

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #47N – Passang Dolma
April 15, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #47N
2. Interviewee: Passang Dolma
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1940
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Tathun
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 15, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Lodrik Old Age Home, Jampaling Tibetan Refugee Settlement, Dulegaunda, Tanahun, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 31 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Palden Tsering
14. Videographer: Dhiraj Kafle
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Passang Dolma was born in Tathun in Utsang Province. Her parents had eight children. As a nomad's child she herded animals and there was no farming. She says the only work they knew was rearing animals, milking and churning curd. Passang Dolma recounts that her family migrated every summer and winter along with their five neighbors. Her favorite festival was the horse racing festival when many people gathered together.

Passang Dolma's family escaped to Mustang in Nepal leaving behind their animals and belongings when they heard about the Chinese coming. They were forced to beg for food and work on other people's lands as farmers. She met a soldier serving in the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] in Mustang and married him when she was in her 20s. Her life changed for the better when they moved to the settlement to work as weavers in the carpet factory.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, nomadic life, escape experiences, life as a refugee in Nepal.

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Interview #47N

Interviewee: Passang Dolma

Age: 75, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 15, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:11

Interviewee #47N: My name?

Q: Yes.

#47N: It is Passang Dolma.

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?

#47N: Of course.

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

#47N: Okay.

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

#47N: Okay.

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

#47N: Okay.

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

#47N: [I] do not know. Would it create problems? Perhaps it will not.

Q: I don't know. Is it okay if we use this interview?

#47N: Yes?

Q: Is it okay to use it?

00:02:27

#47N: It is okay. What can happen?

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

#47N: Okay.

Q: Can you please tell us how old you are?

#47N: Me? 75.

Q: And where were you born?

#47N: [I] was born right in Tathun, born in Tathun.

Q: And what province is that?

#47N: Yes?

Q: Tathun...

#47N: Tathun...the monastery is called Tathun.

Q: Which province is it?

#47N: It is Utsang.

Q: *Ama-la* 'respectful term for mother,' sit back. Relax.

#47N: Okay. [Smiles]

Q: So *ama-la...momo-la* 'respectful term for grandmother,' *momo-la*, when you were born, how many people were in your family?

#47N: Oh, as for family members at home, the parents had eight children. [Laughs] Now they are no more. Some became scattered and some died. Not many survive now.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do for a livelihood? What did they do?

00:04:24

#47N: It was just raising animals and milking. That was it. In my hometown there was not any other work but raising animals. [We] milked, churned curd and that was the food.

Q: When you were a little girl, what kind of chores did you do, *ama-la*?

#47N: As a little one it was herding animals. The parents [sent you] to herd animals. There was not any other work but herding animals and churning curd. The animals were milked and curd churned. That was the only work. It was like that for the nomads.

Q: Did you have any animals that were favorite...some of your favorite animals that had names? Did you name any of your animals?

#47N: Only a few were given names and not the rest. The animals just...

Q: Which animals did [you] like?

00:06:21

#47N: You gave names to some good animals like Tsenyak for a red yak and Nguyak for a blue yak. One raised two such [yaks]. Otherwise, yaks did not have names; animals did not have names. They were just driven along in a group.

Q: Were there many, many...You said you were a nomad family; did you also do farming or only animals, *ama-la*?

#47N: Farming...after the loss of [our] country, loss of the hometown...

Q: Was there any farming while in the hometown...?

#47N: There was not any farm work; it was just the animals. It was just the animals and no farm work.

Q: How many...in your nomad group, about how many families lived around you?

#47N: Family members?

Q: How many neighbors?

#47N: Neighbors?

Q: Yes, neighbors.

#47N: There were five neighbors living around us. There were always five. [We] migrated during summer with the five neighbors and in the winter too. Each one had a respective place. One could not just go anywhere but to the respective site. There were always five neighbors.

Q: When you think back about your nomad days, *ama-la*, what are some of your favorite memories about working and living as a nomad?

00:09:16

#47N: The best memory...it was praying that the animals fared well.

Q: What is the best and the happiest memory?

#47N: The happiest times were when the animals did not suffer from any illness and they multiplied. Then one was happy. Nomads would have nothing if something happened to the animals. That was the only problem and none else.

Q: Did you have any favorite holidays, *ama-la*?

#47N: There were festivals.

Q: There were festivals, but which is your favorite festival?

#47N: There were festivals when all the villagers in the area got together. There was great celebration.

Q: Which is your favorite festival?

#47N: At that time there was a festival during which everyone gathered and there was horse racing. [I] loved this the most. There was not any other.

Q: Did you do horseback riding yourself?

#47N: Oh, no. [I] cannot race horses. My father took part; Father did.

Q: Oh, tell us about your father. What kind of a man was your father?

#47N: Yes?

Q: Please say something about your father. What kind of a person was he, his personality?

00:11:27

#47N: Father's name was Tenpa Tsering and he was well known and used to travel around on any kind of work. It was like that.

Q: And what kind of a man was your father?

#47N: [Father] had a good personality and everybody liked him because of it. Father used to be a *layjay* and traveled. He had a good personality.

Q: What's *layjay*?

#47N: *Layjay* is an influential person who works in an office and [Father] traveled as one.

Q: Was father an official?

#47N: Yes, and traveled as one.

Q: And what about your mother? What kind of a nature did she have? What kind of a character?

#47N: Mother was not very capable, just taking care of the animals, doing the milking and nothing else. [She] did not know much about other jobs.

Q: I want to go back and check something. Your age is...what is your age, *ama-la*?

#47N: Me?

Q: Yes.

#47N: I am 75.

Q: But born in 1930? She was born in 1940, then...1940, yeah. Okay. So I wanted to just check the age. And then so, *ama-la*, does anything change in your village life? Did things stay the same or are there any big changes that come to you and your family?

00:14:10

#47N: A great change occurred when [I] was living in the village. The Chinese appeared. And then [we] fled leaving all the animals and reached Mustang [Nepal] with nothing, reached the place called Mustang. All the animals were left behind. [We] did not possess even one. Such difficulties happened. It was a great hardship.

Q: *Ama-la*, how old were you when that change happened, when the Chinese started coming in?

#47N: How old was I then? Perhaps 18 or 19; perhaps so. I did not see the Chinese but fled when it was said that [they] were coming. When it was said that the Chinese were coming and that one should not remain, we fled for good leaving behind all the animals, leaving behind all the animals and belongings and fled.

Q: [You] were 18 or 19 years old?

#47N: The parents and everyone fled and reached the place called Mustang. [We] had no animals on reaching Mustang. So [we] worked in other people's fields for there was nothing. [We] underwent such difficulties, underwent great difficulties.

Q: *Ama-la*, how many people in your family left with you for Mustang?

00:16:21

#47N: From the family the parents, two *aji* and an elder brother left. The rest had passed away.

Q: Two *aji*?

#47N: Two elder sisters...two elder sisters and the parents.

Q: Tell me about the journey. *Ama-la*, what was the journey like?

#47N: [We] came begging along the way for there was nothing to eat. [We] begged from people, “Please give something. Please give something.” [We] ate whatever the people gave. On reaching Mustang, we got together with friends and cultivated lands and lived for many years. [We] suffered great hardships.

Q: How long...do you remember how old you were when you went to Mustang?

#47N: I can recall arriving in Mustang. [I] was 18, 19 or 20 when [I] reached Mustang. After losing the country [I] came to Mustang at the age of 20.

Q: About 20 years old. What kind of living situation...what did your family live in for a house? Did they have their tent?

00:18:33

#47N: No, [we] rented a house, rented a house and paid rent.

Q: Tell me about the different kind of jobs that you did.

#47N: On reaching Mustang...[the people of Mustang] were all land owners. There were not any other [jobs] except farming.

Q: The fields belonged to others?

#47N: Yes, belonged to others. [We] worked on other people’s fields and were paid wages on which [we] survived.

Q: Did you work in somebody’s house as a servant, *ama-la*?

#47N: Servant in the sense...[I] was not a full-fledged servant but went to work for others during the day and survived on the wages living in a rented house. [I] was not a full-fledged servant. [I]’ve never served as a full-fledged servant.

Q: Were you living in the house with your mother and father at that time?

#47N: [Interrupts translator] [We] were living in a rented house. Father and Mother were there.

Q: Were Father, Mother and everyone there?

#47N: Yes. [I] took the earnings to the parents. [We] survived on that and then once again went to work. It had been like that always. It had been like that always and nothing else.

Q: They were living with mother and father, and brothers and sisters?

00:20:23

#47N: [Brothers and sisters] were there then.

Q: So how many years did you stay unmarried lady at that time? When you were living there you were a young woman, you know, 19, 20. When did you get married?

#47N: Perhaps [I] got married around 20. [I] might have been 20-something. It was after arriving in Mustang, so perhaps 20-something. He was a soldier and [we] met.

Q: In your 20s?

#47N: Yes.

Q: Really? So when you got married, you're far away from your home. So what happened? Did you have a wedding ceremony?

#47N: No, there was not. [We] just met and there was not any ceremony. [We] had nothing to hold a ceremony. He was a soldier and we met and fell in love. These days it is known as lovers. Similar to that we met and there was not any ceremony.

Q: Did your parents approve of your marriage?

00:22:27

#47N: [My father] did not disapprove for we had met each other. Mother had passed away by then. Father was there but Mother had passed away when we met each other. Mother had passed away.

Q: Father was there.

#47N: Father was there.

Q: I'm sorry. How old were you when you got married?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In her 20s.

Interviewer to interpreter: 20s? Okay. I thought I read somewhere she was much older.

Q: You know there are many different kinds of soldiers. There are so many different kinds of soldiers. Was your husband in the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]? Was your husband in the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#47N: Yes, a soldier of the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: And did they receive any salary to support the families?

#47N: Yes?

Q: Did the soldiers receive any salary?

#47N: Yes, a fair amount. They did at that time.

Q: [The soldiers] were given salaries?

#47N: Yes.

Q: Were you able to live in a house together or have your own place?

#47N: He was a soldier. So [we] could not live together. He had to go away as a soldier and if permitted, came on visits. Otherwise, [he] could not live at home. A soldier must go away.

Q: Why did you like your husband?

00:24:24

#47N: [Laughs] [He] was a soldier then and somehow [we] met. Well, love...

Q: You fell in love with a soldier?

#47N: Yes, [we] fell in love.

Q: Did he come from the same area as you did in Tathun?

#47N: [We] are not from the same area. I am from Tathun and he is a Bapa. [We] were not from the same hometown. Yes, [we] were not from the same hometown.

Q: Was his family nomads?

#47N: [They] were nomads.

Q: So how long did you stay in Mustang?

#47N: [We] were in Mustang for three years.

Q: Three years in Mustang with your husband?

#47N: At that time [we] were together but he was a soldier while I lived in a rented house. Then all the soldiers left. We too left and came here.

Q: To the camp?

#47N: [Nods]

[To interpreter] I want to go. Is it okay? The old man is sick and must be fed. [He] cannot walk.

Q: Why did you leave Mustang, *momo-la*?

#47N: Reached Mustang?

Q: You left Mustang and...

00:26:30

#47N: There were no animals and the *Chushi Gangdrug* said that [the soldiers] must go here where there is a factory, to go and work in the factory. The *Chushi Gangdrug* established a factory for the soldiers in which [we] worked.

Q: Factory for what?

#47N: Weaving, carpet weaving.

Q: When you lived in Mustang, did many of the women...did many Tibetan women marry the soldiers?

#47N: Most [of the women] married in Mustang. There were many Tibetans in Mustang. Many married soldiers and everybody came here. After moving here, everyone worked in the factory and it was good. Otherwise, what was there to eat?

Q: Right, you had to survive. It sounds like...did you like it when you moved here, *ama-la*?

#47N: What?

Q: [You] moved here from Mustang. Has it been good here?

00:28:15

#47N: [I] have been happy here. The *Chushi Gangdrug*...one must do one's duty and there was a salary. One received a salary.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you have any children?

#47N: No children, we do not have children. That is the biggest problem, not having children.

Q: Is your husband still living?

#47N: Yes, [he] is sick.

Q: Do you worry about him sometimes?

#47N: Of course, one is worried. [He] nearly died recently and broke his hand. Now the hand is better but he is sick and cannot move around. [He] is lying at home.

Q: Of course, of course.

#47N: [He] is old, 85, very, very old.

Q: Well, *ama-la*, we can end now if this is okay with you. It sounds like you want to go back and see your husband. So maybe I should ask this question again. *Ama-la*, what do you pray for Tibet? Do you have any special prayers that you do everyday for Tibet and for the children of Tibet?

00:30:21

#47N: For the future...if possible [I] pray that Tibet should gain independence. By achieving independence, we can go back to our hometown. [I] pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: *Ama-la*, we share your prayer and hope someday you can go back to Tibet.

#47N: Okay.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#47N: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW