

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #5M – Pasang Dhondup
April 5, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #5M
2. Interviewee: Pasang Dhondup
3. Age: 82
4. Date of Birth: 1928
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Kharten
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 5, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 37 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

When he was 10 years old, Pasang Dhondup started grazing animals. He describes a typical day in the life of a shepherd. His family's main occupation was farming and rearing animals. He briefly touches upon the subject of marriage in a Tibetan family and his own marriage. He also talks about the tradition of admitting one male child to the monastery as a form of tax from every family.

After the Chinese invasion Pasang Dhondup worked as a transporter of Chinese provisions, as directed by them. The people of his village supplied yaks, horses and men for the Chinese. Passang Dhondup talks about how the Chinese killed wild animals for food, which the Tibetans had never killed due to Tibetan laws.

Pasang Dhondup's entire village escaped from Tibet together, but they were nearly forced to return home when a Tibetan "spy" for the Chinese reported their journey. The escape route crossed five mountain passes and brought them a month later to Mustang in Nepal. Later Passang Dhondup was sent to Manali, India to construct mountain roads and finally settled in Mundgod.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, herding, life under Chinese rule, forced labor, oppression under Chinese, environment/wildlife, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #5M

Interviewee: Pasang Dhondup

Age: 82, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 5, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:17

Interviewee #5M: Pasang Dhondup.

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?

#5M: With due thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, you are using this history for peace to reign in the world. We are refugees [whose country] has been invaded by China. As requested by His Holiness, you are lending us your support and help, so that we might get back our country. You are doing this to help us and not to harm us. Of course, you can use it.

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

00:02:10

#5M: Do not mention it.

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

#5M: Okay. You do not have to stop. I do not know about you, but I will answer you truthfully and there is no reason for you not to trust me. We trust each other, right? If someone speaks not in a direct manner or if both the sides do that, then it might not work. You are doing this in good faith and I should speak honestly.

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

00:03:14

#5M: Okay. I cannot say that I will not answer a question you pose to me beforehand.

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

#5M: If this were shown in China, when it comes to the issue of Tibet, the Chinese will be happy and we will be sad. They speak nothing but bad [about Tibet]. For the Tibetans, we consider what you are doing as supporting the cause of Tibet.

Q: Is it okay to show it?

00:04:08

#5M: Of course, you can show it.

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in the project.

#5M: [Smiles]

Q: Where did you grow up in Tibet?

00:04:37

#5M: Tibet is divided into three groups, namely Thoe Ngari Kor Sum, Bhar Utsang Ru Shi and Mey Dhokham Gangdrug. My village was located not in the upper region of Thoe nor in the lower area of Mey. It was situated in the Bhar 'middle.'

Q: What is the name of the village?

#5M: There were two clusters in my village. The part where I lived was called Kharlung or Kharten and the other was called Lungten. We lived together as a community.

Q: What did your family do for a livelihood?

00:05:44

#5M: The livelihood was farming and we also possessed sheep, goats, *dri* 'female yaks,' yaks and horses. The number of cattle varied depending on one's economic position. That was how we lived. The strength of cattle differed from family to family according to their economic position. That was how we were established.

Q: And how many people were in your family?

#5M: Initially there were my parents and two children: a daughter and [a son]. But that was not for long because my father passed away when I was 13 years old. Then my mother also passed away. There was just me and another child, who lives in Lo [Mustang] - I do not know if he is alive or not – and a monk who is also dead. So I am the only survivor.

Q: Your parents had two children?

00:07:07

#5M: There was a monk [son], a daughter and two sons. *Bhu-sum bharpa* 'three sons, the middle one' and *Bhu nyi chungwa* 'two sons, the younger one' meaning the younger son became a monk [in a family of two sons] and in the case of a family with three sons, the middle son became a monk. If there was just one son, he could not join [monkhood].

Q: So there were three sons and a daughter in the family?

#5M: Yes, that is right.

Q: As a child, how did you spend your days when you were about 10 or 11?

00:08:21

#5M: At the age of 10 or 11 years, if a child could not till the land, he looked after the *dri* and yaks. One could also graze the sheep and goats.

Q: What did you do?

#5M: When I was small, I used to work as a shepherd and also tended the yaks. My mother provided me with food.

Q: Would you go out everyday or did you go away for a couple of days at a time?

00:09:06

#5M: At about dusk the animals were brought back - their calves were tethered at home - and some of them were milked. The *dri* were milked in the morning around 7 or 8 o'clock. The goats and sheep returned around noon and then they were milked.

Q: The goats and sheep were milked in the afternoon while the *dri* in the morning and evening?

#5M: Yes, that is right.

Q: When you think of your childhood, what are some of the memories you have of your childhood?

00:10:16

#5M: If I thought about my childhood, I had my duties from the age of 8. I used to graze the lambs and kids. After their mothers were milked, they were let loose to join their mothers for about two hours. And then we had to separate the lambs and kids from their mothers. They were put in separate enclosures.

Q: Were you ever sent to school during your childhood?

#5M: [Shuts eyes and makes a negative sign] If they wished to send me to school, [my parents] would have to be in a sound economic position to keep a servant and pay his wages, which they were not able to. So in the household, the older people did their duties and the younger ones carried out their responsibilities. There were no schools.

[One of the sons] was a monk at the Zonka Chodhe Monastery. He was the middle son among three sons and became a monk at the Zonka Chodhe Monastery [now relocated] in Bylakuppe. In my village, the District Administration and the Zonka Chodhe Monastery were located face to face.

Q: When you were talking about taking care of the animals, how many animals did your family own?

00:12:47

#5M: We owned about 100 *mamoo*, around 30 goats for their milk, 13-14 *dri* and 15 yaks. Besides these, there were the offspring of the animals.

Q: What is a *mamoo*?

#5M: We owned about a hundred *mamoo*.

Q: What is a *mamoo*?

00:13:15

#5M: The animal which we milk and which goes “baa, baa.” [Laughs]

Q: Is that a cow?

#5M: No, they are sheep. They are known as *bakra* and *bakri* in Hindi. We call them *luk* 'sheep.'

Q: Were you considered a poor family, a middle class or a wealthy family?

00:14:02

#5M: I was among the weaker ones. I was neither among the top nor among the poorest of the poor. We were somewhat okay. The wealthy [families] owned 1,000 sheep, 100 yaks and 100 *dri*. They were beyond counting. After the Chinese occupation, everyone escaped with just an empty cup.

Q: When your father died, what was the cause of his death; when you were a child at 11?

#5M: My father was fairly old. He suffered from jaundice and passed away very soon. There was a good doctor who treated him with medicines, but he did not recover. Once your time comes, nothing can be done.

Q: Did your mother ever remarry?

00:15:30

#5M: She lived for many years after that. She did not marry again. She had us, her children and then you get older.

Q: Do you have any memories of your childhood that were scary or exciting or dangerous?

#5M: When you are a young child, your parents provide you with food. However, we had to run errands like gathering firewood. There was no scarcity of food.

Q: Did you experience anything scary?

00:16:28

#5M: No, I did not. I did not need to fear anything when my loving parents were with me.

Q: In the family, were you the oldest or the middle son? What was your position?

#5M: I was the youngest. The middle one was sent to become a monk. That was a form of tax to the Zonka Chodhe.

Q: The monastery received your brother as a form of tax from the family?

00:17:49

#5M: Yes, that was the monk tax. Zonka Chodhe was the monastery where we used to go to practice the dharma. So we had to remit a monk tax. If a family had three sons, the middle son was offered. If there were only two sons, the younger one was sent. That was an obligation. A son was sent at the age of 8 to become a monk at the monastery.

Q: What did the families think about paying a monk tax?

#5M: The families did not have any opinions about that. One joined Zonka Chodhe at the age of 8 and shaved his head, which is the hair offering of a monk as propagated by the Lord Buddha. A full set of monk's robes was provided and if the parents were rich enough, they would also provide him with some food. In case they were poor, he would be sent there with just the set of robes.

Q: Who provided the robes?

00:19:35

#5M: Initially the parents got the set of robes ready. A teacher was found for the child and a payment was made to him. Later he took care of the child's needs and taught him the dharma.

Q: Who paid for the teacher?

#5M: [A learned monk] was requested to become a teacher for their son and payments were made to him in the form of butter, cheese, robes and money. However, that need not be repeated. The parents made the offering only once. I do not know how much it was since I was young at that time. The parents had to provide a full set of monk's robes including a pair of *zompa* 'hand-made boots.'

Q: Did your brother want to be a monk?

00:21:31

#5M: The middle brother did not wish to be a monk but that was a form of tax, a law. It was obligatory to keep a son as a monk at Zonka Chodhe. The central monastery was Sera Monastery in Tibet [Lhasa] and an abbot was sent [to Zonka Chodhe] from Sera. The abbot's tenure was three years. We were forced to keep [a son in the monastery].

Q: Your brother, if he didn't want to become a monk; was he given a choice and could another brother go in his place?

#5M: You could not do that. For example, the family sent him to the monastery to become a monk. In case he did not wish to remain a monk and got himself a woman and ran away, there was nothing to be said either to him or the family. Otherwise the family would have to remit a huge amount of money as monk tax. That was the law. If money was paid in lieu of a monk, he could live at home or anywhere he wished. It was compulsory to pay the tax [either giving a son as monk or a huge sum of money]. It was very difficult.

Q: Did the monks do any agriculture or have any sheep or animals of their own?

00:23:51

#5M: The monastery was not a weak one. It has now been relocated in Bylakuppe [a Tibetan settlement in south India]. It used to own *dri*, yaks and sheep. Zonga Chodhe was very rich.

Q: Did it own land?

#5M: It owned land. It had everything.

Q: Did you ever want to be a monk yourself?

00:24:38

#5M: He might not have wished as he was only 8 years old then. He would not be able to voice his wishes.

Q: Did you ever want to be a monk yourself?

#5M: Me?

Q: Yes.

00:24:47

#5M: I did not want to be a monk. How can I when I was younger than him? [Laughs]

Q: What did you want to become when you grew up?

#5M: When you come of age like when you reach the age of 18, 19 or 20, you love someone around the neighborhood and she loves you back and then you decide to go with your lover.

If you had rich parents, they would approach families living [in a village situated] at a distance from here to Hubli [40 miles] and seek the hand of their daughter for marriage. Some people [from the bridegroom's side] go to bring home the bride. She would be dressed grandly and accompanied by escorts and bridesmaids. Things were done in a grand fashion. The marriage function would go on for four to five days. People sang songs

and danced. There were such rich people in my village. The Chinese made them [poor]. In a way the Chinese are beneficial as we live happily these days.

Q: You mentioned that when one reaches 18, 19 or 20, one falls in love and gets married. Are you talking about your marriage?

00:26:39

#5M: In my case, there is nothing much to talk about the marriage. If both the sides were poor, it was not necessary to have a marriage celebration.

Q: Are you talking about your experience?

#5M: Yes, I am.

Q: Did you get married?

00:26:55

#5M: I did not have a marriage [celebration]. We met and fell in love. Her parents and mine spoke about it. It happened that way.

Q: What happened to you? [How did you meet your wife? How did it happen?]

#5M: My wife and I were neighbors. My wife is here with me.

Q: We are talking about the period in Tibet.

00:27:35

#5M: We did not have a marriage [celebration] as such. They gave us [the bride] and we received her. We ate our food, did our work and that's how we lived.

Q: Was your marriage arranged by your parents?

#5M: Yes. My late mother spoke to her parents. We were close neighbors and wished to form a relationship. So the parents spoke among themselves and that's how it happened. However, there was nothing grand about it, not because we could not do it but survival was difficult.

Q: How did you feel about marrying this daughter of your neighbors?

00:28:43

#5M: She came to live with me in my home. Later my mother passed away. Then my sister also expired. It was just me and my wife. We owned quite a number of animals but when the Chinese arrived, we had to leave some behind and some we sold on the escape journey. That's how we came. Other than that I have not experienced any difficulties. We only had one child.

Q: Tell me what happened when the Chinese arrived?

#5M: If I were to tell you what happened when the Chinese arrived—there were two clusters in our village, Khaten and Lungten. We were told that the Chinese were arriving from Dhingri and Ponglung. The Chinese said that we should make available yaks and eight horses along with 20 people. So we were forced to go with the yaks and horses.

They came from Dhingri and Ponglung and blocked all the roads. They camped for a few days before crossing a mountain pass on the way to Zonga. Their food was the meat of wild asses. In the evening, they sent us to deliver a letter to their army camp [which was located] further away. We traveled in the dark, shouting on our way while the Chinese fired guns. We delivered the letter and they gave us a cigarette and told us to leave. We slept peacefully the whole day.

Then vehicles arrived and we, along with the animals were told to assemble. There were innumerable vehicles bearing food provisions and other things. We were to load these on our animals and carry them over the mountain pass to Zonga. We delivered the provisions at Zonga and then about 40 soldieries arrived there. Our leader, a lama, was at the Zonga District office.

The monastery and the District office were located facing each other. The Chinese raised [their] flags over Zonga Chodhe and the Zonga District. They lived there and told us that we could leave with our yaks and horses. So we prepared to leave.

There was a Tibetan man living with the Chinese at Zonga who was sort of a mediator between us and the Chinese. We relayed [through him] that we would return after a week. So we were granted leave for a week. So we left the very next day—except for driving our yaks and horses, we did not have much to carry. Whatever provisions each of us carried would be shared on the way. However, we could not cover much ground in a day.

00:36:57-00:35:36

[Interpreter seeks clarification regarding above story from interviewee as elder's speech is indistinct.]

Q: What did you take on the yaks?

#5M: Rice, *bhakpe*, *martsa*, tea and all kinds of food items.

Q: What is *bhakpe*?

00:36:39

#5M: *Tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' [and] everything was there. Meat was also transported. Truckloads arrived bearing meat of antelopes, blue sheep and other wild animals that they had killed. And we had to transport these.

Q: What kind of animals had the Chinese killed?

#5M: Wild asses, blue sheep and whatever animal they could lay their hands on.

Q: So they were wild animals and not farm animals they had killed?

00:38:00

#5M: They had not killed domestic animals. However, those people who were engaged in building roads at Nangapuri, Dhingri and Nyelam, when they felt like eating meat, on the pretext of asking our villagers to sell them yaks, killed one or two. We were helpless as they were stronger. They were like Chinese.

Q: Were those engaged in road building Tibetans or Chinese?

#5M: They were all Tibetans. Roads were being constructed from Dhingri to Nangapuri to Nyelam, even when the ground was frozen in winter. They were very domineering. They told us to bring our yaks to carry their stuff and then two men on either side [of the yak] took down the load and drove them away [to be killed]. They were not like Tibetans but demons. Days passed that way real quick.

Q: In those days, can you name the kinds of animals that were in the mountains around you? Were they very few or very plentiful?

00:39:54

#5M: They killed all the wild animals that they sighted.

Q: What kinds of wild animals have you seen in Tibet?

#5M: Oh, there were wild asses, blue sheep, deer, gazelles and all kinds. There were none that were absent. We never ate them. They were there in swarms.

Q: Why did the Tibetans not eat these wild animals?

00:40:41

#5M: We never killed them. It was the law that we could not kill wild animals like tigers and leopards. We never killed nor ate them. Perhaps the beggars stealthily killed one or two. The law forbade killing them.

Q: What was the purpose of the law?

#5M: That was a law, which was passed from Lhasa. Lhasa was the center to pursue any kind of legal matters. The law banned the killing of wild animals. Nobody killed them. They covered the region [points upwards to indicate mountains] and did not fear humans. Nobody ever killed them. Nobody even attempted to kill them. Maybe some beggars who went begging here and there killed one or two. They could not be controlled. Otherwise, no one ever killed or ate them.

Q: Did these animals begin to disappear if the Chinese were killing them?

00:42:24

#5M: When the Chinese appeared, we were with them for around 26 days or less than a month. The Chinese arrived at Zonga and by then, we left [for our village]. Earlier they set up tents and killed wild asses, cut them up and cooked the meat. We saw them eat the meat, one person at a time. We did not eat that way.

Q: Before you escaped, did anything else happen to you because of the Chinese invasion?

#5M: Before our escape, we heard that the Chinese had arrived in Lhasa and we were filled with anxiety that we would suffer greatly and that the situation would not be in our favor. But, we were helpless.

Q: How far away was your village from Lhasa?

00:44:00

#5M: It is very far away from Lhasa. I heard it [Lhasa] is far away, though I do not know. I heard it takes 15 days on horseback. So that is far, right?

Q: How many people were in your village?

#5M: There were around 25 houses in each cluster and 50 in total.

Q: How many people were in your village?

00:44:51

#5M: There were 9-10 members in the larger families, 7-8 in some families and 2-3 or even one in other families. The numbers differed [from family to family].

Q: Were you ever arrested by the Chinese?

#5M: We had to serve the Chinese, but at that time they would not arrest us as we placed our horses and yaks at their disposal. Besides that, we also had to load and unload their provisions. They even asked us to eat and when we did not, they did not like it. But we would not eat Chinese food, however bad the situation.

There were no arrests and beatings but we had to work for them. Just like if I was a leader and I needed my people to work for me, I would not kill or beat them. It was similar to that.

Q: What if you refused to work for the Chinese or refused to help them? What would happen?

00:46:50

#5M: Then what would they say? It was the case of the powerful and the powerless. They certainly would not do something good to us. If we refused to send [our animals and men], that would mean bad more than good for us.

Q: How long did you have to work for the Chinese before you escaped?

#5M: Before our escape, we were called to serve them and we worked for them for about 25-26 days; a little less than a month. It included our horses, yaks and men.

Q: You said earlier that your mother and your sister had died. What caused their death?

00:48:03

#5M: They fell ill and gradually passed away. Nothing could be done.

Q: You didn't know what they died from?

#5M: I do not know from what disease. The doctor gave them medicines. He was a very renowned doctor. They did not get better from the treatment. It was said [after studying their astrological charts] that their lives were at an end. So, they expired.

Q: At that point, you were living in your family home with your wife and did you have any children at that time?

00:48:56

#5M: Our child was born by then. He was three years old when we escaped. He had to be carried on the back.

Q: When you were forced to work for the Chinese in transporting things, what was your wife doing?

#5M: She was living at home then. She ate and slept since there was not much work to do in our village. There was not much work except spinning wool and gathering firewood and then sitting idle. The crops were sown and though we did not have rice, there were plenty of grains to eat.

Q: What prompted you to decide to escape?

00:50:20

#5M: I had a relative who was a renowned doctor and came from a wealthy family. They were good people. There were other neighbors like Phuntsok Rabten who was rich. They possessed assets and properties and enough grains to last for four to five years and their cattle numbered in tens of thousands. He said that it was not good to remain and that everyone must leave, including the poor youth. He said he would provide his yaks and tents and so we fled.

Q: Who was the person who suggested you leave?

#5M: They were the doctor and Phuntsok Rabten, who were like our leaders and very wealthy. They did not say, "You stay back. We are going;" instead they said, "It is better for us to leave together. The Chinese are certain to oppress us." They have been very kind to us, allowing us to utilize their animals and then we crossed over the mountain pass.

Q: Approximately how many people were in the escape crowd?

00:52:09

#5M: The entire population of the two clusters of our village was together, except for one or two persons. There were many people, more than a hundred. I do not know the exact figure.

Q: How did you plan your escape? Tell us about the escape.

#5M: We planned to go to Mustang [Nepal]. If we went towards the direction of Zonga, the Chinese were present there. So we traveled towards Mustang, but could not cover much ground because of the snow. There were many animals to herd along the way. So we crossed the mountain pass the next day and reached another place. Then the following day, we arrived in Bazangthingu. From there we reached the boundary of Wabchen.

The leader of Wabchen, whose name I cannot remember, was living in the innermost part of the region. The next day, the late...[does not mention name] and two relatives went to meet the leader of Wabchen to enquire how we should travel further. He [the leader of Wabchen] said, "It may be okay to hide inside the valley. I am also living in this inner region and it seems to be fine." He said that the Chinese would not do that [be oppressive] and it was fine to remain in hiding there.

That day there was a young man from our village, a trader who was on his way to Zonga along with a relative. They met him when he was traveling to Zonga. Then we carried on and reached Panglung. Everyone caught a cold and we stayed here for five days taking medications. A child from one of the families died here. We were ready to leave the next day.

The man who went to Zonga had informed the Chinese about our escape. When we were about to set off the next day with our horses already saddled, he arrived there. We knew him as we belonged to the same village and one of his relatives was also in the group. He said, "The Communist army has told you to return. I have brought a letter for you. Here it is." However, nobody took the letter nor told him that we would not go [back]. Everyone got on their horses to leave. Then he said, "Do you not believe the letter of the Communist army?" Saying this he left towards Zong Tarung.

00:56:23

Then we held a discussion, "It is not right what we are doing now. The man is sure to bring the Chinese with him. So, four or five men must go in search of him and capture him, for otherwise, he will bring the Chinese." After the discussion, four or five of us went to look for him along the river bank but could not find him. As the sun set behind the mountains, we saw him come in a cloud of dust.

In the morning we saw that he had a sword in his belt. As he came nearer, he had dropped the sword and said, "Where are you off to? I am looking for a yak but could not see him anywhere. I wonder what happened to it." As he came close, a man called Chonphel caught him by the hand and said, "You are a Chinese spy and we are taking you with us." He

replied that he was looking for his yak. A relative of mine, who had a sword this long [gestures about 2 feet in length] struck at him. It hit him on his cap and his ear. Some said, "He must be killed and cut to pieces. If we took him with us, he might escape. And then we would have to serve the Chinese with our animals. Where can we get food [to feed our family]? Shall we kill him or not?" Finally we buried him in the ground and finished him. Then we left.

When we reached there, they [the group of villagers] said that it was well done, since otherwise we would not be able to escape successfully. The late doctor said, "At a later stage, if anybody asks who the ring-leader [responsible for killing the man] was, tell them it was me. They can take me anywhere." When that man was finished, there were no Chinese to pursue us. Then gradually we continued on the journey. At a mountain top, we saw a few Chinese taking photographs and looking [through binoculars].

Later when we reached Mustang, we learned from someone that a person had reported to the Chinese that we were escaping and even described the dresses the women were wearing. However, the Chinese replied that they could not see anything and left. We were guarded by the protective deities, for otherwise they would have come to kill us. But then we were able to get away successfully. If we did not finish off that man, we would not have been able to escape.

Q: How many days was the group traveling?

01:02:25

#5M: It took us many days. On our journey to Mustang, it snowed heavily and it took us several days. There was no grass for the cattle and we had to drive them away. Then gradually, we overcame the mountain passes and made our way to Mustang. I do not know the dates.

Q: While you continued on the journey with the group, did you have any thoughts or feelings about the Tibetan man that the group had killed because they were afraid he was a spy?

#5M: Had we not killed him, we would all have been killed, since we'd have to return. He would have taken us back on orders of the Chinese. By killing him, we could extend a few days, within which we made good our escape. We were forced to kill him. Had he spoken the truth and told us, "You must go away fast as the Communist army has said [you should return] and sent a letter to this effect. It is better for you to escape," we would have trusted him.

However, he arrogantly told us to return and questioned us as to why we did not accept the letter of the Communist army. Naturally nobody would like that kind of attitude. He was running after the Chinese. We were over a hundred people and had we returned, whatever we possessed would have been seized and the people subjected to suffering. The influential would have been taken away and killed. Thanks to the Gods, we escaped that.

Q: Were you involved in the killing?

01:05:16

#5M: Yes, I was. There were many of us involved. There were five or six of us. We were forced to kill him. Had we let him go, he would have escaped [to the Chinese] and had we kept him with us, we would have to guard him. Some of his relatives protested against the killing and started crying. But when someone comes to kill you, you are forced to kill him. He should not have come. Had he not reported our escape to the authorities at Wabchen, there was no need for him to die and for us to flee in such great haste.

Q: When you were traveling in this journey, were your wife and child with you?

#5M: Yes, everyone: dog, wife, child and cattle. Some of the cattle were loaded with our stuff. One's life is so dear that we fled to save it. Otherwise considering the wealth and thousands of cattle we possessed, one could have enjoyed them for ever. However we left many of the animals behind, shut the doors and fled.

Q: What kind of things did you choose to bring?

01:07:36

#5M: We brought the silver ornaments, though we did not own much, like my wife's head dress, and clothes which were a must. The most important item was food, so we brought grains, without which we would not have *tsampa* and also meat. We journeyed along carrying these things. When we reached Mustang, we could earn by working for other people.

Q: You had such a large group of people, how did you hide from the Chinese?

#5M: The two clusters of our village jointly escaped. One man had stayed behind with the Chinese, while the men with the yaks and horses [transporting Chinese provisions] went back home. He [the one who stayed back with the Chinese] also sought leave from the Chinese and promised to return in 5 days' time. So within that time, we fled.

Q: So there was one man who stayed back at Zonga?

01:09:15

#5M: One person had to stay back with the Chinese. He requested [the Chinese authority], "Please give me leave for 4 or 5 days. I will return after that." When he came home, we set off immediately.

Q: So you fled upon his return.

#5M: Yes. We were prepared to leave at once because we had our animals ready to carry the loads. We fled the next day after his return. We traveled very slowly on the journey. Later we heard that two days after we had left, a posse of five horsemen arrived at our village. It was that bandit of a man from Wabchen who brought death upon himself and gave us trouble. He created all the problems. We killed him. Had we not done so, the 100 odd people would have to face oppression, division of wealth and the capture of the influential.

Q: Were there Chinese in your village?

01:10:30

#5M: No.

Q: There was no one to tell the Chinese that you were leaving?

#5M: He was a spy and would have reported back to the Chinese. They were awaiting his return. [In the meantime] he was killed. While they waited wondering what had happened to him, days passed by. Later the Chinese might have arrived.

Q: Why was it going to be important for him to come back to the Chinese?

01:12:02

#5M: His place of residence was Zonga.

Q: Wasn't he a resident of your village?

#5M: No, he was not from our village. He was related to some people of our village. He was a trader and lived in Zonga. His wife was a daughter of a person in Wabchen. It was time for him to go to Zonga [from Wabchen]. When our people approached the leader of Wabchen about directions to continue our journey, he had replied, "It is fine to hide inside the valley just as I am doing."

Q: That's not the point. Your village was preparing to escape and you had a person left behind at Zonga. He was one of your villagers, right?

01:13:05

#5M: He [meaning the man who was killed] was not from our village. He was not one of us. Our man was left with the Chinese because it was required that a representative of the village remain there. So the man was representing our village. He was a man from our village. He had told us, "We should escape. I will take leave and come home." So when he came home on leave, we fled.

The other man was on his way to Zonga from Wabchen. He acted as a spy, which resulted in his death. Had we not succeeded in killing him, we would have been overcome within three days. After returning [to the village] the influential would have faced capture. All the animals and men would have had to go back.

Q: What kind of things did you have to leave behind that you feel sad about?

#5M: [Makes a facial expression to indicate immense proportion] I did not own much to leave behind except grains and clothes. However, the wealthy families owned store houses filled with grains and implements made of iron and copper. The stocks would have lasted forever but they were forced to abandon them. They took away only as much as the yaks

could carry. [Laughs] That was the way of the Gods. We could escape only because of the blessings of the Buddha; otherwise we would not have succeeded.

Q: Is your wife still alive?

01:15:59

#5M: Yes. I am 82 and she is 80.

Q: Does she have the jewels she brought from Tibet?

#5M: They were not of much value and not many in quantity. We had to sell them in Mustang to buy food. When we reached Mustang, whatever jewelry we owned had to be sold. We were forced to sell since we could not remain hungry. However, there was no fear of the Chinese because Mustang and Tibet were under different leaders. Mustang was under a king, so we lived there. We were free to beg or work. We found enough to fill our stomachs.

Q: How long did the journey take from your village to Mustang?

01:17:35

#5M: Oh, it might have taken a month. As the journey progressed, the danger from the Chinese decreased. Then there was the heavy snowfall and our animals would have died crossing the pass. So we let the cattle graze where there was grass and we stayed in tents. Thanks to the Gods, nothing happened then. In that way we reached Mustang after crossing over the mountain pass. We sold whatever animals we could and ate some during the journey.

Q: Was the actual journey very difficult going over the pass? Did you have to go over many mountain passes?

#5M: We had to cross over five mountain passes.

Q: Were people able to handle the height, the altitude and the cold?

01:19:15

#5M: Right from the time we started our journey, only a child belonging to a wealthy family died. Other than him, no one died. He suffered from cold. The rest reached Mustang. Even at Mustang nobody died during the years we were there. Perhaps we stayed there for two and half years.

Q: Did you have a boy or girl child?

#5M: A boy.

Q: So your wife and son survived.

01:20:10

#5M: Yes, they reached [India].

Q: In Mustang, what did you do to survive?

#5M: At Mustang, some engaged in agriculture, the poorer ones begged, some did *la-lay* and various other kinds of work.

Q: What does *la-lay* mean?

01:20:42

#5M: *La-lay* means working with wool or spinning. Some did weaving. I engaged in tailoring, stitching whatever was asked for, whether clothes or anything. I stitched *zompa* 'boots made of woolen fabric.' That was how I earned a livelihood.

Q: How did you get to India? What happened next?

#5M: There was a city called Zongsampa. Crossing over a pass from Zongsampa brought you into Pokhra. From Pokhra, you reached Nepal [Kathmandu]. From Nepal [Kathmandu] we arrived at Dharamsala. Upon reaching Dharamsala, all the children were admitted into schools, thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. After seeing the Chenrezig 'Avalokitesvara, the patron saint of Tibet' [the Dalai Lama], all the children were admitted to schools.

We were told that we could not remain there but had to go to work. When asked where, we were informed that we had to work on road construction. So we went to Manali [Himachal Pradesh, India]. There the people were divided into groups of 100. We were separated and attached to the groups there. We worked for a few years building roads. Then we were asked to enlist if we wished to go to a settlement. All of us, including my relatives gave our names to join a settlement. And then we came to this place.

Q: Did you come to this settlement in Mundgod?

01:23:43

#5M: [Continues without waiting for question to be interpreted] When the Dalai Lama looked out from the room; I felt happy but started to cry. I felt such emotions. Everything is due to the grace of the Buddha [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] that all the children received education; the older ones in one school and the younger ones in another school and gave us work. So, we worked and received a wage.

Q: It sounds like you only did road crew for a little while and then you came to Mundgod. Is that correct?

#5M: I worked as road crew for about five years.

Q: And where were your wife and child?

01:25:00

#5M: My wife was with me on the road crew while my child was sent to school in Dharamsala.

Q: What kind of work did you do on the road crew?

#5M: At the road crew, a line [of measurement] was drawn and we had to pull down the mounds of earth keeping to the measurement. The men cut down the mounds and the women used spades to throw away the soil. That was road construction. We had successfully escaped the Chinese and it was a fortunate time. And we...

Q: What?

01:25:50

#5M: We had escaped from the Chinese and also had enough to eat. So, everyone sang as we worked.

Q: How did you handle the difference in climate since it was so cool and clear in Tibet and very humid here?

#5M: During the hot season, we used to go beyond the pass to built roads. Beyond the pass there was no heat and the region was cool. When the weather changed, we came towards the other side of the pass. When the hot season began, we came across the pass.

Q: After 5 years you came to Mundgod where you are now. So what did Mundgod look like when you first came?

01:27:54

#5M: When we first arrived here, all the tress had been cut down. The big logs were taken away but the stumps were being upturned by bulldozers. We were divided into groups and started separating the woods and made piles for burning. Thus we cleared the ground.

After clearing the ground, the bulldozers converted them into agricultural lands. Then we grew corn and different kinds of crops. After a year or two, the land was divided and each person was given a part. Each person received a share of house and land. And then we cultivated our own lands. That was how our problems were solved.

Q: How much land did you get?

#5M: Lands were given depending on the number of people. Each person received an acre of land. I, my wife and child received three shares. It was the same with the house.

Q: What did you live in?

01:30:05

#5M: For around a year, we lived in tents set up on the land where the monastery is situated now. We lived there for a year. During that period, the houses were being built.

Once all the houses were constructed, lots were drawn to assign the people into different camps. So we received our share that way.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#5M: That's okay.

Q: Do you have any advice for the children of Tibet, for the next generation?

01:31:26

#5M: When a child is small, he attends school. When he grows older, depending upon his intelligence, it is decided if he goes to a high school or not. However there are some, who, due to one's destiny meet a spouse at a young age and get married. I do not have much advice to give because once everyone grows older, everyone becomes similar. If one does well, there is opportunity to study. It is up to oneself if he wishes not to do well. Parents do not have much to say.

Q: When you think of Tibet these days, what picture comes to your mind?

#5M: When I think of Tibet, a clear picture of my residence, region, village and its name is embedded in it. It does not end. I have known them. However, we are helpless. These days we live here, thanks to the Buddha. I do not know when I will get to go to Tibet. Tibet has many monasteries and it was a happy place.

Q: What would you do if it was possible to return to Tibet?

01:33:48

#5M: If we could go back to Tibet, whether we return individually or will be settled in different groups like the Home for the Aged or in separate camps, will be planned and organized by Chenrezig. We will return in that way. If we returned individually, one should go back to one's region. Having left Tibet long ago, some people might have a place to stay and others might not, as everything would be in ruins. However, the land is there forever.

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

#5M: If the Chinese want to give me any problems and asked me to come [confront them], I would go. I would consider it my destiny if they give me any problems. There is no reason why Tibetans would give problems to each other. The interview is conducted to benefit both sides: us and yourselves. Whatever way you look at it, whether from a religious point of view or as a way of life, you are doing it not because you like the Chinese. If this reaches the Chinese hands, the Chinese cannot do anything to us. We are not afraid of the Chinese. You are highlighting the Tibetan issue under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. What problem would I have? There will be no problem.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project?

01:35:14

#5M: Yes, you can.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#5M: You do not have to mention it. You asked me the questions and I answered what was there in my mind. I hope it has been beneficial.

Q: Let's take a picture together.

[Interviewer and interpreter poses with the interviewee for photographs.]

END OF INTERVIEW