

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #65M – Gyurme Chodon
April 4, 2010**

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #65M
2. Interviewee: Gyurme Chodon
3. Age: 69
4. Date of Birth: 1941
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Tseplagang, Kongpo
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 4, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp No. 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 37 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Gyurme Chodon was a well-loved child of a wealthy family in Kongpo. Her family owned 70-80 acres of land and employed 13-14 workers. Due to their wealth they paid a lot of tax to the Tibetan Government. She describes her family's property and her three-storied house. The house was destroyed during an earthquake and collapsed on her mother.

Gyurme Chodon was punished by the Chinese for not going to school in China by spending six months working on a construction crew. She describes how influential people such as her maternal uncle were subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' and imprisoned. After escaping from prison her uncle told his family how prisoners suffered immensely due to lack of food, so much so that they ate human excreta to stave off death from starvation.

The whole family decided to flee the village. In preparation for the escape, Gyurme Chodon's family buried many of their household articles expecting to return in a few months or a year. Once in India the family had to work several years on a road crew in Bomdila until the region was bombed during the Indo-Chinese war of 1962. They had to flee immediately without collecting any of the few belongings they had brought from Tibet.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, taxes, first appearance of Chinese, forced labor, imprisonment, *thamzing*, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #65M

Interviewee: Gyurme Chodon

Age: 69, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 4, 2010

Question: Please first can you tell us name?

00:00:17

Interviewee #65M: Gyurme Chodon.

Q: His Holiness Gyalwa Rinpoche [Dalai Lama] asked us to record your experiences so that we can share your experience of what you went through with other generations of Tibetans and also to the Chinese to show what really happened in Tibet. So your memories are going to help us document the true history and culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#65M: Thank you.

Q: Does the Tibet Oral History Project have permission to use your interview?

00:01:19

#65M: Yes.

Q: You know if you want to take a break at anytime, just let us know.

#65M: Okay.

Q: If there's something you'd rather not answer, there's no pressure to answer. You can choose not to answer.

00:01:48

#65M: Okay.

Q: If your interview is shown in Tibet or China, would this make a problem for you?

#65M: There will be no [problems].

Q: We want to extend our appreciation of your agreeing to share your story with us.

#65M: Thank you.

Q: What was the livelihood of your parents?

00:02:20

#65M: In Tibet?

Q: Yes.

#65M: It was farming and [rearing] animals.

Q: Which parent was a farmer and which was a nomad?

00:02:45

#65M: There was my mother long ago and when she passed away, my older brother's wife and the hired help used to do the farm work. My older brother and maternal uncle went to the hills to graze animals.

Q: How many people lived with you in your house?

#65M: Including all the servants, there were about 15-16 members. However, we must pay wages to the servants. The main family members were [my] older brother, his wife and maternal uncle.

Q: How many were there?

00:03:40

#65M: The actual family members were 5-6. Long ago there were many family members as my maternal uncles' father was very rich. The family went on the decline after the death of our father.

Q: How old were you when your father died?

#65M: I might have been 4 or 5. [I] can recollect a little.

Q: You remember your father a little bit?

00:04:30

#65M: Yes, [I] can remember a little bit that he looked a certain way physically.

Q: Did she live in a house or did she live in a tent?

#65M: The family lived in a house while the nomads lived in tents. They went all the way to the mountains. Around the time of sowing the fields, father and the maternal uncles left [for the nomadic site] along with the yaks and *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow,' which were loaded with provisions to last however many months they were going to stay there. A ceremony of burning incense and erecting prayer flags was held in front of the house for their departure to the mountains.

Q: But you always lived in a house? You never lived in a tent?

00:05:38

#65M: I lived in a house.

Q: What was the cause of your father's death?

#65M: Perhaps father fell ill and passed away. I do not know much because I was about 4 or 5 years old.

Q: You never were told why your father died? Your mother never told you why?

#65M: [She] did not explain anything.

Q: Was it very difficult for your mother after your father died to keep the household going?

00:06:20

#65M: Yes, it was. [She] had to take the responsibility and there were many animals [to graze] in the mountains. We had to pay a huge tax to the government. Though I did not know, the elders used to say that we were obliged to pay a tax of five and half *kang* [?]. The tax was huge.

Q: How much tax did you have to pay?

#65M: I do not know how much the farm tax is. [I] think it depended upon [the size of] the land.

Q: How much land did your family own?

00:07:27

#65M: It was extremely large. If we compare it with the Indian [measurement] it must be about 70-80 acres. When I was a child mother took me with her when she went to deliver food to the workers in the field. I saw it on such occasions. The area was very beautiful. On the other side of the river from my home, there used to be an estate. My father had purchased this estate. The location was around a hillock with the house on top of it. The fields surrounded it close by. It was a very large tract of farmland. There were fruit trees and the house was located atop the hillock.

Q: Seventy to 80 acres. Was that quite a lot of land compared to the other people in your region?

#65M: Yes, it was very large. There were landless people who were allotted small houses nearby our house. They were given work and provided with dry rations. Small plots were given to them for cultivation and the major part of the land was farmed by the family.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So she is talking about employing people.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Employing people.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So because she owned relatively a large amount of land, then that's why she had to pay so much tax.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: The tax that your family had to pay to the Tibetan government did it make it so it was difficult for you to have enough resources for survival? Was it that much tax that it made it difficult for your survival?

#65M: No, it was not like that. It was not like that.

Q: Where are you in your family? Are you younger, older...

00:10:34

#65M: My older brother was the oldest. There were two older brothers, one of whom left after marriage. So there were one older brother, his wife and us. There was one maternal uncle.

Q: How many families in your village approximately?

#65M: [We lived] at a distance from the village like from Camp Number 3 [Mundgod] to here. There might be around 40-50 families in the village. We were like here [this far from the village] as my father had bought an estate and we lived apart [from the village].

Q: Can you describe your house? What does your house look like?

00:12:14

#65M: The house was three-storied and the highest floor was a *bangdom*. *Bangdom* means that it was built with wooden boards. That was the highest floor, the one in which we made prayer offerings. The lowest [floor] was the grain storage in which we stored wheat, barley and the harvested crops. [We] lived on the middle floor. There might be 7-8 rooms on each floor. So how many [rooms] is it if we add all the three [stories]?

Q: What kind of education did you receive? Did you go to school or were you tutored at home?

#65M: No, nothing. There were no schools in Tibet. I was the youngest and the only daughter in the family and I was loved very much. When I was 7 years old, mother passed away. Mother died when an earthquake struck the house. Mother was on the upper floor and the house collapsed on her. She could not run out and died on the upper floor. At that time there was an old lady who used to carry me on her back; an old lady with an extra thumb used to carry me on her back. Leave aside being given work, [I] was not even made to walk; I was loved that much.

Q: So the woman who looked after you, did she have other children or just you?

00:14:55

#65M: She had two daughters and a son-in-law. They were Khampas [people from Kham Province] who had come on pilgrimage and settled in Kongpo. Because we faced a shortage of hands and since they settled there after their pilgrimage, my parents provided them with a house and land. We treated them like our family members. They were not treated badly as servants.

Q: [She] had two daughters and a son?

#65M: [She] had two daughters and a son-in-law and the parents.

Q: And your mother died. How did she die?

00:16:04

#65M: Due to the earthquake. She could not run out of the house. She tried to come out through a window, but could not jump and was killed in the window.

Q: Were you there when that happened?

#65M: [I] saw it happen. [I] saw the body and everything. My older brother leapt out of the window. I think I was naughty as a child because when it was almost time for dinner, I was carried on the lady's back and sent out. So the lady and I were outside. And my older brother and others leaped out through the window. That was how [we] survived. I saw the body of my mother. She was trapped about here [gestures off camera] in the window.

Q: So your brother was in the house when this happened? He escaped out of the window, yes? Where were you when this happened?

00:17:38

#65M: I was outside being carried on the back of the old lady.

Q: So sad. After the earthquake you no longer lived in your house?

#65M: Then the old structure was dismantled and the stones and earth removed. For the time being we lived in the nomad tent. The nomad tent was set up in the vegetable garden. After all the debris was cleaned, a new house constructed.

Q: The older lady who looked after you, how did she treat you?

00:19:05

#65M: [She] took good care. Poor thing, she was very old. Since they were poor people from outside [the village], when my mother was alive she used to leave the house in full faith to the children [of the old lady], their mother or father. She [mother] treated them like her relations. They too were very good to us. After mother passed away, of course the [old lady] loved me; all her family members too took good care of me.

Q: How long did you live with this woman?

#65M: As far as I can remember, mother passed away when I was around 7 years old. At that time the family [of the old lady] was settled there. I do not know whether they came when I was small.

Q: How long did they stay after that?

00:20:09

#65M: After the earthquake and the chaos, as poor people they needed someone to take care of them. My older brother and I were not able to bear the tax, so we gave away the tax [obligation] and the land to others with the condition that we would get them back when we reached the age of 18 or 19. We divided the *dz*o, *dz*omo ‘female *dz*o,’ household articles and ornaments with the person who undertook the tax. My older brother and I received our share.

Q: Her brothers also lived with this woman?

#65M: Yes. When we reached the age of 18, we would take back the tax [obligation] as we would be able to take care of our land. But before that could happen, the Chinese arrived and we had to flee.

Q: So let’s talk about that. When did the Chinese first come to your area?

00:21:55

#65M: [I] do not know the year.

Q: How old were you?

#65M: [Continues to speak without waiting for interpreter] It might have been 6, 7 or 8 years, since the Chinese arrived when His Holiness the Dalai Lama left for India.

Q: You mean your age?

00:22:08

#65M: No. [I mean] since the Chinese arrived. The Chinese had arrived before His Holiness left for India. It might have been 8-9 years since the Chinese arrived in my region of Kongpo. The Chinese took the Chenrezig ‘Avalokitesvara, patron saint of Tibet’ [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] to China on a visit.

Q: Yes?

#65M: The Chinese took the Chenrezig to China on a visit. At that time it was already 5-6 years since the Chinese arrived. The Chinese had already constructed a huge army camp at the place called Phunanga.

Q: What was your first experience of the Chinese coming? What did you see?

00:22:58

#65M: [I] did not know anything as I was a child. In fact, I saw them as well-dressed and very happy. In Kongpo we only had [clothes made of] woolen cloth. They were wearing beautiful cotton printed clothes. I thought, “What nice clothes they have! How grand [they look]!” [I] did not think of anything else.

Q: When you first met the Chinese, your feeling was quite positive about them, yes?

#65M: [I] did not see them as [strange]. Sometimes they came dressed in khaki clothes and sometimes in navy blue or dark green. [I] did not feel anything when the Chinese soldiers arrived. When the school [children] came I thought, “How happy [lucky] they are!”

Q: School?

00:24:35

#65M: The Chinese brought school [children]. They brought school [children] on tour from China.

Q: What did you see the Chinese doing?

#65M: They did not do anything particular. There were some who were hungry and very poor. If they were alone, they came to our house and the older ladies gave them bread and—they liked pork very much—boiled and sliced pork. They did not say so when they were in a group, but if they were alone, they said, “We have wives and children in our village. If we refuse to go [to Tibet] and return, our necks will be severed. We are forced to come. We do not have the wish to make you suffer. It is the order from our leader.” Saying such things they would cry.

Q: And did Chinese come to your house and tell your family this?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, they came to the house and then they shared all this.

Q: I see. I see. So then what happened?

00:27:07

#65M: Much later they [the Chinese] caused extreme suffering. Earlier they did not cause suffering, but claimed that they were helping the poor. They took [children] to school [in China] and did many such things. I was told that I would have to go to school. When that was said, my brother replied, “[She] is very small now and our grandmother is also seriously ill. Do not take [her] to school for only this year. Please excuse [her].” As a punishment for not going to school, [I] was sent to work on road construction for six months. [I] was made to construct roads. [I] worked for six months on the road crew.

Q: Yourself?

#65M: Yes, me. That was the punishment for not going to school to China. [I] was made to work six months on the road crew.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So the Chinese wanted her to go to Chinese school, her brother said no. Her brother refused because the grandmother or the woman who was looking after her was not well.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not woman, grandma.[Clarifies with interviewee] Not that old woman, the grandma. She was old and very sick so until then let us stay with her and after go to the Chinese school.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So the Chinese said if you don't agree to go to school we're going to send you to road construction.

Q: So why did the family decide it was better for you to go to road construction than to go to a Chinese school?

00:29:36

#65M: [I] think my brothers were planning to escape. Once one went to school, one could not return to Tibet for 2-3 years. If one went to work on the road crew, one could avail leave after six months. If one joined school in China, one did not return for 2-3 years.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So by that time the family is already planning to escape and they think they should only go to road construction.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: If you go to school in China it takes two to three years.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So they wanted her to go to Chinese school in China.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They don't want her to go to Chinese school.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah, in China. Not the Chinese school in Tibet, Chinese school in China.

Q: So you were 14 years old when you joined the road construction. Can you tell us what life was like in the road construction? What your life was like.

#65M: I was like a child. [I] think I was small and beautiful. The Chinese did not allot me much work. [They] took me along with the Chinese students to bathe and wash clothes. [I] had to help give them [Chinese students] soaps and wash towels and handkerchiefs. [I] was mostly taken along with those children. [I] was not made to work much on the road construction as [I] think I was small, small physically.

Q: So she had nothing to do with the road construction at all?

00:32:04

#65M: I was not made to work too hard as I was a small child. [I] was sent along with the school [children]. My [responsibility] was fetching the basins and towels and cleaning the rooms of the school [children].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay. So you are talking about Chinese schools that were nearby her village. But just to clarify, Namgyal-*la*, her family was concerned that she was going to be sent to Chinese schools in China, yes? They were concerned she was going to be sent to Chinese schools in China, yes? Not these Chinese schools nearby, yeah?

Q: When it was said that you were going to be sent to a Chinese school, did your brother know that it was to China that you would be sent?

#65M: Yes, that is right. All the [children] were sent to school in China. All the [children] were sent to school in China. We knew that. [They] did not return for 2-3 years, those that were taken to China.

Q: So this happened to many Tibetan young boys and girls, yes? They were sent to Chinese schools in China?

00:33:46

#65M: Yes, that is right. It was good for the poor families because they [their children] gladly went to school. When they returned after two years in school in China, they looked very grand. The wealthy families did not wish to send their children; they were sent to construct roads and punished. Such sufferings occurred.

Q: When you were working doing this kind of work, the washing, etc., were you able to still stay with the woman who was looking after you or did you have to stay in another place?

#65M: You mean during the time at the road construction?

Q: Yes.

00:35:20

#65M: There were groups of coolies. Each group of coolies had tents and little corners where one kept one's beddings. One lived just like coolies. [I] could not stay with the school [children]. [I] had to live with the road crew.

Q: So you were living with the construction crew, but you were doing different kind of work?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right.

Q: I see. Can you just describe the conditions, the living conditions, the sleeping conditions, food conditions in the construction crew?

#65M: Since I was a child, I did not think anything else nor that [life] was difficult. When the Chinese fished, [they] went upstream and bombed the water. The fish died and when they died, they turned over and their white breasts were visible in the flowing water. Then they went downstream and fixed a big strainer to a long stick and picked them up. Sometimes [I] thought, "The Chinese are devils. What sins they are committing! [I] must never eat their leftover food or water. They are the devils." Sometimes [I] thought like that.

Q: How were you treated by the Chinese?

00:37:56

#65M: They did not give me any problems. I was somewhat young. Thinking that the children would not join school in China, they were particularly nice to the children. When children were working on the road gang with adults, the [Chinese] leaders came and gave two or three candies to them and said, “Why do you suffer like this? This is because you do not listen to us. If you listen to us, you do not have to suffer like this. [You] can go to school. School is a very happy place. Look at the school [children] who have come here and how happy they are!”

Q: What kind of advice did they give you?

#65M: There was nothing special. One was always occupied in performing tasks. The adults were wholly engaged in [their] work and I was busy serving and keeping things neat for the school children. There was nothing else.

Q: Do you have other memories of this time? You can say anything else about this experience that you went through?

00:39:35

#65M: [I have] nothing else [to say]. A little after five months, my *chocho* ‘older brother’ sent someone to collect me. He’d sent [somebody as] a replacement and someone with a horse to take me back, “Come back. Come back soon. Take leave from the Chinese and come back. The weather is cold and [I] will make new warm clothes and then sent you back. Say this [to the Chinese] and excuse yourself and come back.” [He’d] sent a substitute for me.

Q: And then?

#65M: Then when I reached home, my *chocho*...During the day we worked in the fields and sat relaxed. There was a hill with thick forests not far away from us. That night all of us including *chocho*, relatives and our many servants went to the hill and dug the ground. [I] wondered what it was for but had no knowledge. *Chocho* did not explain anything. [We] dug holes and one night—since we owned many animals, we had huge copper utensils to boil milk, which were so huge that if I lay in it, my feet would not touch the sides—copper utensils, tools, tree-cutting tools, all of these were placed inside the pit. It was covered with soil and branches of trees. [They] were hidden there.

***Chocho* would not let me go anywhere during the day saying, “Do not go. Stay at home. Do not roam about.” He never let me go. We did not live within the village, so there was nowhere to go for a short while. One must go quite a distance. [He] never let me go and [I] wondered why. One night, perhaps it was 8 or 9 o’clock in comparison to the time here, we loaded a few *dzo* and horses and then [he] said we were going to escape. “We have to escape to India. The Chenrezig has already gone. If we remain here, the Chinese will cause us extreme suffering. We too must run away to India.”**

00:42:03

[I] was sort of numb. [I] said “yes” and came away together. There was a big river nearby over which one had to cross in a boat. Just before we reached the boat, [I] did not feel like going as we were leaving behind all our animals and home. I told my *chocho*, “You take [your] wife, maternal uncle and everyone and run away. I will stay back. Our animals, house and everything will be ruined, so I will stay back and take care.” I thought my *chocho* and others could hide somewhere for a month or two or a year and return. “I will stay. You should flee.” It was just before we reached the river.

My *chocho* held my hand and shed a tear, “Will you not run away?” [Cries] “You run away *chocho*, I will stay back.” [He] said, “Let’s go together until we reach the river.” He said “Let’s go together until we reach the river” and I replied, “Yes.” I thought *chocho* would cross in the boat and send me back.

When we reached the river he said, “Now will you go with me or not?” “*Chocho*, you run away. I will stay back and look after the house and animals.” “Okay, then keep all of these for yourself.” [We] owned some silver articles which were tied to the waist of *chocho*. He gave all of that to me and said, “Take all of these and go back. I’m going to jump in the river. I am going to jump in the water now. I am not going to India. Let anything happen to [my] wife and maternal uncle. I am going to jump in the river. I am not going [anywhere].”

00:43:42

[Begins crying] “Please, *chocho* do not jump in the river. I will prostrate to you. I will go [with you].” I held on to my brother until we crossed the river fearing that he would jump in it. That’s how we escaped.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So she said she would stay and look after the belongings because she thought it was only going to be a short time and her brother said he would jump into the river and commit suicide if they didn’t come together. So then she changed her mind and she came.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right.

Q: So you came along with your brother?

#65M: Yes, [we] came together.

Q: Are you okay? Do you want to take a break?

#65M: [I am] fine.

Q: And then? You can just keep telling your story.

00:47:10

#65M: Then we reached the base of the Indian mountain pass and found Indian sentries on the pass.

Q: Yes?

#65M: Indian sentries. [I] was ecstatic when I saw the Indian sentries. I felt so happy as if I was in an air-conditioned [room]. [Someone] said, “The Chinese will not come here. These are Indian soldiers.” We reached the top of a hill where there was an Indian army camp. Then we stopped and cut some wood. We made a fire and some tea. And then we were sent to India.

Q: Did you face any difficulties on the journey?

00:48:23

#65M: After we crossed the river, there lived a distant relative of ours who was a high official of the Chinese. The Chinese called [him] *u-yon* ‘leader appointed by Chinese.’

Q: *U-yon*?

#65M: The Chinese called the officials *u-yon* or *tsukdung*. He was slightly related to us. He paid tribesmen to help us across the river. Soon after reaching the other side of the river, day broke. [He] hid us in the forest. As we looked out, there was a high mound on the other side of the river. People of our village shouted to the leader of the other village, “The rebels have fled. Keep guards along the way to catch them. Capture them.” [I] thought, “Somebody will find us and capture us anytime.”

I could hardly see with my eyes and have no knowledge how [I] managed to walk. [I] had such an experience. *Chocho* recited his prayers and chanted *Chenrezig*. [I] was a child and did not know what *Chenrezig* was. [He] prayed a lot and when we reached a clearing in a forest, [he] made many prostrations. [He] made prostrations, prayed and intoned *Chenrezig*. [I] did not know what *Chenrezig* was. [I] knew nothing.

Q: How did you find your way? How did you find your way to India?

00:51:26

#65M: [I] was so terrified that I have no knowledge how we got here. There was so much dread. Just before [we] reached the base of the mountain pass—a distance [from here] to the old Palace [in Mundgod]—there was a Chinese army camp. And we had to pass right around here [indicates nearness]. Dogs were barking. When the dogs barked, [I] thought the Chinese had found out and [I] was shivering. [I have] no knowledge how we got to the base of the pass.

The relative who brought was to this side of the river, the Chinese *tsukdung*, since he lived close to the mountain pass, he knew many tribesmen. [He] paid the tribesmen and we came with them. The tribesmen helped us.

Q: Where did the tribesmen live?

#65M: You know Mustang [Nepal]? Manikang? On one side of the mountain pass at Manikang was Kongpo and over the other lived the tribesmen. Mustang was on the other side.

Q: Just backing up a little bit, what was the main reason that your family decided to leave Tibet?

00:53:23

#65M: [I] never thought that [we] would escape permanently. [I] thought that perhaps [we] would hide a month or a year in the forest and then return home. [I] never thought that [we] would have to escape our whole life like this. [We've] hidden a lot of things underground.

Q: But what was the reason that your family left? Why did they leave?

#65M: People used to say, “The Chinese will not let us live happily. They will make us suffer. When the Chenrezig has left, there is no use for us to remain. The country is empty.” The older people like my brother used to say that. “What is the use of our living in this empty country? The Chenrezig has left.” I was a child and did not know what Chenrezig was.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So what did she say about Chenrezig? I'm not quite clear how this connects with her family leaving.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Chenrezig they just had heard [about]. Nothing like pictures. All the old aged people used to say, “Chenrezig, Chenrezig, Chenrezig, protect Chenrezig.” Nothing they have knowledge of: is it a man, a monk, a protector, nothing is known.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: She didn't know that it was the relationship between Chenrezig and Gyalwa Rinpoche---she didn't understand this connection. Was it because Gyalwa Rinpoche had left Tibet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: She didn't understand---her age was quite small.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I'm a little bit unclear on the connection between why she started talking about Chenrezig and her escape. There was some connection.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: All the old age people said nothing is left---Tibet is empty. They thought without His Holiness, Tibet is nothing.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But she didn't really understand what is that.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: This is the first time she had heard.

Q: Do you remember...Did you bring anything with you? Did you take anything from your house with you when you left Tibet?

00:56:47

#65M: There were water-offering bowls and other small religious artifact and some silver articles. Most of our animals were left behind. The small number we brought along was offered to the tribesmen to help us escape from the Chinese at the mountain pass. When we

reached the place called Manikang, [we] had nothing with us. There was just the water-offering bowls, some religious artifacts, some necklaces and some clothes. [We] brought nothing besides that.

Q: Do you still own anything that you brought from Tibet at that time?

#65M: I did not feel anything except that [we] would be returning. [I] never thought that I would take them to India.

Q: But, no. My question is do you still have something in your house that you brought from Tibet?

00:58:18

#65M: [I have] nothing. Whatever little we had, since brother is older to me, they are in his hands. I met [my] husband and lived separately. [I] did not ask *chocho* for anything. And we did not get the chance to bring anything [to Mundogd]. To relate the reason, we were dispatched to Bomdila [Arunachal Pradesh, India] by the government. We were sent to Bomdila from Missamari [Assam] for road construction.

While we were working at the road construction site in Bomdila, a war took place between China and India and we had to run away. The little money we had and the things that were brought from Tibet like the ornaments, the water-offering bowls, silver, everything was left behind in Bomdila. The Chinese and the Indians fought in Bomdila. As we were working on the road, the Indians fired artilleries from this direction and the Chinese from the other direction, so leaving the tools at the work site—without time to go to the tent—[we] fled. There was nothing that we could bring, not even a cup.

Q: How old were you when you were working on the road construction in Bomdila?

[Interpreter translates as: While you were working on the road construction, what particular feelings and problems did you have and how did you overcome the problems?]

#65M: [I] was young and did not feel that the work was difficult. However, the older people and the relatives would say, “How can we continue to do such work? When will we get our independence? May we get our independence before anything happens to the Chenrezig.” The elders used to say that while making the water-offerings in the morning. The old people did prostrations and prayed, “May we never see anything worse than this.” They repeated such things. I was not particularly affected, whiling away the time dancing and playing.

Q: Was it difficult work?

01:01:47

#65M: It was not. The work entailed cutting the ground with a hoe to make road. One did that everyday and [I] did not feel it was particularly difficult.

Q: Do you remember the kind of work that you did?

#65M: The work was constructing roads; digging the earth and removing it. It was just constructing road.

Q: You enjoyed this work?

01:02:43

#65M: I did not feel bad. [I] worked with the other children and time passed in that way.

Q: How long did you do this work?

#65M: [I] constructed roads for around 6-7 years in Bomdila.

Q: What was your strongest memory of this time?

01:03:27

#65M: [I] did not face any such difficulties. [I] was like a cow, being sent out to work and then come back, as *chocho* was there to take care of our livelihood. *Chocho* took care of me in terms of food and clothing. So I had no worries. And then the Chinese and the Indians fought and we faced a lot of suffering during the journey. My brother's children had been admitted to an Indian school at Thukpon, situated near Bomdila. We lived in upper Bomdila while the children were at the lower area. When pursued by the Chinese, [we] had no knowledge about the children's whereabouts. We ourselves could not bring even a cup.

If this was a hill [raises right hand], the Indians were throwing bombs at a hill a little further away from Thukpon. As soon as the bomb fell on the ground, a cloud of dust formed just as if a stone was hurled. A cloud of dust formed. The sound did not emerge from where the bomb fell. It fell and sort of bounced up and then the sound emerged "dhang."

We fled from beneath the point from where the bombs were hurled. We were separated from the children and when we reached Chako near Missamari, we were desperately worried for the children and cried and cried. We had nothing with us, but we did not feel hungry or thirsty because [we] thought the children were lost.

01:04:55

At Missamari all the people were crowded at the station. I do not know who but people said they were intelligence officers, but someone shouted, "The Chinese have come." All the people fled although there was nowhere to run. Everyone who were scattered around fled at the same time.

There was an old lady from Tsona. [I] think she had a small knife at her waist. "It is better for me to die than to fall into the hands of the Chinese," saying this she slashed her neck. Everybody said, "An old lady has died. She has slashed her neck." I was a child and ran to see. [I] saw that some skin here [points to nape] was left. Blood was spurting out of here [points to neck] and the head was held by the skin. The head was jerking. [I] saw that.

Q: The bombs were from airplane?

01:06:53

#65M: No, no. There was a canon which was set up on an iron stand. It was set up upon the hill and we could see the bomb landing on the other hill. It was not from an airplane.

Q: You saw this [suicide]?

#65M: Yes, [I] saw it. I was a child and when it was said, “A lady has cut her neck,” I ran to see.

Q: Did all your family manage to make it out of Tibet safely?

01:08:28

#65M: No, not everyone; my older sister, her husband and children [could not]. Her husband was captured by the Chinese at Phu. The husband could not come. Older sister and children could not come.

Q: And what happened to him?

#65M: [We] never heard anything, so [I] do not know what happened. At that time we could not write letters and there’s been no contact at all. [We’ve] never heard about them.

Q: And what about her mother’s uncle? I have a note here that he was captured.

01:09:48

#65M: [He] was subjected to a great deal of *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions.’ In Tibet my maternal uncle was like the Secretary to the Settlement Officer here. He was like the Secretary and was subjected to a great deal of *thamzing*. He was made to remove his pants. He was made to remove his shirt. White stones were broken and laid on the ground. And then he was made to [kneel] on the stones. The people and his servants were made to say and conduct the *thamzing*, “How did you make us suffer in the past? What did you do? How did you make us work?” He was held by his hair and dragged up and dragged down. The Chinese told those people that did the dragging that they would receive presents. Those people that refused to do the dragging were told, “You still possess ‘green brains’.” He was made to suffer so.

Q: How did you learn about this?

#65M: When a *thamzing* was to be conducted, they [the Chinese] called all the villagers to conduct the *thamzing*. The leaders would be subjected to *thamzing* one by one. All the villagers were called and the session happened in the center of the gathering. Whoever agreed to take part in making [the prisoner] suffer was told that he would receive a present and was praised. Those who did not take part in it were told that they were “green brained.”

Q: So you saw this personally?

01:12:55

#65M: The *thamzing*?

Q: Yes, the *thamzing*.

#65M: Yes, [I] saw it. All the relatives were called. The relatives, the family members and the entire village were called [to watch] the *thamzing* take place. “You must think well. If you have ‘green brains’ like them, this is the only way for you,” they [the Chinese] said like that.

Q: How old were you when you saw your uncle’s *thamzing* session?

01:13:39

#65M: I might have been 13 or 14 years old.

Q: What went through your mind when you saw this?

#65M: What was there to feel and think but cry! But one was not allowed to cry.

Q: Not feeling, thinking.

00:14:19

#65M: I thought, “We [meaning maternal uncle] carried out the responsibilities entrusted by the Tibetan government in the district. It was not personal work nor did we [he] misuse anything. Why are we made to suffer like this when we did not use other people’s wealth?” I did not know anything else.

Q: How did your uncle respond to the struggle session?

#65M: Immediately after maternal uncle was subjected to suffering, he was taken to prison in Phu. For a month or two, family members were allowed to take him food. After that those who went to deliver food were not allowed [to see him]. Maternal uncle was in prison for 2-3 years.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It says here [pre-interview form] that he was starved and he had to eat human waste.

Q: Did your maternal uncle suffer from lack of food and forced to eat human waste?

01:16:08

#65M: Yes. [He] was in prison in Phu for about three years. [He] was imprisoned in Phunanga by the Chinese. [Family members] went to deliver food at times but could not meet him. Sometimes when there happened to be a Tibetan leader [at the prison] that the [family members] knew, they requested that food be taken [to uncle]. Sometimes when [food] could be taken in secretly he said, “It’s not necessary to bring such good food. Any

low quality food is satisfactory. Never mind food, we cannot even find dry human excreta to eat.”

The prisoners’ food included greens like radish leaves or other green leaves mixed with some *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and nothing else. If one found some dry excreta of a fellow prisoner and ate it, it satiated hunger but it was not tasty. It was sort of rough. If one ate the excreta of the Chinese, since they ate good food their excreta was softer to the palate. My maternal uncle said such things.

Q: Did your maternal uncle tell this to you?

#65M: Yes.

Q: So you went to visit him in prison and he told you this when you went to prison?

01:18:58

#65M: Our people went to meet [him] in prison secretly by bribing the leaders. He told them such things. “Let alone food, we cannot even get human excreta. It is difficult to get dry human waste. How could we get food?” He said that the Chinese excreta were softer and tastier. We met after he managed to escape and when all the relatives gathered together, he spoke about it.

Q: Did your maternal uncle escape from the prison?

#65M: Yes, maternal uncle escaped from prison. The reason he could escape was...After three years in prison...There are *ga* ‘saddles’ for horses and *dzo*. Do you know what a *ga* is?

Q: Yes, I do.

01:20:32

#65M: The Chinese asked [the prisoners], “You Kongpo people are accomplished in working with wood. Do you know how to make saddles?” My maternal uncle and the others replied that they knew to make saddles. “That’s good if you can make saddles. You should go to the forest and look for wood to make saddles. We will give you ropes and axes. Bring wood to make saddles and whoever makes the best saddle will receive a prize.”

So [the prisoners] were sent to look for wood to make saddles. My maternal uncle went atop the hill and cut two logs of wood and tied them together with the rope. Then on a long piece of wood, he made something like with which we stir rice. Maternal uncle pushed it in the river and fled on it to our village. After he reached the village, he hid the logs beside the river in the night and came home for a little while. “I have managed to escape. Now I am going to India and you too must come away.” After that many of our relatives fled.

Q: When your uncle came to your house after his escape, do you remember that day? Was it daytime or was it nighttime? When was it that he arrived at your house?

#65M: It was night time when he escaped. It was not possible to flee during daytime. [He] hid in the mountain during the day and fled at night through the water.

Q: So he arrived at night. Does she remember his arrival at the house?

01:23:46

#65M: The older people knew of it and said that he'd arrived and after [he] left, we prepared to escape soon.

Q: Were you asleep when this happened?

#65M: [I] might have been sleeping.

Q: You slept all the way through and he left by the morning time, yeah?

01:24:16

#65M: Maternal uncle just dropped in to give the message as he could not linger in the house. The neighbors might pass on the information. He left immediately. After he'd escaped, our older relatives started making preparations without leaking the news of maternal uncle's escape to others. We secretly hid our things and in that way [we] escaped.

Q: When did she see him again?

#65M: [I] met maternal uncle in India. He came to Bylakuppe [Karnataka, India]. He'd been beaten so much by the Chinese that his whole body was sort of bent. At the time of his death, his joints gave him a lot of pain. He died from pain in the joints. He'd been beaten a great deal by the Chinese and he could only walk with a stoop. [He] could not walk straight. He walked like this [stoops forward].

Q: What was your relationship like with your uncle? Were you close?

01:25:48

#65M: My paternal uncle's wife used to call him *ashang-la* 'respectful term for maternal uncle.' So we too addressed him as *ashang-la*. My paternal uncle's wife and he were brother and sister.

Q: How many times did you witness a struggle session? You witnessed your uncle's and how many other times?

#65M: I do not have much to relate. When my uncle was to be subjected to *thamzing*, since we were related we ran there out of grief. However, as we were located apart and not in the village, [I] do not have much to relate.

Q: So when you were at your uncle's *thamzing*, what was the reaction of the Tibetan people who were witnessing this? How did they react?

01:27:20

#65M: Some of them obeyed the Chinese and conducted the *thamzing*. [They] beat and pulled the hair. However, most of them went behind and cried. If one cried and it came to the Chinese' knowledge, he was derided, "Do not be 'green-brained.' If you do not think properly and act 'green-brained,' ultimately this is the only way for you to go." One could not cry much. If one did that, on another day those people who had cried would be called to attend a meeting to change their "brain."

Q: What was your uncle's official position?

#65M: Compared to [the system] here, he was like the Secretary. He was below the Settlement Officer.

Q: Was your family treated differently because you were quite wealthy?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: By?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: By the Tibetans.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: By the Tibetans?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Hmm.

[Interpreter translates question as: Did you have any particular status from the Tibetan government as yours was a wealthy farmer family? Was there any special treatment by the Tibetan government?]

01:29:20

#65M: There was nothing special. We were treated on par with the other people. There was no particular status. The uncle was educated. He was from a wealthy family and was educated. So [he] was given that position by the government. He was made an official. We did not have any particular status.

Q: But other Tibetans, ordinary Tibetans not the government, but just ordinary Tibetans—was there any sense of jealousy, you know because your family was quite wealthy? So was there any tension about this?

#65M: There was nothing like that. There was nothing like that.

Q: You had quite a few people working on your land, yes?

01:30:28

#65M: Where? In my family?

[Question is repeated.]

#65M: There were about four poor families who lived with us. We owned a lot of land. However, I do not know how much the area is. I did not take much notice [then].

Q: But when you were at the struggle session, there were some Tibetans who were going along with what the Chinese were trying to get them to say, yes? Do you think that they were really feeling this or they were just acting, you know to please the Chinese? Or do you think some of them were happy to see a powerful person, you know being treated this way? Did you think any of them were enthusiastic about the struggle session?

01:31:56

#65M: Suppose [Mundgod] was the village, [we] have nine camps here. In these nine camps, there are different leaders. Since he [uncle] held a high position, some of them treated him very severely. However, there was no one among the ordinary people who conducted the *thamzing* severely. Before the *thamzing*, if some of the elders mentioned that he [uncle] was a good man and shed tears, they [the Chinese] said, “You have ‘green brains.’ Come to a meeting tomorrow.”

Q: So when you came to India and you were working on the road construction in Bomdila, you were 18, yes? You worked from 18-24. Is that correct? You said you worked on the road construction in Bomdila for six years and you were 18 when you came to India. So I’m just checking, from 18-24 years old you were working on the road construction?

#65M: Yes. [I] lived in Bomdila until 24. At age 24 the Chinese arrived in Bomdila and at age 25, I came here.

Q: And this is where you met your husband?

01:34:05

#65M: [I] met my husband during the road construction in Bomdila. [I] had my first child after coming here.

Q: The first baby was born here?

#65M: [Nods]

Q: And then you have four children, yes?

01:34:27

#65M: [I] had nine children, but because of cutting the forest, doing a lot of work and carrying heavy loads, [I] miscarried three times at around the third month. It was due to the hard work. I have four children now. A daughter died at the age of 25 due to tuberculosis and a son died at age 27 in the [Indian] army.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I just wanted to ask when she was...Just to go back to Tibet—she was staying with the road construction crew when she was doing that other work, what conditions did she see the Tibetans working under during road construction?

Q: When you worked on the road construction in Tibet...

#65M: [Interrupts] No, [I] did not in Tibet. Oh, you mean for the Chinese?

Q: Yes, the Chinese. You worked for the road construction. When the Tibetans worked under the Chinese, what special feelings...

01:35:51

#65M: [I] did not feel anything. [I] was like a child and went up and down with the Chinese school children. [I] did not have any particular feelings.

Q: All right. Tell her thank you so much. Just to make sure that she's comfortable with everything, I just want to ask you one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for you?

#65M: There'll be no problems at all. What I have seen, I have seen and I have related what took place. I have no problems at all.

Q: Are you comfortable with your real name?

01:36:41

#65M: Sure. I have not caused any problems between countries. I have related what was and not, what was not. [I have] no problems whatsoever. If it was not [true], I would not dare tell it to you.

Q: Thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

#65M: Thank you. [Joins palms and bows]

END OF INTERVIEW