

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #5 – Chonzom
June 29, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #5
2. Interviewee: Chonzom
3. Age: 79
4. Date of Birth: 1928
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Seralung
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1967
9. Date of Interview: June 29, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged and Disabled,
Lugsung Samdupling Settlement,
Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 39 min
12. Interviewer: Martin Newman
13. Interpreter: Lhakpa Tsering
14. Videographer: Tsewang Dorjee
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Chonzom's family was *Samadok*, those who did pastoral farming. *Samadok* lived in houses built of stones and mud. There were no schools and Chonzom worked in the fields and also took animals to graze. At the age of 8 Chonzom was offered to the village nunnery as a form of tax. She performed various duties for the nunnery and at the age of 25 she became the accountant. She provides insight into how the nunnery functioned and how they supported themselves.

When the Chinese arrived in her village, Chonzom was arrested simply for being in charge of the nunnery. She was imprisoned, beaten, insulted and publicly humiliated. After release from prison she was sent back to her village and as a punishment, she was made to kill rats and flies and report her killings to the Chinese.

Chonzom's uncle urged her to marry another former prisoner and escape to India. She and her husband suffered terribly during their journey to India after they ran out of food. They had to hide during the day and travel only at night. Chonzom describes this as the most difficult phase of her life and believes she was near death by the time they reached India.

Topic Discussed:

Farm life, monastic life, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, brutality/torture, *thamzin*, escape experience, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #5

Interviewee: Chonzom

Age: 79, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Martin Newman

Interview Date: June 29, 2007

Question: Please tell us your name.

Interviewee #5: Chonzom

Q: Chonzom, do you give your permission to the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#5: Yes.

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

#5: [Nods]

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

#5: [Nods]

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or discuss some issue, please tell us.

#5: [Nods]

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

#5: [Nods for No]

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

#5: [Nods]

Q: So I'd like to begin by asking you a little bit about your childhood and your life in Tibet before the Chinese invasion.

#5: [Nods]

Q: Can you tell me where you were born?

#5: I was born in Gyangtse. The district was called Gyangtse and there were many small villages.

Q: And was that a big town or a small village?

#5: The place where I was born; there were many small villages and I was born in Sera Lung. It came under the district of Gyangtse. I don't know how to say.

Q: What did your family do?

#5: They were *samadok* who did both farming and dairying.

Q: Did you live in a house or a tent?

#5: The house was built of stones and plastered with mud. There was no cement.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#5: There were my parents and five children, three daughters and two sons.

Q: Did you go to school or did you work in the fields?

#5: There were no schools. I used to work in the fields and also tended to the animals.

Q: Did you enjoy doing that?

#5: Farming was okay, if you do not work in the fields. That's where your food came from. We get to eat from farming and dairying.

Q: So you just have to work?

#5: Yes, it's for the sake of food. Farming and dairying were our source of food. If not we would have no food.

Q: Did you have time to play with your brothers and sisters, or your friends?

#5: Yes, we used to play. We used to play at home. Now both my sisters are dead, but my brothers are still living. I am here. I received a letter from Tibet saying that my sisters were dead and two brothers are alive. Our parents are dead.

Q: I am sorry at the passing of your sisters.

#5: My parents are dead. My two sisters are dead. I received the letter which said my two brothers are living.

Q: How long ago?

#5: I heard my parents died but I don't know which year. It was after I had escaped to India. I don't know which year. When I came here, I was in my thirties.

Q: You were talking about playing with your brothers and sisters. Do you remember what kind of games you played?

#5: We used to play skipping and running and catching. One person would run and the other would give chase and catch.

Q: Did it get very cold where you lived?

#5: The weather was very cold.

Q: Were you warm enough in the winter?

#5: In our region we had what was called *pang*...[inaudible]

Q: As a child, did you hear any stories from the old people around you, who would tell you about their life much earlier and the traditions of Tibet?

#5: No, at the age of 8, I was sent to become a nun as a form of tax. In our region there were two small nunneries. I was sent at age 8 to one of the nunneries, as a nun tax. It was taxed because otherwise nobody would join the nunnery because as *samadok* we had a lot of work to do in the village. At the age of 8 I was made a nun, but I did not know how to cook, so I was admitted into the nunnery at the age of 13.

Q: You became a nun at the age of 8. You became a nun because you had to do a lot of work?

#5: Yes.

Q: How did it come that you joined the nunnery?

#5: In our village there was the nunnery and they called girls to join the nunnery. So my family sent me to become a nun.

Q: You joined or did your family send you there?

#5: My parents sent me.

Q: Were you happy to go there?

#5: Yes.

Q: What was life like for you in the nunnery when you first went as an 8-year-old girl. What kind of things did you have to do?

#5: When I became a nun, we were taught the scriptures. The nunnery had no other source of income, but from the land, which they leased from others and cultivated. We used to have prayer congregations called *Tsechue* in the fifth month and *Nyungnay* in the first month. The nuns had to arrange food for themselves during these times. Then we studied the scriptures; we had a Lama.

Q: How long were you in this nunnery?

#5: I became a nun at the age of 8. I stayed at home until I was a little older. At the age of 13, I joined the nunnery, learned the scriptures and did some work.

Q: You lived in the nunnery from the age of eight to 13?

#5: Yes.

Q: Was there anything that you did not like about living in the nunnery?

#5: No, I did not have.

Q: Did you think that you would stay there for the rest of your life?

#5: I was admitted into the nunnery at the age of 13. At the age of 25, I was keeping accounts for the nunnery's office.

Q: How long did you stay as a nun? Was it from the age of 13 to 25?

#5: From the age of 13 to thirty-something and then I was imprisoned by the Chinese.

Q: Was that 13 or 30 years old?

#5: 30.

Q: I just want to make sure I understand what you are saying. So I think you said that from age 8 to 13, you were paying some kind of fees to the nunnery and then when you were 13, you joined the nunnery. Is that right?

#5: Yes.

Q: So you actually joined when you were 13? Once you joined the nunnery, how long did you stay at the nunnery?

#5: When I escaped to India, I was thirty-something—I don't remember the age. Maybe my husband knows. I don't know the year. I stayed until the Chinese imprisoned me.

Q: When you left the nunnery you were around 30?

#5: Yes, around 30.

Q: So from 13 to 30. You were imprisoned by the Chinese at age 30?

#5: Yes.

Q: I am going to ask you about that in just a little while.

#5: Okay.

Q: From the time you went to the nunnery from 13 to 30, would you say that your life stayed very much the same?

#5: Yes, it remained the same.

Q: Were there special meditations or practices that you did; that you learned during your time in the nunnery?

#5: How would we know about meditations? We learned the dharma and not meditations because the nunnery had lands and sheep which was the source of living, so we had to look after them. Our learning the scriptures was by the way. We did not spend the whole time studying the scriptures, meditating or practicing the dharma.

Q: Do you remember about how many nuns were in the nunnery?

#5: There were about 12 nuns.

Q: There were 12 nuns in the nunnery?

#5: Yes, about 12.

Q: 12?

#5: There were about 12. A few died. There might have been 13 or 14, but two or three nuns died, so there were about 12.

Q: That's very small.

#5: It was a small nunnery. There were two nunneries. The nunneries were very, very small. There were no big nunneries. There were no donations and we had to arrange our own food and learn the scriptures. There were no big nunneries where you only studied the texts.

Q: I see. That must have been very hard.

#5: Yes, we had to earn our own food and learn a little of the scriptures.

Q: But you were happy though?

#5: I did not notice much. I was learning the scriptures a little and working in the fields and looking after the cows.

Q: You were happy?

#5: I did not notice in my mind. I did not notice whether there was happiness or not.

Q: While you were living in the nunnery you still were visiting with your family?

#5: I went to see my family. Our nunnery was in the north and in the middle between the nunnery and the village was a river. We could go back and forth. I went home and came back.

Q: You visited often?

#5: Yes, I did. It was not far. The nunnery was in the north on a hill. The village was situated below and in the middle was a river. There were two small nunneries.

Q: How did you learn that the Chinese were coming? Did you have any warning?

#5: They didn't say that the Chinese were coming. We heard that something called the *Lhasa Kaypa* was coming, that ate humans. I was scared. Everyone was so scared.

Q: That the Chinese ate humans?

#5: They didn't say Chinese. The *Lhasa Kaypa* was coming and that they ate humans. The children were frightened. Later it was the Chinese. That's what they said.

Q: Who told you that?

#5: I heard the children talking about the *Lhasa Kaypa*, who were the Chinese, who were eating humans. It was the children talking among themselves. Later it turned out they were the Chinese; something called *Lhasa Kaypa*. It was the children who said they ate humans.

Q: How far away were you from Lhasa?

#5: From Lhasa, from our region to Lhasa? I have never been there, but my husband has and he says it's a long way to go with the donkeys. You wouldn't reach Lhasa from our regions.

Q: How many days did it take?

#5: I had never been there so I wouldn't know. I was a nomad and had never been to Lhasa.

Q: When you heard the story about eating Tibetan flesh, what did you think?

#5: I thought, where did these people emerge from, who eat human flesh? I was scared and later learned they were the Chinese.

Q: Were you afraid they would come into your area too?

#5: Yes, I was scared when the children said that they would eat humans. I thought, "Where were these human-eaters coming from?" Later we learned they were the Chinese.

Q: So after you heard that news, what happened next?

#5: I heard that they ate humans, but later learned they were the Chinese.

Q: What happened next, after you heard that?

#5: I heard that the Chinese detested the monks and nuns even more, so we were sure that we would be arrested. That was announced and in the fifth month our Lama was arrested and taken to prison.

Q: Who was the Lama?

#5: He was a Lama from our region.

Q: The Chinese came to your village or nunnery?

#5: They came to the village.

Q: Did they come to the nunnery?

#5: They didn't come to the nunnery. They came close. They came to the village where my husband's house was. Except for the river, we were very close. The Chinese did not come to the nunnery.

Q: And then you heard when they were in the village they arrested a Lama?

#5: The Lama was in the home. He was left for about two months saying that he would have to teach at the school. Then he was arrested in the fifth month.

Q: From whom did you hear that the Lama was arrested?

#5: I saw it because he was arrested from the home where we were.

Q: The Lama was living at your home?

#5: We were living together in the nunnery along with the other nuns. They first arrested the Lama, but none of the nuns were arrested. The Lama was arrested in the fifth month and I was arrested in the sixth month. None of the other nuns were arrested. The Lama and I were the ones who took responsibility for the nunnery. We were arrested and taken to prison.

Q: I didn't know that you were the head of your nunnery. How did that come to be that you became the head of the nunnery?

#5: I was the head of the nunnery.

Q: How did you become the head of the nunnery?

#5: The nuns did not have much time for learning the texts, as we were engaged in farming and dairying to earn a livelihood. We did not learn the scriptures full time.

Q: How did you become the head? Were you hard working?

#5: I was older in age and I had...

Q: Was there a monastery nearby your nunnery also?

#5: Except for one Lama, there were only nuns.

Q: There were no other monasteries?

#5: There were two nunneries, located a little further apart. There were no monks, except for the one in our nunnery. All were nuns.

Q: And the Lama was living in your home?

#5: The Lama was not living at home. He was living in the nunnery. He was then taken to prison.

Q: He was living in the nunnery?

#5: Yes, in the nunnery.

Q: Why did the Chinese come to arrest him?

#5: First they said he should remain as a teacher and then later arrested him.

Q: Why was he arrested?

#5: Because they arrested all those who were monks and nuns. They despised monks and nuns. After the Lama was arrested, I was arrested. They took me to Dhewa Dhotay for five months. When we fled, the Lama was still not released. Later he was released and now he is dead.

Q: Why do you think they disliked Lamas and nuns?

#5: They did not like those who practiced religion. They despised monks and nuns more because they [Chinese] do not have religion.

Q: How long was it between the time that they arrested the Lama and they came and arrested you?

#5: The Lama was arrested in summer, in the fifth month.

Q: When were you arrested?

#5: The Lama was arrested in the fifth month and I was arrested in the sixth month. They came back and arrested me. They asked me what things I had hidden and I said I hadn't hidden anything. They charged me and arrested me.

Q: What were you doing at the time between the arrest of the Lama and your arrest? Did you conduct your life just as you had before?

#5: We remained as we were, looking after the fields and doing our normal work. I lived with the fear that I would soon be arrested. If I didn't stay, there was nowhere else to go. Then one day they arrested me.

Q: You thought you would be arrested?

#5: Yes, I did. There was nowhere I could escape to. Where do I run? The Lama was arrested first, then me and then all the nuns ran away.

Q: And then they did.

#5: Yes, I was arrested.

Q: Can you tell me exactly what happened when they came to arrest you to the best you could remember?

#5: It was the Tibetan officials who came. They ordered me to hand over the keys to the chests and the rooms and said I was to go. They took me with them. My husband's family was the most prominent in our village and they put me in his house. There was another boy imprisoned there.

Q: When they arrested you, did they grab you roughly, did they beat you or did they quietly take you away?

#5: They didn't beat me, but took me with them. They took me to Sol.

Q: They took you away quietly?

#5: They imprisoned me in Sol for one night. They said I was to stay for the night and that the next day I would have to go. Sol, my husband's family was the top family in our village and I was kept for one night in his house. The next day I was taken to a place called Shon where there were three prisoners.

Q: Sol was the name of a house?

#5: Yes, it's the name of a house.

Q: A house called Sol. What is the house called Sol?

#5: Sol was the name of the family. I was put in a room in their house.

Q: Were you put in the room by yourself or were there other people in the room with you?

#5: There was a boy who was arrested but he was put in another room. For that night, he was put in one room and me next to it. The next day we were told that we had to go to Shon and we were taken there.

Q: You were put in the room by yourself?

#5: Yes, I was alone.

Q: What was Shon?

#5: Shon was the name of the place. I was put in a house there. There was one man who was from Luksa, the mother of the Gongma family, the boy and me from Seralung. So in all there were four people put in there.

Q: Four people in one house?

#5: Yes, four people were put in one house.

Q: Three other women or men and women?

#5: Of the four people one was arrested from Luksa, an old man. Then there was one boy, a mother and myself. We were four in all. We were all in one house.

Q: What happened next?

#5: Then they said that the next day the people would decide. They said we had to come there. There was a family called Gongma, whose land the people were told to gather on for a meeting. The prisoners were brought there and we had to bow our heads down. Then they said we had done this and this and grabbed us by our head and neck.

Q: They hit you in public. Did they hit you with their hands or anything else?

#5: They did it with hands while we sat with bowed heads, with our eyes not looking up. They pulled our heads and our necks and some boxed our cheeks. They told us to confess, but we had nothing to say. They said we had suppressed the people and they hit us and shook us. Then we were put back and the next day we were taken to Dhotay. We couldn't say either yes or no.

Q: Was it the villagers...were the Tibetans hitting you too and the Chinese? Were the Chinese making the Tibetans hit you? Who is hitting you?

#5: It was the Tibetan people.

Q: The Tibetan people were hitting you?

#5: Yes, the Tibetan people. There were the *U-yon Tsokdang* 'Tibetan leaders selected by the Chinese,' who were hitting us and the Chinese were standing there ordering them to do it. They were hitting us and saying we had done this and this.

Q: It was not the people who were hitting you. It was Tibetans?

#5: Yes, Tibetans.

Q: What did they want you to confess?

#5: They asked us to confess, but we had nothing to say. What we did, what do we say? We were people of the region, what do we say? The Chinese were saying do this and don't do this; they were forcing us.

Q: They ask you to confess. What were you to confess, that you did bad things?

#5: What bad things we had done. We were to tell what the Chinese were like.

Q: How long did this beating go on?

#5: They beat us for durations of five minutes, as we sat there silent with bowed heads. They would remark, "Look at these bold people, they do not confess." We could not say that the Chinese were beating us. We just sat there with bowed heads and again they beat us saying we were bold.

Q: Then what happened?

#5: They beat us and falsely accused us of doing this and that. We said “yes” and sometimes remained silent. Again they would say we were bold and hit us. We just sat with bowed heads and took all the beatings. Then they put us back into the house. The next day we were taken to Dhotay, with our hands tied behind our backs.

Q: Did you suffer any injuries from the beatings?

#5: No, I didn't have any injuries. They grabbed us by our shoulders and slapped us hard on our cheeks. They didn't beat us with sticks. They pulled us by our hair and shook us.

Q: What were you thinking at this time after this happened?

#5: I hadn't done anything wrong and I thought if they want to kill me, let them. When they slapped my cheek [gestures on the right cheek], I would fall on the ground [gestures on left side]. When they slapped me on this cheek [gestures on left cheek], I would fall on this side [gestures on right side]. They hit us extremely hard, but somehow I didn't die. The people were making a lot of noise. We were then put back into the house. The next day we were taken to Dhotay. The men were dragged by their hands, which were tied at the back. The other woman and I were made to ride on donkeys and our hands were tied; we didn't walk.

Q: You were on donkeys?

#5: Yes, we were made to ride on donkeys, as we were women and it was a long way.

Q: Okay. I didn't quite understand that. When they took you to where?

#5: To Dhotay.

Q: What is a Dhotay?

#5: It was the name of a place. There was the Dhewa Dhotay which was a private family. There were many prisoners there and we were taken there.

Q: It was the name of a place?

#5: Yes.

Q: You went on the back of a donkey?

#5: Yes, they took us on donkeys. There were two Chinese in front and two at the back because they feared that we might escape.

Q: How long a ride? How long were you on the road?

#5: It took us only one day; it was close. From where we were to there was near. We reached it in the evening, around 5 o'clock.

Q: When all these things were happening, what was going through your mind? What kind of thoughts did you have?

#5: I thought why did such a thing come to pass? I did not commit any mistakes, why did such a thing come to pass? I was feeling very sad but I was helpless. I was thinking why did this come to pass? There was no reason. I was just earning my livelihood and I was being beaten. I was put in prison. I was very sad, but there was nothing I could do.

Q: Did you fear that you would be killed?

#5: I thought they may not kill me. They put us in prison and some time passed by. They didn't kill me, but I was beaten a lot. I thought they would beat us and they did. They slapped us and grabbed our heads. Those who beat us were not the Chinese, but the Tibetans who were on the Chinese side and appointed as *Tsukdang*. They were ordered to do so by the Chinese and they did.

Q: Did you hate them?

#5: I was very angry at them but there was nothing to do. Even though we hadn't done anything, we answered "yes"; for if we didn't reply in the affirmative, they would hit us. When they hit us on the right, we fell to the left and when they hit us on the left, we fell to our right.

Q: And when you got to Dhotay, what happened then?

#5: After we reached Dhotay, then they made us to work. We were made to cultivate vegetables like radish and others. There was a huge monastery called Langpa Siling on a hill. The monks of the monastery had either fled or been arrested and we were made to bring wood from the monastery. We had to climb up the hill.

Q: What kind of work did they make you do?

#5: They made us cultivate vegetables. Then we were sent to bring wood. We were eight women in all and we had a difficult time climbing up the hill. We carried huge loads of wood on our backs and while coming down, we would almost fall over. It was very difficult. There were men also. We were made to cook food for the prisoners.

Q: Did they continue to beat you while you were working there?

#5: If we performed our work on time, they didn't beat us. We were so scared that we did our work. When we did the work, they didn't beat us.

Q: How long did you have to do this for?

#5: I was there for five months. Then I was sent back to my region. There I was made to work exceedingly hard.

Q: Did you have enough food to eat?

#5: For food they used to give us little *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley'. We got small quantities.

Q: Were you allowed to talk to the other people that were there? Was it forbidden to talk?

#5: They allowed us to talk. We could talk to each other.

Q: What did you think would happen to you?

#5: I thought that they would never release me. That I would never get back to my village, where all my relatives were left behind.

Q: Did you have any word from your family if they were okay or not?

#5: No, I never heard anything. Who could send words?

Q: Did you worry for them?

#5: Of course, I was worried about them. My older sister had given birth just three days prior and she was separated from her child. She was already there before us.

Q: While you were in Tibet?

#5: Yes, she was there at Dhotay. She was subjected to *thamzin* 'struggle sessions' and fled. The child was very tiny and they brought her there thinking her mother was at Dhotay.

Q: She got divorced and came to Dhotay. You mean she came to Dhotay or the Chinese brought her to Dhotay?

#5: Who?

Q: The elder sister?

#5: It was not my older sister, someone else's.

Q: Someone else's older sister?

#5: I did not have an older sister. I was the eldest in my family.

Q: Was it the Chinese that brought her or did she come on her own?

#5: Only one child.

Q: This woman came to Dhotay?

#5: She was captured and brought by the Chinese.

Q: She was brought by the Chinese?

#5: Yes. She was separated from her child. She was taken to be subjected to *thamzin* and from there she fled. The child was left behind.

Q: They made her leave the children?

#5: Yes.

Q: You were in Dhotay five months and what happened after that?

#5: After that I was sent to my village.

Q: To the place you came from?

#5: I was sent to my village, but I couldn't go back to the monastery. So nearby they gave me a small house, three *gyama* [measurement similar to kilogram] of *tsampa* and one *gyama* of butter. Then they said I would have to work for the people.

Q: The Chinese gave you?

#5: Yes, the Chinese gave me, taking it from a family who had *tsampa*.

Q: The Chinese gave you a house?

#5: Yes, when I returned to the village, I couldn't stay without a house. It was a small room.

Q: So you were released by the Chinese?

#5: Yes, the prisoners were released. However, three were sent back.

Q: The Chinese released you?

#5: Yes, they released me. They said I would have to work hard for the people and do whatever they told me to do. They told me that I was there because of the decisions made

by the people. That I was to do every bidding of the people, so I had to do what the people said.

I was made to kill rats. I had to wait by the rat holes and kill the rats. Then to kill flies. There were flat metal device with bamboo handles; I was made to kill flies. That's how I had to kill.

Q: So they told you, you had to kill rats and flies?

#5: Yes, to us prisoners who were released. They told us we had to kill flies. They had segregated divisions like *Denjo* and *Ngadhak* 'holding leadership post,' in whose homes we had to kill flies.

Q: How were you supposed to kill the rats?

#5: I didn't know how to kill rats and had to sit kneeling and waiting the whole day. We placed a flat stone and on it a wooden pole, with a bamboo attached to it and a piece of *pa* 'kneaded dough' as bait.

Covertly, I asked other people to teach me as I didn't know how to kill. We went covertly into the fields. I just didn't know how to kill rats and spent the whole day kneeling waiting by the rat hole. There was an old man who I knew. I pleaded with the old man, who ran a flour mill and he used to kill rats. I bought four to five rat tails from him and collected them.

We were told to bring these during the *dondhu*. Dung had to be collected for *dondhu* and also firewood. Every week they had a *dondhu*.

Q: What's a *dondhu*?

#5: They did a *dondhu* during which they asked us to show what we had collected.

Q: You had to show how many rats you have collected?

#5: Yes, how many rats we had killed and how many flies we had killed.

Q: How often did you have to show them that?

#5: We told them we only managed to kill two or three and that the others didn't die. We didn't know how to kill flies, it was impossible.

Q: The Chinese would come to take count of number of rats killed; did they do it everyday or weekly?

#5: They didn't come everyday.

Q: Weekly?

#5: They came weekly. It was the Tibetans, the *Uyon Tsokdang* who came and then related to the Chinese how many we had killed.

Q: What would happen if you hadn't killed as many as you were supposed to?

#5: One day they took us to the nunnery and gave us this device, a flat metal piece attached to a bamboo and we were supposed to kill by hitting them against the wall. There were glass panes and the poor flies were trying to get away.

Q: If you had not killed any rats or flies, would the Chinese, those Tibetans beat you?

#5: They didn't beat us. We would collect and also show them dead ones.

Q: If you hadn't collected much, if you hadn't killed any flies or rats, would they beat you?

#5: If we didn't have any, they would say that we didn't take any notice within our minds.

Q: How long did you end up doing that for?

#5: I must have spent a year killing rats and flies. However, if we didn't have any to show they did not press us. We would tell them that there was none to be killed. We picked up those flies which had died by the glass panes and produced two or three when asked.

Q: What did you do with the dead flies?

#5: We had to show them that we had killed them; that we had killed such. We were made to kill and when we couldn't, we picked up dead flies and showed them. We bought rat tails from the man who ran the flour mill. We pretended we had killed them.

Q: There were separate people who killed flies?

#5: There were no separate people. They made us cruelly kill and ordered us to show them, but the general public did not kill flies. We were not allowed to remain in the house. We were told to go outside to kill everything, rats and others, and not permitted to stay in the house. So we would go into the fields and wait near a rat hole the whole day. It was not possible to kill rats.

Q: What were you feeling during that year you were doing this?

#5: I was very depressed and used to think, what terrible times have fallen on us, but there was nothing to do. I couldn't kill any. I went to the nunnery and secretly picked up the dead flies near the window panes and showed them two or three at a time. I went to the flour miller, who knew that we the *Ngadhak* were treated worse. He would sell me two or three rat tails.

Q: What happened after the year that you spent there? What did you do next?

#5: I was there one year, but there were no rats and flies. I stayed in my village.

Q: Where did you go next?

#5: After that, they didn't send us anywhere. I escaped to this place.

Q: Because you couldn't get enough rats and flies, your life became harder there. Is that what you are saying?

#5: We couldn't kill any. We were labeled *Denjo* and *Ngadhak* and we were always made to suffer. We were told that the *Denjo* would have to go to Kyenka. I had an uncle married to a relative of my husband, who told me, "Both of you should escape together. You cannot be a nun now, the nunneries are taken away." As for my husband, while he was in prison for seven years, his wife had two children from another man. So he told us to go together and that's how we escaped.

Q: Your uncle was there too?

#5: Yes, in Tibet.

Q: He told you to flee?

#5: Yes, he told me to flee along with my old man.

Q: The old man is your husband?

#5: Yes. Yesterday he gave an interview.

Q: Let me try and understand this. So your uncle arranged for you to have a husband or your uncle said that there would be this person who you would just call your husband?

#5: The uncle said that I could not be a nun because all the lamas and nuns were evicted. My old man, he was imprisoned by the Chinese for seven years. He gave an interview yesterday. A sister of the old man was my uncle's wife. He said we should get together and flee; otherwise, you will be again arrested to be taken to Khenka. So we escaped.

Q: Your uncle told you to marry.

#5: He said, "You both should get together and escape or else you will be again arrested and taken to Khenka." Then we escaped.

Q: It was the uncle who told you to get married?

#5: Yes, the uncle said we should get together and escape; otherwise, we did not know how to go. Oh God, we faced such extreme hardships on the way as we did not know the way.

Q: Your uncle arranged for you to marry someone and then for both of you to escape together to India.

#5: Yes, and that I could not be a nun. To my husband he said that “Your wife has two children while you were in prison, so you should both get together and escape.” So we escaped together.

Q: Did you know the person you ended up marrying from before or was this someone your uncle just arranged for you to meet?

[Answer given by interviewee is missing from tape. The following answer is spoken by interpreter.]

#5: Because we are from the same village and my uncle told me that it was impossible for me to become a nun again. So he told me and my husband to flee to India.

Q: So tell me about your escape and how you were able to plan that?

#5: The reason for escape was that I could not be a nun again. My husband's wife had children while he was in prison and they could not be together and so we both escaped.

Q: After he told you that, what did you do?

#5: Then I fled with my husband. I was not allowed to stay in the nunnery and upon being released by the Chinese I was living in a small room in Shol. My husband had a home and a wife earlier, but while he was in prison, his wife had two children. So we got together and escaped. That's how we came. Then we reached here.

Q: So your husband brought along his other wife and the children when you fled?

#5: It was just the two of us. There was no one else. It was the two of us. The wife stayed at home. She had children, children from my husband. We both fled together.

Q: And he left...

[Interpreter to interviewer] **He left his wife and two children over there.**

Q: Can you tell me what was the night or the day that you started to flee? What you did? So I would like to hear about the very, if it was day or night that you started your escape? How did you prepare for that and what did you do right at the beginning?

#5: We reached Indian Territory in the morning and were caught at a lake called Tso Lhamo. We had taken a detour because we'd heard there was a lake. There were two soldiers who caught us on the edge of the lake. They took us to the station.

Q: In India?

#5: At Tso Lhamo there were army guards, the Indian army. We were kept here for more than half a month. Then we were sent to Lachen.

Q: When you were escaping, how many days did it take, what things did you bring with you?

#5: It took us about 15 days between there to India.

Q: What about the very first day? What was that like?

#5: We had nothing with us as all our properties were confiscated. We had both been arrested; I from the nunnery and my husband too. We had nothing except a cup, a small bag of *tsampa* and a pat of butter. We didn't even have a pot to cook with us. We feared we would not be able to escape. We had nothing.

Q: Did you just start walking?

#5: What else was there except walking? We hid the whole day in the forests and then walked in the night. We crossed stretches of water and hills; hiding during the day and walking at night. We suffered terribly on our journey.

Q: So you walked all night long?

#5: Walking all the time, whether it was hill or valley. At one point we had no food. The boots I wore were wet with sweat and plastered with dust. They stuck to me and made a "tsak, tsak" sound as I walked. At times we were so desperate that we just fell asleep. There was no food or anything hot to drink. I didn't die; humans are really strong. I should have died in that situation.

For 15 days we had nothing except the small amount of *tsampa* and butter. We couldn't take the road. We had to look for paths to avoid meeting people on the roads. Both of us didn't know the way and we just guessed our way. We had nothing.

Q: You didn't know the way, so how did you know which way to go?

#5: How do we know the way?

Q: When you didn't know the way, how did you know you were in Indian border?

#5: From our village we could see a snow-capped mountain. We had heard that to go to India you had to go toward that snow-capped mountain, so we just guessed our way and went.

Q: You went towards the snow-capped mountain?

#5: We reached the Tso Lhamo once. After reaching it, we went back again. We had circled the snow-capped mountain. Later we learned that we had actually reached Tso Lhamo. It was in the dark and we had retraced our way. We lost the way.

Q: Did you think you would make it?

#5: We thought we would not see India because we did not know the way. We were going round and round and thought one day we would be caught. One day at dawn we saw some Chinese making a road on the middle of a hill and we turned back and hid the whole day in a sort of a cave. There was nowhere to run.

Q: You hid inside a hole?

#5: If I relate about our journey, it will take a long time. It was terrible how much we suffered. I just didn't die. There was no food after the *tsampa* was finished. It was such a long time.

Q: You didn't want to die?

#5: I thought it was okay even if I died. It was a lonely place and I thought, "Let me die anywhere." I was ill and my face was yellow and everything I saw was yellow. I thought I would die. I never thought that we would reach India, but it was the grace of the Buddha who came to Gyangtse and my prayers to God that saved us. We did not know the way and saw yak herders, shepherds and Chinese road workers. No one saw us and so we escaped arrest.

Q: What gave you strength? How did you keep going?

#5: It was the gods and Lord Buddha that saved us. Otherwise, how could we reach it here when we did not know the way? The only direction we had heard about was the snow-capped mountain. Other than that both of us had no knowledge of where to go. We couldn't walk during the day; we had to walk in the night. We came through hills, valleys, water, rocks, various places. In the day we climbed higher to seek hiding places. Our prayers were answered. When I reached Dharamsala, I was almost dead. The army men were very kind to me. They bought things to eat, tea and fed me.

Q: In Dharamsala?

#5: When we were brought to Dharamsala. When we reached Indian Territory, they guided us.

Q: Your husband also made it with you?

#5: Yes, we were together. We were together, but both of us did not know the way. There was one Indian gentleman we met on the way, who was very kind to us. He said we should not worry and that we were going to Dharamsala and would see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He was a very nice Indian man.

Q: Did you meet with His Holiness?

#5: The man said that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was there and we were to stay there. Later we were put among the group of *Gyapon Kyashok* [?] and one day, saw His Holiness. We also saw His Holiness' tutors, the Yongzin Ling Rinpoche and Trijang Rinpoche. We were told to relax and be happy and that it was okay now. And then I cried. He told us to relax again and again. I started to cry.

Q: And then how long did you stay in Dharamsala?

#5: I stayed about two years in Dharamsala. There was a house in which many newly arrived Tibetans were staying together. Then my husband was asked to come to the kindergarten to split firewood. We were told to join the staff of the Tibetan Children's Village. At that time I was pregnant. My husband was asked to join first and that later I could join him, so he went to work there, splitting wood.

Q: Did you think you'd become a nun again?

#5: How can I be a nun when I was pregnant? There was also nowhere to practice religion.

Q: Why did you leave Dharamsala?

#5: My husband had a relative in the Tibetan Settlement in Bylakuppe, who wrote asking us to come here. The Tibetan Children's Village said that he could go for one month to see his relative and that they would take care of our child and me.

Q: You were sent here by the government?

#5: We went by ourselves.

Q: When you came to Bylakuppe, what did you see here? What was it like?

#5: I don't know which year it was. We were allotted in the *Gulledahalla* camp. The way from *Gulledahalla* camp to the first camp was a jungle, which was yet to be cleared.

Q: What was the livelihood of the people?

#5: While we were in Dharamsala, we received food rations.

Q: You were provided food rations in Bylakuppe?

#5: When we came to Bylakuppe, there were no food rations. When we were in Dharamsala, during the day we went to work and in the evening we were given food rations. In Bylakuppe there were no food rations and we did not have money. We borrowed grains and oil. We were then allotted a house. We wanted to go back to Dharamsala.

Q: You were able to do that?

#5: The Director of the Tibetan Children's Village told us that we were putting our feet in two places. He said if we were allotted land, then we should stay in Bylakuppe and if not, we should come back. So we planned to go back, but then we were allotted land, so we stayed.

Q: So what happened?

#5: We received land and a house. We worked here.

Q: So you stayed here?

#5: Yes, we stayed here cultivating the land. We also leased land from Indians and worked hard. We did not hire coolies, but worked ourselves day and night and succeeded in repaying the loans we had borrowed for our journey from Dharamsala. We did not have children and had become old, so when the announcement was made that such people could join the Home for the Aged we did.

Q: Was it hard for you to adjust to the climate here?

#5: When we came here we found the climate moderate. In Dharamsala it was very cold and we did not have proper clothes. We only had the ones we wore as what we possessed was confiscated. We felt very cold in Dharamsala; here it was alright.

Q: That's unusual. Usually people complained it was too hot. But because you didn't have the clothes, it was too cold.

#5: Yes, we didn't have enough clothes. When I was sick, a Westerner arrived, who gave me a coat, a pair of pants and a cap. I was surprised and thought, "Why is he giving me these? I don't have the money to pay for them." So I told him that I didn't want them, but he left them there and went away.

Q: In Dharamsala?

#5: I told others about it and wondered if he was troubling me. But I learned that the kind person was leaving the place and when they were going away, they normally gave away their things. I didn't know it then.

Q: He gave them to you.

[Interpreter to interviewer] Yes.

#5: I had the coat and the cap when I came to Bylakuppe. I had pleaded with him that I didn't want them, even though I didn't know the language. I thought he was telling me to buy them and I didn't have the money. He left them there and went away.

Q: So you ended up staying here in Bylakuppe and your husband came with you here, yes?

#5: Yes, we came together. I was told to stay back, but I had heard there were people from my village in Bylakuppe.

Q: You came together?

#5: We came together. When my husband was granted leave to visit his relative in Bylakuppe for one month and I was to stay back and be taken care of by the Tibetan Children's Village. I requested my husband to take me with him to Bylakuppe because I had heard that there were people from my village there. I told my husband we could come back together after one month in Bylakuppe.

Q: Did your husband request you to take him with you?

#5: My husband had a relative here who asked him to come to visit for one month.

Q: Who asked whom? Your husband asked you to take him with you to Bylakuppe from Dharamsala?

#5: I asked him to take me with him. My husband was going on a visit to see his relative. I was to be left behind in Dharamsala and taken care of by the Tibetan Children's Village.

Q: By this time you have had your child or you had more children?

#5: I gave birth in Dharamsala. The child was born in Dharamsala and died after we came here from heat.

Q: You don't have other children?

#5: I gave birth to only one.

Q: Did you have any more children after that?

#5: After that, I miscarried two more times. In total I had four, but I lost three through miscarriage. I had a miscarriage in Dharamsala when we had been there for two years.

Q: I'm sorry.

#5: Then we came here because we have no children. Unlike others who receive help from other sources, we had none. We toiled very hard cultivating lands and were able to pay off our debts. We worked so hard that my husband became sick with tuberculosis. In Tibet he was called Jola. So the camp leader came to our door and said, "Jola, you are suffering from TB. Life is very difficult for you both. You should join the Home for the Aged." So we joined it.

Q: The camp leader told you about the Home for the Aged and you joined it?

#5: Yes, the camp leader came to our door and said that we had no children to support us. We were getting old; my husband is 82 and I am 79. We were old with no children to support us, so we were asked to join the Home and we did.

Q: And you are both here together now?

#5: We are together.

Q: I want to ask you, what do you think gave you strength to endure all the hardships you went through in your life.

#5: The main strength was the blessings of the gods and Buddha that we could come here to a foreign country. We have no land to call our own, yet we are able to live comfortably and eat. That is the blessing of the Buddha and the gods. I always pray to Buddha and the gods. Otherwise how would it be possible to say in a foreign land that anything is mine when we have no land to call our own? We were allotted land and house. That is thanks to the grace of Buddha, else from where would we get land and house? We were given land and we worked hard on it.

Q: Is there any advice you would like to give to the younger generation of Tibetans?

#5: That they must work hard to continue with the traditions and culture of Tibet which were there earlier. It is impossible that Tibet will not regain independence. You are doing this work for the cause of Tibet and I think it's just a matter of time before Tibet gets independence.

Even if I were dead, my relative has two children. I didn't know that earlier, but when I came here I found two of them. These days they can write that it is thanks to the blessings of Buddha, while in Tibet they couldn't and had to work. Right from kindergarten, it is the blessing of the Buddha that we can be comfortable in a foreign land. I advise the children to work hard. My relatives live in Camp Number 1. I pray morning and evening to the Buddha.

Q: Do you hate the Chinese?

#5: Yes, I do. It was they that made us come to a foreign land.

Q: Are you angry with them?

#5: Yes, when we came to this country. On seeing the young men and women, I wonder about our tradition and culture. I pray to God that they could go back. It is difficult for those of my generation to go back. It is my prayer that the teachings of the Buddha would flourish, that all the sentient beings are happy and that Tibet should regain its freedom. That is my prayer both in the morning and evening. Buddha and lama; the dharma should flourish. If Tibet regains freedom, we would be firm because there is a great Tibetan population; how much more we would multiply.

They [interviewer] are doing this; I request them to do it for the cause of Tibet. I thank them for doing all this for the cause of Tibet, for their support. I pray to the Gods and Buddha and to those who support us. You are a young man [to the interpreter]; ever ready; if only we could get back to Tibet. The Tibetans on Indian soil are all first-class, the young men and women. The truth would definitely prevail. I always think that truth would prevail.

Q: I want to thank you so much for sharing your story with us. It is a very, very important story for other people to hear.

#5: That is right. We are now old. You are a young man [to the interpreter]. There are many young men and women like you. It is very good to follow our tradition and culture. The elders are not capable of doing anything except pray.

END OF INTERVIEW