

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #77 – Dawa Dolma
July 5, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #77
2. Interviewee: Dawa Dolma
3. Age: 83
4. Date of Birth: 1924
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Toe Yancho Tanga
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: July 5, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 5, New Camp No. 6, Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 37 min
12. Interviewer: Sue Gershenson
13. Interpreter: Lhakpa Tsering
14. Videographer: Jeff Loda
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Dawa Dolma and her childhood friend, Tsamchoe, now in their eighties, recount their life experiences in Tibet. In summer, their village became a trading ground for a thousand traders who exchanged salt and grain. Nomads came with their goods, tents were set up, and Dawa's village became a lively market place for two weeks each year. The local people sold their wares such as woven carpets and clothes. A tax officer would come from Lhasa to collect taxes from the traders.

The lives of Dawa Dolma and Tsamchoe began to change after they both married and had to cope with the challenges of raising a family while earning a livelihood. The friends separated when Dawa Dolma left Tibet with her husband and child soon after the Chinese arrived in their village, fearing that her daughter would be taken to school in China. Tsamchoe witnessed villagers being subjected to *thamzin* 'struggle sessions' inflicted by the Chinese.

Tsamchoe and her family soon followed Dawa Dolma into exile, taking the same route through Nepal. Today, they are still friends and neighbors living in the same refugee settlement.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, festivals, first arrival of Chinese, life under the Chinese, *thamzin*, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #77

Interviewees: Dawa Dolma [and Tsamchoe]

Age: 83, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Sue Gershenson

Interview Date: July 5, 2007

[The interview was conducted with two interviewees Dawa Dolma and Tsamchoe. The statements of Dawa Dolma are marked #77DD and Tsamchoe as #77T]

Question: Please tell me your name.

Interviewee #77DD: Dawa Dolma.

Q: And Dawa Dolma, do we have your permission to use this interview? Does the Tibet Oral History Project have your permission to use this interview?

#77DD: That is fine.

Q: Please tell me your name?

#77T: Tsamchoe.

Q: Does the Tibet Oral History Project have your permission to use this interview?

#77T: You can do whatever you like.

#77DD: Why take our pictures when we are close to death? But you can if you like.

Q: That is all the more reason to take your picture. If you are not here, I can't take your picture.

#77T & DD: That is right. You can take our pictures.

Q: I want to remember you.

#77T & DD: That is right.

#77DD: If I die my daughter is here [points to daughter who is off camera].

Q: But right now you are here and I would like to hear your story.

#77DD: Okay.

Q: I will ask questions. When I ask a question, I will just ask it to both of you and whoever wants to answer or if both of you can answer, it is fine.

#77DD: It will be the same [answers] whoever answers from the two of us because we come from the same village. There is no one else here, but the two of us from our village.

Q: Some would be the same and some maybe a little different.

#77DD: It will be the same. Here, except for the two of us we do not have anyone from our village.

Q: The only people in the whole of Bylakuppe?

#77T: There are others [in India], but everyone's scattered everywhere. In this area, it's the two of us.

Q: All right then let's start. Will you tell me something about the village where you were born? What kind of village was it? What was it like?

#77DD: It was very large.

#77T: In summer the nomads arrived from the north.

#77DD: The grain [traders] arrived from Dhingri and Shekar. Salt and grain were bartered. We cultivated the lands and consumed the grain [with no surplus for sale].

Q: Too big? It [the village] was too large? Too many people came?

#77D: A multitude of nomads and other Tibetans mostly trader arrived in summer.

#77T: The salt traders came from the north and they took the grain in exchange.

#77D: They [traders] brought grain and rice, which were taken by the nomads. Everyone came to trade.

Q: In a Tibetan year, how many traders or businessmen do you think would pass through your village?

#77DD: They came only once a year, in summer.

Q: Could you quote a figure, say 100 or 200?

#77DD: Much more than that, about a thousand in summer.

Q: One thousand every summer?

#77DD: Yes, they came to trade. They put up tents and it rained and there was a sort of festival.

Q: Would they stay a long time? If they brought a tent, it sounds like they stay a long time?

#77DD: The traders stayed for about 10 to 15 days. They came with yaks and sheep. The place used to be crowded.

Q: Did they walk to your village or did they come on horses? Did they ride horses?

#77DD: The nomads came walking, driving their sheep along. Those who brought the grain and rice, their loads were brought on yak backs. The people came walking.

#77T: There were no roads.

Q: So there were both nomads and businessmen who came there?

#77T: Both types of people came. People coming from the lower region came with grain. Those from the upper region in the northern part brought salt. They traded their goods and returned.

Q: So the meeting place was your village and the exchange happened? You must have been in the middle between north and south?

#77DD: Leaders were assigned to the north and the south. During this time, a tax officer arrived from Lhasa who collected taxes.

Q: Because all this business was happening?

#77DD: When you did business, you had to pay taxes. The tax collector came.

Q: The tax collector collected a lot of money?

#77DD: When the officer came, we had to work for him. He arrived riding a horse and we had to take care of his horse and cook for him.

Q: The payment you made to the tax collector was in terms of grain or food?

#77DD: No, not grain, but in money.

Q: What did you pay for taxes?

#77DD: The *tapa* 'tax payer' did the manual work and the others paid in money.

#77T: Some people also paid in butter, which he [the tax collector] took with him to Lhasa.

Q: Aside from the nomads and the businessmen, how many people lived in the village fulltime?

#77DD: There might have been around 100 or 200 people. It was very large, maybe around 200 including the children.

Q: A population of 100 or 200 people is big? Do you mean 100 or 200 families or 100 or 200 people?

#77DD & T: A 100 or 200 people in the village.

Q: That's not big.

#77DD: That's fairly big.

#77T: The people lived in areas that were scattered. When the traders arrived, the population grew; otherwise, it was not that big.

Q: That was too many?

#77D: That was how it was in our village, but there were many villages around. For example, here you have Mysore and Bangalore. So likewise there were many villagers who worked as *tapa* for the Tax Collector. He came to collect taxes from all the villages on the route. That was how the officer arrived while the traders came from their point, traded and left.

Q: What is the right size?

#77DD: Our area was quite large because we had to cultivate the fields. There were pastures for the sheep and yak to graze and beautiful flowers. It was a beautiful place.

#77T: A lot of people came in summer.

#77DD: The summers were so enjoyable. There was plenty to eat like meat and butter.

Q: So you always had enough to eat?

#77DD: We had good food and if we stayed home, we wove our clothes and spun yarn out of sheep's wool. Other than that we had no work.

Q: How did you learn to weave?

#77DD: I learned it from my mother at a young age. I did a lot of weaving in Dharamsala. We wove like this [points to her dress] and this [points to her apron].

Q: And do you weave in Bylakuppe?

#77DD: Yes, I did earlier. Now my eyes are not good and I have stopped. I used to weave like this and this [points to carpet and her apron]. I wove the carpets used in my house.

Q: You made them yourself?

#77DD: Yes, I did and they [the carpets] are spread inside.

Q: Did you make this yourself?

#77DD: Yes, this one [points to carpet on which she is sitting] and those inside the house. Now my eyesight is not good and I can't do any more weaving. I did it when I first arrived at this settlement. Now my eyesight is bad and I have had a surgery.

Q: We would very much, after we finish talking out here, I would love it if you could show us some of the things that you have woven.

#77DD: Okay.

Q: Do you have your loom still?

#77DD: I sold them. I used the wood part [of the loom] as firewood. I am too old now [to weave].

Q: I am very curious because so many strangers came to your village. How were the businessmen different from the people who lived in the village?

#77DD: The difference? When the traders came we had more to eat. When there were no traders, our livelihood was much harder. We had only housework and weaving to do and food was hard to come by. When the traders came we had plenty to eat.

Q: So it was very good for the village when they came.

#77DD: Traders over here [in Bylakuppe] earn only for themselves. We do not benefit in any way. We are old now. My husband and I had five children when we came here. They went to school. Only this daughter [points to daughter] stays home now. My husband is 84 years old and I am 83.

Q: Your husband is living?

#77DD: Yes, my husband is living, but my daughter's husband is no more. The old man you saw is my husband. He is hard of hearing.

Q: Let's go back to your village. How did the businessmen, if I understood what you said, the businessmen were selfish, they were only looking out for themselves; were they unkind to the people in the village?

#77DD: They did their trade and left. We benefited by selling them the clothes we wove. The traders were good.

Q: I would like to know about each of your families. Dawa Dolma, tell me about your family: how many children were in your family and what did your parents do?

#77DD: My parents had only one daughter and one son. When the Chinese came, my mother was left behind. We couldn't bring her with us and she died there. We fled because they [the Chinese] said they were taking my daughter [points to her daughter] to a school.

Q: And they [your parents] were farmers?

#77DD: Yes, we were farmers.

Q: What do you remember about your father? What kind of person was your father?

#77DD: [Laughs] What kind of a man? He was a good man. He died when he was quite young.

Q: How old were you when he passed away?

#77DD: I must have been around 28 years old then.

Q: So he was there for your whole childhood?

#77DD: Yes, he was there then. My father died and then when the Chinese arrived, we escaped.

Q: How about your mother? What kind of mother was she?

#77DD: [Laughs] My mother was good. When the Chinese came, she refused to come with us citing that the Chinese did not cause any torment in Lhasa. So she was left behind in our village.

Q: Why did she think they couldn't do anything to her?

#77DD: She had come from Lhasa to our village. When we wanted to escape, she said there was no need and that the Chinese would not cause any suffering. She said she would remain there.

Q: Why did she think they wouldn't cause her suffering?

#77DD: I don't know. My husband, daughter and I escaped.

#77T: It was thought that they [the Chinese] wouldn't hurt the old people.

Q: So your mother stayed in Lhasa?

#77DD: Not in Lhasa. She had come to my village and she remained there. We told her we should escape. She was basically from Lhasa and perhaps the Chinese in Lhasa didn't do any harm because she said, "I have lived long in Lhasa and didn't see the Chinese doing any harm." She escaped to our village and then I was born. Later when we told her we should make our escape, she said that the Chinese didn't do anything in Lhasa and they would not do anything in the village. Now she is, of course dead, as I have reached old age.

Q: Tsamchoe, tell me about your family; how many children were in your house?

#77T: There were two boys and two girls and I am the youngest.

Q: Two boys, two girls and two parents?

#77T: Yes, two parents but my mother died very early.

Q: How many were there altogether there in your family?

#77T: Two boys, two girls and myself, now how many is it? That's two plus two four and the old parents and myself, so that's seven in all.

Q: How can it be seven? Two parents and four children, that's six.

#77T: And me. That's seven.

Q: Where were you in the order? Young, old, middle?

#77T: I was the youngest. Now there's no one [siblings] in Tibet; all are dead. I heard that they are all dead.

Q: How many brothers and how many sisters?

#77T: Two older brothers and two older sisters. My siblings would have married and had children, but I don't know anything about them.

#77DD: All were left behind in Tibet.

Q: Tell me about your parents—tell me about your mother and your father? Do you have any memories of your mother and father from your childhood?

#77T: Yes, I do. When I escaped I was old enough. I was 33 years old and fled with my husband. My mother died before the Chinese arrived and my father said the Chinese would not harm an old man and refused to join us. He said that they would not harm him and that we should escape.

Q: I want to hear your stories of leaving Tibet, but I would like to talk a little more about your life in Tibet before that. I promise I will ask you many questions about leaving Tibet.

#77DD: [Laughs] That's right.

Q: I know you were friends when you were little girls. Did you play any games together? What did you do when you were together as little girls?

#77DD: Yes, we used to play together, making tea and drinking together and lots of other things.

Q: What else? You pretend to make tea?

#77DD: We made tea. We collected provisions and cooked. We would bring tea stuff from our parents and the girls would make tea together.

Q: Just for the two of you?

#77DD: Yes, we were friends. Sometimes she brought the things and sometimes I did.

Q: I am interested from each of you what is your favorite memory from your childhood? What thing do you remember that makes you most happy?

#77DD: In Tibet?

Q: Yes.

#77DD: I remember the times when we were young, the New Year celebrations, drinking *chang* 'home-brewed beer', singing and dancing and making merry. We were young then.

#77T: We used to work for the rich families and in the evening returned to our homes.

Q: How much beer did you drink?

#77T: The men drank. The women didn't drink.

Q: But you said you drank *chang* and danced.

#77DD: A lot of people gathered together and the men drank. We drank tea and danced. It was like a party.

Q: When you partied, did you or didn't you drink alcohol? I am a little confused.

#77DD: We drank tea. The men drank *chang*.

#77T: The women didn't drink *chang*.

#77DD: There was *chang*, but no strong alcohol.

Q: But you danced?

#77DD: Yes, we did. We were young then.

#77T: Like children.

Q: What kind of dancers were you? Were you very good? Did people like to watch you?

#77T: At that time we were not married. We danced our traditional dance and played the guitar like children.

#77DD: We were happy.

#77T: At that time we were not married.

#77DD: We had no children.

Q: So you had fun?

#77T: Yes.

#77DD: Once we had children, we had to bring them up. We had to work and earn a living.

Q: No more fun when you have children?

#77DD & T: No. [Laugh]

#77DD: Then we had to think about our life, cook and bring up the children.

Q: After you got married, did you still dance?

#77DD: Then I had children. The children's father was there. He was very domineering and used to drink. We would have arguments.

Q: Too much *chang*?

#77DD: He drank a lot.

Q: What was that like? What happened when he drank too much *chang*?

#77DD: I had to bring up the children and do the household work. When I was young, I enjoyed my life.

Q: Your husband was domineering?

#77DD: Yes, very much so. After he drank, he...[gestures action of beating].

Q: Dominating and drunk? Not such a good combination for a husband.

#77DD: That is not good, but there is nothing to do as it is my karma.

Q: But I wish it had been better karma.

#77DD: [Laughs] If life is hard and your husband is domineering, then there is suffering.

Q: What problems do you think there are? Tell me what problems.

#77DD: He beat me and scolded me.

Q: Does he do that now-a-days?

#77DD: Now he is too old.

Q: Do you beat him instead?

#77DD: No, I never. I used to run away when he beat me.

Q: Could you run fast?

#77DD: I used to run very fast. [Laughs]

Q: Were you able to escape?

#77DD: I used to run and enter the houses of the neighbors.

Q: Very smart.

#77DD: I had to run away with the children. If he wasn't drunk, he never beat me. Only when he was drunk, did he beat me.

Q: Did he beat your children also?

#77DD: He didn't beat the children, but they were small and I took them with me. The older one would run away by himself.

Q: Back to karma. Was there a monastery near your house?

#77DD: Yes, there were two monasteries. One was called Chadur Gonpa and the other Nupkoe Gonpa in the west. Now there is no Chadur Gonpa left.

Q: Have the monasteries been destroyed?

#77DD: They were destroyed. There are no more monks. They [the Chinese] must have done what they wanted to do.

Q: When they existed, when you were little girls they were there, what sects were these monasteries?

#77DD: Chadur Gonpa was Bon [the earliest religion in Tibet]. It belonged to the good Bon, the *Bonkar* 'white Bon' and not the bad one. There is another type is called *Bonnak* 'black Bon', which is the bad one.

Q: So this was a good one?

#77DD: Yes, the *Bonkar*.

Q: What was the other monastery?

#77T: It belonged to the Nyingma sect [one of the sects of Tibetan Buddhism].

Q: Which of any of the *gonpa* did you go to? Did you go for festivals to pray or were you involved in the *gonpa*?

#77DD & T: We went to both the monasteries on special occasions.

Q: Was there one monastery you liked better?

#77DD & T: They are the same. Both are equal.

Q: There is no partiality?

#77DD: No, they are the same.

Q: The times you went to the monastery, were those happy times? Did you enjoy being there? Was that a good part of your life?

#77DD: It was a very good monastery.

Q: Were you happy?

#77DD: Very happy. Both the monasteries housed many religious idols and holy scriptures. Now I don't know what they [the Chinese] have done.

#77T: On special occasions, we used to take butter lamps and go to the monasteries.

#77DD: On the fourth month of our calendar, there used to be *cham* ‘religious performance by monks’ dance. Now there is nothing.

Q: Were there any schools in your village?

#77DD: There were no schools. No schools for children.

#77T: There were schools in Lhasa, but none in our area.

#77DD: Yes, of course there would be schools in Lhasa.

Q: Just one more question about your childhood. Are there any special holidays or festivals that you remember that you especially liked that you celebrated?

#77DD: Except for those visits to the monasteries, there were none.

#77T: The festival was *Losar* ‘Tibetan New Year’ once a year.

#77DD: Then we used to have fun. We ate meat and sheep's head and made merry.

Q: Sheep's head?

#77DD: It's the sheep similar to the ones you find in India. During the New Year festival, people ate a sheep's head.

Q: Sheep's brain, was that delicious? Do you like sheep's brain?

#77T & DD: We didn't eat the brain, only the head.

Q: Was that delicious?

#77DD: Yes, the head was well cooked. That was like a good omen to eat on the New Year day. We ate rice mixed with butter and drank warm *changko* ‘fermented rice.’ We made offerings of it [to the gods].

Q: Did you drink *chang* too?

#77T: During that time even the women drank.

#77DD: On the New Year day, it was a good omen to drink warm *changko* with cheese added to it. It was a must to drink it.

Q: Is that why *Losar* is your favorite festival?

#77DD: Yes, *Losar* was the happiest time.

Q: Was it because you got to drink *changko*?

#77DD: [Laughs] The year changes and a fresh year starts. We come closer to death.

#77T: On that day we wore our best clothes.

#77DD: Any good clothes we had, we wore.

#77T & DD: Then people played games.

Q: So on *Losar* you got to eat meat and play and wear nice clothes and drink *chang*?

#77DD: We made *changko* and drank it.

#77T: Early in the morning on *Losar*, we heated *chang* to make *changko*, which the women drank. I did not drink much. The men drank cold *chang*.

Q: Did you make *chang* in your homes before *Losar* so that it would be ready for *Losar*?

#77DD: Yes, we made it before *Losar*. On the day of the New Year, we first offered *changko* to the gods and then we drank it after saying a prayer. Now I don't have anything more to say.

Q: You are doing great. Okay, so *Losar*. Each of you has mentioned your husbands. Tell me how did you meet your husband and how old were you when you met your husband?

#77DD: I met my husband in Tibet when I was 24 years old. It was a love marriage.

Q: A love marriage? Where did you meet?

#77DD: We came from the same village. We were both born there.

#77T: Just like this village here, the same village.

Q: And you, Tsamchoe?

#77T: I was 26 years old [when I married].

Q: Was it arranged by your parents?

#77T: No, it was a love marriage.

Q: And where did you meet your husband?

#77T: We also were from the same village—the husbands and the wives.

Q: Good village. And tell me, each of you, what was your life like after you were married? Where did you live? What change?

#77DD: Life became harder and harder.

#77T: We had children.

#77DD: We had children and then life became very hard. Then the Chinese came and we fled to this foreign country and there was a lot of work to do. Life has been very difficult. It's been difficult all along, except that we can see our God [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] here.

#77T: After coming into exile, the [Tibetan] government has been very good to take the children.

#77DD: The best thing here is the opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This is not our country.

#77T: It was impossible to feed our children and the government took care of them and educated them.

#77DD: There were schools for the children to go to.

Q: So I think I have gone too far ahead. Were you each married after you left Tibet or when you were in Tibet?

#77T & DD: We were married when we were in our village in Tibet.

Q: That's before leaving Tibet. How was your life when you were first married? Were your children all born in Tibet as well?

#77T: For me one child was born in Tibet and the rest in India. I fled Tibet when the child was 6 years old.

#77DD: A son and a daughter were born in Tibet to me and the son died there. I brought the daughter along with me to India and here I had three more children.

Q: Tell me about the Chinese coming. When did you first realize that your life was changing because of the Chinese? Tell me what happened?

#77DD: First, two Chinese came to our village. They moved around and let us see some shows. Then gradually their number increased and then we fled.

#77T: They [Dawa Dolma and family] left a little earlier than us.

#77DD: The monastery office under which my husband came would not release him. We were scared. We were not there to see the large number of Chinese arrive.

Q: I have a feeling some more things happened.

#77DD: I did not see it, but I heard that they [the Chinese] were beating people in the lower regions.

Q: In your village such things did not take place?

#77DD: It did, but we fled before that could happen.

Q: Did you flee before 1959?

#77T: It was after His Holiness left in 1959; perhaps 1961 or 1962.

Q: Did you witness the Chinese beating anyone?

#77DD: When we learned that our daughter would be taken away to school because we came under the monastery office, we fled in fear. It was just the three of us—father, daughter and myself.

Q: Who said they would take your daughter?

#77T: The Chinese said they would take the children.

Q: So you fled with your daughter?

#77DD: Yes. At that time it was said that the monastery office and the Chinese were a team.

Q: You must have feared something about the school. Why did you take your daughter and not want her to go to the school?

#77T: Because she would be taken to China.

#77DD: Some children were taken and they never came back. About three [children from the village] were taken to school by the Chinese, and they didn't come back. Fearing that my daughter would be taken, we fled.

Q: How did she know that they went to China?

#77DD: I saw with my eyes three children from our village being taken to school. They were of the same age as my daughter. We feared that she would be the next on the list. Then two Chinese came and we fled.

Q: When you had heard that the Chinese were hurting Tibetans in other places, nearby, and so first, just two Chinese soldiers came to your village? What did you think when these first two soldiers arrived?

#77DD: We had heard before that the Chinese were coming. When the two first arrived, they presented us with some shows with a monkey and a dog.

Q: Were they soldiers?

#77T: They were soldiers.

#77DD: They were Chinese soldiers. They made the dog plow the field with the monkey holding the plow.

Q: They tried to entertain you?

#77DD: Yes, they did. At that time we heard that the Chinese were present in Lhasa and Shigatse.

Q: So were you suspicious when they came with a monkey and a dog?

[A man enters the room and he is introduced as Dawa Dolma's husband.]

#77T: My husband is dead.

#77DD: He [husband] doesn't drink anymore. He is not drunk.

Q: We got scared when your husband walked in.

#77DD: No, there is nothing to fear now. He cannot hear. We really have to shout to talk to him. Now he is good. While in Tibet, he used to drink. Not anymore here.

Q: Too old to hurt you.

#77DD: Now he doesn't drink. He never beat me when he is sober.

Q: So back to the monkey and the dog. Were you suspicious when the Chinese arrived with the dog and the monkey after hearing about things in Shigatse and Lhasa?

#77DD: Yes, we were suspicious.

#77T: We thought, "Now they will cause us misery."

#77DD: Who has heard of a monkey and a dog plowing? We thought that was a sign of bad things to come. We became suspicious.

Q: Wasn't it like entertaining you?

#77T: Yes, it was.

#77DD: A lot of people gathered and then they played the show.

Q: Was it entertaining?

#77DD: We became suspicious. Making a dog plow was a bad omen.

Q: Sounds like the monkey was hurting the dog?

#77T: It must have suffered.

#77DD: They [the Chinese] made the dog to plow the land with the monkey holding the plow. People were told to gather to watch the show and that was a deception. The other Chinese might have laid in wait at another place; at the lower regions. They did not hurt the common people, but the leaders and businessmen suffered a lot. Though I didn't see it with my eyes, I heard about it.

#77T: That was because she left earlier.

Q: When they gathered all the people, what happened?

#77DD: They started the show when all the people gathered. The monkey and the dog were removed from a box and made to plow. They were kept in a box.

Q: Did they say anything else? Just "Hello, here is a dog and a monkey?"

#77DD: No, they didn't say anything. They spoke some gibberish. They didn't say anything to us.

Q: You didn't understand it?

#77DD: They might have been talking gibberish to the monkey.

Q: And then what happened?

#77DD: After that they went back. Those two people went away. There was nothing, but everybody was suspicious.

#77T: They [Dawa Dolma and family] left earlier while we stayed behind. Then many Chinese started arriving in the village.

#77DD: Yes, we fled earlier, but they [Tsamchoe and family] were there [in the village] when the Chinese came. We left around a month earlier.

Q: What I will do is hear how Dawa left and then I would like to hear what kinds of things happened after Dawa left.

[Some side discussions among Dawa Dolma, Tsamchoe and interpreter take place.]

Q: How soon after the entertainers came, did you leave? Was it right away?

#77DD: After around a month we fled. It was not easy to escape. We had to cross the Tsangpo River in coracles [small, round boats].

Q: Of course. Yes. Big, big river?

#77DD: It was very wide. You cannot cross it except in a boat.

Q: Who left with you? Who was in your group?

#77DD: We did not have anyone with us except the three of us.

Q: Who were they?

#77DD: My husband, daughter and myself. We thought if we didn't flee, our daughter would be taken away to school. So we fled secretly. We had a donkey with us. If many people left, we would have to request permission from the leader. So we did not seek permission, but left secretly.

Q: Just the family; no other people?

#77DD: When we fled from home, we were just the three of us. Arriving here in India, I had three more children. My relatives were left behind.

Q: What was your route? How did you go? From your village you traveled on foot to where? I guess on foot.

#77DD: We loaded our provisions on the donkey and went away. My mother refused to join us, so she was left behind at home. After crossing the river in the coracle, no one said anything to us.

Q: How did you get across the river? Were there boats waiting for you or did you hire someone to take you across?

#77DD: There were men with boats on the riverbank. Boatmen always stood waiting there. After crossing the river, no one said anything and we passed other villages on the way.

Q: How old was your daughter at this time?

#77DD: She must have been around 8 years old then. She was quite young.

Q: Do you remember what year this was then when you left your village?

#77DD: When must it have been? His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already left.

#77T: His Holiness left in 1959.

#77DD: It was very soon after that.

Q: It was after 1959?

#77DD: I do not have much knowledge about it [the dates].

#77T: Yes, it was after 1959. His Holiness left in 1959. It must have been around 1961 or 1962.

#77DD: At that time His Holiness the Dalai Lama was in Bodh Gaya and Varanasi [Cities in India considered Buddhist pilgrim sites].

Q: So much had been happening all around Tibet before 1962. However, no Chinese came to your village until around 1961 or 1962?

#77T: Nothing happened in our village before that.

#77DD: Only the two Chinese soldiers arrived in our village and no one else. I told you about the two who came.

Q: You have seen only these two Chinese?

#77DD: I have seen no other Chinese except those two.

Q: You were free when you reached the other side of the Tsangpo River, but were you still in Tibet when you crossed the river?

#77DD: Once you cross to the other side of the River, you were in a village called Chamko and then Zongka.

Q: Is it in Tibet?

#77DD: Yes, it is in Tibet.

Q: You felt safe from the Chinese once you crossed that river?

#77DD: Yes, then you were safe from the Chinese.

#77T: At that time, there were not many restrictions from the Chinese.

#77DD: We were among the first to leave, so there were less restrictions. Then later it became very difficult to escape.

Q: You were far enough ahead that you were able to get out.

#77DD: Yes, that is right.

Q: I wanted to ask, how many days journey from your village to the river?

#77DD: It took us five days, as we have to cross over a mountain pass.

Q: You have to cross a pass to reach the Tsangpo?

#77DD: After the crossing the Tsangpo. The River is very close to our village.

Q: How long did it take to reach the Tsangpo from your village?

#77DD: It is just a day's journey.

Q: Please summarize for me. Once you cross the river you are still in Tibet. Where did you stay and where did you go? Tell me how you got from there to here in Bylakuppe?

#77DD: After crossing the River, we three spent one night at the mountain pass. Then we reached Zongka.

Q: After Zongka?

#77DD: After Zongka, then Kyerong.

Q: Are these places in Tibet still?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: From Kyerong to where?

#77DD: From Kyerong down towards Nepal.

Q: How many days did it take to reach Nepal?

#77DD: From where? From my home in the village?

Q: From your home to Nepal, how many days did it take?

#77DD: It might have taken about 20 days. We made stops for a day to rest and then walk. We cannot keep going continuously. We were walking all the way.

Q: It's all on foot?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Were there any problems crossing into Nepal?

#77DD: At the border, the Nepalese searched our bodies, but there was nothing to be found on us. Then they let us go.

Q: Please tell me the rest. How long did you stay in Nepal and what happened from there?

#77DD: We spent about a month in Nepal and then went to Dharamsala.

Q: You are still with your husband and daughter?

#77DD: Yes, we were together.

Q: How long were you in Dharamsala and then here?

#77DD: We stayed about a month in Dharamsala.

Q: And then where did you go?

#77DD: Then we were sent to construct roads in Manali. We were building roads for a year and then went back to Dharamsala. The following year we again went to work as road crew, so for two years we constructed roads in Manali.

Q: And then you came to the settlement?

#77DD: Yes, then we were sent here.

Q: Now we will go back to the village. It is probably 1961 and after the monkey and the dog and the two Chinese came, tell me what else happened after Dawa Dolma left the village. Tell me what happened.

#77T: After that many Chinese arrived. There were two leaders in our village that had left for Lhasa. So when the Chinese came, the servants of these leaders who were there were tied up by the Chinese with ropes around their arms and beaten. The Chinese then tied the hands of the monk officials from the monastery and imprisoned them.

Q: The two officials—these are people from the village?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, they were people from the village.

Q: These two officials—they knew the Chinese were coming, so they left? Is that what happened?

#77T: No, the officials did not run away. They normally went to Lhasa in winter and came to the village in summer, so it was during the time they went to Lhasa that the Chinese arrived. They had people working for them in their house, so they were arrested by the Chinese.

Q: Are the two official local people?

#77T: No, the officials were from Lhasa.

Q: Even the servants are from Lhasa?

#77T: No, the servants are people of our village. The leaders came from Lhasa and stayed in our village. They were called *tsaduwa*.

Q: But the officials were from Lhasa?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Usually the Chinese, they gave food and land to the servants. Why did they beat the servants?

#77T: No, in our village they didn't give anything. Leave aside giving—they tied up the servants. They made them work during the day and imprisoned them at night. In the daytime they were made to go in search of firewood.

Q: All the people?

#77T: No, just the servants.

Q: And then let out again in the daytime?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Were the Chinese wanting information from the servants about what had happened to the officials, do you think?

#77T: The servants were there during the absence of the officials. They were there in the house while the leaders had gone.

Q: Why do you think they caught and beat the servants?

#77T: The Chinese were treating the government badly and their masters worked for the government.

Q: Because they did not like the Tibetan government?

#77T: So the servants were tied, beaten and made to undergo *thamzin* ‘struggle sessions.’ People were told to assemble and in the center of the circle of people, they were forced to undergo struggle sessions. It was our own people who subjected them to a lot of beatings.

Q: Who was made to undergo the *thamzin*?

#77T: The servants of the officials and high lamas from the monastery.

Q: What did the village people think about this when these things were happening. When the Chinese *thamzined* the servants and the lamas?

#77T: If the people raised their voice, the Chinese came pointing their guns, so the people remained silent. When the *thamzin* took place, we were so terrified that we fled.

Q: Please tell me after the first two Chinese came how much time passed before more Chinese came?

#77T: Quite soon after the first two Chinese came, the other Chinese arrived. Perhaps the first ones were studying the situation. It was less than a month.

Q: And how many Chinese?

#77T: They were about 26 in number. Our official's house was on higher ground, so the Chinese climbed up there and stood pointing their guns down at us. It was extremely terrifying. Everybody was scared.

Q: Is there anything else you can tell me about what happened and what the Chinese did before you and your family left?

#77T: Until I fled I didn't see more than what I told you. When they executed the *thamzin* we immediately escaped. We were so terrified.

Q: And the *thamzin* that happened, that was when they tied them up and put them in prison?

#77T: They tied the hands at the back and brought them from the prison. All the public was asked to gather in a circle and the victims were put in the center. Then they were beaten and questioned as to what they did during the time of the earlier government.

Q: While other people watched in the center of the town?

#77T: If people screamed asking not to beat them, the Chinese came with their guns. No one could say anything.

Q: What I am not quite clear on—were the people experiencing the *thamzin*, they were just tied or beaten or what happened?

#77T: They were beaten a lot. Their hands were tied at the back and they were beaten.

Q: Were they released after that?

#77T: They were put in prison. In the daytime, they were made to work and at night put in the prison. There are hills around our village, so during the day they were made to look for firewood in the hills.

Q: How many people?

#77T: *Chapchu*, including the monks.

Q: What's *chapchu*?

#77T: Around 10. There were about two or three monks from the monastery and five or six servants of the leaders. Many were arrested.

Q: And over how long a period of time was this happening?

#77T: We were terrified that the Chinese would do the same to us that we escaped one night. It was winter and the river had frozen, so we fled at night.

Q: How long did the Chinese do this before you left?

#77T: It must have been around five or six months that the *thamzin* went on. Then we made our escape quickly.

Q: Before you left, had other people in your village left? After Dawa left did more people leave before you left?

#77T: Yes, people left secretly. Not many had been able to leave because of the Chinese presence. A few, in small numbers of one or two may have left.

Q: Tell me about your journey; who left with you when you fled and where did you go?

#77T: We were with a relative and some people from my village but they returned home after reaching Nepal.

Q: How many people were there with you?

#77T: My family members?

Q: How many were with you when you fled?

#77T: You mean companions? There were two other families from my village.

Q: How many from your family?

#77T: My husband, a son and a daughter.

Q: That means two children?

#77T: Yes, four members.

Q: Then where did you go?

#77T: Then we crossed the river and reached Chamko. From Chamko we went to Zongka, Kyerong and then into Nepal.

#77DD: It is the same route that we had taken.

#77T: It is the same route.

Q: How many days?

#77T: It takes around 26 days because we had to walk.

Q: How did you know how to get there?

#77T: Normall,y people traveled a lot to Nepal.

Q: Have you been there?

#77T: No, I had not been there, but my husband had. People went to trade in Nepal.

Q: Did you encounter any Chinese on the way?

#77T: No, we did not meet any.

Q: Which year was that?

#77T: His Holiness left in 1959, so it must have been around 1964.

Q: Did you encounter other Tibetans on the road?

#77T: There were many other Tibetans from other places. We did not know them. In our group we were four family members and the other two families from our village.

Q: You met many people on the road. Were they all fleeing?

#77T: I don't know if they were fleeing or going to Nepal.

Q: All going to Nepal?

#77T: Yes, going to Nepal.

Q: Please tell me what happened then? How long were you in Nepal and where did you go after that?

#77T: I told you about our two companions. They returned to Tibet after reaching Nepal.

Q: Why did they return?

#77T: Because they had family members back home, so they wanted to go back. My family was all together.

Q: How long were you in Nepal?

#77T: We were about a month in Nepal.

Q: Then where did you go?

#77T: Then the government bought our tickets and sent us to Ruxol on the Nepal border.

Q: And then?

#77T: Many refugees were arriving in Ruxol from different places. There was a huge place where all the people stayed. The Tibetan government gathered all the people there and provided food, and then we were sent to Dharamsala. The children were sent to school.

Q: How many days did you stay in Dharamsala?

#77T: We were in Dharamsala for about a year, selling sweaters. Then we went to Kulu Manali for about two years.

Q: Then where did you go?

#77T: Then we were sent to the settlement here.

Q: Did you go to Delhi from Ruxol?

#77T: No, not to Delhi. We were in the train and taken direct to Dharamsala.

Q: Which was the place where you did your business [selling sweaters]?

#77T: That was in Delhi.

Q: So you were two years in Delhi?

#77T: Yes. Then we went back to Dharamsala.

Q: You came to the settlement from Dharamsala?

#77T: There were many Tibetans in Dharamsala. The Tibetan government sent us to the settlements.

Q: How long did you stay in Dharamsala?

#77T: About a year.

Q: So you arrived here in what year?

#77T: Perhaps it was 1964 or 1965.

Q: Okay.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I think she said that she left Tibet in 1964.

Q: Was your whole family still with you when you got here—your children, husband and you?

#77T: Yes, they were here.

Q: How many children?

#77T: The children were sent to school. At that time there was a daughter of my husband's relative.

Q: How many children did you have?

#77T: I had two children. Was it two? [Asks her friend Dawa Dolma]

#77DD: Yes, you had two.

#77T: I had two children. No, three. It was two children.

Q: Here is a final question. First, thank you very much for telling your story. I would like to ask you finally, since now you are old and wise, do you have some advice or what advice do you have for the next generation of Tibetans? What would you like to tell them?

#77DD: Do you think the youngsters of today would go back to Tibet?

#77DD & T: They must study hard and serve the Tibetan government. We will be gone, but they must be good and cordial towards others.

#77T: They must think about returning to Tibet.

#77DD: When Tibet regains freedom.

Q: I hope that you are not about to die so soon as you think.

#77T: We may not look it, but if there is no life left, we will die. [Laughs] That is the advice that we always give to the children. They must study well and serve the Tibetan government. I tell them that they must think and make plans to get back Tibet.

Q: If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would you have any problem or concern with that?

#77DD & T: Please show it. We have no one left in Tibet and those who were there are dead by now. You can show it. There's no problem.

END OF INTERVIEW