

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #70D – Tenzin Dechen (alias)
May 23, 2012

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[Anonymity Requested]

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #70D
2. Interviewee: Tenzin Dechen (alias)
3. Age: 60
4. Date of Birth: 1952
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1982
9. Date of Interview: May 23, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 39 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tenzin Dechen was born into a large family in 1952. Her father was put in charge of all the property that the Chinese confiscated from wealthier villagers. He took pity on refugees arriving from other villages and gave them housing and supplies. For this her father was sent to prison when she was only 9 years old. Tenzin Dechen's mother and aunt struggled to feed and clothe the large family on their own. They lived under the commune system launched by the Chinese, who awarded stars to the workers on the basis of which a person was allotted food grains.

Tenzin Dechen recounts her father's suffering in prison for six years and his stories about prisoners who died of starvation. She talks about how the biography of Jetsun Milarepa inspired her to become a nun at the age of 25 and how she covertly wore robes and covered her shaven head because religious practice was not allowed under Chinese occupation.

Tenzin Dechen escaped to India in 1982. She recollects her escape, the suffering during the journey, arrest by Chinese, the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama she saw and her life in the Gaden Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala for 13 years. She describes her trip to Tibet to visit her siblings in 2011 and her imprisonment by Chinese.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, Dalai Lama, destruction of monasteries, imprisonment, life under Chinese rule, commune system, Buddhist beliefs, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #70D

Interviewee: Tenzin Dechen [alias]

Age: 60, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: May 23, 2012

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:12

Interviewee #70D: Tenzin Dechen.

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?

#70D: [Nods]

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

#70D: [Silent]

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

#70D: [Nods]

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

00:01:46

#70D: There will be no problem when one reveals a true story.

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

#70D: [Nods]

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: How many family members were there?

00:02:03

#70D: There were seven family members.

Q: How many children and where were you in the lineup?

#70D: There were six.

Q: Six? Were you in the middle or the oldest?

#70D: I was the second one.

Q: What kind of work did your family do when you were a little girl?

#70D: I used to herd pigs when I was little.

Q: *Ani* 'nun,' what year were you born?

#70D: [I] was born in 1952.

Q: *Ani*, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood? What was it like? What were some of your memories of your childhood?

#70D: When I was little, there were many siblings and Father was in prison. [He] was already in prison and I was aware of it. Father was in prison for six years.

Q: Was it when you were 6 years old?

00:03:55

#70D: No. I was around 9 years old then.

Q: [Father] was sent to prison when [you] were 9 years old?

#70D: Yes. [I] can recall [father] being taken away. Father was captured and taken away by the police. [I] was aware of it.

Q: Why was he imprisoned?

#70D: The reason was this. You know Rinchen Khando of Tasotsang [family]? Rinchen Khando, the wife of Ngari Rinpoche [Dalai Lama's brother]? Her father and my father were sons of wealthy families. [They] were taken on a tour of China before the Reformation. [They] realized the situation and when [they] returned, Rinchen Khando's father escaped to India. My father was at home and they [the Chinese] appointed him as an official.

Q: What official? Chinese official?

00:05:12

#70D: Appointed as a Chinese official. The possessions and houses of all the *sadhak* ‘land owners’ and *ngadak* ‘leaders’ were confiscated. Father was appointed to take care of these properties. People had fled and there were many empty houses. All the people that arrived from here and there and all those that did not own houses and slept outdoors were given houses. All the confiscated possessions and houses...clothes that were taken from the *sadhak* were distributed. Articles and houses were distributed. [He] was captured on account of that.

Q: Who was this person, the Rinpoche?

#70D: Ngari Rinpoche is His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s brother. [He] lives here in Dharamsala.

Q: Okay. I’m going to back up a little bit in the story. *Ani*, before we talk about your father’s imprisonment and how it happened, before we do that, I wanted to know what were conditions like in your family before your father was taken away?

#70D: All the six children were born by then. We were all there. No, there were five children and a daughter was born after [father] returned. [He] was six years in prison.

Q: Were your family working everyday as farmers and were you doing any work yourself on the farm?

00:08:13

#70D: It was fieldwork always.

Q: Did you work?

#70D: Yes, [I] did. I did not have good clothes then. [I] used to wear a short jacket and was always barefoot and did not own shoes. There was a lot of hardship.

Q: So what conditions, difficult? Were you a poor family and was that always your condition to be a poor family or had something happened to make your family poor?

#70D: It changed after the Chinese arrived. Earlier we were not extremely rich but there were two servants. They were orphans and did the work. The family members did not treat them badly nor forced them to work. Mother told me that. [In fact,] the workers used to give instructions [to the family members]. [I] was told that they [the family members] were kind-hearted and spent time in religious practice. That’s the actual truth as mother told me about it.

Q: Were there any Chinese in your area when you were a little girl?

00:10:04

#70D: Yes, there were. Soldiers stayed in our house and stole all the wood [indicates floor boards]. They removed all of it and stole our dog and boiled [it] at night. They removed all of it [wooden floor] and made fire.

Q: Did [they] forcefully take [them]?

#70D: We were sleeping at night. [We] were sleeping at night and the soldiers went and stole a dog. [They] stole a dog and in order to boil it, they removed the wooden floors of our home since there was no wood available. Our [flooring] was of wood. They needed to boil the dog and had removed all of it [wooden floor]. I asked, “We have wooden panels in our room. Why is there not any here?” Then mother explained about it. [Chinese] army leaders stayed in it—our house was not very large but it was beautiful—and at night the army leader might have given the order. [They] stole a dog and removed all the wooden panels of the kitchen. I asked what had happened to it. There were no wooden panels and we felt cold. [I] was told that Chinese soldiers stayed there, stole a dog and boiled it at night by removing them to make fire.

Q: What was the family’s reaction to having their dogs killed and eaten by the Chinese?

#70D: One dare not say anything to whatever they did. One dare not even mention in the morning that [the dog] was boiled. Soldiers were staying there. They were soldiers. One must keep quiet.

Q: What did you think of that, *ani*?

00:12:19

#70D: I asked mother, as I have no recollection about the stealing and boiling. It happened just after the Reformation and I was 5 or 6 years old. I asked mother later when I was much older. [I] used to sweep and it was very difficult. When I asked, mother told me that the soldiers did it.

Q: When told that, what did you feel? Were [you] angry?

#70D: [I] thought how audacious but one dare not utter it. I thought it was very audacious, and you did not even have authority over your house. I did not know it then but there was a photograph of His Holiness the Dalai Lama when [he] was at a young age.

Q: Age?

#70D: A photograph when [His Holiness] was at a young age. It used to be hidden. When [we] heard that the Chinese were coming, it would be placed atop the pillar. I can remember that. It was hidden. When the call came that the Chinese were coming, it was hidden. [I] remember it.

Q: A small picture of what?

[Interpreter interprets as]: Was it His Holiness the Dalai Lama's photograph?

00:13:58

#70D: Yes, a photograph. When we searched for it later, it could not be found. Perhaps the rats ate it.

Q: Was it placed atop a pillar?

#70D: It was hidden atop a pillar.

Q: What did you know was happening in Lhasa in like...when you were 5, 6, maybe 7, 8? Did you know anything about what was happening in Lhasa and what was happening to the Dalai Lama or what did happen? When did you begin to understand what was happening?

#70D: [I] was aware of it from a young age because we had to go to work. They made us work from the age of 10.

Q: The Chinese?

#70D: Yes, I was given the task of herding pigs.

Q: From the age of 10?

#70D: Yes. The commune system had started then. When I was not old enough to herd pigs, I used to be kept at home. The children were left at home and [mother] locked the door and left. I had to take care of the children.

Q: Initially you took care of the children?

00:15:15

#70D: Yes, initially [I] took care of the children.

Q: Were they your siblings?

#70D: Yes, [my] siblings.

Q: Did mother leave after locking the door?

#70D: There were two mothers.

Q: Two mothers?

#70D: One was a maternal aunt. They took care of the home as father was already in prison then.

Q: What do you remember? What was the feeling in your family at that time around the Chinese presence? Were you scared? Was it dangerous? Were you okay? What was the feeling?

#70D: They caused a lot of suffering and mother used to cry, “The Chinese are like this. The father [of the family] cannot live at home and is imprisoned. When we are no more, how much will the children suffer.” She would cry. I was the older [among the children].

Q: Do you remember what your mother would say to you?

#70D: Yes, [I] understood everything.

Q: What did [she] say?

00:17:05

#70D: “Your father is in prison. If we [mother and aunt] do not attend work...even if one is late by a minute—in a day [a person] was awarded 10 stars—if one is late even by a minute, one star from the ten is deducted. If we do not go [to work]...one must work for the stars as grains are distributed based on the number of stars accumulated. If there is no accumulation [of stars] children will not have anything to eat. If we attend [to work], the children are forced to shoulder tasks. [We] hardly have any food.”

Q: If one works hard for the Chinese, stars...

#70D: It was collective fieldwork.

Q: Did the Chinese award 10 stars?

#70D: Yes, 10 stars were awarded in a day. If one was late by a minute, a star was deducted; one received only 9 stars. It was like a prison. They were very smart and it prompted one to arrive fast. It was similar to a prison. One had nothing to eat without the stars. One attended work [on time] fearing the deduction of stars. If one went out for an hour—it was just like a prison—one requested for an hour’s leave to go to buy something and was granted an hour’s leave. The system in Tibet was exactly like a prison. It continued until ’81. I realized that it was useless to work in the fields after becoming a nun, and that there was a place called India where one could go. So mother sent me.

Q: Did your mother send you?

00:18:49

#70D: Yes. [Mother said,] “Shave your head and do not work in the field. Go to India.”

Q: Did you come to India in 1981?

#70D: Yes, it was like ’81-’82. It was between these [dates]. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was giving a teaching in Bodh Gaya [Bihar] then. [I] arrived in Nepal in ’81 and in Bodh Gaya around the 1st or 2nd month of ’82.

Q: How old were you when your mother said you should become a nun?

#70D: I was 25 years old.

Q: Twenty-five? Did you become a nun at the age of 25?

#70D: Yes. I was assigned to milk animals at the nomadic site. While there [I] looked up Jetsun Mila's [Milarepa] *namthar* 'biographies of those who attained liberation both for themselves and others' and realized the futility. [I] thought about the vicious cycle of existence, the Chinese' oppression and there being no freedom to practice religion. [I] felt it was worthwhile to learn to read and practice the dharma.

Q: Where was your father at that time?

00:21:23

#70D: Father had been released by then.

Q: After six years, right?

#70D: [His] *khema* 'kidney' was damaged from being kicked. Pus had formed here [touches right kidney area] on the *khema*.

Q: *Khema*?

#70D: Kidney.

Q: *Ani*, I would like to go back and understand the conditions around your father's arrest.

#70D: Okay.

Q: Was there a monastery near you?

#70D: There were no monasteries. [They] were destroyed. One was allowed to practice dharma a little and recite the *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' but one dare not use the rosary. It was hidden while chanting.

I knew the story of my parents and siblings and thought it was futile. [Cries] [I] thought getting married and working there was useless.

Q: *Ani*, you mentioned something about His Holiness' brother and I was trying to understand.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah. His Holiness' brother... "My dad's family belonged to the wife of Ngari Rinpoche. They were from the same family." So by blood they were connected to some important people.

Q: Was the important people your dad's family belonged to the wife of the Rinpoche and the Rinpoche was the Dalai Lama's brother?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Younger brother.

Q: Where was he living?

[Interpreter interprets as]: Had Ngari Rinpoche arrived in India then?

00:23:52

#70D: We had no knowledge about what was happening in this part [India] then.

Q: At the time [your] father was imprisoned?

#70D: At the time father was imprisoned, Ngari Rinpoche was in Lhasa and Rinchen Khando was very small, around 7 or 8 years old. My father and her father were very close. They were close from a young age and father said that he used to carry her, Rinchen Khando. [Father] was married at that time but there were no children. Rinchen Khando would have had no knowledge about Ngari Rinpoche then.

[Interpreter mixes up the fathers of Ngari Rinpoche and Rinchen Khando while interpreting the above statements.]

#70D: No, [my father] did not know Ngari Rinpoche then. Rinchen Khando hailed from the same village as us.

[Interpreter clarifies the mix-up.]

Q: Now can we go back again and explain how did your father get in trouble and what did he do that the Chinese accused him of and send him to prison for six years?

00:26:08

#70D: All the *dzi* ‘special beads made of agate stone,’ corals, lambskins, and possessions of the landowners and wealthy people were collected.

Q: Collected by the Chinese?

#70D: The Chinese said they were implementing the liberation process of democratization and collected everything. Our father was put in charge of that. There was one called *chutang*...

Q: Was he appointed as the leader for safekeeping?

#70D: Keeper of the assets. Leader or whatever you might call it. [He] was the keeper of assets. He held that authority. [He] was imprisoned on account of that. [He] was supposed to be given the authority. Many had fled. There were just a few families left.

Q: Had the majority escaped?

#70D: [They] had fled; fled to Lhasa or if possible to India. [They] fled when the Chinese arrived. Hence, there were many empty houses. The roads were crowded with people.

Q: Were they poor people?

00:27:05

#70D: [They] could be called poor. [They] were not poor but were rendered so by the Chinese. They were without houses and lands. Father gave everyone houses and lands. [He] did not dare give away the *dzi* and corals, but distributed things like tents and utensils to them. He gave them away with a “come what may” thought. [He] was told, “You are bad. [You] have given away all the possessions that have been collected.” [He] was captured on account of it and imprisoned.

Q: *Ani*, why do you think your father was selected for such a big job for the Chinese? Why was he given such a task?

#70D: [Father] was not given the task of collecting wealth. They [the Chinese] collected and [he] was the keeper of the assets.

Q: Why was that?

#70D: What?

Q: Why do [you] think [he] was given that job?

#70D: That was because we were a wealthy family earlier and he [father] had already been taken on a tour of China. Reformation was being carried out [in China] and realizing that, Rinchen Khando’s father escaped. Rinchen Khando was small then. [She] was carried and [her family] fled to India. My mother was pregnant with the first child and [father] could not leave her and hence, stayed back.

They had been taken on a tour by the Chinese and realized that things were not good. He [Rinchen Khando’s father] knew that and escaped. Our father did not flee because [his] wife was pregnant. Had he fled, his child would be left behind and [he] stayed back. He was a very righteous and noble person and did not speak much. They [the Chinese] left [the properties] in his hands. [He] was the custodian of the properties.

00:30:09

There was one called Adhu *Phodang* ‘Palace’ and a family called Adhutsang. All the assets were stored there and [father] was appointed the custodian. He was determined come what may. Numerous people had come from different regions and were living by the roadside. Most of them did not have [their] fathers since the fathers had fled. [He] gave them the houses and blankets, irrespective of whether he was caught or whatever the consequences. He told [me] that [he] gave them away.

Q: How long did your father... You said your father was sent to China. Where did he go in China and do you know how long?

#70D: There was a prison called Minyak. [He] was put in jail.

Q: Earlier [he] was taken to China...

#70D: Yes, [he] was taken to prison in China.

Q: [He] was taken on a tour to China...

#70D: Like a tourist but they had become aware of the reality that people's assets were being collected. Such things were being done. All the properties were confiscated. Lands were confiscated. [They] learned such things, which was why Rinchen Khando's father escaped, while our father...

Q: How many days did [they] spend in China?

#70D: [I] would not know it, as I was small. [Father] mentioned that he had gone there and became aware of the happenings.

Q: In the early days many leaders had been taken [to China]...

#70D: Yes.

Q: Many district administrators. Did they go together?

00:32:17

#70D: No. Well, our [fathers] could be called district administrators...I told you that [they] were not actually leaders but sons of wealthy families. [They] were taken [to China] to put fear in them that such things were being done. To be honest it was to say, "The same thing will be done to you." Rinchen Khando's father escaped.

Q: Was Rinchen Khando's father together?

#70D: [They] were together.

Q: You were young but do you know, was he gone for a long time, a year or just a few months and where did he go?

#70D: [You] mean in China?

Q: Yes.

#70D: It might have taken around two months. [The Chinese] did not keep [them] for long. One must ride horses because there were no vehicles then.

Q: Where in China?

#70D: China lay close to our [region]. You reached it in a day's bus ride.

Q: A day's bus ride?

#70D: Yes.

Q: Were [they] taken just there and not to Beijing?

00:33:47

#70D: Beijing is not far away.

Q: Beijing isn't far away?

#70D: [I] am told that presently one can reach it with 300 *yuan*. It is [a journey] of little over a day.

Q: Where [they] taken to Beijing? Where were [they] taken?

#70D: Yes, [they] were taken to Beijing.

Q: [They] were taken to Beijing?

#70D: Yes. Instead of recounting this incident earlier, I am doing it now. Earlier when His Holinesses the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama visited China, my father was in the Tibetan army. [He] accompanied them.

Q: Was your father a soldier earlier?

#70D: Yes.

Q: Like a security army?

#70D: No, [he] was a soldier of the Tibetan Government Army.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama...

00:34:22

#70D: Yes, along with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He was a *zimga* of the Panchen Rinpoche. *Zimga* is one who stays close and cooks. We knew it because [we] have a photograph. There was a very large photograph. There were the two Holinesses and my father, though [we] could not recognize [him]. [He] was young, maybe around 18 years old.

Q: When the Dalai Lama went to China, your father went as a cook for the Panchen Rinpoche who was with the Dalai Lama and you have a picture of that. Do you remember what year or how old you were, *ani*?

#70D: I do not know. [I] was not born then.

Q: [You] weren't born then?

#70D: I was not born then. Mother used to tell me these. [We] had the photograph and [mother] told the story. His Holiness mentions staying around four months in China. It was the *Kusung Magmi* ‘Dalai Lama’s Security Army,’ like the police.

I wasn’t born then. Father was young, around 18 years old. Officials came to our region and recruited all the 18 year olds. I should have related this earlier.

Q: Father was a cook, right?

#70D: Yes, yes.

Q: In the army?

00:36:32

#70D: Father was a cook but not in the army. [He] was always by the side of His Holiness the Panchen Lama, cooking or doing whatever, a trusted one. We would call one as police, something like that.

Q: *Ani*, you were born in 1960 [1952] and your father was put in prison in 1969. So you were 9 years old. While he was gone, what happened in the family? How did the family manage with six children?

#70D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] It’s because [I] should have related this portion of the story earlier.

[We] were extremely poor. We hardly had anything to wear. I and my sibling possessed one fur coat between us. We wore a blanket over it and slept in the straw. There were many children and no clothes. There were not many clothes.

Q: What about food?

#70D: We were small then. Animals had been distributed based on the number of family members. A milk-producing animal was given to every three or four people. [We] owned two *dzomo* ‘female animal bred from a yak and cow.’ We did not suffer much later because there was plenty of milk to drink.

Q: If your father was imprisoned, were the other people told to shun you or were they friendly to you because your father had tried to give back property and homes?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean the Tibetans?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes, the Tibetans.

Q: He tried to give property and homes back, so did the people in the community tried to support you and your mother or were they made to shun you by the Chinese as a bad person?

00:39:26

#70D: People living close by said, “[Your father] has been kind-hearted giving clothes to the people. [He] has been captured on account of the people.”

Q: [They] said [he] was good?

#70D: Yes, [they] did.

Q: The people liked your father then?

#70D: Yes, [they] did. [He] was extremely just.

Q: Your father went to prison when you were about 9. I think you said 9. You were born in ‘60 [?] and your father went to prison in ’69 [?]. He was there for six years. So you’re 15 years old when your father is released from prison. Do you remember what he told you about prison?

#70D: [I] was [old enough] to know everything then. Father cried and exclaimed, “My children” and hugged. My older brother hugged [him] and cried but [I] dare not hug because [his] hair was this long [points to right shoulder]. [His] hair had not been cut for the duration of six years. [He] did not have anything to cut [his] hair. The Chinese were strict. [His] hair was long and I dare not hug [him], unsure if it was father. Honestly. [I] am speaking the truth. Why should I lie?

Q: When your father was in prison, where was the prison and was it possible for you to visit him and bring him food or see him? Where was it and was it possible to visit?

00:41:28

#70D: It was called Yanga. The Chinese call it Yanga and we Tibetans call it Rangakhang.

Q: Rangakhang.

#70D: It is located a little further away from Tawu. It is in Tibetan territory though.

Q: Was it located close by?

#70D: No, of course not.

Q: How far?

#70D: It is half a day’s journey by vehicle.

Q: Half a day?

#70D: Yes. We met only when [he] was released. Others go on visits.

Q: Wasn’t visits allowed?

#70D: [Mother and aunt] could not go because they had six children to feed.

Q: Not even once in six years?

#70D: No, [they] could not.

00:42:34

Father described a lot of suffering. The prison roof was made of metal sheet and it was extremely hot. Prisoners slept in rows and in the morning, there'd be 6-7 dead from starvation. [He] said that due to lack of food, [the prisoners] did not have the strength to carry the 6-7 bodies. [The bodies] were dragged and then [they] could not dig deep, exposing the stomach parts. The birds and crows—there was a bird called a crow—pecked. [They] pecked and ate the bodies.

Q: Whose bodies were being eaten?

#70D: The corpses of the prisoners. There were many thousands of prisoners in the jail. Each morning 7-8 people were dead.

Q: Were the people dead in the morning?

#70D: [Father] mentioned that there were the dead.

Q: Six to seven people?

#70D: Yes. They [the Chinese] did not do the burying, which the prisoners had to perform. [Father] said the stomachs were exposed because [they] could not dig deep. So birds and dogs ate them.

Q: Ate the stomach?

#70D: Stomach and then [they] would eat the whole body.

00:44:23

Father used to say that he believed “This is my karma” and was kind and helpful to the people. He walked the sick up and down and the Chinese realized that he was kind-hearted. [The Chinese] trusted and appointed him to care for the pigs. [The Chinese] raised numerous pigs and he was given the task of caring for them. He said he used to cut away parts of potatoes and radishes that were not rotten, cooked them over a fire...

Q: Radishes?

#70D: Yes, radishes and potatoes. [He] cooked them on a fire and gave to his colleagues. [Father] said that [he] suffered such miseries.

Q: *Ani*, what did you mean when you said your father thought it was sort of karmic? Can you talk about that a little bit? What was karmic?

#70D: [Father thought] it was because he must have caused suffering to people in [his] past life. However, [he] said that he had no regrets since he was able to do what he wanted to by distributing the clothes and houses. [He] was able to give them to the poor people. He felt it was right and was happy, he said.

Q: In the prison?

#70D: Yes.

Q: [He] said [he] was happy?

00:46:14

#70D: Yes, because he was able to do what he wanted to. [He] said [he] was happy. Then mother would cry and say, “How could [you] be happy when [you] cannot see the children and when [you] cannot see me?” [He] said [he] felt fine as he used his authority to distribute to the people. [He] said [he] felt fine.

Q: Mother had a different kind of suffering.

#70D: Oh, yes [she] suffered as the children suffered a lot for food. Everyone starved. The region starved. The bodies would be dragged a little way and thrown into a shallow river. [Nobody] could carry the bodies. Even I know of it. [Food] was rationed like in the army and each of us six children received only half a Chinese *gyama* ‘half kilogram’ of *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley,’ I was aware of that. I and my older brother were sent to school for a while.

Q: Chinese [school]?

#70D: [We] attended a Chinese school. [We] used to pluck greens and eat it together with *tsampa*.

Q: When your father gets out of prison you are 15 years old. Is that when you were sent to school with your brother to a Chinese school at that age?

00:48:37

#70D: I was 9-10 years old when I attended school.

Q: Nine to 10 years old, and for how long?

#70D: Only for three years.

Q: Three years?

#70D: Then my father was released. Father who had been in prison was labeled an evil man and children of evil people were barred and [we] were expelled. Otherwise, I liked going to school.

Q: Were you told not to attend after three years?

#70D: [I] was not allowed.

Q: Were [you] told not to attend?

#70D: Yes. The children of *sadhak* and evil men were not to get educated. [We] were not allowed to attend.

Q: Did the Chinese tell [you] not to come?

#70D: Yes.

Q: *Ani*, can you tell me what happened in the... This is a school run by the Chinese. In this Chinese school, what kind of subjects were you taught for three years?

00:49:37

#70D: Mathematics and Chinese script were taught. Initially, there was no restriction and a little Tibetan was taught.

Q: Was Tibetan taught?

#70D: [It] was taught.

Q: Was the teacher Tibetan?

#70D: The teacher was a lama from the monastery.

Q: Mathematics, Chinese and a little Tibetan. And then what else?

#70D: That was it.

Q: Wasn't any science taught?

#70D: No, no science at all.

Q: Were the teachers from China or from your area for math and Chinese?

#70D: One was from China and Teacher Tseyang, a Tibetan lady taught mathematics. The Chinese taught Chinese language.

Q: Were you a good student?

00:50:47

#70D: I loved to study. It seems like I was kind-hearted even as a child. When [classes] got over, there were some children who had soiled [their clothes]. There was not anyone to

change [their clothes] and I used to wipe and clean [them]. As a reward, I had a red cloth here [indicates right arm]. [I] was given the award as a child.

Q: Let us continue with your story. You said when your father got out of prison, conditions were difficult and then, how old were you when you... So what happened from the time your father got out of prison until you left for India? What was happening in your life, from 15 to 23?

#70D: From the age of 16, I...

Q: From age 19?

#70D: From 16.

Q: Sixteen.

#70D: Normally the awards were given at 18 but I worked hard without any pretense. [I] worked without any pretense, so from the age of 16, I was awarded stars like adults.

Q: Stars of adults?

#70D: [I] was awarded 10 stars like adults. The others used to grumble.

Q: And then?

00:52:39

#70D: [The Chinese] said that [I] was working hard.

Q: That [you] were working hard and were capable?

#70D: Yes.

Q: What kind of work did you do?

#70D: Fieldwork.

Q: Just fieldwork?

#70D: It was just fieldwork, like weeding and hoeing.

Q: *Ani*, did this change? Why did you want to leave if things were pleasant for you?

#70D: The reason was this. At the age of 21, I was assigned the task of milking animals in the mountains. *Dri* 'female yaks' and yaks. [I] had to milk the *dri* while yaks cannot be milked.

Q: *Dri*?

#70D: *Dri*. [I] milked the *dri* and found plenty of [free] time. After milking in the morning, [I] made the cheese and then there was time until the next task began. So [I] read Jetsun Mila's *namthar*. There was a lama who was responsible for collecting butter. Being a lama he would not steal the butter, so a lama was appointed as butter collector.

Q: Was a lama appointed to make butter?

00:54:23

#70D: [He] was responsible for keeping butter.

Q: Keeping butter?

#70D: Yes. [He] read Jetsun Mila's *namthar* and advised us what to do. And then I became a nun.

Q: At the age of 21?

#70D: Twenty-four.

Q: Did the lama also stay on the mountain?

#70D: Yes, we were together. [We] lived in the same tent. There were five people and he was the one in charge. I became a nun after learning about Jetsun Mila's *namthar*.

Q: So this is at age 16?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Twenty-four.

Q: Oh, should be at age 24. You became an *ani* because you were getting lessons. What does it mean to become an *ani*? What does that mean?

#70D: [Speaks before translation is complete] I was listening [to Jetsun Mila's *namthar* at age 24]. [I] was not a nun then, just a girl. I shaved my hair at 25 after hearing [about Jetsun Mila].

Q: [You] were receiving teachings at age 24?

#70D: [I] was receiving teachings.

Q: Did you have to do that in secret or was there freedom to do that?

[Interpreter interprets as]: Did you cut your hair in secret? How did [you] do it?

#70D: What?

Q: [You] became a nun and cut [your] hair. Was that done in secret?

#70D: The lama cut [my] hair on the eve of a Losar ‘Tibetan New Year.’ I told [him] that [I] wished to. I and another [girl] cut [our hair]. [She] could not continue [as a nun] but there is no need to talk about it. I am a nun. I and another became nuns but the other did not continue and has a child. After I had cut off my hair... There was no proper light—I used to keep studying at night after mother and the others had gone to sleep and then fall asleep. Mother used to cry, “[My] daughter studies so hard. Do not remain here to do fieldwork.” And then [she] told me to go to India and that there was His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India.

Q: Didn’t the Chinese say anything upon [your] becoming a nun?

00:57:26

#70D: Yes, [they] did. [I] made fake hair and wore it for around a year.

Q: Fake hair. What did it look like? What kind of wig was it?

#70D: We normally made tiny plaits, [touches hair] in separate strands. [I] sewed those back. Many [people] used to come to the nomadic area to look for medicinal plants. They had seen me and had remarked, “[We] heard [she] has become a nun but it is not so. We saw [her] and [she] still has hair.” I was wearing the fake hair. [I] heard that people remarked thus.

Q: How did [you] glue it?

#70D: It was not glued.

Q: [How did you] wear it?

#70D: It was stitched. The slender strands were [sewn] back and worn like a cap.

Q: *Ani*, why did you want to become a nun?

#70D: The reason was that I had seen the sufferings of my family members. That is the reason. And [I] was dejected by the vicious cycle of existence, of getting married, of going [to another family] as a *nama* ‘daughter-in-law’ though there were many that asked for my hand. [I] replied that I did not want to [get married] and became a nun. Otherwise, [I] would have been given away as a *nama* in a week’s time.

Q: How many times?

00:59:28

#70D: *Nama*.

Q: Were [you] already given away as *nama*?

#70D: No, [I] was to be given away in a week’s time. I would be given away as *nama* a week after Losar. Hence, [I] cut my hair.

Q: Tell me more about that. Why didn't you want to get married and have a family?

#70D: My mother had suffered and the Chinese were still present. [I felt] the same thing would happen to me. Jetsun Mila practiced dharma diligently and that inspired [me]. I felt that there was no meaning in worldly matters. [I] felt dejected.

Q: *Ani*, what spiritual teachings did you find very inspiring that the lama was teaching you? What spiritual...?

#70D: Presently or at that time?

Q: Yes, earlier.

#70D: Jetsun Mila lived in the hills with nothing to eat except plants, and still struggled for the benefit of sentient beings while I have food and clothes, so there is no reason why I cannot become a nun.

Q: And then? What special teachings did [the lama] give?

01:01:24

#70D: I took teachings after coming here [India]; [I] learned the script there [Tibet]. There is a *namthar* called Nangsa—a girl called Nangsa who suffered and was given away as *nama*. [She] suffered a great deal of misery. It is a story.

Q: What was the message? What message moved your heart in the teachings and in the plays?

#70D: Nangsa Woebum went as *nama* to a very wealthy family. The younger sister of her husband tormented [her] a great deal. [She] died and came before the Lord of Death, who sent her back saying, "You must go back to help all sentient beings." [She] had been beaten unrestrainedly, scarred and killed. There was the man she [married] called Dakpa Samdup, her husband.

Q: That's in the story?

#70D: Yes. The one called Ani Nyimo [sister-in-law] tormented and killed her. [She] died and went to hell and was sent back. The Gods healed the scars. [Nangsa's] body was taken to the cremation ground where [she] came back to life. Believing that she was a zombie, she was almost rejected. Later she was accepted when [she] explained, "I am not a zombie. The Lord of Death has sent me back to help all sentient beings."

Q: *Ani*, who's the lama who gave you the teachings and what sect was that?

01:05:03

#70D: Presently? In Tibet?

Q: Yes, earlier in Tibet.

#70D: [He] was called Lobsang Tenzin.

Q: Lusung?

#70D: Losang Tenzin.

Q: Lobsang Tenzin. Was he a Gelug lama?

#70D: [He] was Gelug.

Q: Gelug. Are you also a Gelug?

#70D: I belong to all. My father was Sakya and mother Gelug. My two brothers are Kagyu and I am non-sectarian. I understand everything because [we] cannot practice without the Buddha dharma. Thongsha ‘Confessions of Emptiness’ and Zangchoe ‘Bhadracarya Pranidhana’ and most of the [teachings] teach about supplicating the lineage of Karmapa, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Sakya Gongma Rinpoche. I have gone through all the *duptha* ‘philosophical tenets’ and there is no difference [among the sects]. There is nothing but to practice the Buddha’s dharma and I do my studies slowly, as a non-sectarian.

Q: Did your father have any reactions to your shaving your hair and becoming a nun?

01:06:44

#70D: Father had passed away when I became a nun.

Q: *Ani*, what happens next? You’re now a nun; you’re living with your family...Are there other women in your community who became nuns and are you wearing regular clothing? Are there other women? Are you wearing regular clothing? Or did you have to stay in lay clothing?

#70D: To be honest, when I left from there [Tibet], there were many that were observing [me] and [I] hid near Norbulingka.

Q: Were there other nuns while [you] lived in Tibet?

#70D: [Women] who became nuns?

Q: Were there others that became nuns?

#70D: People were astonished when I and my colleague became nuns, as there were no monks to be seen and no nuns to be seen because in order to take the vows, one approached Zong Geshe in..., where you travelled in the night. One dare not do so during the day. After taking the vows, one wore red and yellow inner clothes with black [points to outer attire]. [I] did this for five years until the age of 30 under the Chinese.

Q: Were [you] five years under the Chinese?

#70D: Yes, after having [my] hair cut.

Q: Were [you] in monks' robes?

01:08:17

#70D: One was not allowed to wear monks' robes, of course not. All the monasteries were destroyed. There were none. I did it, but one was not allowed to become [a nun]. One chanted the *mani* a little.

Q: How long did you continue like that until you left? Did you continue like that as a nun secretly until you left for India and how many years was that?

#70D: For five years.

Q: Five years?

#70D: Yes, from 25 until 30. [I] fled here at the age of 30.

Q: Was it hard to keep secret for five years that you were a nun?

#70D: It was hard because you cannot be seen with a shaven head in front of the Chinese. [I] wore black clothes and a Chinese cap.

Q: In disguise.

#70D: [Nods]

Q: That was 1977-1982. So in 1982 what happened? In five years when you left, can you tell us what happened?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In the five years, what happened?

Q: When the five years were over, what happened?

01:10:39

#70D: [I] came here in '82, to India.

Q: Was that easy to do or was there any difficulty in coming? How did you prepare?

#70D: [I] did not bring anything to eat or drink. Though there was money at home, [I] did not bring money or anything else. I borrowed a small pot from a colleague. Well, not borrowed but [I] was given it as it was broken and without a lid. Another family gave me a cup. [I] did not bring anything from home. Then [I] fled without any food for the journey.

Q: How did [you] get food then?

#70D: [I] begged. Tibetans give, as [we] were two nuns.

Q: Were you alone?

#70D: There was one companion.

Q: One companion?

#70D: She is no longer a nun.

Q: Was she a nun?

#70D: [She] is not a nun. She is married.

Q: Was [she] a nun earlier?

#70D: [She] was a nun earlier.

Q: Did you wear robes?

01:11:55

#70D: No, [we] were wearing black. Otherwise, the Chinese would not let [us]. At that time there was no bridge [across the river] at Dam [Tibet-Nepal border] near Tamo. There were no guards. Two huge logs were placed [across the river] and had we fallen, [we] would have drowned. [We] woke up early in the morning and travelled in the night.

Q: Were there no guards?

#70D: No because there was no bridge and it was believed nobody would dare cross [the river]. We were not aware and dared to come. [We] crawled across the [makeshift] bridge. [Laughs]

Q: The Bridge between Tibet and Nepal? Which bridge?

#70D: It is located at the border. Even now the Chinese have put a marking halfway [across the bridge]. Half of it is in Nepali territory. One must cross it. [The bridge] is well constructed now.

Q: You walked across the bridge and then you came to Nepal, Kathmandu?

#70D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] We were jailed for a night.

Q: A night in prison?

#70D: In prison. And [we] fled from there.

Q: Which prison?

01:13:20

#70D: At Dam in Tamo.

Q: Was it a Chinese prison?

#70D: Yes, put in a Chinese prison. They put [us] in a school building. We fled from there. [Laughs]

Q: How many days were [you] there?

#70D: [We] were put in for a night and fled that night.

Q: Were you released in the night?

#70D: [We] were shut in for the night but they had not locked the door. As [we] listened, the policeman was a Khampa. He did not lock the door, perhaps indicating for us to flee. [He] dared not mention it but did not lock the door, just bolted it. There was a drizzle just before dawn and we fled.

Q: After you were arrested?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: You were arrested on the Chinese side or the Nepali side?

#70D: The Chinese. It was the Chinese, Chinese police.

Q: Locked in prison, immediately before you went over the bridge?

01:14:51

#70D: Yes.

Q: The Khampa didn't lock the door and you escaped early in the morning?

#70D: Right. He was a Khampa and spoke with a Derge accent.

Q: Where did you go?

[Question not interpreted]

Q: Do you think he left it open, so you would go out?

#70D: [I] do think so, on account of him being a Tibetan. Otherwise, one would make sure the door was locked. It was just bolted. The glass pane was broken and [I] could reach the bolt with my hand. Then I woke [my] companion, "Wake up, wake up. Let us run away quickly."

Q: Where did you go?

#70D: Then [we] crossed the border. [We] reached there in a day.

Q: A day later?

#70D: At around 3 o'clock, I virtually saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama then.

Q: I see.

01:15:53

#70D: [I] did not know [His Holiness] then. Someone in monk's robes stood in front of me for around 10 minutes. My companion could not see it.

Q: Where did you see [His Holiness]?

#70D: On the way. [I] just saw [His Holiness] on the way.

Q: It was His Holiness?

#70D: [The apparition] was this high [holds out right hand to height of around three feet]. [I] could see above the knee. It did not disappear for around 10 minutes and then...

Q: Was it around 3 o'clock?

#70D: Yes. It was around 3 o'clock in the evening.

Q: Three o'clock in the evening.

#70D: Yes.

Q: By evening, do [you] mean early in the morning?

#70D: No, it was evening.

Q: I see.

#70D: It was around 3 o'clock in the evening. We were walking and there was a slight drizzle and hazy sunlight. [I] saw [His Holiness] then. This is the truth. [I] am not lying. There is no reason to lie.

Q: For around 10 minutes...

01:16:34

#70D: Yes, for around 10 minutes [the apparition] stood in space. It was above here [indicates knees].

Q: [Did you see His Holiness] in your mind?

#70D: I could see and told my companion many times, “[I] think this is His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Lama has come here.” [The apparition] stood for a long while but she could not see it.

Q: You had a clear vision of His Holiness.

#70D: [I] realized it was His Holiness the Dalai Lama when [I] arrived in Bodh Gaya. The vision I saw was [His Holiness]. I had never seen [him] before that. His Holiness held me like this [not discernible] three times. [He] asked me, “Where are you from?” He could foretell and three times [His Holiness] held [me] asking where I was from. [I replied], “I want to go to Dharamsala.” [He] said, “I am there in Dharamsala. Come to me.” However, one cannot get the chance to meet His Holiness. Then I painted pictures of deities for 15 years at TCV [Tibetan Children’s Village].

Q: Painting?

#70D: Yes, as [I] could not get admission into the nunnery.

Q: Was seeing the vision for real or what was it?

01:18:01

#70D: [I] saw it for real like a movie. The sun was hazy...

Q: And did [the vision] ask questions?

#70D: No, [the vision] did not speak. If I stood here, [it] was a little further away in space. [I] could see above here [indicates knee area].

Q: What was he doing or saying?

#70D: [I] did not see [the vision] speak nor did [I] ask anything. [I] told my companion many times, “Look. Look. [His Holiness] is visible.” But she could not see.

Q: And then what happened, *ani*?

#70D: I thought, “We will not succeed in escaping. [We will] not get to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and perhaps this is to suffice for it.” And I felt sad.

Q: You felt that it was a prediction that you would see him now and not see him later?

01:19:22

#70D: Yes, that is right. [I] thought [we] would get caught by the Chinese. [We] did not know the region and it was very narrow. [We] were just walking through [aimlessly]. And then we came across the *zampa* ‘bridge.’

Q: *Zampa*?

#70D: *Zampa*.

Q: No problem crossing the bridge?

#70D: [We] were scared. If you fell, it would be over. It was many floors high, perhaps 10-15 floors. There were two logs placed across and [we] crawled across them.

I was stupid then. [I] was carrying a package here [gestures to back] and had it fallen, it would have pulled me into the water. [I] crawled with it over [my] back but did not fall. [I] felt scared after the crossing.

Q: What?

#70D: There was a package [gestures to back].

Q: You are very fortunate, *ani*.

#70D: [Nods]

Q: What happens next in your story?

01:20:42

#70D: His Holiness the Dalai Lama arrived the day after I reached Bodh Gaya. Shamar Rinpoche and Situ Rinpoche were very small and were waiting [for His Holiness]. When [His Holiness] got down from the vehicle, I saw that it was His Holiness that I had seen [in a vision] at the border. Then I cried.

Q: Bodh Gaya? You went from the bridge all the way down to Bodh Gaya?

#70D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] During the course of [our] stay there, the Reception Committee took care [of us]. [I] think it was the Reception Committee that put [us] in the home of one called *Dhargay-la*. We were given two beds in a big room.

Q: Where? In Bodh Gaya?

#70D: No, in Nepal.

Q: Nepal?

#70D: The Tibetan Government offered prayers at a place called *Lhari Lungten*. There is a hill called *Lhari Lungten* and [I] prepared *lungta* ‘wind horse’ [prayer flags] of Dolma ‘praises to the 21 Taras.’ [I] spent many months there.

Q: How many months did [you] stay there?

01:21:54

#70D: [I] spent around two months there.

Q: In Nepal?

#70D: Yes. They provided food and everything.

Q: What was your purpose in going to India with your friend?

#70D: If one lived there [Tibet], one must wear black attire and work in the fields. We had already taken our novice vows from a lama. Working in the fields meant committing a lot of sins. Also one will not get an education. Hence [I] came here. And His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives here.

Q: You were seeing the Dalai Lama in person when you went to Bodh Gaya. He was really there but it was the image you saw in the snow or in the mountains.

#70D: [It] was the same. I told [my] companion, “His Holiness is the one I saw [in my vision].” And I cried.

Q: So it was more a prediction of what you were going to see and not a warning.

#70D: Yes.

Q: *Ani-la*, how long do you stay in India and how long before you...How long do you stay in India and why do you go back to Tibet?

01:24:38

#70D: It's been 30 years now.

Q: Thirty years?

#70D: Yes. It is 31 years this year. [I] have lived [here] for 30 years.

Q: No, you went to Tibet earlier. How many years had you lived in India prior to that?

#70D: Thirty.

Q: Thirty years?

#70D: Yes. [I] arrived here at the age of 30 and this year, [I] turn 60.

Q: You went to Tibet in the meanwhile? If you are 60 now...

#70D: It has been 30 years.

Q: Yes, it's been 30 years including this year.

#70D: It is not necessary to count this year.

Q: Is it 30 years excluding this year?

#70D: Is it not 30 years?

Q: It is 30 if you are 60 now.

#70D: Right. [I] went last year [to Tibet].

Q: Did you go last year?

#70D: Yes.

Q: Was that the first time you went back to Tibet?

01:25:40

#70D: Yes.

Q: I thought *ani* had some experience of being imprisoned.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, when she went back once.

Q: So when you went back after 30 years to Tibet, what happened?

#70D: Yes?

Q: What happened in Tibet?

#70D: The houses to a certain extent...They [the Chinese] allowed [people] to trade and had slackened [their hold]. Lands were divided and unlike in the past, there was some freedom to...

Q: Was there some freedom?

#70D: ...work in your field and compared to the past, there is good improvement. Formerly it was like a prison. It was a prison in which we were put. One did not know anything. [People were] held as if in a prison and were not allowed to trade and do other things. Then the lands were divided. Now it is good.

Q: Was there some freedom?

01:26:37

#70D: Yes, there was freedom if the Chinese did not visit. If the Chinese came, there were meetings and a lot of things to say.

Q: Didn't many Chinese live there?

#70D: There were not many except for a few at the District [Headquarters]. Most of the internal [officials] are Tibetans these days due to the foreign [exposure]. There were just one or two [Chinese] authorities in the office. However, there were a host of policemen.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What prison before? Was she ever in prison before?

Q: *Ani*, were you ever in prison at all?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay. When she goes back 30 years later?

[Interpreter]: Later, yeah.

Q: *Ani*, you are put in prison? Why?

#70D: [I] do not know why for actually the world should not have the authority [to imprison me] when I possessed proper documents. [The papers] mentioned that I was born here to a woman that lives here [in India].

Q: Did you have a Chinese pass?

#70D: Yes, [I] had a pass but they [the Chinese] do not conform to any laws or rules. [I] was put in prison without any reason. I argued with them.

Q: So when you went back to Tibet after 30 years, what year was that you went back?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 2011.

Q: 2011. Okay and how long were you in prison, *ani*?

01:28:23

#70D: Twelve days. I was sick due to the altitude, lack of hygiene and grief. Three days after [I] was arrested, [my] nose started bleeding in the night. [I] bled almost half a basin full. When [I] pressed here [touches nose], it bled from the mouth. They [the Chinese] became scared and took [me] to a hospital. The doctor said that a delay of five minutes would have cost [my] life. The doctor was a native of Chamdo.

Q: From Chamdo?

#70D: Yes.

Q: What did he do for you?

#70D: They [the Chinese] gave [me] the tablets, which were many small ones. They made me take the tablets but did not give [me] the entire prescription, just in doses. When [I] was released, [I] did not get to see Lhasa...

Q: How many days were [you] in the hospital?

#70D: [I] took medication for nine days.

Q: Were [you] nine days in hospital?

#70D: The prescription was collected [from the hospital] and given [to me] in the prison. [I] had been brought back to the prison from the hospital in the night. [The medicine] was given in the [prison] room.

Q: For nine days, right?

01:29:49

#70D: Yes. And they released [me] by dispatching [me] to Trindhu by train. They bought the tickets and secretly [sent me off]. I did not get to see Lhasa. [My] head was covered with a black cloth and [I was] sent off. [I] had no knowledge where [I] was being taken to except that [I] was put on a train.

Q: Where were [you] sent after being put on the train?

#70D: To China, to Trindhu.

Q: To China?

#70D: There is a route from Lhasa.

Q: Were [you] sent until China?

#70D: Yes. [My] head was covered with a black cloth, which was removed when [we] reached the railway station. "You must get on the train. Your things have already been sent," [I] was told.

Q: Were [you] sent from China to Tibet?

01:30:24

#70D: No.

Q: Were [you] taken to China?

#70D: [I] was taken there from the prison. When released from the prison, they did not release me in Lhasa but sent [me] to China.

Q: Was the prison in China?

#70D: [I] was sent to China from Lhasa.

Q: From Lhasa to China.

#70D: It was not my wish to go; they put me [on the train] along with all [my] belongings. [At the destination] if not for a driver hailing from my region of...who had papers, I could not get back [my] belongings and spent two days trying to retrieve my things.

Q: *Ani*, when you returned to Tibet, you didn't go back to your village. You went to Lhasa. Is that on pilgrimage or what was the reason you went to Tibet?

01:31:53

#70D: I was not well and faced hardship in my subsistence. A girl from the United States sponsors me through an organization with 1,500 rupees. It was not enough to cover my medical and food expenses.

Q: So you decided, *ani*, to go back to Tibet because you thought that conditions would be better for your health?

#70D: [I] would not face hardships in subsistence and would also get to meet my siblings.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: How long were you taken to China, for how long?

01:32:52

#70D: Once [I] reached there, there was not anyone to keep track [of me]. I had to pay for myself. When [I] got down from the train, I just had a small bag in my hand and nothing else. There were seats but no berths to sleep in the train. Everybody was sitting since it was an inferior train. The journey was three days and nights and [I] had to sit through the nights.

Q: Three days?

#70D: Yes. Fortunately, due to the grace of God, [I] met a nun from Tawu. We sat side by side on two seats.

Q: What happened in China?

#70D: Once there, she [the nun from Tawu] was familiar with the region. She used to travel back and forth to Lhasa. She took me to a guesthouse for [I] was there a few days to retrieve my belongings.

Q: Why did the Chinese send [you] to China?

#70D: They did not allow [me] to see Lhasa and sent [me] away. Had [they] released [me] in Lhasa, I would have told my many relatives [there] about the imprisonment. That was the reason.

Q: But you had only been to prison for one day, for a few days.

#70D: What?

Q: [You] were only a few days in prison.

01:34:36

#70D: [I] was in prison for 12 days. From the 20th to the 12th [?].

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: And then?

#70D: [I] stayed home for around eight months. [I] wished to stay permanently but could not. I did not have the right to go anywhere and had to present myself every 15 days [to the Chinese office]. [I] heard there were informers in my village and it was like a prison. [I] did not want to stay and also there was the Kalachakra ‘Religious Initiation’ [in India] and hoping [I] would be able to find a solution to my hardships [I] came back [to India]. It was not possible to stay on.

Q: *Ani*, we’re going to have to finish now but I want to ask you a few questions about the Buddha dharma.

#70D: Okay.

Q: *Ani*, what do you think is important for people like yourself to understand about the Buddha dharma? What is the most important part of the teaching?

01:36:11

#70D: It has been around three years since I left the monastery. [I] studied the debates deeply while in the monastery. [I] studied *pharchin* ‘perfection’ for 13 years at Gaden Choeling here. [I] studied and dwelled profoundly on the relationship between the debates and one’s mind, and about one’s past and how future life emerges. I studied a lot, the *ka* ‘Kagyü,’ *sa* ‘Sakya,’ *ge* ‘Gelung’ and *nying* ‘Nyingma’...perhaps you cannot follow if [I] speak about the *thongnyi* ‘emptiness concept in Buddhist philosophy.’ I realized something like *thongnyi*.

Q: What’s *thongnyi*?

#70D: *Thongpanyi*.

Q: Yeah, *thongpa*...

#70D: [I] realized what is called *thongpanyi*, which is emptiness but with something existing. [I] realized that. That was the main reason I left [the monastery] because you need to practice and have the freedom to do so. You need freedom to meditate and dwell in thought. That was why I left and for two years...

Q: How many years were [you] in Gaden Choeling?

#70D: Around 13 years.

Q: Thirteen years?

#70D: Yes.

Q: [You] left Gaden Choeling after 13 years?

01:37:52

#70D: And then I lived outside and...

Q: Was it better to practice once [you] lived outside?

#70D: It is very good and [I] read the 12 volumes of *bum* ‘100,000 verses of Prajnaparamita,’ which is all about *jangchupsem* ‘enlightened mind; mind directed towards pure and total presence.’ One has to help others and not get angry while practicing *jangchupsem*, and [I] became conscious that I was moving towards that direction.

Q: *Ani*, thank you. Thank you for sharing...

#70D: [Interrupts] Even an ant is just like us, desiring happiness and not suffering. [My] mind understands and it is good. [I] feel it has been worthwhile.

Q: *Ani*, we ask that you pray for us and for all the people of Tibet and for the work that we are trying to do to help.

#70D: Okay.

Q: Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW