

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #21 – Choekyi (alias)
June 30, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #21
2. Interviewee: Choekyi (alias)
3. Age: 72
4. Date of Birth: 1935
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Phari
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 30, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Interviewee's residence, Camp No. 1, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 37 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Jeff Loda
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Choekyi is the eldest of 16 children. Her family worked as pastoral farmers who both farmed and raised animals. They lived a very isolated life with no schools or doctors. Choekyi says, "It was all work, and playing was out of the question." Helping her parents during sowing season and tending animals were her chores, but she had no complaints.

Choekyi provides a vivid description of various aspects of farming activity and her simple life. She describes how she slept with sheep and goat droppings in winter because they acted as insulation. She explains the complete process of making butter and cheese, including how the fresh milk was poured in leather pouches and kept in river water to cool it.

Choekyi's encounter with the Chinese first occurred when they came to her region looking for grasslands for the animals they had procured. A month after hearing that His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped to India, she and her family left Tibet. From Phari it was a night's journey to Bhutan and they travelled with their belongings and the small children on 14 yaks.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, herding, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview # 21

Interviewee: Choekyi [alias]

Age: 72, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: June 30, 2007

Question: Can you please tell us what village were you born in? Where were you born?

Interviewee #21: I was born in Phari.

Q: How many people were in your family? How many children and mother and father?

#21: In Tibet we were eight children and two parents.

Q: What did your father do for a living and your mother?

#21: We were farmers. We were farmers and also raised animals. When the children were small, my parents had servants. When we became older, we helped them. At times when the workload was heavy, we had children from the poor families to help, to whom we gave food and clothes. This went on for about 10 to 15 years.

Q: What kind of a house did you live in? Did you live in the country or in the city?

#21: The place where I was born was Phari but I lived in Lhague, which was isolated.

Q: Your mother and father had eight children. Where were you, were you the oldest, in the middle or the youngest?

#21: My mother gave birth to sixteen children, living and dead. I am the oldest among the children.

Q: You were the first-born and your mother lost many children after you?

#21: Eight children died. From the older ones, one is living in house Number 5 along with my other brother who is mute. After he was born, my mother gave birth, but the child died in two months and this happened a few times. She also had about three miscarriages. One died when she was about 20 years old.

Q: In your village, did many women have children, like eight to 16?

#21: There were not many, only my mother. In Tibet, we did not have the liberty of having one or two children and then stop. However, many [who] were conceived were born.

Q: Were there many women who had many children?

#21: My mother had the greatest number of children. There were many other women who had nine, eight, seven or six children. There was no one else except my mother who had 16 children.

Q: Did people want to have big families or that's just what happened because there was no birth control?

#21: Those with agricultural land and animals would like a large family.

Q: How did your parents do? You said your parents were like servants for a rich family and then they had their own land. How did that happen?

#21: Where my parents worked, there were some who gave sheep. The sheep were thus collected for over 2 to 3 years. Our relatives sometimes gave us a *majam*. In Tibet an ewe and a lamb were called *majam*. When my parents were married, they had a flock. There were some well-off families who owned animals, but did not have family members [to look after them]. They would say, "You can look after the sheep. You should not say that any of them died and you can keep those born as yours." That was called *kyemey-chimey*.

Q: What is *kyemey-chimey*?

#21: *Kyemey-chimey* is what we say in Tibet. None of the sheep could be counted as dead and those born could be kept by the tender. Whatever the number of sheep the family entrusted him with, that same number should be handed over to them.

Q: If any died, they had to be replaced from those born?

#21: If any died, he had to replace it. The same earlier figure had to be returned and the surplus could be kept. That was how it began.

Q: Your parents must have been very good sheep herders.

#21: They worked with sheep from the time they were very young. My father is still living at house Number 5. He is 90 years old. He is blind.

Q: When you were a little girl, did you help with the sheep? What chores did you have to do as number one daughter?

#21: Whatever work they [parents] were not able to attend to, I was sent to do it. I was sent to tend to the yaks with the other yak herders. During the sowing season in summer, I went to the fields. I was involved in depositing fertilizer to the crops, irrigating the lands,

sowing and hoeing. When the crops were this high, we had to channel water to them. We did that in our village, while in some other villages they did not channel water to their fields.

Q: When you did so many chores and worked as a child, did you ever have time to play?

#21: No, never. I never saw it—that and studies. Though there were so many children, my parents were watching over us. Playing was out of question.

Q: You are smiling when you said that. Was that okay or were you sad about that?

#21: No, I never thought anything. That was how it was in the village then and there is no point feeling sorry about it. It was not just me, but similar for all the children in that village. Except the very young who played, those in the ages of 7 or 8 did the same work. I do not feel sad about that.

Q: What are some of your favorite memories of your childhood?

#21: When I was young I used to think that I should be able to complete the work of the day. I never thought about happier times or such. Our parents allotted tasks for us. I used to wish I could complete my work fast so that I could go home. I would think if I could finish this work, my parents would not scold me. When I went to look after the yaks, I had to be careful not to lose them and then I could return home happily. If I lost a yak or was not able to complete the task, I would get a lot of scolding. If that was completed, I had no worries. I never wished for this or that.

Q: Were your parents very strict parents?

#21: My parents were very strict. If anyone visited our home and we looked around, they would tell us to get out. They wouldn't allow us in.

Q: Can you describe what your mother was like? What kind of a person was your mother? Can you describe her a little bit?

#21: When I was about 9 or 10, I was left at Phari for around 6 or 7 months. I missed my mother terribly. My mother was a very hard worker. She weaved the whole day and made clothes for all the children. There were no clothes to purchase and neither was it necessary for us to do so. We had a lot of wool available.

They would send me to look after the cows and the yaks and other works, too. When I returned in the evening, my mother would work on combing out the wool. We were three girls and a maid who did the spinning. My mother was so fast that four of us couldn't keep up with her. There would be a surplus basket of cleaned wool still to be spun. She was a very hard worker.

Q: What does it mean by “my mother is *thupo*”?

#21: "My mother is *thupo*" means that she was not miserly and stingy in feeding the children.

Q: You were always busy as a child.

#21: Yes, considering we were children. In India, after school hours, the 8 to 9-year-olds have nothing to do but play. We never had time to play in Tibet. If we returned from tending the cows, they would shout, "Brats, what are you doing? Go and fetch fuel." At that time I was too small to carry the water container. They would shout that there was no water. If the water source was close, I was sent to fetch water in small containers. In summer we had water very close to the house. In winter we had to go a little distance away.

Q: Were there some jobs and some work that you were very good at and that you liked and some things that you didn't like to do at all?

#21: No, I did not have anything like that. It depended on my parents. There was no talk about whether I liked or not. Where I was told to go, I had to go. What I was asked to do, I must do it. You did not say you liked to do this or expressed your dislike or else you would get a beating.

Q: Who did the beating, mother or father? Who was the disciplinarian in the family?

#21: Both my parents were very strict disciplinarians. Many visitors came to our house. My father would sit here and my mother would sit by the fireplace. The children would be made to sit at the side. During the day we would have been working and at night we as children would be sleepy. My mother would scold us for dozing. My father would say that we should be hit with the spinning device. Both were strict. [Laughs] They never said that we could go to sleep.

[Interpreter asks interviewee if she has a *phang* 'spinning device.' Interviewee shows a part of a similar device and demonstrates how it is worked to make woolen thread.]

Q: What kind of a man was your father? Was he very strict or was he funny or strong or brave? What kind of a man?

#21: My father was not funny. He was strong and he was frugal. My late mother was not like that. She would feed anyone, irrespective of whether they were good or bad, clean or dirty. She would invite them in and say, "Come in. Eat something. What do you need? I will share with you." My father wouldn't do that.

Q: Your mother had many children. Did you ever help in her delivery of children?

#21: No, I didn't. I was young at that time and if I happen to be home, I cooked and served her warm food. I never helped her in the delivery. My mother did that herself. She was

very arrogant. If she gave birth early in the morning, after the placenta was delivered, she would sit up and order us to do this or that.

Q: Your mother was physically very strong.

#21: She was very healthy, very hard working and very kind. We had so many visitors and she would say, "The poor things. Isn't there something in our house to be served to the travelers? They must be hungry. They must be tired. There is nothing in the desert but stones. They must be served with drinks."

Q: I am confused about...you were born in Lhague. When did you move to Phari?

#21: I was born in Phari.

Q: The town of Phari. Where was Lhague?

#21: It was very far away. Compared to here, how many miles is it to Kushalnagar [the nearest town]?

Q: Kushalnagar might be about 4 to 5 miles away from here. Can you say approximately how far it was?

#21: It might be about the distance from here to Periyapatna [10 miles]. If you left in the morning, you reached there. Though you reached it, it was a long walk. It took one whole day.

Q: So you always lived in Lhague or you moved to Phari?

#21: I was born in Phari, but I lived in Lhague until I fled to India.

Q: Can you tell us what kind of food did the family eat for breakfast, lunch and supper?

#21: In Tibet we had nothing but *pa* 'dough made from roasted barley flour.' In the morning we were given *pa* and *thukpa* 'noodle soup.' It was *pa* for lunch and *pa* and *thukpa* for supper. In summer we had a grain called *tawu*, 'buckwheat' which was brought from Bhutan. This was eaten with cheese. We had that in the summer. Our normal diet was just *thukpa* and *pa*. Meat was there all the time.

Q: What kind of meat?

#21: The meat was mutton.

Q: How did they cook the mutton? How was it prepared?

#21: There were other people who killed the animals. We didn't do it ourselves. It was never the custom to do that. We didn't cook it like a curry. The meat was left to dry for

months after the animal was killed. Our region was very cold. There were no refrigerators, no insects and the meat turned crispy to be eaten.

Q: Didn't you boil it?

#21: We didn't boil it unless it was very cold in winter. Sausages would be made if it was very cold and misty. Mother would boil the sausages, drain the water, dry it and feed us the greasy looking sausage. It was said to warm our hands and fill our stomachs.

Q: Did you have in the summer time, did you have any vegetables of any kind?

#21: In summer we used to eat *tawu*.

Q: What is *tawu*?

#21: We used to go to Bhutan, taking woolen cloth, wool and meat for sale. From there we brought *tawu* 'buckwheat,' wheat flour and rice. The radishes came from Bhutan.

Q: Did they have any vegetables?

#21: In summer we grew some radish and in spring, *saptsoe* 'nettle' grew. We do not have it here, but it is found in Dharamsala.

Q: Was *saptsoe* cultivated or did it grow wild?

#21: It grew wild. The parents would say like this, "Go and pick some *saptsoe* if you want to drink noodle soup." We would go very happily because it was very tasty. We would drink so much of it, even if our stomachs were full. You would feel sleepy, your eyes prickly and a tasty meal. [Laughs]

Q: Did the parents use nettle to beat you when you were bad?

#21: Yes, they did. In the morning the children would be sleeping because we had no worries. We would have eaten our fill the previous evening and gone to bed late as we would be spinning. They would wake us, but we would keep sleeping because it was windy and so cold. Even upon repeated callings we would not get up. Then they would just pick up the blanket and we would fall out naked—children slept naked in Tibet. Even then we would still be half awake, stupid us. They would pick up a nettle by a cloth and hit us. Oh, then we were full of rashes. [Laughs]

Q: That woke you up. As a child and a teenager, did you learn how to make things like butter and cheese?

#21: Yes, I knew it.

Q: Could you give a description of how to make it so your great-great grandchildren will know; so that we can tell her children to come; in generations to come?

#21: To make butter and cheese, you had to milk [the sheep] and then heat the milk. We would test the warmth of the milk by our finger and then if it was the right temperature, a small quantity of curd was added; if you didn't add anything to it, the milk wouldn't curdle by itself. You had to add a little bit of curd to each and then cover it up. On top of the cover, as was the custom in Tibet, about three pieces of sheep droppings were placed on each. This was left to set around 10 in the morning and by three o'clock when you removed the cover and tilted it, it had set into curd.

Q: Please continue.

#21: Then at around 5 in the evening, the curd was put into the churner. If it was summer, the churning was done before dawn. When day broke, one had to go to milk the sheep. Before dawn, the churning was completed and butter removed. After the butter was taken out, cheese was made and you either gave it to others or kept it for yourself. Then the churner was washed and we had to go to milk the sheep around dawn.

Q: Was it delicious?

#21: They were very delicious.

Q: Do you have anything like it these days? Anything come close to that taste?

#21: No because the soil is different. The soil of Tibet was very fertile. When the butter was kept there, it looked absolutely yellow. In Tibet, the milking was done in the morning and kept in the river water in a leather pouch. The leather pouch was kept in the river as the water was cool.

Q: The milk was not heated but poured in the leather pouch?

#21: It was poured into the leather pouch, tied tightly and then kept near a rock so that it was not washed away. It was put in the water to cool it. At around 10 or 10:30, the milk was brought back. A big fire was lit and the milk poured into the vessel. As the fire burned, the milk was stirred continuously and when the temperature was right, the bubbles vanished. The milk was then immediately poured into the churner and churned. Butter about this size formed and you could hardly remove it with your hands.

Q: The butter was not formed from curd?

#21: No, not from curd. This butter came from milk. The curd butter used to come from *Lhopra*.

Q: The milk was poured in the leather pouch, cooled in the river water and then did it become hard?

#21: It became freezing cold; so cold you couldn't put your finger in it. This was made on purpose so that we got the best quality of butter, to get more butter. The butter didn't form when it was cold, so the milk was brought back and poured into huge vessels and warmed. Measuring with a ladle, the milk was poured into three or four churners in equal quantity. Though milk was poured into all the churners in equal proportion, yet a person with strength, with the same amount of milk could extract more butter. I don't know the reason. Perhaps because of the strength, he churned harder.

Q: Did stronger people get more butter?

#21: Yes, if the milk was churned hard and deep. We got less butter because we were not able to churn hard enough. We were children and did not mix it well.

Q: A lot of work?

#21: It was a lot of work, but it was tasty. During New Year too, we did not shy away from work.

Q: It sounds like there was no problem with food. There was always enough food?

#21: Food was okay, but we had to tend the animals, and the weather was extremely cold. Now it is summertime in Tibet and if you looked out around this time, you would see the white blanket of ice. If one went close to it, one could hear the sound of the ice melting. If you looked out, you saw the pastures were green and the ice was white. If you looked down in the valley, you saw the water, the forest and it was nice. When it rained, the goats almost froze to death and they would bleat.

Q: You didn't face any problems with food except the weather?

#21: When we were small, our parents had undergone a lot of problems. We were many children and then we grew up and each one of us did a job. Then our parents saw better times. Things improved, we enjoyed good health and our livelihood was much better and then the Chinese arrived.

Q: Can you please describe your house? Did it stand alone or was it with other houses?

#21: No other houses, it stood alone.

Q: Can you describe the inside of the house?

#21: To describe about the inside of the house, in Tibet we did not have furniture like we have here in India. In the center of the room, we had the heater and around it, a support to prevent the fire from spilling over. We used goat skins as mats.

Q: Dung?

#21: Dung was for fuel for the fire.

Q: What did you use for seats?

#21: For the children we had yak skins. For the parents there were woven mats and goat skins or sheep skin, which gave warmth.

Q: There were no beds?

#21: In my village there were no beds.

Q: What were the walls made of, of the house?

#21: It was made of stones and mud, but the houses were very strong. In India, those houses made of reinforced material do not leak but those made of cement leaked. In Tibet it was just mud. At times, there would be a little leakage and the mud became darker and my parents would say, "Go up on the roof and close the leakage," and the children would be sent to stamp on it. If there was a crack, the water entered it and we would be asked to look for the crack and stamp on it with our feet. So we looked for the crack and stamped on it and it leaked no more.

Q: Was it a one-storey house?

#21: It was only one storey.

Q: And how many rooms in the house?

#21: If you went towards the kitchen side, there were two rooms and inside from the kitchen was one room.

Q: There were three rooms?

#21: It was four rooms.

Q: Where did they sleep?

#21: As children we were made to sleep among the *rima* 'sheep and goat droppings' by our parents.

Q: In the sheep and goat droppings?

#21: Yes, we slept among the *rima*. It was like that.

Q: How did you sleep in the sheep and goat droppings?

#21: There was no need for beddings. In winter the house was filled with *rima*. During summer we didn't have fuel because of the rains. Through out summer we used the *bipa* [bellows]. So the winter *rima* waste stocked in the rooms and the children were made to sleep on them. There was no need for beddings, just a piece of pillow. We all slept side by side.

Q: Were they warm? Is that why? Insulation?

#21: They were warm.

Q: What was the floor made of?

#21: There was no cementing. It was earth.

Q: With so many children, children obviously get sick and some die. What were the common illnesses that children had and did they have any treatment that they used? Medicinal?

#21: I was young then in Tibet, so I cannot say what illnesses the children suffered from. Some died about a month after birth, some died in the womb.

Q: When the babies died a month after they were born, do you know what the illness was?

#21: How would we know that in Tibet when there were no doctors and no medicine? If one suffered from cold, one ate his fill of *pa* and chilies and went out in search of dung. [Laughs]

Q: When you were older, did many of your siblings died? Not the miscarriages, but did any of your brothers and sisters die when you were a girl?

#21: One sister died at 20.

Q: In your village, how many other houses were there where you lived?

#21: There were only about three. They were at a distance where if you shouted, they could hear.

Q: You were very isolated. What did the family do for spiritual or religious practice?

#21: Once in a year or a few months, we had monks come home for prayers from the monastery.

Q: When you got to be a teenager, what did you want to do when you grew up? Did you have any dreams or plans for what you would do when you were a mother or a grown-up woman?

#21: In spring and autumn, we used to work in the fields and I never feared that I would lag behind because I was a hard worker. There was no thought of education or traveling to

distant places. Though Phari was a day's journey, we hardly went there, except when we had food or wood to sell. I lived only in the vicinity of my village, so there were not many thoughts. There were no opportunities for studies and to get new views, we did not have an interchanging of ideas with others. The village was isolated and we were involved with unending work. There was nothing else.

Q: Did you want to get married and have a family?

#21: At that time I hardly ever noticed such things.

Q: When did you leave your family or did they all leave Tibet together? Did you get married in Tibet?

#21: I married in India.

Q: How old were you when you left Tibet?

#21: I was about 26 years old.

Q: Did the Chinese come into your area before you escaped from Tibet?

#21: Yes, the Chinese had come. What happened in our region was that the Chinese drove a lot of sheep and yaks, perhaps from the Apo Ho. Our region had good grazing areas and anyone was free to graze their animals with no one complaining. I don't know where the Chinese took the animals from, but they looked like northern sheep and Apo Ho yaks, which had fringes. They had flocks of these and grazed them on the pastures. Later they [the animals] became unlike their old selves, thanks to the availability of grass in our region.

Q: Where did the Chinese get the yaks and sheep from?

#21: They must have driven them from the northern direction. The sheep looked like northern sheep with curled horns.

Q: So they brought them down to graze in your pastureland? Were they allowed to do that?

#21: There was no one opposing them. The Chinese were there in large numbers in the isolated area; we were just a few families. There was no way we could oppose them. They were free to stay wherever they wanted to. We were in fear.

Q: In Tibet where you lived, were people assigned different pasturelands or could you go wherever you could take your flock or your sheep?

#21: There was an area called *chitsa thanka* 'community grassland' and any animal could graze on it. Travelers grazed their animals; anybody could graze there. There were some areas on which tax was paid called *dhamtsa* where lambs were born and fed. No one was

allowed to graze on the *dhamtsa*. Even if there were just two or three families, the Chinese were not allowed to graze there because that grass was *loktsa*, for use when lambs were born. Anyone who grazed their animals there would be removed.

Q: Those who paid tax had their own fields and none were allowed to graze?

#21: Those who paid tax not only had fields but grasslands. The government provided them with sections of grasslands and on this land, if the Chinese came, they would be told *tsolo*. That was the only Chinese word we [knew], *tsolo*, which meant “go away.”

Q: They would be the rich taxpayers?

#21: We were under some private families and they used the land and made us pay the tax. That was the custom in old Tibet. We were allotted small areas of land. When the sheep gave birth, they could not go far and so they grazed close by.

The other sheep were taken far away. These were not pregnant and could rest anywhere when night fell, so they were taken to distant places to graze. The pregnant ewes grazed closer—perhaps from here to where the bridge is down there [half a mile]—and around the lakes. Otherwise, the lambs might be born and we had to take care of the lambs in the extreme cold weather. That was why they were kept in and around the village.

Q: The taxpayers, did you come under a private family?

#21: Yes, we were under the Langdhong. My father was under the Langdhong, but my mother did not come under the Langdhong.

Q: They were the owners of the land?

#21: Since the early times, these lands were occupied by different people; at a much later age, it was owned by the Langdhong.

Q: You were working under them?

#21: My father came under the Langdhong.

Q: They had to pay taxes to the government?

#21: Whatever they might be paying to the government, we were made to do the work. We were allotted a small piece of farmland and a small piece of grassland. As payment, we had to work for them everyday.

Q: Aside from seeing the Chinese grazing the animals, did they come in to your village? Did you see any of them up close?

#21: They didn't say anything to us. They moved about in the northern areas, Tibet is a country with many hills. They didn't wear clothes like ours. A mug was slung from the waist and they walked freely. Towards evening, they cooked some rice and drank *chintang* 'black tea' without any salt.

Q: Did you have any contact with them?

#21: No, we did not have any contact with them. They didn't talk to us and we didn't talk to them. They were grazing in the community grassland. We didn't have any contact with them.

Q: When did you learn that the Chinese had invaded Tibet?

#21: It was said that His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped to India in 1959. A month after we heard of His Holiness' escape, we fled.

Q: When did you hear that Tibet was lost?

#21: We heard that Tibet was going to be lost. It was in 1957 and 1958 that we heard about battles being fought and the Chinese' invasion. Around 1958, the elders used to say that the Chinese have invaded and we were unfortunate people.

Then in 1959 we heard that His Holiness had escaped. Hardly a month after His Holiness' escape, we fled. We were close to the mountain pass. However, we faced problems because of the many children to take care of. We couldn't carry the children on our back and neither could we leave them behind. My brother and sister were very small, around 6 and 7. Children had been born to my parents every year; like dogs which had puppies every six months. It was almost like that.

Q: The Chinese, according to history came to Lhasa in 1951 that means for six years the Chinese were in the country, but you hadn't heard about it? Is that the case?

#21: Yes, that was how it was. How would we hear about it in the village? We did not travel.

Q: What made the family decide to leave and how did you leave with all the children?

#21: The Chinese had arrived and if His Holiness was not there, there was no way we could live there. Also at that time the Chinese summoned my father to join the propaganda training. He provided some excuses, and was able to avoid going once and then a second time. There would be no escaping the third time. He would be forced to attend the session. So before that could happen, we fled.

Q: Who left with you? Who was in the party that escaped?

#21: There were my father, my late mother and six children. Then there were some other families of the lower classes.

Q: How many families?

#21: We were about five families together. We could escape because the route was easy for us.

Q: Did you take animals to carry the supplies?

#21: We had fourteen yaks. The yaks were loaded with the things. Between the packs of things, we placed pillows on which the children sat. They were tied up with ropes, so that they didn't fall off. Those were the children who were not able to walk. Those who could walk were my brother, who is mute and I.

Q: How were they put on the yaks?

#21: On the yaks back, loads were put on either side. In the center were two saddles, one in the front and one behind which formed an arch in the centre. A mat was placed on this arch with two pillows on both the sides to prevent the child from falling off. Then the child sat in the center and ropes were tied on both sides. We traveled in this way for one night. We started on the 15th lunar night when the full moon was just rising and when we reached the Bhutanese side, dawn had begun.

Q: It took you one day?

#21: It took us one whole night. We drove our sheep, cows and yaks. We left them to themselves in Bhutan. It would have been worthless if the Chinese got to eat them after all the hard work we had done.

Q: Did you sell them in Bhutan or just left them free?

#21: If we sold them, they paid us just one measure of *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' or rice for a sheep; one measure of rice for an animal skin. For a yak, the price was three to five *rupees*. So, we just freed them.

Q: Did you free them into the hills?

#21: My father and my late mother said, "We have managed to escape from our enemies. Now we have decided to set them free. Only God knows who will eat them or not." Then they were set free.

Q: Where did you go to?

#21: The Bhutanese treated us very well. The yaks were set free and now we had all the saddles, saddle mats, fur skins and the things. We could not carry them. The Bhutanese

told us, "It is very hot in India. You shouldn't go there. Your woolen clothes and fur skins will rot there." We thought that was the truth and so we sold some for a few *rupees* and some we gave away.

The saddles and other things of the animals were given to the leader there because we couldn't carry them, and how could we throw them away when we had worked hard for them? When these were given to the Leader, he did us good in return. He said, "You have many children to take care of. I will give you some deer musk, which will be very good for you in the heat of India. It is extremely hot there. As soon as you reach Missamari, give the musk to the children." We stayed for about a month in Missamari. The heat was unbearable there, but we didn't die. We ate the musk.

Q: How did you feel about leaving your country Tibet and did you think you would ever go back?

#21: As long as His Holiness the Dalai Lama is there, we would be able to go back irrespective of the time. If His Holiness doesn't live, then we are in darkness. Then we are finished.

Q: When you were leaving your farm, what was the feeling of your parents? Were they sad? Were they worried and what was your feeling when you were leaving behind your home?

#21: I did not think anything, but my mother said, "Now we have to leave our village where we have been so happy. We have to depart from our home."

Q: Your mother was sad?

#21: My late mother was sad.

Q: What did the family think was going to happen? What were they going to do when they left? What did they imagine was going to happen to them in India?

#21: Not considering India, the journey until Bhutan was so very difficult. I wondered what kind of a country we would reach. Our village was on a plain except for the snow-covered mountains. We were not surrounded with forests. I wondered where we would reach to die.

When we reached Missamari, it was excruciatingly hot. Many, many people died. We were there for one month, but none of us died. All the six children are still surviving. No one died except for my mother, who is now dead. One of my siblings is mute.

Q: Did your mother and father come out with the family or come out in another group of people?

#21: We came together.

Q: After Bhutan, where did you go?

[Interpreter to Interviewer]: After Bhutan they went to Missamari.

Q: For how long?

#21: We stayed there for one month in Missamari.

Q: And then what next?

#21: We were sent on road construction to Simla.

Q: What happened to the children? They were too young to work on the road, so what happened to them?

#21: The two younger ones, a boy and girl were accepted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Dharamsala. Later when the parents were settled in the settlements, they were sent to the parents. Two or three years after the settlement was started, the children were sent to the parents. During the time when we were on the road crew, they were accepted there.

Q: Did the children go to school here in Bylakuppe?

#21: They went to school.

Q: When you came to Bylakuppe, how old were you?

#21: I was 27 years old when I came to Bylakuppe.

Q: Had you married yet? Did you get married later?

#21: I was not yet married.

Q: And how did you meet your husband?

#21: My parents arranged that.

Q: You got married and had how many children?

#21: Six children.

Q: Are they here?

#21: I have two children here. One is in Kollegal.

Q: Now you live here with your husband and anyone else?

#21: There's my oldest son and a grandchild.

Q: This was a very, very nice interview. Thank you very much for your time.

#21: Thank you.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama would be very, very proud that you shared your childhood experiences with us.

#21: Yes.

Q: Now we can pass them on to your grandchildren.

#21: Okay.

Q: Does anybody else have any questions?

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us that we forgot to ask you about?

#21: No. If you ask me questions and if I know the answers, I will explain. If you do not remember, then I don't remember at all. I am a person who has no education. You, who have education, should ask me the questions.

Q: Given that you had to leave your home because of the Chinese invasion, what feelings do you have about the Chinese?

#21: The Chinese are forever criticizing His Holiness the Dalai Lama; as if there is no God, they debase His Holiness so much that I wonder if they will ever be happy.

Q: Lastly, what advice would you like to give or tell the next generation of Tibetan children? Does she have any advice or suggestions about how they should live their lives?

#21: His Holiness the Dalai Lama advises and he is worried and so are we. Rather than for me to talk, if a person who has a wider view speaks, that would be more helpful. Like our village in Tibet, we heard nothing, saw nothing and even if we wanted to meet people, the village was too small. Because the village was small, what you saw was small and what you heard was small.

On this land, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is working so hard and everybody can hear widely and see widely. Once the older generation is gone, everything is finished. They [younger generation] should remember that they, [older generation] during their times, did things in this or that way. If they do not remember that, then they will definitely face problems for sure. Who will be there to serve them [younger generation] always? One should be able to stand on his feet. Even if we advise a hundred times, they will not listen. Before we are gone, the younger generation must study hard and learn to stand on their own feet.

Now they have everything that they want to eat. When we came to the settlement, we never had that. If we had maize or millet to eat for today, we would think about what we would get to eat tomorrow. We were very poor. These days, thanks to God, they are not in that situation. They have the chance to study hard and the chance to dwell on our cause. Those with education and knowledge, over the age of 18, should definitely think on these lines. Our cause should not be left for His Holiness the Dalai Lama alone. They [younger generation] should support him. The older people just talk and their time is over.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Tibet next?

#21: I wish that Tibet would be the place where I die. His Holiness the Dalai Lama once told us, "You must eat well. You must eat well; otherwise you may get exhausted in the middle of Nathula [mountain pass between Sikkim and Tibet] when we cross it. What would you do then? Wouldn't you be worried?" Even if I die here, my soul will go there. My soul will not remain here. It will go in search of my village.

END OF INTERVIEW