

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #11B – Tsewang Namgyal
January 4, 2014

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #11B
2. Interviewee: Tsewang Namgyal
3. Age: 87
4. Date of Birth: 1927
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Hapchen
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: January 4, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Private Residence, Old Camp 4, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 28 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tsewang Namgyal was born into a middle class nomad family with six children. They reared animals such as yaks, *dri* 'female yak,' sheep and horses. He describes the large number of animals, the grass-covered mountains, availability of good water and the rocky mountains. He says that milk products like butter, curd and cheese were consumed and bartered for rice, wheat flour and grains. The also used milk products and wool to pay taxes once a year to the local monastery. Tsewang Namgyal describes the taxes and how it could be a burden to nomads.

After his parents' death Tsewang Namgyal became a servant to a local wealthy family, but was treated well. He recounts his escape to Nepal after hearing from travelers about the suffering being inflicted by the Chinese in far away regions. The nomads attempted to drive their animals to Nepal but could not find grass during wintertime, which led to the death of the nomads' herds and they were reduced to beggars.

While in Nepal Tsewang Namgyal was informed that the wealthy family for whom he had worked was subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' and their riches distributed to all the villagers. So he secretly visited his village and learned about the repressive policies, destruction of shrines and burning of scriptures which had occurred under the Chinese occupation.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, nomadic life, herding, taxes, servitude, oppression under Chinese, *thamzing*, escape experiences.

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Interview #11B

Interviewee: Tsewang Namgyal

Age: 87, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: January 4, 2014

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:16

Interviewee #11B: Tsewang Namgyal.

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?

#11B: Yes.

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

#11B: Okay.

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

00:02:00

#11B: There will be no problems. Except for the truth, I am not someone who is cunning and fabricates stories. [I] do not know how to.

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

#11B: Okay [Nods].

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' can you please tell me where you were born and how old you are?

#11B: [The birthplace] is called Hapchen.

Q: How old are you?

#11B: It is 87.

Q: What province is Hapchen? What is the nearest temple?

#11B: [You] can put it down as Zonga Choedhe. The district is Zonga Choedhe.

Q: What is the name of the nearest monastery to Hapchen?

#11B: It is Zonga Choedhe. It is the Zonga Choedhe where taxes were paid and everything else.

Q: *Pa-la*, what did your family do for a livelihood?

00:03:54

#11B: When [I] was small [my family] raised animals for a livelihood. The animals were milked and [we] consumed butter and other milk products. That is how [we] earned a livelihood. If there were young ones, these were sold and the income utilized.

Q: What kind of animals did your family herd?

#11B: The animals were yaks, *dri* ‘female yaks,’ sheep and horses.

Q: About how many were in the herd that your family owned?

#11B: We owned around 30 yaks and *dri*, around 200 sheep and four or five horses.

Q: In terms of your prosperity as a family what would you say you are...moderate level or poor or well off?

#11B: [My family] was among the moderate.

Q: How many children were in your family and where were you in that order of children?

#11B: There were six children from the same set of parents. Now, except my older sister and me, all children and parents have passed away.

Q: From the six children, were you among the older, middle...?

00:06:31

#11B: I am the oldest.

Q: Oldest?

#11B: Yes, the middle one.

Q: Oldest among the children?

#11B: Among the middle. I am the middle one among six children. [I] am the middle one.

Q: Where is your oldest sister living, *pa-la*?

#11B: My older sister is 93 years old and I am 82 [87]. Except [us], there are no more siblings left from the same set of parents.

Q: [You] mentioned [you] were 87.

#11B: I am 87 and...

Q: Older sister is 93?

#11B: Older sister is 92.

Q: Where is the older sister now?

00:07:29

#11B: Older sister is in Village Number 3 of New Settlement. [She] is very old and receives aid from the [settlement] office. Foreigners take [her] picture and [she] survives on help from others. [She] has a daughter who lives in Dharamsala and works for the Tibetan Women's Association. I am the only sibling [my] older sister has.

Q: *Pa-la*, when you think back on your childhood, can you tell us about your village? Tell us how many families lived there and when you looked outside of your house, what did you see? What did it look like? Paint us a picture.

#11B: [Number of families] in the village?

Q: Yes.

#11B: Like the villages we have here in the settlement?

Q: Yes.

#11B: Villages like here?

Q: Yes.

#11B: There might have been 15-20 families. During wintertime all moved closer to each other while in summertime everyone scattered to wherever there was good grass.

Q: What's there around the village, like mountains, a river, meadows and such?

#11B: Around the village are grass-covered mountains; good water but there is not any forest. There are many rocky mountains.

Q: When you say that in the summer people scattered to where there were grazing, it sounds like they were nomads or did most people who raised animals do that a well?

00:10:32

#11B: Yes, [we] were nomads. You drove the yaks and sheep to places where there was good grass.

Q: Were everyone nomads?

#11B: Yes, nomads.

Q: What kind of a little boy were you in this family? You were in the middle and so what kind of a child were you?

#11B: Me?

Q: Yes.

#11B: Me?

Q: Yes.

#11B: I was intelligent and an obedient child and did whatever people asked which is why people called [me] Abu. Otherwise, [my] name is Tsewang Namgyal. People liked [me] and did not call the real name. They said, "Such a nice boy, so obedient. Poor thing, Abu." Then [I] came to be known as Abu.

Q: Were there any big events in your childhood, Abu?

00:12:20

#11B: An important event in my life was that when I was around 9 years old [my] mother passed away due to which [I] faced great problems. I was small then and there were just father and the siblings. Mother passed away when [I] was small. That was a big problem. Other than that, I married and did not face any problems in my life.

Q: Did you stay at home your whole life until you were married or did you go to the monastery or what happened?

#11B: Me?

Q: Yes.

#11B: I was a nomad. [I] was home and went to trade driving yaks. [I] drove yaks to the valleys to obtain rice, wheat flour and grains. Otherwise, [I] worked as a nomad. One did not stay home but herded animals and went to trade.

Q: Have you been to the monastery?

#11B: We went once a year to the monastery to pay taxes. When the bad district administrator was present, [we] went to perform labor tax that lasted around a month. Otherwise, we did not go anywhere but worked as nomads.

Q: What kind of taxes or what amount of taxes did you have to pay and what was it based on?

00:15:02

#11B: The taxes consisted of what you had collected during summer like butter, cheese and wool. What the district administrator ordered depending upon the number of animals we owned, we loaded the butter, wool and cheese on the animals and delivered to the district headquarters. [We] must travel to the main town, which is near the Zonga Choedhe Monastery.

Q: During summer?

#11B: [We] went around autumn.

Q: So your taxes were paid in the form of goods that you had developed.

#11B: That is right.

Q: Was the amount of goods very affordable or was it difficult for you to pay?

#11B: It was difficult to pay the tax. It was not very difficult if you owned good animals and were well off. Otherwise, if you were poor and the family was not in a good situation, you could not pay the tax that was in the form of butter, cheese and wool. There were great problems if one was unlucky with the animals and unfortunate, since one was obliged to pay the same amount of taxes that were being remitted earlier. In this way one became poorer and poorer and poorer.

Q: How was it for your family? Did you ever run into difficulty because you couldn't pay taxes?

00:17:57

#11B: Much later I did. The parents were no more and the children were not old enough and [I] faced great problems.

Q: Did [your] father too pass away?

#11B: Yes, [he] passed away.

Q: Did your father pass away?

#11B: Father passed away and mother passed away. The oldest sister survives but the sister older to me and one younger have all passed away.

Q: How old were you when your parents passed away?

#11B: I might have been around 7 when mother passed away. She passed away when I was small.

Q: Was it 7 or 9, *pa-la*?

#11B: Seven or perhaps 8.

Q: And father?

#11B: Father lived to the age of 60. In Tibet if you were 60 years old, you had aged very much because of the difficulties. I am 86 years old and father was...people say, "You look good." It was very difficult in Tibet, herding animals and paying taxes and loans. It was very difficult.

Q: When your father died at 60 how old were you?

00:20:21

#11B: At that time I was...when father was 60 I was...[calculates]...I might have been 30 years old then.

Q: *Pa-la*, did any of the children in the family...?

#11B: [Continues to calculate]

Q: [You] might have been around 30 years old, right?

#11B: Yes.

Q: *Pa-la*, were you ever sent to the monastery as a child?

#11B: The tradition is for the middle among three sons to become a monk. Perhaps I did not possess the good fortune to become a monk as [I] ran away. The middle of three sons must become a monk and I was to become a monk, but [I] refused to go to become a monk and ran away. Perhaps [I] did not possess the good fortune. Otherwise, the middle among three sons became a monk commonly. I refused to go to become a monk.

Q: How old were you when they wanted you to go to the monastery?

00:22:23

#11B: [I] must have been 9 or 10 years old then.

Q: What did you do to avoid going to the monastery?

#11B: [I] did not become a monk and continued as a nomad, herding animals and doing such work.

Q: You said [you] ran away.

#11B: Yes.

Q: Where did [you] run away?

#11B: I refused to become a monk and ran here and ran there. The parent said, “You must go to become a monk.” [I] replied, “I will not become a monk.” Then [I] ran here and ran there and escaped from becoming a monk. Remarking, “He does not have the desire to become a monk and is not fortunate.” [I] was let off.

Q: *Pa-la*, why did you not want to go to the monastery when you were 9 years old?

00:23:51

#11B: [I] believed it was very difficult for a monk as one must study and refused to go. [I] could not think deeply then and enjoyed going after the animals and grazing them as a nomad. [I] thought it was difficult being a monk. Now [I] realize monkhood is not bad. A child does not have understanding.

Q: When you said you continued to work as a nomad, did you work for anybody else besides your family?

#11B: Earlier the nomadic work was my own but after the passing away of the parents, [I] went to work as a nomad for a rich family.

Q: What happened to the flock that belonged to your own family when your parents passed away?

#11B: You became a servant to friends and relatives when you could not manage the animals of your parents. You could not manage the family and lived with relatives and such. Finally in this way, there were no animals left and you became poor. Then [I] went to work for a rich family called Gertso Wangdu who later lost everything to the Chinese.

Q: Well, before we hear that story tell me who was this rich family? Were they nearby? Did you have to go far to work for them?

00:27:20

#11B: [The rich family] lived in our village. We were taxpayers [paying taxes] for the land [we] owned and they were *gerpa* ‘private land owners.’ [We] were under the leadership of Zonga Choedhe and they [rich family] did not have to pay tax. Our village sold grass to them. [They] were grass-buyers. We were taxpayers. The rich family lived near our village.

Q: Did they own lands in order to sell grass?

#11B: [They] did not have lands. We were taxpayers and owned lands. We sold our lands to them and they were the grass buyers and paid for the grass. They used our lands.

Q: Did [you] mean the rich family?

#11B: Yes, the rich one.

Q: Did the rich one graze animals on your lands?

00:27:59

#11B: Yes, grazed animals and paid for the grass annually. [They] made a payment to the village.

Q: Paid to you?

#11B: Yes. We gave our lands to them and they paid [us] for the grass in the form of butter and such that we needed to pay as tax. We gave our lands to them for summer, winter and such.

Q: What kind of a relationship, *pa-la...pa-la*, what kind of a relationship did you have with that family? Were they kind to you or were they difficult for you?

#11B: The earlier rich family was very good. They were grass buyers and we were taxpayers. [I] went to [work for] them and the family was very good. In the family were the father, mother, son, daughter, daughter-in-law and son-in-law. It was a very large family. One could eat whatever one liked and there was not any difference between the food consumed by the family and the servants.

It was a very rich family. Each one performed his respective duty and there was no ordering the servants about what to do. It was a rich and good family. The family was incredibly wealthy and when the Chinese arrived, poor thing, they became [victims] of the Reformation.

Q: *Pa-la*, how did you come to know that they were subjected to suffering when the Chinese came?

00:31:38

#11B: We had fled to the territory of Nepal earlier while they stayed back. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [guerrillas] went there [to the village] and told [the rich family], “Do not stay back. Abandon all the animals. Take the valuable things like silver. Load provisions and the valuable things and drive around 20 yaks. All of you must leave. You should abandon the animals because they are of no use. Everybody is leaving, so animals are of no use.” The *Chushi Gangdrug* [guerrillas] arrived at night to escort them.

“We raised the animals by our hard work and not by oppressing people. [We] will not abandon such a large flock of animals. [We] cannot do it. Should the Chinese arrive, they cannot be devouring human flesh. [This wealth] is a result of our hard work. Besides, there are Tibetan people among us that take away yaks tied in the yard. There are Tibetans that take away good clothes and provisions. Moreover, [they] threaten to kill [us] with knives. The Chinese cannot be worse than this. [We] cannot leave and will remain with the help of God.”

[The wealthy family] thus surrendered to the Chinese army and stayed back. Two of the daughters had been given in marriage to tax payers and they have reached Indian Territory. Otherwise, the rest of them including the son-in-law were left behind in Tibet. Later the Chinese launched the Reformation, and the animals...The Chinese launched Reformation in three years and all the wealth was divided among the people and he [the father of the wealthy family] became powerless. The old man and the older son were subjected to *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions’ and killed.

Q: Can you tell us the name of the father of this family, and the father and the son’s names?

00:35:57

#11B: [The father] was called Gertso Wangdu, Wangdu.

Q: Wangdu. What’s the family name? Gertso?

#11B: Yes, the family name is Gertso. The old man’s name was Wangdu.

Q: Gertso Wangdu?

#11B: Yes.

Q: He and a son was subjected to *thamzing* by the Chinese...

#11B: He [the son] was called Jampa.

Q: Jampa.

00:36:23

#11B: Jampa. The older son that was subjected to *thamzing* by the Chinese and killed was called Jampa.

The older son used to be always engaged in herding sheep. He was later killed. The Chinese said, “You are a person that is used to taking care of 3,000-4,000 sheep. You have the experience. Now, [the flock] is the property of the people while in the past it used to be your own property. Now it is the people’s property but [consider] it the same. You must raise them as you did in the past when they were your own. This is the people’s property.” He was given the task of a shepherd. One day, wolves attacked and killed a huge number of sheep.

Q: Wolves?

#11B: Yes, wolves. There is an Alsatian dog-like animal up in the mountains. They killed a large number of sheep. “You are green-brained [uneducated]. You are the one that used to take care of around 3,000 sheep when they belonged to you. Now that they are the people’s property, [you] let them be devoured by wolves, which indicates you still remain green-brained. You, who earlier never let one sheep be taken by wolves, now that they belong to the people, [you] let the wolves take them. You remain green-brained and there is only one

way for you. That is the way [your] father went. You must go the way your father did.” Later the older son was subjected to *thamzing* and killed. The father and son succumbed to *thamzing* with just a difference in time.

Q: *Pa-la*, who told you this story?

#11B: The story?

Q: Who told you the story about what happened to Gertso Wangdu and Jampa?

00:39:42

#11B: They are the people of our village. Before they were subjected to suffering...We did not live under the Chinese and fled. This is something I witnessed. We had fled two years earlier and were living in Nepal. When [I] heard that the family was subjected to such suffering and about the Reformation, I went to [see] the family there from Nepal. [I] met the younger son who is my age and [he] said what had happened to his father, older brother and to their wealth. The younger son wept and recounted to me. I had fled earlier before they were subjected to suffering, but upon hearing what had happened to them, I secretly went back to their house and the younger son who was my age was there. He recounted the whole situation.

Q: *Pa-la*, do you know what happened...you said that the father...They had owned like a herd of 3,000 animals. What happened to all those animals? Did the son tell you?

#11B: ...[not discernible]. After the father and older brother were killed, the property belonged to the people. The animals and such were divided among the people saying, “These are your properties.” [The wealth] was distributed among the people. Each person received a certain number of yaks and sheep. [The animals] were given to the people. “They are your property. Each of you must take care of your animals. You have your own properties.”

Liberation was implemented and [wealth] divided based on the number of people. [The younger son] said that since they had a large family with many children, they received a good number of animals. The division was based on the number of members [in a family]. All the animals were divided based on the number of people.

Q: What do you think was the ability of the poor people who received these animals to care for them and help them reproduce? Were they able to do this? Were they herders themselves?

00:43:50

#11B: [They] knew how to take care. When you are given wealth based on the number of people...if given wealth, you would be happy. You became the owner and took care [of the animals] being nomads earlier. You tethered [the animals] and took care. [They] knew how to do it because of being nomads.

Q: If the same number of animals were in the area, did the village... You know, you went back to the village two years later... two years after you fled... I should ask first of all, *pa-la*, what year did you leave the village and how old were you? What year?

#11B: [I] wonder which year it was? I was 37 years old when [I] fled the village, the *kag* ‘barrier’ year.

Q: When fleeing from Tibet?

#11B: Yes, I was 37 years old when [I] fled from Tibet. The older brother was with [me] but he returned and is living in Nepal. [He] did not return exactly to Tibet. I was 37, the *kag* year. [I] escaped then.

Q: And so, *pa-la*, you came back when you were about 39. What condition or state was the village in? Were the people more prosperous because the animals had been dispersed?

00:45:46

#11B: There was progress but no practice of the dharma. There used to be very long [indicates about 3 feet] *mendhang* in our village.

Q: What’s *mendhang*?

#11B: *Mendhang* is a stone carved with *mani* ‘mantra of Avalokiteshvara’ that is positioned on a pile of rocks. There used to be huge, long piles of such. [I saw that] the rocks were used in cattle sheds and the *mendhang* on top were placed inside the tents. Some had been broken and one could hardly walk without stepping [on *mani*-carved stones]. People’s thinking had also changed. [They] were no longer spiritual.

Besides in the night [they] went to watch what [they] said was some sort of a movie. [They] no longer cared about negative actions. Looking inside [the tents, I] could not see any shrine or butter lamps. Only a picture of Mao Zedong hung inside. There was a red flag fixed at the back of the tent. Other than there, there was no practicing the dharma, no butter lamps, nothing. That is what had been done to the *mani* [stones]. [I] was told that all the scripture volumes had been burnt, that all had been set on fire.

Q: Did [you] see these when [you] went back after two years?

00:47:41

#11B: Yes, [I] saw it. All the scriptures had been set on fire. Those that did the burning were poor Tibetans. The poor Tibetans had done that. They were given big titles like *shangdang* ‘village leader.’ One was appointed a *shangdang* and told, “You be the *shangdang*.” There used to be one or two poor families long ago and one person said, “I have been poor and was made to suffer.” He cried.

[The Chinese authority said] “You have experienced suffering. You have suffered earlier and will understand joy. The sun has risen for you. The cloud in the sky has disappeared over the pass. Now you should be a *shangdang*.” He was appointed a *shangdang*. Then

under his leadership scriptures were set on fire and *mendhang* demolished. Subsequently he became paralyzed. When I arrived there, he was paralyzed and his hands trembled because [he] had set fire to the scriptures. When I fed [he] could not eat. [He] was in that condition.

Q: *Pa-la*, what did you feel in your heart when you saw the condition of your village and how it had changed?

#11B: And then when I met and spoke to the boy [for whose family] I used to work earlier, I cried. [I] felt very sad. Even now [my] throat tightens. [Cries]

Q: *Pa-la*, this is very hard, we understand for you to remember this and tell us about the suffering in your village. When you're ready, please continue with your story if you are able to.

#11B: [Silent]

Q: You said you went back and met the younger son [of the family you worked for]. And then what happened?

#11B: [I] met the younger son and later...[I] met the younger son and [we] spoke about a lot of things. Then shook hands and never saw each other again. Later upon enquiry, [I] learned that he had passed away. All the elders of the village of his generation have passed away. There is only the younger generation, the children's children.

I have a daughter that went to Tibet once. Earlier [she] used to work in Dharamsala [India]. Her husband is from the district of Shekar, which is a little distance from our village. My oldest son is still left in Tibet. My oldest son is left in Tibet. The daughter searched for him in the village and [they] met. [She] searched by mentioning about [her] father and met [my] older son. Met the son there and...presently this son lives in Tibet.

Q: *Pa-la*, what do you think about what has happened to Tibet? Can you tell us in your own words what you think? I know you have a lot of feelings about it but is there some way you can tell us what you think about what happened and what the effect has been on the people and the country of Tibet?

00:56:04

#11B: The older son is in Tibet and he says, "If we do not engage in politics, focus on earning a living, keep silent and do what the Chinese authority orders when he comes and remain silent, [we] are happier than before. We can save, trade and sell wool, butter and cheese. The Chinese have opened a shop where [we] can buy whatever is required. As long as we do not engage in politics, [we] are happy." The older son has a daughter and she has children. There are many branches of children. [He] said, "This is the house given by the Chinese and this is the one we constructed later." It is a large house. My daughter went there. She was born in India. [She] went and said it was good there. That is what [she] said.

[She] said that one was not to indulge in politics, as that would mean being led away by them [the Chinese] immediately and there was no way of giving any explanation. If one just

focused on sustaining oneself, [the Chinese] did not give any problems. [My] daughter who went there said so. In the areas of our village...what was done earlier was done but it is good now, they say.

Q: Did your daughter tell you if there was any religious freedom in Tibet and how were the monasteries and were there monks? Was your son free to have a photo of the Dalai Lama? What was that part of his life like?

00:59:11

#11B: [She] said such [as the Dalai Lama's picture] were not allowed. Except for the presence of Chinese security guards, one was allowed into the Potala Palace in Lhasa. One could visit Sera, Drepung and other monasteries. Security guards were present but one was free to visit [the monasteries].

Q: *Pa-la*, why did you leave Tibet, like what were the circumstances? You were working for this family and if you left, you said you were 37, so that was like 1964. What was going on that made you leave at that time?

#11B: Me?

Q: Yes.

#11B: The reason I fled was that earlier all the people...In those days nomads from the region between our village and Lhasa traveled towards Thoe. Many merchants traveled and they said, "The Chinese are inflicting suffering in faraway areas and there is no way one can stay." Earlier the traders used to leave their wives and children and go towards Thoe on trade missions. "Now there is no trade but [we] left the wives and children on the pretext of trade driving the yaks. Unlike the normal practice, [we] cannot go home back to the wives. Everything is lost and we have witnessed leaders being subjected to suffering. There is no way one can stay back. One is forced to separate from the spouse." We knew traders from Sakya in the past who said, "Do not pin hopes on your wealth. Do not remain clinging to wealth. Do not remain and continue life as usual." Those escaping from Sakya said so. Then we sold all our animals, drove a few and fled.

01:03:20

The flocks were driven towards the valley in wintertime. Then it snowed and all the animals of the nomads...it snowed heavily in the valley and animals could not find grass and thousands of the nomads' animals died due to snowfall.

Q: During the escape journey?

#11B: Yes. [We] drove animals during the escape journey. Then it snowed and they perished. When we fled, [we] drove animals. Then it snowed in the valley and there was no grass available. The animals were turned north but it snowed and all the animals died. Nomads do not have any assets except animals. Once the animals died, all became beggars.

Q: When they were fleeing? So *pa-la*, you were fleeing with more than your own animals. Is that correct? You were fleeing with many people so that it was thousands of animals and what time of year were you fleeing when that happened?

#11B: Yes, it was the same route for all the escapees. There were numerous people, like a whole village fleeing. The animals were similar and so also the destination—there was only one way through the valley—and along the escape route, it snowed and all the animals died of starvation.

Q: Was it winter then?

#11B: Yes, it was winter, at the onset of winter around the 11th Tibetan lunar month or January/February. It snowed and all the animals were in the valley. It snowed and the animals returned north. Then it snowed heavily and all the animals perished.

Q: Died of starvation from lack of grass?

01:06:12

#11B: Yes, it snowed and [the animals] were hungry as there was no grass. [They] tried to go back but failed as it snowed heavily.

Q: Why were [they] going north?

#11B: Yes?

Q: Did [they] go in the northward direction?

#11B: Yes, [they] were going back the same route but it snowed heavily and perished.

Q: About how many people were in the group that was escaping and was that in the year 1964?

#11B: In each family were four, five or six people. There were children too. There was no school in the village. Each one brought along his children, whether it was three or four. In a family were five, six or four people and you escaped driving your animals.

Q: About how many people in total?

#11B: Altogether there might have been 70-80 people. A family would consist of nine, 10, seven, five or four members and you fled with your family.

Q: If this was...Why would you go in the winter when it was so cold and if this was 1964, were the Chinese, were they not watching you to see such a large group of people escaping? How was it possible?

01:09:13

#11B: It must have been so [1964].

Q: How many years was it after His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left?

#11B: Perhaps three or four years after His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left.

Q: Why did [you] escape in winter?

#11B: Yes?

Q: Winter is very cold. So why did [you] escape in winter?

#11B: Although it is cold in winter, the Buddha [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] had left and everybody was fleeing from Tibet. At that time one did not have much knowledge about the Buddha, as one had not seen him. One could not describe what the Buddha looked like. It was said that all the aristocrats of the government had fled and there were no more aristocrats left. So saying that we must also flee; everybody took flight.

Q: Were there no Chinese watching the borders then?

#11B: There did not seem to be anyone watching then. All the Chinese were moving towards Thoe. Just prior to our escape, the Chinese were moving towards Thoe. There is a river [originating] from Mount Kailash and a lake called Mansrover. This river flowed close to our village from Lake Mansrover. It is a large river. On our village side of the large river— not the other side—there is a straight trail on a mountain. It was said, “The Chinese are moving towards Thoe. The Chinese are going towards Thoe.” The mountain resounded and the sky became overcast with dust. “The Chinese are moving towards Thoe.” The mountain resounded and [they] moved to Thoe.

Q: *Pa-la*, how was it...Did you go with all of your...Were you married at that time? How many children did you have and did they all choose to go with you?

01:12:12

#11B: Yes [I was married].

Q: How many children were there?

#11B: I have six, three daughters and three sons. There were eight children but two passed away.

Q: [You] mentioned that one child is left there.

#11B: The oldest son is left there. He was born when [his] mother was 19 years old. That son lives there now. The daughter went there to see him.

Q: Was there some reason he didn't want to go with you?

#11B: The oldest son...My wife had a maternal uncle. This maternal uncle did not have children, the old couple. Since [he] was my wife's maternal uncle and did not have

children, they said, “Leave this child with us aged ones. We are old and need someone to help during sickness. Leave [him] here.” [We] lived in the same village for 2-3 years and then lived in different villages. At the time of moving away...the old couple loved him very much. At the time of moving away he was asked, “Do you want to stay with the grandparents or with the parents?”

01:14:25

“I want to go with the grandparents,” said the child who was fed the tastiest of food and loved by the elderly [couple]. [A child] cannot think about the future. Hence, [he] said, “I want to go with the grandparents.” [He] left with the grandparents and later we drew up an agreement so that the grandparents did not say [to the child], “[We] have no wealth to give you. You can go wherever you want.” The village leader drew up an agreement stating, “Should the old couple die first and the child survive, the possessions [of the old couple] must be given to the child.” The agreement stated that [the old couple] could not say, “You can go wherever you want. [We] have nothing to give.” [We] got this document from the village leader. Hence, in that way the son got left behind with the elderly [couple]. The old couple passed away and the son inherited the properties.

Q: *Pa-la*, what do you think is the most important or some of the most important things to be saved or preserved about Tibet? What are the things that are dear to your heart that you hope are not lost during this time when the Chinese are occupying Tibet? What do you hope will endure, will live on?

#11B: [I] wish [we] get independence by the grace of the Buddha. If we get independence, get our land back; this will give [us] the chance to return. The old people may not meet, being close to death but siblings will meet each other. The younger generation will get the chance to meet. [I] have such hopes. I am old and if [we] cannot return for some time, in three or four years the old ones will be dead. However, if [we] get independence, siblings will have the chance to meet each other. [I] wish if only I could return to my land. This is what I feel in [my] heart.

Q: I think that your story tells us in many ways why Tibet is so important—the land and the people and the life that they cherished. So I think this is maybe a good chance to wrap up. Maybe I could just ask one last thing, *pa-la*. Do you think it’s important or why do you think it’s important or is it important to get the stories of the old people of Tibet? What are your opinions on this?

01:20:08

#11B: Tibet’s tradition is important. [I] think that if Tibet could get independence and [we] could go back, the earlier practice of Tibet’s dharma and culture, one’s tradition, food habits, way of living and the affection between siblings will be adopted. [I] think if [we] continue to live as [we] are the older generation will die and even the younger ones, if [they] live in India and die in a foreign country, Tibet’s practice of affection, tradition, genteel manners, gender...[not discernible] will disappear. If [independence] is achieved during the Buddha’s lifetime, it will be good. Otherwise, the affection and such will disappear. [I] am anxious about it. I am not in a position to do anything and if independence is achieved due to the grace of the Buddha, that would be good. That is what’s in [my] mind.

Q: *Pa-la*, one last question. If you could give a message to the young people of China, what would you want to tell them about yourself or about Tibet? What would you want them to know about...from your perspective?

#11B: I hope that the Buddha himself and officials of the Tibetan Government get the chance to talk to the people of China face to face during the Buddha's life. The [Tibetan] authorities should not drop [negotiations] because the Chinese do not respond but continue to hold talks with Chinese leaders. Not only Tibetans but leaders from other countries should be invited to the talks that must be held again and again, which would result in change and deliberation [on the part of the Chinese]. [I] think the authorities will hold talks and do everything to bring about a change and invite people from other countries.

If the higher authorities in the Tibetan Government, like the members of Parliament, could get the opportunity to hold talks, [I] feel that would be good. The Chinese will try to not give [back Tibet] if nothing is done. Living under the Chinese would mean nobody practicing the dharma. The older generation like us will come to an end and the younger ones that have not seen Tibet nor lived there will not have much belief. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is living here [in India] and the Tibetan way will not...[not discernible]. [I] am worried about it.

Q: *Pa-la*, thank you for that very important advice and suggestion. And thank you for your story, which will help the next generation of both the Tibetans and the Chinese understand what life was like in Tibet in your time growing up. Thank you.

01:27:02

#11B: Okay [nods].

Q: To be sure I want to ask yet one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#11B: I have spoken about what actually happened and what I experienced, the suffering, the escape, the way of life, the actual fact. There are no lies or any such thing and [your showing it] anywhere will not cause any problems.

Q: Thank you.

#11B: [To interpreter] They [interviewer and team] will also face no difficulties. On my part, I will face no problems as I have recounted all of what happened to me and nothing otherwise. They will not face difficulties later about the story being untrue or without any evidence. I have given the facts. Please explain this.

Q: Thank you.

#11B: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW