent country. We lived as an independent country until '49. And then the so-called 17-Point Agreement was signed.

So the younger generation should be told the history and they should take an interest in learning it well. If that is not done, if we do not take interest and believe that we are under the Chinese, there might come a time when Tibet is lost totally. That's what I think and therefore it is important to know the history. The Chinese told His Holiness, "You must accept that Tibet's history is a part of China since long ago." His Holiness replied, "History will remain permanent. There's never anyone who will alter history." So deep down the Chinese are afraid when the history of Tibet proves that it was an independent country. I think one must know the history well.

Q: That's why it's important that we are doing your story.

#47M: [Nods]

Q: Just a few more questions in that regard. So what do you hope will be preserved about Tibet for future generations?

02:00:21

#47M: I think that is easy as His Holiness is always stressing on that. "We should preserve the Tibetan culture for the next generation," His Holiness always advises. Once the culture is lost, everything deteriorates. Therefore, we must preserve the religion and culture of Tibet for which His Holiness is doing so much and [I] think we should try out best too.

Q: Thank you for that very good information.

Q: Just because we have covered so much, I want to ask again. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

02:01:48

#47M: I have no problems whatsoever. All my relatives in Tibet have been killed and cut up and there's nothing left to do now. I am living here and what harm can the Chinese do?

Q: Can we use your real name for this project?

#47M: Yes, yes.

Q: *Gen-la*, thank you for sharing your wonderful story.

02:02:19

#47M: I have one thing left to say. Whether it is your project or you madam [to the interviewer], you have all put in a lot of effort and done this, so from my side I would like to thank you from the depth of my heart.

Q: It is our pleasure.

#47M: [Bows]

Q: Before you go...

[Interviewer presents interviewee with an envelope and gift]

#47M: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW