

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #51N – Sonam Khando
April 16, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #51N
2. Interviewee: Sonam Khando
3. Age: 77
4. Date of Birth: 1938
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Namla
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: April 16, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan Refugee Settlement, Hemja, Pokhara, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 10 min
12. Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Dhiraj Kafle
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Sonam Khando was born in Namla in Utsang Province. Her father died when she was just 4 years old and her mother worked for a wealthy family milking *dri* 'female yaks' to support her daughters. Sonam Khando recalls herding animals and all the aspects of producing dairy products. They had to protect the herds from wild animals such as wolves, foxes and large birds. Her family engaged in the process of spinning wool and weaving bags, clothes and tents during the wintertime. In the spring they were busy helping with sheep and goats giving birth and ensuring the newborn kids and lambs survived the bitter cold.

The nomads from Sonam Khando's region bartered their dairy products and salt they collected with farmers for grain at the fair that was held twice a year. She describes the system of measurements used when bartering different products such as grain for butter or cheese and for salt. Sonam Khando also talks about how traditionally women were not allowed to go to the salt pans to collect salt and families treated boys in a superior manner, but otherwise, women were allowed to do everything that men did.

Sonam Khando's family left Tibet after hearing that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had fled to India. She shares her joy of having had the opportunity of seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama and receiving teachings from him in exile.

Topics Discussed:

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

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Interview #51N

Interviewee: Sonam Khando

Age: 77, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway

Interview Date: April 16, 2015

Question: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ thank you very much for meeting with us today and thank you for being interviewed.

00:00:21

Interviewee #51N: Okay.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama has asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#51N: Yes, thank you.

Q: Thank you.

If during the interview you need to take a break or stop at any time, please let us know.

#51N: Okay, yes.

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

#51N: Okay, okay.

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

#51N: There should not be any problem. What problem would there be?

Q: Thank you very much. We really appreciate and are honored to record your story.

00:02:12

#51N: Okay.

Q: So *ama-la*, please tell us...Sorry. I'm sorry. *Ama-la*, could you tell us how old you are, please?

#51N: Seventy-seven.

Q: And when did you leave Tibet?

#51N: [I] was 22.

Q: And where do you come from?

#51N: Namla.

Q: Namla.

#51N: Namla. There was a monastery called Namla close by.

Q: How close was the monastery?

#51N: The monastery was located atop a hillock and we were below. [We] had a house, a house to stay in during wintertime.

Q: How many children were in your family?

#51N: There had been three children in my family. There was an elder sister. Mother said that a son died at the age of 4 but I cannot recall. Father passed away when I was 4 years old; Father was no more. There had been three children.

Q: What happened to your father?

00:04:12

#51N: It seems Father suffered from headaches and passed away.

Q: I'm sorry to hear that. Do you remember him at all?

#51N: I cannot remember. Mother told me about that but I cannot remember.

Q: And what kind of work did your family do?

#51N: During winter [we] did weaving and made bags that were used to carry things on the animals and tents; tents that were pitched like houses. Then [we] made clothes. Mother did the weaving while we spun—spun yarn.

Then kids and lambs were born in springtime; goats and sheep had kids and lambs that had to be taken care of and there was no time to spin wool. The little animals must be taken care of and taken to the grasslands. In the three summer months, there was milking, churning curd, drying cheese and make *lawo*. So there was no wool work and such.

Q: Cheese and...?

#51N: The *dri* ‘female yaks’ must be milked—if one possessed *dri*—and first the milk has to be boiled. Then the milk fermented and curd churned. Then one must make *lawo*. Buttermilk was boiled to make *lawo* and pouring into...[not discernible]. Then the cheese must be dried in the sun. There were such things to do during summer.

Then the cheese was loaded on yaks and taken to the farmers to buy grain [by bartering] cheese and butter.

Q: When it was time for the sheep and goats to give birth, did you help with that too?

00:07:22

#51N: Yes, they must be helped and taken to the mothers during the day and enclosed in the pen at night. Else, [they] would be attacked by [wild] animals. Those lambs that were unable to walk should be taken care of and those that could would be grazing with the mothers. There was a lot of work in springtime.

Q: The lambs have to be taken to graze?

#51N: Yes. An offspring of a sheep is called *luku* and a goat is...the Nepalese call it *bakra*. A goat is known as *bakra*. *Bakra* is goat.

Q: What has to be done to the kids and lambs? Did [they] have to be taken to graze?

#51N: [They] have to be taken to the grasslands, have to be herded. If a herder did not have helpers, the kids and lambs cannot keep up with the mothers and could be preyed upon by [wild] animals. There was a bird that attacked from above and there were [wild] animals that attacked on the ground.

Q: So which wild animal did you have to be careful of?

00:08:48

#51N: Wild animals that preyed upon large animals like yaks and sheep were wolves that resemble a dog. It is called a wolf. Then there were smaller ones that preyed upon smaller ones called fox. Then there was another one called *derey*, like a cat that attacked. Then there were those that came down from the sky to prey on small animals.

Q: Which preyed upon smaller ones? Fox and...?

#51N: That preyed upon smaller ones are fox and *derey*.

Q: *Derey*?

#51N: *Derey* is a small one like a cat.

Q: Is it a cat?

#51N: It is not a cat but looks like a cat. It is not a cat for cats do not prey on animals. They were there in our region. Then there is a bird called *tsing* in the sky that preyed upon kids and lambs. It carried [the prey] up into the sky.

Q: When the sheep and the goats were ready to give birth, did they need help from Tibetan people or did they always give birth on their own?

00:10:35

#51N: There was not need for help. There was not need for help; they gave birth themselves. There was not need for help. However, a kid, if born in the grasslands has to be carried for it cannot walk. A lamb can walk with its mother immediately after being born.

Q: Were any kids and lambs born that were little bit sickly, not as strong as the others and needed special care?

#51N: Yes, sick ones were born; disfigured ones were born. Some died after birth while some survived. In the case of lambs, soon after birth they started suckling and moved together with the mothers. In the case of goats, [the kids] must be carried for [they] cannot walk for 2-3 days and must be left at home.

Q: Why was that? Why did they have to be left at home for 2-3 days?

00:12:29

#51N: For 2-3 days it cannot walk with the mother and has to be left behind.

Q: So once you took them back to the pasture, did the mother goats recognize their babies?

#51N: In the case of lambs, except for a few, they knew the mothers and went to her right after birth. With [baby] goats, having been kept at home, when the mothers returned in the evening, each kid must be led to its mother saying, "Here is your kid, here is your kid." If this was done for a few days, then they knew each other.

Q: When the kids were at home, so that was two or three days, what did you feed it and how did you feed it?

#51N: [The kids] need not be fed. In the morning the kids would be in an enclosure. Each mother was given her kid who then suckled. Then the mothers went to graze while [the kids] who cannot walk to the hills were penned. In the evening when the mothers returned each must be given [her kid]. Later the mother did it herself. In a week's time [the mother goat] took [her kid] along.

Q: So you didn't give them a bottle or anything like that?

00:14:48

#51N: This was not done. However, there could be a large number of goats and sheep with some being weak. Then a healthy animal was milked and fed [to a little one]. However, it was not necessary to feed [young ones] if each had its mother.

Q: So if you had to feed a kid, what did you use?

#51N: Then a goat with plenty of milk was milked and the kid fed in a teat like thing.

Q: Did you do it through a little bottle in a teat?

#51N: [Speaks before question is translated] You have the feeding bottle here. It was like that but not made of plastic. The skin of animal was sewn like a teat and [milk] fed through it.

Q: What was it that was sewn?

#51N: The skin of animals like goat. Such skins were sewn and used to churn curd; curd was churned in such. This kind of skin was sewn in the shape of a teat and fed.

Q: So the skin of a goat was used like a bottle and then the skin was used like a teat?

00:16:50

#51N: Yes, such was used to feed a kid.

Q: When I was a little girl, my mother's family had farms and one of my favorite memories was when a lamb's mother had abandoned, it would be brought into the farmhouse by the fire and I would get to give it milk on my finger and it would suckle.

#51N: Poor thing! [Nods]

Q: Did you have that experience?

#51N: Yes, when some kids did not have a mother or if a [goat] gave birth to two. In such cases milk was fed.

Q: What did you do exactly?

#51N: About what?

Q: The act of feeding milk.

#51N: Regarding this, another animal was milked, which was poured into the skin and then fed through the teat.

Q: Did you ever bring any baby animals into your home where it was a bit warmer?

00:18:58

#51N: Yes, during winter when it turned cold and started to snow, [baby] goats and sheep were rubbed with dust to dry [them].

Q: When [babies] became wet?

#51N: The inside of a mother is wet. If the weather was cold the little one felt the cold. So dry dust was rubbed to make it dry. If the mother happened to be an older goat or sheep, the mother licked the snout [of the baby] clean and made it white, and then cleaned the ears and made them dry. If the ears and snout were cleaned dry immediately, [the babies] did not perish.

Q: Did not perish?

#51N: Then [they] did not perish. If the mother happened to be a young one, like in the case of humans, it does not know to clean the snout immediately. If the snout and ears are not cleaned immediately...the ears turned cold and broke away.

Q: Froze and broke away?

#51N: Yes. The ears froze into ice and broke off, unless cleaned.

Q: So when the mother lamb or goat, I mean the mother sheep or goats licked the snout or the ear, would it not leave liquid that would then freeze?

00:21:12

#51N: [Makes action of licking] [A lamb or kid] is wet when it emerged from the mother's stomach. The mother licked and made it dry. It became dry. A mother is like that.

Q: So when the mothers were about to give birth, did you bring the animals close to your home?

#51N: Yes, if it was found that the birth would take place in the hills, it was taken home slowly and enclosed in the pen where animals are kept.

Q: But not taken into the house?

#51N: There was no house; it was an enclosure.

Q: It wasn't taken into the tent?

#51N: No.

Q: How would you know that the kid or lamb, the kid or lamb's mother didn't know to lick the baby dry? How did you know that if they were in different places?

00:23:10

#51N: When it was understood that the mother was not going to clean [the baby] the herder or someone would rub dry dust and clean the snout, the ears and the whole body, clean by rubbing dust. Then it became dry.

Q: How would it be known that [the mother goat or sheep] wasn't going to lick?

#51N: The person that watched knew it. A young mother may not take care of the baby, so it was watched. However, it was not necessary to watch the older goats and sheep [mothers].

Q: This is very interesting. Thank you.

#51N: [Smiles]

Q: Particularly as I've been on farms in my country and it's interesting to see how practices are similar or different.

#51N: Poor thing.

Q: Could you tell us please how many animals your family owned?

#51N: There were around 20 yaks and 30 sheep but no goats.

Q: Was your family considered wealthy or poor or middle class?

00:25:14

#51N: My family?

Q: Yes.

#51N: It was among the middle class, among the middle class.

Then my mother passed away in the hometown, [I] fled here and met [my] husband. He was quite old while I was young.

Q: Given that it was just your mother, you and your older sister, did your family have enough resources to live well or did you have to work for other people?

#51N: My mother used to go work for a wealthy family while the two of us took care of the animals and did the household chores.

Q: So could you please tell us what you remember about your mother working for the wealthy family? How far away was it? Did she stay there? What kind of work did she do?

00:27:11

#51N: No, [mother did not stay there]. It was close by, a neighbor. [Mother] went back and forth to the neighbor's, which was very close.

Q: What kind of work did she do for the family?

#51N: [Mother] had to go help milk the *dri*. *Dri* is [the female] yak that [she] milked. They owned many yaks. [Mother] helped milk the *dri*.

Q: How many did they have?

#51N: The wealthy family owned about 60 *dri*. There were many workers.

Q: What else did she do?

#51N: There was not anything else but to help milk the *dri*. Then there was work to be done at our home.

Q: If your father had been living, do you think your mother would have gone to work for this wealthy family?

#51N: Maybe or maybe not, perhaps not. There were some that had to do so. In some poor families, elders went to work and also send children to work for others.

Q: As a young woman, what were your duties? What did you have to do? You mentioned spinning. What else did you do because I believe you left when you were 22?

00:29:50

#51N: In the hometown?

Q: Yes.

#51N: In the hometown...after reaching Dolpa you had to weave your own clothes.

Q: In the hometown?

#51N: In the hometown it was weaving, spinning, churning curd, milking and boiling the milk, turning the milk into curd and churning it, making butter, *lawo* and drying the cheese.

Q: What's *lawo*, *ama-la*?

#51N: *Lawo* is...you churn the curd and remove the butter. Then the residue, which is *dhara* 'butter milk,' is boiled and *lawo* is formed. This is squeezed and dried as cheese. The cheese has to be dried. Then in autumn, the cheese and butter are loaded and taken to Dolpa to be bartered for grain.

00:31:19

The men went to gather salt in the Changthang 'Northern Plain' and took it to the fair where farmers and us [nomads] gathered to trade. It was like meetings that are held here. Salt trade took place there. It happened once in autumn and once in spring. In springtime, salt was gathered and...

Q: Autumn...spring is...

#51N: Spring is the 1st, 2nd and 3rd [Tibetan] lunar months. The 4th, 5th and 6th months constituted summer. Autumn is the 7th, 8th and 9th lunar months. Winter is the three months of the 10th, 11th and 12th. Each [season] has three months.

Q: Did you ever go on one of the bartering trips?

#51N: Yes, I did.

Q: Could you tell us about it because I have never heard anybody describe that?

00:33:04

#51N: [Speaks before question is translated] More quantity of salt has to be given. There were the *dhothe* and *sumthe* [salt/grain bartering ratios]. In the case of *dhothe* three parts of salt was exchanged for two parts of grain. Three parts of salt has to be given.

Q: Three parts of salt for...

#51N: ...for two parts of grain. There is the *manu* and *pathi* ‘measuring instruments.’

Q: What are these?

#51N: In this region they are called *manu* or *pathi*, called *manu*.

Q: What’s called *manu*?

#51N: The one in which grain is measured. Presently it i a scale but in the past there was the *manu*. Salt is cheaper. So more has to be given for less quantity of grain. In the case of selling *marchu*, we gave less and received more grain from them.

Q: What’s *marchu*?

#51N: Butter and cheese [*mar* ‘butter,’ *chura* ‘cheese’].

Q: By giving butter and cheese...

#51N: ...we would receive more grain. There were *dhothe shikor* ‘4:1’ and *ngakor* ‘5:1.’ By giving one kilogram of butter, one received five or six kilograms of grain.

00:34:40

Beneficial animals...yaks give *khulu* ‘fur on upper part of yak’s body’ and *tsipa* ‘yak hair’ that can be exchanged for grain. Wool can also be bartered for grain. Buyers of wool came [to our region.]

Q: And could you describe what this fair looked like?

#51N: During autumn we came to the fair with the yaks laden with butter and cheese. They came bearing grain. We gave them the butter and cheese and took their rice and grain.

Q: What was the fair like? In what kind of a place was it held?

#51N: The fair was held in the place called Kyato Tsongra.

Q: Yes?

#51N: Kyato Tsongra

Q: Kyacho?

#51N: Kyato Tsongra.

Q: Kyato Tsongra? The name of the place was Kyato Tsongra?

#51N: Yes, Kyato Tsongra.

Q: What was the actual place like?

#51N: The place is in the north, the Northern Plain. It is in the north.

Q: Northern Plain?

#51N: Northern Plain.

Q: Were there hills, plains...?

#51N: There were hills, plains and rivers.

Q: And so when you arrived with your yaks, did you put blankets on the ground and put your products on the blanket or how did you go about bartering?

00:37:11

#51N: The butter and cheese were weighed, weighed like in kilograms. Butter was given in weight and grain received in volume.

Q: How was the grain measured?

#51N: Grain was measured in something called *pathi*. It is called *pathi*.

Q: It wasn't weighed in kilograms?

#51N: Grain was not weighed in kilograms.

Q: Was it [measured] in a container?

#51N: Yes, butter was given after weighing while grain was measured in a container and received. In the case of cheese, one part of cheese was exchanged for two parts of grain.

Q: So were there a lot of nomads in this big area? I'm trying to visualize what happened.

#51N: Yes, nomads came and farmers came. They stayed in their tents and we in ours.

Q: One stayed in tents?

#51N: Yes, there were no houses at the fair but tents. Most of the nomads were in tents.

Q: What did the children do?

00:39:13

#51N: If there were children that had come there, what will [they] do but graze the animals?

Q: And if there were no animals at the fair what will they do?

#51N: If there were no animals children will just play for there was not any work for them.

Q: Weren't animals always there?

#51N: Yes, because there were the animals of the traders. Older children were taken along to herd animals; those that could offer help were taken and not little ones.

Q: So about how many families came to this fair?

#51N: One member from every family came to conduct trade.

Q: A member from each family?

#51N: A member from each family came.

Q: And how many families altogether?

#51N: There would be many families altogether. There were some that went to the fair at Mustang but I do not know about that.

Q: Like 100, 200?

#51N: Of course, there 100-200.

Q: And how many days did it last?

#51N: A longer period would be 10 days and shorter, five.

00:41:19

There was a fair in springtime in the 3rd lunar month and in autumn in the 7th lunar month.

Q: And did different products get taken to the fair and bought at the fair in those two different times?

#51N: Nomads took butter and cheese in autumn and salt in springtime.

Q: When did [the nomads] take butter and cheese?

#51N: Butter and cheese were taken in autumn, in the 7th lunar month.

Q: Were there any responsibilities, any jobs that you were not allowed to do as a young woman?

#51N: There were not any responsibilities that a woman was not allowed to do.

Q: Were there any particular things [a woman] wasn't allowed to gather or any place that a woman wasn't allowed to go?

00:43:05

#51N: Women are not allowed to go to gather salt. If a woman went to gather salt, one would not get any salt because it is a precious gem.

Q: Yes?

#51N: One would not get any salt. If [a woman] went to gather salt, the salt will vanish because it is a precious gem and a woman is some sort of a lowly birth, which is why girls would not get any salt. Children age 8 or 9 are pure and may be taken as helpers but older girls were not allowed to go to gather salt.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It was said what?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was said that women were of lower birth and the older girls were not allowed to go there while girls in the age group of 8-9 who were considered pure go.

Q: Right. And so it...what does it mean that women are of lower birth?

#51N: Yes?

Q: What does it mean that women are of a lower birth?

00:44:44

#51N: That is because one is a girl. Girls, right from the time life was formed...right from the first reincarnation of the Dalai Lama...There are stories told that boys possess a *dalha*

‘war deity or deity of the enemy’ and wherever they ventured, none can cause them harm. In our region wolves used to come in the night to attack animals during which if a little boy shouted, it got frightened and if a girl shouted, it was not afraid and came back. Women have a certain impurity [menstruation] in the body. [I] think it is because of that. That is my guess.

Women were not allowed to go gather salt. Else, there was not any place women were not allowed to go.

Q: What do you think it was about menstruation that it would have made the community think that women might contaminate the soil?

00:46:43

#51N: There is a story about a woman that went to gather salt. She was not satisfied even after filling the bags and thought, “What to do?” She then filled her pants and the salt vanished. It is a tale and I do not know anything about it.

Q: A girl went to gather salt and then?

#51N: After filling all the bags [she] filled her pants and then the salt vanished. Old people tell such tales but I do not know anything about it.

Q: Was it for the lack of bags?

#51N: Yes, all the bags were full of salt; all that were to be loaded on the yaks had been filled and perhaps she wanted to carry some on her back and filled the pants. Old people tell such tales but I do not know anything about it.

Q: She filled up her pants?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: She filled up her pants with salt.

Q: And what was the problem with that?

#51N: Then the salt vanished. The salt deity was not happy.

Q: It...pants?

#51N: The salt in the saltpans disappeared. Salt is formed in water. Salt is formed in water. That is what was said though I have not been to a saltpan. It is said that salt is formed in water. Since it is formed in water, it turned into water and there was no longer any salt.

00:48:48

Since then women did not go to gather salt as told by the old people, but I do not know anything about it.

Q: Do you think that women are of lower birth?

#51N: Yes?

Q: Do you think that women are of lower birth?

#51N: That is because in our hometown—in this country everything is being done [by women]—in our hometown boys are said to be in possession of *dalha* and were not allowed to touch the spindles and weaving tools we used. It was said that [touching these] would affect the boy's *dalha* and reduce good fortune.

Q: What aren't [the boys] allowed to touch?

#51N: Spindles that girls work with. Boys rolled balls [of yarn] while girls spun. Spindles and weaving tools—there are many weaving tools—little boys were not allowed to touch these, which must be superstition on the part of the old people.

Q: What did boys do, *ama-la*?

#51N: Boys rolled yarn on a stick. Boys rolled yarn to make tents and such.

Q: Girls didn't do this?

#51N: It is not like girls were not allowed to do it. Boys were not allowed to touch girls' tools, which could be superstitious belief of old people. It is not part of history. It is not part of history.

Q: So in Tibet, were boys and girls treated differently?

00:51:04

#51N: [Parents] did have more consideration for a boy.

Q: I see.

#51N: If there were fights with others, the boy would win and was [considered] smart. While practicing the dharma, the boy was smarter. Hence, it used to be said that there was more consideration for a boy.

Q: [You] have to repeat that.

#51N: Okay. All parents have more consideration for a boy.

Q: In case of fights what would a boy do, *ama-la*?

#51N: In case of fights, a boy is said to be more courageous.

Q: So they value the boys more than the girls. How did they show that?

#51N: [Parents] show happiness on the birth of a boy. [Laughs] These days [parents] are happy when a girl is born, but in the hometown there was joy on the birth of a boy.

Q: Why is that you are happier here when girls are born?

00:52:42

#51N: Here girls do not become wayward while boys are wayward in this country. I think perhaps it is because we are so happy due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. That is what I think. In the hometown, there were not a large number of people living together like here with each one engaged in work.

Q: So the Dalai Lama is a very special person in your life. Is that correct?

#51N: Yes?

Q: So the Dalai Lama is a very special person in your life?

#51N: Of course, he is. [Joins palms] He is now the 14th reincarnation and from the 1st reincarnation he has been like so.

Q: In what ways has he helped?

#51N: Many, many generations back there was the one called Ling. Ling was like His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Ling was the King Gesar.

00:54:52

Throughout the many reincarnations he has done a lot of work and has compassion, compassion for the whole world. [I] do not know to say much.

Q: What kinds of work has he done that's helped you?

#51N: Yes?

Q: What kinds of work has His Holiness the Dalai Lama done that's helped you?

#51N: Not just , His Holiness the Dalai Lama has brought happiness and well-being to the whole world through [the teaching of] not fighting and by peace. "If someone fights with you, smile back," His Holiness says. His Holiness the Dalai Lama! [Joins palms].

Q: Did you leave Tibet before the Dalai Lama left or after the Dalai Lama?

#51N: We came after. When it was heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left, everyone had no wish to remain and came away.

Until death [I] will surely follow wherever His Holiness goes and abide by whatever advice he gives.

Q: Have you met the Dalai Lama?

00:57:06

#51N: [I] have. I went to Dharamsala [India] to see [His Holiness]. [I] went to Dharamsala where [I] saw His Holiness but the first time was at Lumbini [Nepal].

Q: Yes?

#51N: [I] saw [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] for the first time in Lumbini.

Q: Lumbini?

#51N: Yes, and then twice in Bodh Gaya, twice in Varanasi and once in Siliguri. I went to Dharamsala for the long-life ceremony. [I] have had to opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa. [Joins palms]

Q: So you've seen the Dalai Lama, about seven times?

#51N: Yes.

Q: How did those experiences of seeing him affect you?

#51N: I got the chance to go along when there were other people going. [I] thought, "If I have the fare for the journey, food expenses should be okay." If not for the people, it would have been difficult for me to go alone to see [His Holiness]. It would not be possible.

Q: What was the context that you met him? Where did you meet him and did you personally speak with him?

00:59:08

#51N: [I] did not get to speak; [I] did not get such an opportunity.

Q: Where was he?

#51N: Once in Dharamsala during the long-life ceremony where we had gone to make a long-life offering and got the opportunity to see [His Holiness].

Q: To make a long-life offering?

#51N: Yes, to make a long life-offering.

Q: And then?

#51N: [I] first saw [His Holiness] in Lumbini and then twice in Varanasi, twice in Bodh Gaya and once in Siliguri for the Kalachakra empowerment.

Q: To receive the Kalachakra?

#51N: Yes, for the Kalachakra.

Q: Where was the Kalachakra?

#51N: [I] received the Kalachakra twice in Bodh Gaya, twice in Varanasi and once in Siliguri while at Lumbini it was just to see [His Holiness].

Q: For people who don't know the Kalachakra, could you please explain it?

#51N: Kalachakra is an empowerment.

Q: How does he do that?

#51N: The empowerment?

Q: How is the empowerment transmitted?

01:01:00

#51N: There would be a large crowd of people and so His Holiness cannot come to each one [to bless them]. [The empowerment] is transmitted to everyone present.

Q: Can we go back to your exile and when you left Tibet? Could you tell us about the circumstances that led to your family leaving?

#51N: The situation was that when it was said His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left Tibet...

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

#51N: It was said, "The Chinese do not allow His Holiness the Dalai Lama to remain in Lhasa. There is danger to His Holiness and he will go abroad."

Q: Where?

#51N: "[His Holiness] will go abroad, towards India." Then everybody left saying, "If His Holiness the Dalai Lama does not stay, it is meaningless to stay behind."

Q: At this time when you heard that the Dalai Lama had left, did you feel...were you afraid or did you just feel a sense of hopelessness?

01:03:17

#51N: There was fear and sadness. If His Holiness does not stay, one would naturally feel sad. One could not sleep in the night and could not eat during the day.

Q: And so, what did your family do?

#51N: “Now it is meaningless for us to stay. It is meaningless for us to stay when His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left. There are monasteries and [the Chinese] will trouble the lamas. They [the Chinese] are heartless and do not practice dharma. They will not [allow] practice of Tibet’s dharma.” Such was being discussed.

Q: What did your family do?

#51N: What?

Q: What did your family do?

#51N: “It is meaningless for us to stay behind when His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left. Though not common people, the Chinese will cause suffering to the influential. Dharma practice in the monasteries....all the texts in the monasteries will be burned. Monasteries’ objects will be burned. Lamas will be troubled.” Such was the discussion.

Q: Then what did your family do?

#51N: Then it was said, “Let us flee.”

Q: Did you actually ever see any Chinese?

01:05:16

#51N: I have seen the Chinese. After coming here, there was not sufficient grass for the animals and one day [I] went back and saw [the Chinese], but they did not cause any suffering. They said, “Come back.”

Q: Have you seen any Chinese before leaving Tibet?

#51N: No.

Q: Did [you] go back once to Tibet after coming here?

#51N: Yes. There was not enough grass for the animals and [I] went back once and encountered the Chinese.

Q: This was...Dolpa was on your way to...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: After coming to Dolpa, in exile, I went to graze my animals into Tibet. There I saw the Chinese.

Q: What were they doing? What were the Chinese doing when you went to graze your animals?

#51N: [The Chinese] said, “You should not go back to the reactionaries but come back and become citizens of the *seryung* [government (?)].”

Q: Yes?

#51N: “Do not go to the reactionaries but return to the *seryung*.”

Q: Sering?

#51N: *Seryung*. They are called *seryung*.

Q: Is Tibet called *seryung*?

#51N: No, the Chinese are called *seryung*.

Q: What were the Chinese doing when you went there?

#51N: [The Chinese] did not do anything to us, but said, “You must join the *seryung*. Do not go with the reactionaries.” Tibetans living here were called reactionaries. “Do not go with the reactionaries.” [The Chinese] did not say anything else.

Q: What were they doing, *ama-la*?

#51N: [The Chinese] did not do anything [to us].

Q: What were the Chinese doing?

#51N: The Chinese said that [we] should not go with the other side but join them.

Q: And what did you do and what did you say?

01:07:45

#51N: [I] did not say anything—nothing, neither yes or no. Then they went beyond the mountain pass and we came back.

Q: Did they still think that you were living in Tibet or did they think that you had gone into exile?

#51N: Because they suspected [me of being in exile they] asked that [I] return.

Q: *Ama-la*, thank you very much for your interview. Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about your experiences living in Tibet?

#51N: There is not anything left [to say].

Q: Well, thank you very much. It was interesting to hear about your life and your memories.

#51N: Okay.

Q: We'd like to take some photos with you and we have a gift for you. But before we do that I need to ask you, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for you or your family?

#51N: There should not be any problem. What problem will there be?

Q: And may we use your real name?

#51N: Yes.

Q: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW