

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #15N – Tsering Choedon  
April 11, 2015

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #15N
2. Interviewee: Tsering Choedon
3. Age: 86
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Drikung
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 11, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Swayambhu Old Age Home, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 02 min
12. Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway
13. Interpreter: Palden Tsering
14. Videographer: Henry Tenenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Tsering Choedon's birthplace is called Drikung, a village in Utsang Province. There was a large monastery called Drikung The with a lama called Drikung Kyabgon. Her family earned a living by farming and raising animals. During summertime there was work in the fields and during winter they fetched wood or did farm work. They were *telpa* 'taxpayers' who owned their own land and were able to keep all of the harvest. She explains that a *telpa* was required to pay taxes by supplying labor and animals to transport supplies for the soldiers as well as do other errands assigned by the government.

Tsering Choedon recounts that her father, who used to be a wealthy man was subjected to *thaptsoe* 'physical struggle [*thamzing* 'Chinese struggle session']' and forced to become a pig herder. He stole pig feed in order to ward off starvation while her brother and paternal uncle were imprisoned for refusing to submit to the Chinese' demands. They died due to torture. Tsering Choedon managed to escape by giving her money and jewels to a man who smuggled her out of Tibet to the Indian border.

Tsering Choedon describes her life after arriving in India where she worked as a foster mother in a nursery school for Tibetan refugee children in Shimla. She describes her duties and her wages. Tsering Choedon later left this job to work on a road crew before being relocated to a settlement.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Utsang, childhood memories, farm life, taxas, imprisonment, *thamzing*, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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## Interview #15N

**Interviewee: Tsering Choedon**

**Age: 86, Sex: Female**

**Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway**

**Interview Date: April 11, 2015**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:07

**Interviewee #15N: Tsering Choedon.**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

**#15N: Yes.**

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

**#15N: [Nods]**

Q: If there's any question that you do not want to answer or you don't want to talk about something, please let us know.

**#15N: Okay.**

Q: If this interview were to be shared in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

**#15N: If it is shown in China?**

Q: If this interview were...?

**#15N: If China hears of it?**

Q: If we show it in China or Tibet, would you face any problems?

00:01:59

**#15N: If I continue to live in India or Nepal there will be no problem. There will be problems if [I] happen to go to Tibet. There are relatives. We will face problems; that is for sure. They [Chinese] cannot be trusted.**

Q: Okay. At the end of the interview I'll ask you the same two questions and you can decide whether you want to use an alias or your real name. Can we use your real name?

**#15N: Okay.**

Q: So at the end I'll ask you the same question and you can decide. So thank you.

We appreciate your participation in the project.

**#15N: [Nods]**

Q: You are now 86 and you left Tibet when you were about 30. Can you tell us some of your early memories, your earliest memories of life in Tibet?

**#15N: Tibet was lost when I was 30 years old.**

Q: Please talk about your memories as a little child.

**#15N: How? Memories of childhood?**

Q: As a little...

**#15N: About the journey coming here?**

Q: Not about the journey...

**#15N: During the journey...**

Q: It's not about the journey.

**#15N: Then?**

Q: Of when you were in Tibet before the age of 30.

**#15N: While in Tibet I was a *telpa*, someone that pays taxes to the Tibetan Government, a *telpa*.**

Q: A person who pays tax?

00:04:06

**#15N: Yes, a taxpayer. As a taxpayer performing labor tax for the Tibetan Government, the Chinese said that [I] was to go to school but the parents did not send me to school. "[She] will not be sent to school. [We] will pay the tax." The parents knew, knew [the Chinese] would cause suffering and were planning to send [me] outside. [I] was not sent to school.**

Then we began to face more and more problems in terms of food. I did not get to serve my parents for I escaped. Father was like a lama in the past and was sent to herd pigs and stole pig feed to eat. Mother didn't have anything to eat; [she] was not given food. [I] was told that [mother] opened [her] eyes a little bit when a spoonful of *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' was burned and sniffed at it. There were the children and other people [that told me this].

I came here in '84 and went back to Tibet again in '84. [The children and other people] spoke about it then. [I] went to see relatives. The parents were no more; everything was destroyed. [I] had an elder brother that passed away in prison. [He] was no more after facing imprisonment. It was like that. One was sure to land in trouble. Having lived under such difficulties the parents made every effort to send me here. [I] escaped. During the escape journey, there were some *geshe* 'Buddhist monks with philosophy degree,' *geshe* from Sera [Monastery].

Q: You mentioned being a *telpa*?

#15N: [I] was a *telpa*.

Q: Does *telpa* mean someone who pays tax or who collects tax?

00:05:45

#15N: There were two kinds of taxes of the Tibetan Government, an external tax and an internal tax. [We] were farmers. As farmers [we] owned estates, lands, everything. Though [we] owned those everything was confiscated, destroyed. My family name is Pongsang.

Q: When you say *telpa*, did you have to pay taxes to the government?

#15N: A *telpa* is...[To interpreter] Son, you do not know. Our government tax...when Tibet was independent in the past taxes had to be transported towards that side to Kham by horses and men and towards this side to the Tibetan Government's aristocrats and soldiers. Soldiers were stationed everywhere and [they] had to be transported there and here. [We] owned farmlands and animals and were like tenants of the government, pure tenants of the Tibetan Government. It was like that.

Q: Did you have to pay grains and such to the government?

#15N: Yes, it was like that. My actual birthplace is Drikungnang, Drikungnang. There is the Drikung Kyabgon 'Refuge and Protector' who presently lives in Dehradun [India] and is the royal son of Tsarong. He is the lama of our monastery.

Q: Your father was very poor. He herded pigs. How many pigs did he have?

00:08:07

#15N: My father was...what to say...Later became poor when the Chinese...in the past was a rich family. [Father] was like a lama. However, later during the *thaptsoe* 'physical

**struggle' Father was not actually killed but was not given food and was sent to herd pigs. It seems [he] got to eat a little by stealing pig feed.**

Q: Your father was...when did your father...? I'm lost. So was your father in a monastery?

**#15N: It seems [Father] was a monk earlier, like a lama. Although a monk, perhaps something happened with mother and then [they] got married.**

Q: Once your father met your mother and stopped being a lama, what kind of work did he do?

00:10:07

**#15N: He stayed at our home. There was not any government job or anything. There were some responsibilities connected to the monastery.**

Q: What kind of work did he do for the monastery?

**#15N: Like doing any work outside [the monastery], acting as an advisor, teaching and such. He was experienced and advised other monks that did not have any experience.**

Q: Did your family have lands on which you grew crops and on which you have the animals?

**#15N: Family members in Tibet are two sisters...three sisters and a brother. The only brother was killed in prison. [I] have...one, two, three, four, five, six family members in Tibet presently. Then there was a relative, a lama who passed away—is no more. His hand had been severed here [looks at right hand] while in prison in Sera. The left [hand] of the son of Lhagyari called Kusho Norbu-*la* was severed while my relative *tulku's* 'reincarnation' right [hand] was severed.**

Q: The monk?

**#15N: In the past in Tibet. [We] just about met when I went in '84.**

Q: He's passed away?

00:12:06

**#15N: Yes in Tibet.**

Q: The Chinese severed his hand?

**#15N: [He] is no more, has passed away.**

Q: What was the name?

**#15N: [He] was only released in '84 from the prison in Sera.**

Q: Which prison?

**#15N: In Tibet.**

Q: The prison's name?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: What's the name of the prison?

**#15N: The lama? [He] was called Soktrul Rinpoche, Soktrul Rinpoche. The *ladang* 'grand lama's residence' was called Sok Ladang. [He] has passed away, is no more.**

Q: What's the name of the Chinese prison?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: The name of the prison?

**#15N: Prison?**

Q: The prison's name?

**#15N: The prison? Sera Prison.**

Q: Sera Prison.

**#15N: Sera's in Lhasa. The Sera Prison was the worst.**

Q: The six members belonged to your family?

**#15N: Yes, my family members. [The late Soktrul Rinpoche] was my maternal uncle's son. That is the previous incarnation. If [he] takes rebirth presently [he] will not be related to me. When the previous incarnation was released from the Sera prison, [he] stayed for a few months in the monastery and then passed away. [He] was ordered to get married but refused. [He] was ordered to smoke but refused. [He] was taught to do different things but refused. [He] was very weak and was released only in '84. After a few months in the monastery, [he] passed away and is no more.**

Q: Where did you live in Tibet?

00:14:16

**#15N: Me? I lived in Drikungnang, a little further away from Metogongkar. There was a large monastery called Drikung The.**

Q: Drikung?

**#15N: Drikung The.**

Q: Drikung The?

**#15N: There is the Drikung Kyabgon in Dehradun, who is the lama of our monastery, Drikung The. We are not monks of the monastery but lay people. Drikungnang, you can mention it as Drikungnang. Drikung The.**

Q: How close to Lhasa was your village?

**#15N: It is a day's journey these days if one drives a small vehicle. If one left for the monastery at around 8 o'clock, one could return to Lhasa by 4-5 o'clock after eating, circumambulating the monastery and spending some time in the relative's home. It would take around two days to go on foot.**

Q: When you say by road, do you mean walking on the road or do you mean taking a vehicle?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Vehicle, taking a vehicle. I'm sorry.

Q: What kind of vehicle would you take?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, no, these days.

Q: Oh. So you were a young woman when...you were a woman before you left China, I mean before you left Tibet. How did you spend your days before you left Tibet? What did you do? What kind of work did you do?

00:16:29

**#15N: Being the child of a taxpayer, there was no work. I was young then. Being farmers, I engaged in farm work, fetching wood, farm work and spinning wool. There was not any other work besides these activities. During summertime there was work in the fields and during winter fetching wood or farm work. If the government imposed any [labor] tax, one was obliged to do so being a taxpayer. One also herded animals.**

Q: You said that you grew up in a taxpayer's farm. Did your family own that land?

**#15N: By *telpa*, it means that our family was obliged to pay tax to the Tibetan Government. There were many such families. Our family was called Pongsang and the family was obliged to pay tax to the Tibetan Government and also to perform *wulak* 'labor tax.' [A taxpayer] must perform *wulak* by transporting things to Kham and to Lhasa on horses with additional labor from men as well. That is a *telpa*. We were...what to say...of the Tibetan Government. People here do not understand what is a *telpa*.**

Q: One must pay tax to the government?

**#15N: One must pay tax to the government. When Tibet was independent, there were soldiers being deployed to Kham. [Taxpayers] must supply horses, men to transport things to the destination and then bring back stuff to be reached to Metogongkar or to Dechen. [Taxpayers] must do such things. You also owned lands and had rights.**

Q: The tax to the government was the grain that you had harvested and you had to give part of it to them?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Part of it to them and to the army like it's related with...

Q: So how much of your crop could you keep?

00:19:42

**#15N: The harvest from the fields was for your consumption and need not be paid to the Tibetan government. You cultivated the area of land that was specially provided called *telshing* 'tax payer's land.' You cultivated it and you consumed the harvest. It need not be given to the Tibetan Government.**

**What [we paid] to the Tibetan Government was in the form of horses and men at the time troops were deployed to Kham or returned from Kham. If horses were required, [the taxpayer] supplied horses; if yaks were required [the tax payer] provided yaks to transport supplies. The Tibetan Government dispatched supplies to Kham or brought stuff from Kham to be unloaded in Lhasa. [The tax payer] provided animals, horses or men for a distance of 2-3 days journey. Other than that grains need not be given.**

Q: So did your family own your animals or did the government own them?

**#15N: Animals? [We] had [animals].**

Q: Did you own them or the government?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: Did the government own them?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: Did the Tibetan Government own [the animals]?

**#15N: No, no. [The animals] were yours and not the Tibetan Government's. [They] were yours. Whatever the number of animals, you took care and the Tibetan Government did not provide animals. [Providing transport animals as] tax was the only [obligation].**

Q: So how did you buy animals? What did you use to buy the animals?

00:22:02

**#15N: The animals were there since [I] was little and [I] do not know how [they] were purchased. A few were bought from the nomads in the north and then they multiplied. If you needed to buy, nomads came to sell from the north. The nomads lived far away in the Changthang 'Northern Plateau.' You bought [from them].**

Q: Right, they give birth.

**#15N: You gave them [nomads] grains and in return got salt, butter and animals. Such was done. Wheat and such was given.**

Q: How many animals did you have?

**#15N: [We] owned around 50-60 animals, not more than that. There were goats, sheep, *dri* ‘female yaks,’ and yaks.**

Q: Earlier you said...I thought I heard you say that your family was wealthy at one time but then you said your father was poor. So was your family rich or poor?

00:23:50

**#15N: [The family] was among the rich in the past.**

Q: Later after the appearance of the Chinese, the Chinese...

**#15N: ...destroyed it. The Pongsang [family], we had a three-storied house. This was demolished and on the site the Chinese had created [living area for] 13 families, 13 families.**

Q: For how many families?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Thirteen.

Q: Could you please tell us about your memories of when the Chinese came to your home and what happened to you and your family?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: Do [you] remember the Chinese coming?

**#15N: [I] do remember. [The Chinese] came and...**

Q: Please talk about that.

**#15N: [The Chinese] came and...**

Q: Please talk about what happened to your family.

**#15N: It was said, “The Chinese have come. [The Chinese] have come.” [I] did not know what and how being young in age then. There was fear and people remarked, “What could it be? What could it be?” Nobody guessed they would occupy and destroy the country. Nobody knew in the beginning.**

Q: How old were you when the Chinese first came?

00:25:44

**#15N: How old would I have been then? Perhaps 15-16, [I] must have been about so or maybe in the 20s. Must have been around that but [I] cannot recall correctly.**

Q: You remember your cousin the Rinpoche being captured and your brother being captured.

**#15N: Yes, the elder sibling was called Sonam Bakto. He was imprisoned and was killed in the prison and is no more. [He] did not even get to come out of prison. My paternal uncle was together with him. The paternal uncle was father's younger sibling and is no more.**

Q: Were they both killed in prison?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: Were they both killed?

**#15N: Both are no more.**

Q: Did you see them being taken away to prison?

00:27:14

**#15N: I did not see for I had already left. [The Chinese] ordered them to do this and that and tried to make [them] obey but they would not submit. Thus [they] were captured and taken away. They would not submit, would not submit. When the Chinese issued orders to do this and that they would not accept. Thus [they] were put in prison and rendered no more. [They] were killed by excessive beatings and are no more.**

Q: What were they accused of?

**#15N: The reason for being put in prison was that [they] would not obey their [the Chinese] orders. When [they] did not obey [they] were put in prison. [They] would not surrender when told to do so. They [the Chinese] ordered that they denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama, denounce the Tibetan Government and do various acts, which [they] would not obey. When ordered to marry, [they] refused to do so. They were monks. When [they] did not obey such orders, they were interned.**

[Winces]

Q: Are you okay?

**#15N: [I] have knee pain.**

Q: Are you all right?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: So you were about 30 when you left Tibet. Had you married in Tibet?

00:29:31

**#15N: Yes, 30.**

Q: Had you married?

**#15N: [I] was not married in Tibet. I wanted to become a nun but could not do so. I did not want to marry but after coming to India I met a man at work who was from Tiwu. He has passed away. We were *lendha* ‘same age.’**

Q: *Lendha* meaning same age?

**#15N: Yes. Yes?**

Q: *Lendha* meaning?

**#15N: *Lendha* meaning he was 61 years old and I was 61 years old and we were both in the *kag* ‘barrier year.’ [He] passed away during the *kag* at 61. [We] married after coming to India. There was no wedding as such but we just met [and lived together]. [We] met at the work place.**

Q: So can you tell us about how you left Tibet? How you came into exile?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: Please talk about how [you] came into exile?

**#15N: When [I] first arrived here?**

Q: Yes.

00:30:57

**#15N: At the time of coming, we were...there were three *geshe*, monks from Sera and lay people, many people from Ladakh. Those from Ladakh were not stopped but we were. My relatives paid a person from Dromo to take me. [I] was brought through a forest, smuggled.**

Q: Can you explain who these people are who are...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Laymen from Ladakh region.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And the other people?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sera *geshe*.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What are they?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They are like *geshe*. *Geshe* is a doctorate degree holder, a high lama. So three of them were with her along with other laymen from Ladakh region.

Q: And you paid the laymen? Did you pay the laymen to help you go into exile?

**#15N: The one that brought [me] was paid money. Besides money...in the past [I] possessed a necklace of real *dzi* ‘special beads made of agate stone’ and corals, real corals of this length [indicates chest level]. [I] gave that, money and a rosary of corals as payment and was brought to the Indian border.**

00:33:06

**When a person is in fear, one does not have any feeling or any value for possessions. There was just the dread that you could be caught and killed.**

Q: I understand. Were you the only one from your family who went to Ladakh or did a group of your family members go together?

**#15N: There were no family members. My family members were not there. There were monk companions that did not hail from [my] hometown. Later they went to their respective monasteries and [I] have no idea where [they] are.**

00:34:13

**What I did while living in India was...soon after we arrived, His Holiness the Dalai Lama came. Once His Holiness the Dalai Lama arrived, the Indian Government accepted and established nursery schools and such. I worked as a foster mother in a nursery school in Shimla, a government foster mother for children. There were two nursery schools in Shimla. I served as the foster mother of Sterling Castle.**

Q: What?

**#15N: It was called Sterling Castle where I served as a foster mother.**

Q: Sterling?

**#15N: There was one called Sterling Castle and another one. [I] was there for a short while but did not stay long. There was our English director who was like her [interviewer]. The director was changed. The earlier one was very good while the successor was very short tempered. So the cook, cook’s helper, foster mothers, all were changed. Then [I] had nowhere to go and went to work as a coolie constructing roads. It was very difficult then having to look after very little children. Then I worked in a hospital...**

Q: What business did [you] do?

00:36:09

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: Did [you] do some business later, after serving as foster mother?

**#15N: After serving as a foster mother, [I] went to work as a coolie constructing roads.**

**A foster mother's salary then was five *rupees* per month. One was provided with food. It was a nursery school.**

Q: At that time was four *rupees* a month considered a lot of money?

**#15N: Five *rupees*, five Indian *rupees* it was then. It was not foreign money. It was Indian *rupees*. However, it was good. Money had a lot of value then. One could find something to eat for four *annas* 'quarter of a *rupee*' or eight *annas* 'half a *rupee*.' A cup of tea cost four *annas* then.**

Q: You must have been very disappointed when the school closed.

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: You must have been very disappointed when the school closed.

00:37:43

**#15N: The nursery school did not close. The foster mothers were changed. When the English director changed, the latter one was short tempered and dangerous. Hence, most of the old [employees] did not remain and new ones were recruited, new ones were recruited. Someone called Rongchong, Chadhampa Ogyen-*la* and the likes were recruited. Cook, cook's helper, everyone was changed, did not remain.**

Q: You decided to leave the job or they fired you?

**#15N: I left. It was not me alone; all of us left, the cook, cook's helper, everyone.**

Q: Why did you decide to leave?

**#15N: Because the *ama-la* 'respectful term for mother' was short tempered and [we] did not get along. Then we left and went to work as road crew. One was free to go anywhere then. [We] were allowed to leave. Then the Tibetan Government established camps. [I] stayed in the camp for three years. Then [I] was sent to a settlement, the settlement in Bir. [I] was sent there by the government, the Tibetan Government. [I] was in the Bir Settlement but there was no income; there were no farmlands.**

Q: So when you were working as the foster mother, how old were the children?

00:40:42

**#15N: The children there were aged 3, 4, 2, and some were even a year old that were left there. The parents had fled [from Tibet] and left [the children there]. [Some of the children] could not even sit properly and it was very difficult. I was working in the hospital and there were only three of us. There was a nurse called Kusho Dolma Youdon-*la* who was the niece of Kundeling Datsa. Dolma Youdon-*la* has gone abroad. There was I and**

**another lady. If there were many children, all the sick children were brought there and it was very difficult. [The children] would not sit up and it was difficult while feeding. When the number of children decreased it was okay.**

Q: How many children were there?

**#15N: There might have been around 50-odd children. Sometimes the parents picked up some of the older ones. Otherwise, with nowhere to go or stay and having to work, they had nowhere to leave the children. That is why [the children] were left there.**

**[The building] was four-stories and there were beds everywhere in threes, three here, three here and three here [moves hand around room]. Each week one foster mother was required to stay up the whole night. One could not sleep the whole night. If [I] went up, someone cried from below and then after sometime someone from below cried. [I] moved one [child], took another to the toilet and then another...[I] could not sleep the entire night.**

00:43:14

**The food was good.**

**The food was good for all the management team was English. [They] provided bulgur gruel. [Laughs] The food was good.**

Q: Good. What else did you have to do as a foster mother? You mentioned you had to change diapers.

**#15N: There was not any other work except caring for the children. [The job entailed] taking care of the children, cleaning the children, providing medical treatment and washing their clothes at times. A lot of washing was not required. Except for doing these, there were not any other tasks. In the kitchen were the cook and helpers and everyone. There was no time to rest for the children do not sit still. [We] had to feed the children and [they] refuse to eat.**

Q: Did you enjoy this work?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: Did you enjoy this work?

00:44:42

**#15N: I enjoyed working for the government. It is good and not bad to work for the government but one was unable to do so. [I] felt happy. There are some people who engage in corruption but we have never done that. There was not any other thought but of serving the government and carrying out its orders like going up when ordered to do so and going down when ordered to do so. There are other Old Age Homes to seek admission but since this is a government one, [I] am here. Other than that, [I] have not indulged in malpractice like corruption. There are some who engage in corruption. Being able to work for the government is the best.**

Q: Why was that? Why were you happy to serve the Tibetan Government?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because this all are run by the Tibetan government. This foster home, everything is for the Tibetan people.

Q: So this school, this foster care place was in India in a Tibetan settlement camp and it was run by the Tibetan Government.

**#15N: Yes, in India in the place called Shimla, Shimla. There was a nursery school called Sterling Castle and another called Summer Hill in Shimla. I was in Summer Hill. There were two.**

00:46:34

**His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited our nursery school in Shimla. During the visit, His Holiness was sitting on the throne there. We were in a row along with all the school children. I was carrying a little child and Kusho Dolma Youdon-la who was the nurse was holding another child. There is a picture and it must be with the Home Department. There is a picture.**

Q: I know that working with little children is hard work. How was it working building roads?

**#15N: Building roads?**

Q: Yes.

**#15N: That was difficult. It was difficult and the salary was meager. [I] faced problems with survival. Then the government formed camps but even then the work of building roads was the same.**

Q: How much did you get paid?

00:48:33

**#15N: The salary was not much. The women received...how much was it? As coolies in Shimla the women received two *rupees* and eight *annas* a day, two *rupees* and eight *annas*.**

Q: For men?

**#15N: For men it was three *rupees*, an additional eight *annas*.**

Q: Okay now. Were they Tibetan *rupees* or were they Indian *rupees*?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: Indian *rupees*?

**#15N: Yes, Indian *rupees*.**

Q: That was per day?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: That was per day?

**#15N: Yes, per day.**

Q: Then you said you earned four *rupees* a month as a foster mother.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: This is for road construction.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I know but I thought she...

Q: Didn't you say that you...if you earned...did you earn more building roads than when you were a foster mother or less?

**#15N: Yes?**

Q: The salary you earned as a foster mother...

00:50:06

**#15N: As a foster mother it was five *rupees* a month.**

Q: So that's a lot less.

**#15N: Five Indian *rupees*.**

Q: 2.8 *rupees* a day as opposed to five *rupees* a month.

**#15N: The road building was for the Indian Government. The camp was established by the Tibetan Government. Camp means to stay together in tents pitched on an empty land. There was an officer from the Tibetan Government. Later the government dispatched officers from Dharamsala to the camp to take photographs and select boys and girls to be sent to settlements. The boys were sent to train in a blanket-making factory in Delhi and the girls to work in beauty parlors.**

**When they returned we were sent to a settlement, to Bir Settlement. There was no farmland in Bir Settlement, no revenue. Then some went to sell sweaters during wintertime by borrowing money from others. One had to live on the little profit during summer, which was not sufficient. Then we went to Shillong, to Shillong in Assam. [We] did some petty business in Shillong, in second-hand clothes that came from Bangladesh. One could earn a little more money. Later in the year '84 I went to Tibet to meet relatives.**

Q: The question is, as a foster mother you earned five *rupees* a month and while building roads...

00:52:05

**#15N: Two rupees and eight annas.**

Q: ...in one day.

**#15N: Yes, in a day.**

Q: So in a month [you] make more money building roads.

**#15N: Yes. That is how it was because road building is a more difficult task. The money for the road building is from the Indian Government while the foster mother's [salary] is from donations and not from the government.**

Q: Why did the men get paid more than the women building roads?

00:53:09

**#15N: The men get eight annas more.**

Q: Why was it so? Why were men paid more?

**#15N: Only eight annas [more]. They receive three rupees while it was two and eight annas for us.**

Q: Why was it so?

**#15N: Two and half [rupees for women] and three [rupees] for them.**

Q: That's right but why were the men paid more than the women?

**#15N: [I] do not know. That is how it was paid. [Smiles]**

Q: Tell us about the work that you had to do building the roads.

**#15N: The men dug the earth and rocks, and we women pushed, heaved and cleaned. It was not required [of us] to carry on the back.**

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your life in Tibet?

00:54:43

**#15N: The experience while living in Tibet, which is your country is that though there was not any work connected to soil and rocks, one engaged in farming and wool work. One wove wool to make *nambu* 'woolen cloth' that was used to make clothes. There was spinning wool, weaving *nambu* and chanting prayers. Other than that in Tibet one need not dig the earth or pull out rocks, as there were no vehicles or trains; [people] were like nomads then. One herded animals and such.**

**One must weave *nambu* [looks at dress] and spin wool.**

Q: Anything else you'd like to tell us about your life in Tibet?

**#15N: There is nothing else to tell. What to say?**

Q: Anything [you] can recall as a child?

**#15N: That is about living in Tibet, paying taxes and doing farming when there was no [labor] tax. One was happy then, living a carefree life. During autumn one worked in the fields but in the summertime except for watching the fields, there was not much to do because in our region it was not necessary to irrigate the fields. It was...[not discernible]. The work was not very difficult.**

00:56:37

**Day and night [I] think about and hope that His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives long and the Tibetan Government regains freedom. [I] feel extremely sad that [I] will die, die in a foreign country before Tibet regains freedom. [To interpreter] Please tell [the interviewer] this.**

**The United Nations, everybody, the foreign countries, private individuals...there are foreign individuals, organizations and the United Nations and everybody that are helping the Tibetan Government and Tibetans. [I] wish to say thank you. However, still...in particular the United Nations, other organizations and private individuals whoever they maybe, all those that are helping us Tibetans, [I] would like to say thank you and to please support more strongly so that a solution is reached.**

**Before Tibet regains freedom all the people have become old and the children have gone abroad. [The children] learn the foreign way of life and have not much knowledge about the Tibetan ways. It makes one sad. I would be happy if there is more support and if His Holiness the Dalai Lama can go to Tibet. If His Holiness cannot go a few of us going makes no difference. I have relatives in Tibet who ask me to return but I do not feel like going back. If His Holiness cannot why should we go? We left in '59 and our view and theirs is different. It is not possible. [To interpreter] Please translate this.**

00:059:58

**I participated in a peace march.**

[Interviewee holds up a certificate]

Q: For how long did you go on the march?

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: So I'm going to ask you those two questions again from the beginning.

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

**#15N: If the Chinese come to know of it and if one were to go to Tibet, the Chinese will cause problems. [The Chinese] will know, they will know instantly. There are many shepherds around here. There are many secret agents around here. There are many of their moles here. It is not possible that there cannot be because this is Nepal. There are. [The Chinese] come to know immediately what each one has done and will arrest. However, I am not going to Tibet and [the Chinese] cannot arrest [me] immediately.**

Q: Can we use your real name?

**#15N: Yes, [you] can. It is okay.**

Q: Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much...

**#15N: *Tashi Delek* ‘Good Luck.’**

Q: ...for giving your time.

END OF INTERVIEW