

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #26M – Dekyi
April 13, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #26M
2. Interviewee: Dekyi
3. Age: 68
4. Date of Birth: 1942
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Thoe Ngari
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1961
9. Date of Interview: April 13, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod,
Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 55 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dekyi was the youngest of four children. The family's occupation was farming and herding animals and they lived near to the Indian border. They faced severe water shortage during winter due to freezing temperatures and traveled far to fetch water. They used the wood of apricot trees and dung cakes as fuel. There was much work to be done all year and she had considered running away from home.

Dekyi visited India on a pilgrimage when she was 18 years old. She recounts her experience during this journey to Buddhist holy places and of seeing the disfigured people in Bodh Gaya, which many believe was the result of destroying Buddhism in their previous lives. She wished to become a nun and nearly stayed back at Varanasi instead of returning to Tibet. She thought that the Indian people seemed happier and that life was easier there.

Just 15 days after returning home from the pilgrimage, her family decided to make their escape to India. They had heard stories about Chinese atrocities in other regions and also the Chinese requested their children be sent away. After reaching Punjab in India, she worked as a coolie and then later settled in Mundgod.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, pilgrimage, first appearance of Chinese, trade, customs/traditions, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #26M

Interviewee: Dekyi

Age: 68, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 13, 2010

Question: Can you start by telling us your name?

00.00.15

Interviewee #26M: Dekyi.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans so that we can share your experience with the new generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and with people in the rest of the world. Your memories are going to help us document the true experience, beliefs and history of the Tibetan people.

#26M: I will relate whatever I know. However, since I left [Tibet] at the age of 18, I do not have much to say.

Q: Thank you. Do you give permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use your interview?

#26M: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

00:01:28

#26M: [Nods]

Q: During this interview if you want to take a break at anytime, please let us know.

#26M: Okay.

Q: And if there's a question you don't want to answer, just say "I don't want to answer that."

00:01:54

#26M: Okay.

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

#26M: There will be no problem. They [the Chinese] did not oppress us because we were from the border region of Ngari Gar. They appeared and cut our trees and took them away. We had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to go to the fields; we did not have

watches at that time. When we passed them, we could see them making a fire and cooking their food. Four or five of them would be sleeping and one person would be awake. That was it.

Q: And it is fine to use your real name?

00:02:28

#26M: Yes, you can.

Q: Thank you. We really appreciate your coming today.

#26M: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us something a little bit about your village of Thoe Ngari in Tibet? What you remember about it?

00:03:00

#26M: Should I tell you about the livelihood?

Q: Yes.

#26M: Should I not tell you how the Chinese arrived?

Q: Let's start with the livelihood.

00:03:07

#26M: Okay. Regarding the livelihood, there were two [types]. There were the *dok* 'nomads' and the *sadok* 'farmers.' One of these worked for only one period because of the snowfall. [To the interpreter] You can interpret that.

[We] had to leave at 4 o'clock in the morning to fetch water. Otherwise, the snow could melt and wash away in a flood. There was no storage and water was a problem.

Q: So it was really cold where you lived?

#26M: The weather was cold. Snow covered the higher areas and in order to fetch water during the wintertime, we had to go to the lower areas. We collected water from the springs.

Q: What did you use for firewood to keep warm?

00:04:28

#26M: When the clothes got soiled?

Q: No. What fire did you use to keep warm?

#26M: [We used] wood and cow dung. [Some people] in Tibet lived in the nomadic camps. Some wives had two or three husbands. One of them left for the nomadic camp. [He] brought back cow dung. We also used the wood of apricot trees to make fire.

Q: What was your house like? Can you describe your house?

00:04:59

#26M: You mean members in the family?

Q: How many people were there in your family?

#26M: There were five or six members in the family: two sons and two daughters. One daughter went to England and expired. One of the sons is living in England at present. His name is Namgang Tsering. The other son is in Camp Number 6 [Mundgod]. There are only two [children] left now.

Q: Initially in Tibet there were your parents and family members. Who were there?

00:05:24

#26M: My mother had four children of whom three survive. That is it. There are three children: two boys and a girl. I am the only daughter. The other girl passed away in England.

Q: And your house. Could you describe the house you lived in?

#26M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] My parents have passed away.

[Question is repeated.]

00:06:03

#26M: The house in Tibet had two upper floors. The family lived on the uppermost floor, the middle floor was used as storage for meat and other things and the young animals were housed on the ground floor. The adult cows, horses and sheep were also kept in there when the weather grew cold. There were three floors.

Q: So people lived on the first floor and what about the middle floor?

#26M: During winter the family moved down to the middle floor. In summer we moved up. When the weather turned cold, we moved downstairs. That was because of the heavy snowfall.

Q: Tell us about the pilgrimage that you went on to India when you were 18 years old. Can you tell us about, like did you go with your whole family?

00:07:18

#26M: We first came to India when I was 18 years old. [We returned], stayed for 15 days before everyone, including the parents came away. [We] stayed for 15 days in Tibet

Q: Who did you go with on the pilgrimage?

#26M: My parents were not with [me]. They were at home. I came with relatives who are no more these days.

Q: Who were the relatives?

00:07:37

#26M: My junior and senior mothers. There were senior and junior mothers. My mother lived in Tibet then.

Q: How many people were there during the pilgrimage?

#26M: We were 110-111 people who came together to Nepal. If one possessed 1,000 *rupees* then, one could visit Tso Pema [Lake Rewalsar, Himachal Pradesh, India], Dorji Den [Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India] and Varanasi [Uttar Pradesh, India].

Q: A thousand Indian or Tibetan *rupees*?

00:08:09

#26M: A thousand Indian *rupees*. The Tibetans did not have money and [we used the] same money as the Indians. There were no windows in the trains then. Nowadays you have the windows. [The money] could get us food and drinks, too.

Q: So who organized the pilgrimage?

#26M: There was no one who led us because in Tibet we had a lot of work to do. Though we wished to run away, our parents would not allow us. I had been planning to run away with friends, but my parents did not think running away was a good idea and sent me along with relatives. I was sent with the junior and senior mothers. They are all dead now. Later everyone was forced to escape. [Laughs]

Q: And did more and more people find out about it and they wanted to join you? Is that what happened?

00:09:24

#26M: Every year people left on pilgrimage. Since we lived on the border region, people loaded donkeys and horses with foodstuff and left. They stopped during the day and ate their mid-day meal and then carried on. Again they had their night meal and drove the donkeys along until they reached Indian territory.

Half the people returned along with the donkeys and horses after doing some trade. Some of us visited the holy sites. One could not return in the 12th month [Tibetan lunar calendar]. They went back in the 9th month after conducting trade. The younger ones had heard that India was a good [place]. [Laughs] We had heard about it. So we came but could not return after visiting Lake Rewalsar and other places because the route was blocked by snow. We waited and then returned in April.

Q: Yeah but how did it go from just her family to 100 people? I don't understand. Did word get out that they were going or did they meet people on the way? How did it go from just her family to 100 people? It's a big difference.

#26M: Some of the men had come not on pilgrimage but on trade. They brought wool and went back carrying *buram* 'brown sugar cubes' and sugar. There was a trade fair in September and after that the men went back. We, the younger ones came on the pilgrimage.

Q: So all the people were not on pilgrimage?

00:11:26

#26M: No, not everyone.

Q: Approximately how many people [were on pilgrimage] then?

#26M: We were about 50 who proceeded [to India].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No, not who they were. How did they? How did the word get out, do you understand...that they were going on pilgrimage?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Every season they tried to go. This is the season for trade time.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: So every people go for a trade.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes, of course.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: With that time, this was the period for going to the Indian border.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So they just gathered people on the way?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Every year this goes like that, not only...Every year this is a rotation style, those who want to go to India for pilgrimage.

Q: So how did they meet up with the traders? Did they meet in the village and go or did they meet them on the way?

00:12:19

#26M: The hundred people of the village planned to go on trade. They loaded their stuff on the horses and all the relatives joined together like we do here when we leave on pilgrimage. Everyone came together and then the men went back while we came further. [People] came on the trade mission in September or October and they returned immediately. We proceeded further for the pilgrimage. It snowed in October and when we could not go back, we had to remain while they returned. The younger people worked as coolies after the pilgrimage. The wage was a *rupee* and a half.

Q: Why did you want to go on pilgrimage by yourself? What made you want to do that?

#26M: Everybody did not want to work 12 months of the year and in our homes in Tibet, we had to work the entire 12 months. There were spinning of wool and making cow dung cakes, etc. I wanted to go on a pilgrimage and also His Holiness the Dalai Lama had reached Mussoorie [India]. However, I did not think that the Chinese would come like they did. Everybody went on pilgrimage and returned after having purchased various types of clothes. [Laughs] So I thought I would do that too.

Q: But you were pretty sure your parents were going to say no if you asked them, right?

00:14:22

#26M: I wished to run away and had to hide some things like wool in preparation. My parents found out about this. They knew I was planning to run away, so sent me along with my relatives. I had hidden money and such things.

Q: So instead of being angry with you, they decided to go with you. Were you disappointed that it was such a big group or was it kind of fun to go with so many people?

#26M: For food we had brought *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ with us which lasted until we reached Lake Rewalsar. We also purchased rice to eat. At that time one could get a kilogram for just a quarter *rupee*. So food was okay that way. There were my paternal uncle and many others. They did not allow us to eat in the restaurants because that was expensive. We made a makeshift fireplace and burned wood. We walked all the way to Lake Rewalsar. We journeyed by train to Nepal. We went to Lake Rewalsar through the direction of Punjab. One could cover the distance by foot in a day.

Q: So where did you go on pilgrimage apart from Tso Pema?

00:16:35

#26M: [We] went to Varanasi, Bodh Gaya, Lumbini and Chagoe Phungpori. [We] visited all the pilgrim centers at Bodh Gaya. I do not know some of the names as nobody told us what each site was called. We visited each holy place and left. We were many people and made fleeting visits.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: She was 18. She wasn’t that small.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Even though, that was the first time and she had not much knowledge, which place is this?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I know. I know but I’m sure it made some impression.]

Q: Was there a particular place that made a very strong impression on you?

#26M: A special feeling [I had] was at a small rock opening through which one crawled and emerged on the other side. Those people that were great sinners could not pass through and had to turn back. They were said to have committed transgressions. There was a tiny

passage through which we could crawl. [I] had a feeling of devotion. There were some who could not pass through. Some did not have transgressions. On the rocks were the footprints and handprints of the Buddha. I have faith in those.

Q: What did you think of the Indian people?

00:18:50

#26M: I thought the Indian people looked happy because we were not very happy. To be frank, we lived on the mountain and it was difficult to work in the fields. [India] was a good place and I found [that the Indians] made a good living. However, I did not find Bodh Gaya good. I believe long ago the Muslims demolished Nalanda. There were mothers with many children who were poor. People said that Tibetan Buddhism was ruined and I thought that was true because there were many fingerless and toeless people who were begging.

Though Tibetans are virtuous people, there was no technology even if we wanted to do something. And secondly, the location was not good while this country is better located. One can farm anywhere [unlike Tibet] which lies on the mountains. However, Bodh Gaya was not good. [I] heard that Nalanda was ruined by the Muslims due to which there were many people who were disfigured. When we went on the visit, they were huddled and sleeping. That [disfigurement] happened as a result of destroying Buddhism and I felt for them.

Q: You'd never seen somebody with that kind of condition before?

#26M: No, I had never seen such. I saw them in Bodh Gaya. It was not just one person in Bodh Gaya but there were 40-50 such people. They were there on the steps and over that side [gestures]. If one gave alms to those people on this side, then the other side...There were many [such] people.

I believe that was the punishment for demolishing Nalanda. [To the interpreter] You must mention that and [people] will believe that Buddhism is a good religion because there are some who say the opposite.

Q: What else did you see that surprised you?

00:21:33

#26M: When I went on the pilgrimage, I thought of settling down in Varanasi. [Laughs] I did not wish to return to Tibet. [But people] would tease me if I did not return. They would say, "She is loitering about." There were many Indian Khampas 'people of Tibetan origin who live in India' that went to Tibet. Dharma originated from India and the Indian Khampas were free [to travel]. Tibet was a harsh [place] and I did not wish to go back. [Laughs] I wanted to stay back in Varanasi. I wanted to remain there as a nun.

Q: But you got a very strong feeling in Varanasi?

#26M: I got a strong feeling and did not [?] wish to stay. The food was cheap and the place was good. However, if someone stayed back people were very critical. Some of us girls

discussed that we should stay back. The Khampa sold cheap corals as they had already escaped from Tibet, from Lhasa, while we had not escaped. For a quarter *rupee* one could get enough curd and food to satiate a person. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already arrived in Mussoorie.

Q: Really? So it is after 1959.

00:23:12

#26M: I do not know, but I was 18 years old. At that time we did not calculate [the year]. Perhaps it was '60.

Q: It was 1960.

#26M: We came later while His Holiness had already arrived [in India] and people asked us as to which region we belonged. They told us not to flee and to stay back. We wished to escape and the things that we'd purchased here [in India], we cut them up into halves and stitched them up halfway during the journey. We could take them into Tibet in this condition and not otherwise. We left all our things at the border, at the Indian border. [We] carried only the more valuable things. That was good because we came away in 15 days.

Q: How do you mean? Were you not allowed to carry your things?

00:23:56

#26M: No, we were not allowed to. We'd purchased different types of thin clothes [in India]. During the journey, [we] cut them up and stitched them a little and took them. We'd heard that the Chinese were not permitting such things and that there was trouble on the way. One was required to show passes on both [the Indian and Tibetan] sides.

It was imperative to return because our parents were there. Since His Holiness had already arrived [in India], we wished to stay back. However, the parents would be worried. We had no idea that they planned to escape. Had we known that, we would not have gone back.

Q: How many days after you reached your village did you escape?

#26M: We stayed for only 15 days. Then we worked on contract basis transporting wood in India. One would be exhausted from the work. The others transported continuously, day and night on horses and humans.

When the plan to escape was formulated, some people refused to come. I cannot remember much, but there were the fathers of the families who planned and said, "If you wish to come, you have to do so now. Otherwise we are going to burn the bridge." Then the bridge was set on fire, the bridge over the Langchen Khabab 'River Sotlej.' Some people stayed back while others left even as the bridge was being burned. Some stayed back.

There was this bridge over the Langchen Khabab and if the bridge was cut off, they did not have airplanes then and the Chinese could not pursue. We transported our belongings day and night, though there was not much.

Q: Were you able to bring your things?

00:25:38

#26M: Yes, we were able to bring our things. We drove all our donkeys and horses. However, we did not get much from the buyers.

Q: Before you went on pilgrimage, what experience did you have of the Chinese in your area?

#26M: I knew that the Chinese were inflicting suffering. Long ago when the Hasa Khapa ‘people of Xinjiang’ arrived, we locked all our houses and fled into the mountains. The parents told us that something like that was going to happen again.

We were here [India] earlier and His Holiness the Dalai Lama had escaped. Tibetans were selling their coral, turquoise and *zompa* ‘boots’ for 15 rupees [in India]. [I] did not wish to go back [to Tibet] knowing that the Chinese would cause suffering. However, it was not good to leave one’s parents.

Q: The Khampas would come and the women had to hide in the bushes? They had that bad of a reputation?

[Interpreter translates the questions as "You just mentioned Hasa Khapas. Who were the Hasa Khapas?"]

00:27:47

#26M: The Hasa Khapa were Chinese who were oppressed by other Chinese. They were a type of Chinese.

[Interpreter translates Hasa Khapa as Nationalist Chinese.]

#26M: They are called Xinjiang.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It’s called Nationalist Chinese.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: You said Khampas.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not Khampas. She’s saying Nationalist Chinese.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, the Nationalists.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They had escaped from the Red Chinese.

#26M: They were oppressed by the Chinese and had fled into our region. We treated [them] badly, beat [them] and [they] fled to India.

Q: Who?

#26M: We did not allow them to stay. They [the Xinjiang escapees] did not oppress us if we gave them food. The Chinese oppressed them and the people of Xinjiang had escaped. Ours was the border region.

Q: What did they do when they came to your region?

00:28:23

#26M: When they appeared in our region, we fled to the hills and ate our food there.

Q: Why?

#26M: Due to fear. Though they were not mistreating us, we feared they might kill us.

Q: But you said particularly the women were hiding in the bush.

00:28:49

#26M: Not just the women but everybody ran away. They [the Xinjiang escapees] were oppressed by the Chinese and they were Chinese. The Chinese oppressed them because they were Buddhists. They must have heard that there was a good region near the Indian border. We did not know what was in their mind and we were scared of them.

Q: And then they sort of passed through?

#26M: They proceeded on to India. When we asked our parents the reason for [our] escape, they said, "They will rob our things and kill people." I must have been about 10 or 11 then and did not know the reason. I only remember that we used to eat in the hills.

Q: Where did they flee?

00:29:55

#26M: They fled to India. They were treated well by the Indians. We feared that they would rob us of our food. If we'd given them food, they would have remained and worked for us. They then left for India. They were from Xinjiang.

Q: Oh, these are the Uyghurs. You are talking about the Uyghurs.

#26M: I do not have a clear knowledge. I was a child then, maybe 13 or 14 years old.

Q: They are Muslims?

00:30:32

#26M: I do not know if they were Muslims. I heard there are two types of Chinese. These days the elders say that if we had treated them well and given them food, they would have served us. However, we believed all Chinese were the same.

Q: Did you ever hear about any Tibetans fighting alongside the people from Xinjiang in their struggle against the communists?

#26M: We heard that they [the Communist Chinese] were killing people, forcing siblings to marry each other and preventing births. The elders used to discuss among themselves and we heard the stories.

Q: What did you hear they were doing?

00:31:25

#26M: [We] heard that they were forcing siblings to marry each other. I believe they took away children when they were 3 years old and they never knew that they were siblings. The elders used to say such things. These are embedded in my mind.

Q: Did you hear about fighting?

#26M: Yes, I heard that they were killing people. I heard that they dug a pit and killed [people] in a row. First they dug a pit near the prison. When a gun was fired, the person fell in it automatically.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Tibetan people?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not Tibetan people. Chinese and the...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The Uyghurs?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Uyghurs.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: That they had killed many of them.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The old people used to just say that.

#26M: People were imprisoned and felled. I heard that it would be announced that they [the selected prisoners] must be put in the pit the next day. When they came out of the door, each of them fell in the pit one by one.

Q: Yes?

00:32:51

#26M: When they [the prisoners] emerged out of the door, they were fired at immediately and they fell one by one into the pit. The next day the ground would have cracked like this [shows a gap of one foot], perhaps because they had been gasping for breath. Then we became very scared.

Q: You didn't have any experience of the Communist Chinese at all, just the Nationalists?

#26M: That's what we heard [that the Communist Chinese were doing] and that was why we fled. We did not know much but the fathers knew about it. So we set fire to the bridge and fled. We heard that they were oppressing in Lhasa and in Ngari Gar and we fled.

Q: Did you hear about children being sent to school in China?

00:34:15

#26M: They ordered that [children] be sent and we fled. They said that [the children] must be over the age of 18 and should reach by June or July and we escaped around the month of May. Both boys and girls were ordered to come.

Q: Yes?

#26M: They ordered that boys and girls over the age of 18 should come. The elders said it was useless for them to stay [if their children were taken away] and so the bridge was set on fire with kerosene and [we] fled. Had they not asked for the children, those of us living at the border did not suffer.

Q: Did you ever hear of other kids who did go to China?

00:35:49

#26M: No, I did not hear of anyone having been to school in China. I heard that some from Lhasa did go. They might have been taken forcefully. There were some Tibetan aristocrats who liked the Chinese and I heard they sent them.

Q: Have you ever met anyone in exile who was sent to school in China?

#26M: No, I did not meet any Chinese children.

Q: No, not Chinese children, but Tibetan children who had been to school in China?

00:36:37

#26M: I do not know anyone who went there. However, those who are my age have become leaders and they say that they are happy there. They have become Chinese leaders.

Q: Do you want to tell us anything more about your journey coming out of Tibet?

#26M: I heard that we'd fled many times. Long ago the Xinjiang people oppressed us and we had fled once. India was a free country and [they] fled to India. Some stayed back and some returned. Escaping had become a habit and people buried half their belongings under the ground; those that were valuable and could not be carried. Hoping that we would return, we have left our belongings at the border. We left our utensils and clothes, which is a loss. We had the mind to return. What can you say about that? [Laughs]

Q: Where did you bury it? We should go look for it.

00:38:11

#26M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] It had become a habit since long. They [the villagers] had been fleeing a lot. They fled and then they returned. We left all our belongings. For the *dzo* ‘animal bred from a yak and a cow,’ we did not even get the value of a calf. The animals were given away at the border to people we knew. Had we returned, they [the Chinese] would have come to our village.

Those with whom we left our belongings were Tibetans who knew the [Indian] language. We left all our things with them, like clothes. When someone was sent away as a bride, her clothes would be counted in Tibet. All those clothes were there except [my] necklace which I brought. [I] went once to fetch them from Punjab. [I] brought the silver with me but all the rest are still there.

Q: Oh, she had left it from the pilgrimage...

#26M: [Interrupts] What do I know? My parents left them there.

Q: ...she left it there when she came back from pilgrimage and she picked it on the way out. Is that what you are saying?

00:39:38

#26M: I went [to get the things that were left at the border] from Punjab.

Q: You came on a pilgrimage and returned...

#26M: I did not return [to Tibet]. My parents and I lived at Kusumri for ten years. We lived in Punjab. We went to fetch the things from there [at the border].

Q: You went on a pilgrimage and returned. You came along with your parents again. And then did you go there again from Punjab to fetch the things?

00:40:00

#26M: When [I] went to fetch the things from Punjab, they had been left [with friends who were living] in Indian territory. It was in the Khunu region and not in Tibetan territory. They were left at the border.

Q: And then?

#26M: When [I] went to fetch the things, I had to return [to Punjab] and except for the jewelry I could not carry all the clothes. So they were left there.

Q: So you went to fetch the ornaments again.

00:40:17

#26M: Yes, [I] went to fetch the ornaments. [We] lived in Punjab and it was the same country of India. They [with whom the valuables were left] were people of India who had to pay taxes to India. They were actually Tibetans. India had occupied two or three regions of

Tibet. They knew our language and were like us in the way they dressed. Such people from Khunu used to come to Lake Rewalsar.

Q: Were your belongings left with them?

#26M: They were left with them, including our sheep, horses and everything.

Q: You really trusted these people not to sell your things.

00:41:37

#26M: They were Tibetans. India was a gentle country and they did not pay taxes. They did not have to pay taxes and they lived in India. Actually they were Tibetans. Long ago when the people of Xinjiang oppressed them, they had fled [Tibet] and not returned. Perhaps there was a lot of suffering in Tibet due to the appearance of the Xinjiang people or whatever.

[We] knew these people [with whom the valuables were left at the border] as they came to our village. We offered them food [when they visited the village] for two to three weeks and they did the same when we went to their village.

Q: And what about your beautiful clothes that you got from India?

#26M: They were left there.

Q: Did you not get them back?

00:42:28

#26M: [I] did not get them back. We told them to use them. We wrote to them. Our thinking was such that we refused to go to this place [Mundgod]. The people of Punjab said that they would not let us go. It was said that the place [Mundgod] was beyond the seas and that there were black people living there. Some of our people refused to go and opinions were divided at Kusumri. Then the two officials refused to distribute the commune money. One of them [the officials] is my husband and the other has passed away since. [They said,] “If you leave [for Mundgod], we will pay you the commune money and if you do not...”

Q: What is commune money?

#26M: Each month a *rupee* used to be collected from every person.

Q: Why?

00:43:00

#26M: The intention was to use it if someone became sick. It was better not to give away the commune money for other purposes. So it was paid to those who left and not to those who stayed back.

We'd heard the journey [to Mundgod] was difficult and my parents left first. I joined them later with my husband. We received the commune money but not those who stayed back. However, later when things became good here, everyone arrived. The Punjabis were good people.

Q: What work were you doing there? Road construction?

#26M: We used to work as coolies in Punjab.

Q: Doing what?

00:43:41

#26M: We were making roads and working in the fields. The Punjabis gave us work and we worked for the rich families. The adults were provided with 12 kilograms of food ration and butter.

Q: Daily?

#26M: Not daily; that was for a month. The salary was 50 rupees per month. [Laughs] I think the wheat and canned meat came from abroad [as aid]. [I] do not know whether they came from England or elsewhere.

Q: So she talked about the things that they brought back from India and they left with the Tibetan traders at the border. What about the things you buried? What were the things you buried that you brought out of Tibet?

00:45:04

#26M: We sent message through people asking those that had stayed back [in the village] to dig out the things and to use them. There were huge copper vessels and such. The relatives who stayed back have used them.

Q: Did anyone find it? Did they dig it out?

#26M: Some of them were able to use them. There were others who after reaching Punjab [and] after reaching Simla became sick; many people fell ill after arriving at Rampur and everyday two or three people died due to the heat. So some people went back [to Tibet].

Q: I'm talking about the stuff that her family buried. They brought some things out of Tibet and she said they buried some things. So first of all, I'd like to know what those things were that they buried. I have a couple of more questions about this.

00:46:15

#26M: [We] buried utensils and horse saddles and clothes that were useless [for the new destination] or too heavy. There were utensils, copper ritual items and scriptures. The scriptures would have decayed by now. [We] could not carry those.

Q: Do you know if anyone ever found it?

#26M: They found them. They sent message that they found them and also sent us some presents. Now he [older relative] has passed away; the older generation [has passed away]. The children are living there and they said that they got to use the things.

[Discontinuity in video—video resumes in the middle of interviewee's statement]

...His Holiness provided us with flour and other food rations when we arrived in Punjab. People used to tease those people who depended on the rations. [Laughs] People are different. Much later when we had no food, we had to eat the rations. It used to be said that we had to live in India and could not return to Tibet.

There was one person who was alone and he ate [the food rations] as he said it was difficult for him to depend on others for his meals. Rumors were afloat that eating the wheat flour would kill us or make us like Indians. [Laughs] We did not eat them [then] but later we struggled trying to get food rations.

00:47:58

People's minds are strange. We thought we would go back soon. During the previous generations, they had been able to return. The people of Xinjiang appeared and [the Tibetans fled] for a few months and then returned. [We] thought it would be like that.

Q: I just want to go back to Varanasi for a moment for when you were in Varanasi when you were 18 and you said that you felt, you had this feeling that maybe you wanted to become a nun when you were in Varanasi. So I'm just curious, like why did Varanasi have such an affect on you? Did something happen there?

#26M: The feeling I had was that this place contained the footprints and handprints [of the Buddha] and if one did bad, he would be re-born disfigured. They [the disfigured beggars] had done something bad [in their previous lives]. They had demolished Nalanda. [I thought that] if one sinned in that way, such things would come about and I wished I could spent my life there. However, if I stayed back our people were very critical and would say that I abandoned my parents in that manner. So that was what I felt.

These days most of the beggars are Muslims. It is said that the Muslims demolished Nalanda and that is the result of their deed. [To the interpreter] She [the interviewer] must have visited Varanasi. Nalanda is in Varanasi, right?

Q: It is not in Varanasi but in Bodh Gaya.

00:51:15

#26M: It's been many years and I have forgotten it now due to the medications that I take.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Tell her I also just went there for the first time and I also felt very, very strong feeling there. Varanasi, I'm talking about.

#26M: There are the footprints and handprints on the rocks at Chagoe Phungpori. Only the trace of a building is there at Nalanda. There are no doors or windows left. The Indians

leave some money at one side saying that a Buddha image used to stand there. When [I] looked around, there was no Buddha image and the building has been demolished. It says in the scriptures that doing such things will result in fingerless hands and toeless feet. One cannot understand how they eat. [To the interpreter] Have you not been to Varanasi?

I had the feeling because of that. They looked fearful but it is their destiny that they have to live and not die. It would have been better to die and they were not dead. Perhaps they had to suffer so. That is suffering hell while one is living.

Q: In Tibet you did not see many people suffering?

00:52:49

#26M: I had never seen such in Tibet. There were none like that. I have not even seen people born with twisted limbs. There might be extra digits, like an extra thumb. [People] say that it is the outcome of [offering] too many or too big or too high butter lamps.

Q: How do you feel about the Chinese today?

#26M: Regarding the Chinese, I wonder if I should say this now, but I believe it is due to the result of “causes and effects.” I believe the Tibetans had made them suffer [in their previous births]. I do not know if it is right to say that.

Q: How did they cause them to suffer?

00:53:31

#26M: During the period of King Songtsen Gampo they [the Chinese] had been pursued [by the Tibetans]. I do not know if it is right to say this. [Laughs] It is better to suffer during this life time.

Q: Yes?

#26M: That’s what one has to suffer. Recently it aired on television about our history and how we suffered. So likewise, the Chinese cannot be blamed and perhaps it is our [fate] that we have to suffer.

Q: Is there anything else you want to tell us?

00:54:33

#26M: I think it is not good to say anything in particular. You will show this to the world and I have nothing to say. [Smiles]

Q: It can’t be incorrect what happened to you, so nobody can correct that. You know better, yeah?

#26M: [Laughs]

Q: Well, thank you very much for talking to us today. I just want to ask you...

[Interviewee gets up from chair]

Q: Please wait a minute.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: She's in a hurry. She's going to get back to work.

Q: I just need to ask you again. It's protocol. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it make a problem for you?

00:55:25

#26M: [I will] not face any problems. I did not say that they [the Chinese] were bad. What is bad is bad.

Q: Can we use your real name?

#26M: You can use it because I have related the facts.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW