

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #12U – Nyinyi
April 4, 2017

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #12U
2. Interviewee: Nyinyi
3. Age: 71
4. Date of Birth: 1946
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Sakya
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1966
9. Date of Interview: April 4, 2017
10. Place of Interview: Sakya Settlement, Puruwala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 36 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tenzin Choenyi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Nyinyi was born in Sakya, Utsang Province in 1946. Although her family was wealthy, they worked hard daily on the farm and paid taxes for use of the land. She lived with her mother and uncles, one of whom worked as the great secretary of the Sakya government. Nyinyi attended a school that the occupying Chinese established, learning Chinese script and exercise drills.

Several members of Nyinyi's family were arrested by the Chinese along with other influential members of the community. They were imprisoned and subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.' The Chinese seized Nyinyi's family home and all their possessions. The family was forced to live in the kitchen and continued to work on the farm. Her elder siblings and many others went to construct roads for the Chinese because they paid the Tibetans well.

Nyinyi witnessed the destruction of all 108 monasteries in Sakya by the Chinese, except for the great Sakya Monastery, which the monks protected. The Chinese removed priceless valuables from the monasteries to take to China. Nyinyi's family wanted to escape, but her mother refused to leave until her uncle returned from prison. Once he was released, they left hastily fearing that he may be imprisoned again soon. Nyinyi concludes her interview by singing a few songs.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, education, farm life, taxes, government/administration, life under Chinese rule, oppression under Chinese, *thamzing*, imprisonment, destruction of monasteries, escape experiences.

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Interview #12U

Interviewee: Nyinyi

Age: 71, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 4, 2017

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:11

Interviewee #12U: It is Nyinyi.

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?

#12U: Yes, yes.

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

#12U: Okay.

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

#12U: Okay.

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

#12U: [Nods]

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

#12U: I will have no problems.

Q: We're honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#12U: [Nods]

Q: Can you please tell me where you were born, *ama-la* 'respectful term for mother'?

00:02:21

#12U: It is the town of Sakya—Sakya.

Q: Sakya in Utsang?

#12U: Sakya comes under Utsang.

Q: What year were you born?

#12U: I do not know the year. I left from there at the age of 12 or 13. Based on that it must be in the 40s.

Q: How old are you now?

#12U: [I] am 71 now.

Q: You were born in Sakya and who was in your family?

#12U: My mother lived separately from her family. In the family were my elder sister, elder brother, mother and father. We were four members in the family.

Q: It's five.

#12U: Yes, five. It is five.

Q: What level of society was your family? Were they very wealthy, medium income or poor? Can you describe the status of your family?

00:04:16

#12U: My mother's family was among the wealthy.

Q: What was the family name?

#12U: Lhanga Yundha, Sakya Lhanga Yundha.

Q: Lhanga Yundha?

#12U: Lhanga Yundha.

Q: Did they live in Sakya?

#12U: Yes, lived right in Sakya.

Q: Did you have any family members who were very high up in government in Sakya?

#12U: My mother's elder brother worked there. Since the time of his father's father [they] had served Sakya.

Q: So your mother's brother was...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...elder brother...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...elder brother...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...and also mother's father.

Q: They were what?

#12U: They were farmers.

Q: You mentioned [they] were among those that worked in high positions. So what work...?

#12U: [My mother's elder brother] worked as a *dungkhor* 'lay official' in Sakya—a *dungkhor* in Sakya. It is called *dungkhor* in Tibet, while in Lhasa they are known as aristocrats. In Sakya it is called *dungkhor*.

Q: *Dungkhor*.

#12U: *Dungkhor* in Sakya.

Q: I see that you have a photograph. Can you show us in the photograph?

00:06:27

#12U: Okay. [Bends to pick up picture frame]

Q: Can you hold it up? Oh, good. Can you point to who is...Can you tell us who the people are in the photograph?

#12U: [Holds up photograph of six people standing in row] Okay. One [of the people] in the photograph is the father [of the Sakya family] Dorjee Chang—Dorjee Chang.

Q: Dorjee Chang. Can you please point?

#12U: [Points to third person from right] This is the father, Dorjee Chang.

Q: And then, *ama-la*?

#12U: This [points to second person from right] is the Governor of Sakya, the one that makes arrangement of offerings. This [points to lady on far right] is the Great Mother, his [points to Dorjee Chang] wife. This one [points to fourth person from right] is his treasurer. This one [points to fifth person from right] is my mother's elder brother, who worked as the great secretary. He wrote whatever letters had to be written.

Q: Point to him again, please?

#12U: This [points again] is Mother's elder brother, who is my maternal uncle.

Q: The one with the hat on?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

00:08:01

#12U: This [points to person on far left] is the *rinpoche* ‘reincarnate lama’ of Phuntsok Phodang that passed away—passed away in the United States.

Q: Oh, that’s the Rinpoche?

#12U: He is the paternal uncle of Gongma Rinpoche.

Q: Which one?

#12U: [Points to person on far left again]

Q: The name of the person who recently passed away is...?

#12U: We addressed him as Rinpoche Kudel and I do not know the name.

Q: Rinpoche what?

#12U: Rinpoche Kudel.

Q: Okay.

#12U: He [points to Dorjee Chang] had two *dhungsay* ‘sons of the clan.’ The younger *dhungsay* passed away and this is the elder brother. So we addressed him as Rinpoche Kudel ‘elder one.’ The younger one passed away and he [Rinpoche Kudel] passed away last year. So we addressed him as Rinpoche Kudel.

Q: Does *kuteng* mean “the elder one”?

#12U: *Kudelwa*, the elder brother.

Q: Which one was the Sakya leader at that time? Was that the first one?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sakya? The council of ministers?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The head of the Sakya tradition?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The head of the Sakya tradition is the one in the white dress, Dorjee Chang.

Q: Dorjee Chang. Okay, good. Thank you, *ama-la*. Very nice, very nice.

#12U: Can I put it down?

Q: Yes.

#12U: [Bends to place photo frame on the ground]

Q: So if your family was very well off—that's established—what did they do for a living? How did they, you know, have material goods: food and shelter?

00:10:08

#12U: [They] did farming, just farming, and worked in the fields and paid tax.

Q: What kind of...what kind of things did they grow on the farm? What kind of produce?

#12U: The crops cultivated were barley, peas and mustard for oil—mustard for oil. These three were cultivated. These three were grown in Sakya.

Q: Who owned the land?

#12U: The owner was my mother's family.

Q: So if the land belonged to your mother's family, who were you paying taxes to if the land was already in the family?

#12U: The tax must be paid to the government of Sakya.

Q: What were the taxes based on that had to be paid to the government of Sakya?

00:12:07

#12U: The basis of the tax in Tibet...We had what is called *thakang mikang*. Depending on the area of land received from the government of Sakya one had to pay tax according to that.

Q: What's *thakang mikang*, *ama-la*?

#12U: There was the practice in Sakya that we called *thakang mikang*. There were four types of taxes and one that paid all four types were those that had received a large area of land. Taxes had to be paid based on the size of land.

Q: So when the land was taken from the Sakya government, was it purchased and then you owned it, but then you paid taxes on it or did the land continue to belong to the Sakya government?

#12U: [I] do not know if the Sakya government owned the lands. There were some people that owned their lands—owned their lands. I do not know much about it.

Q: I see. Okay.

#12U: You took additional land from the government and paid taxes. If you had sufficient land, there was no need to pay taxes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Had to take it, had to rent it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Rent it from the government.

Q: You were the member of a well-off family. What kind of activities did you do as a little girl? Did you have to work in the fields or did you stay at home? What did you do when you were, you know, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10?

00:14:32

#12U: When we reached the age of 7 or 8, [we] were sent to graze cows, horses and donkeys.

Q: Were there any classes or education for you to have?

#12U: Students came to my maternal uncle's home to learn. Children from outside came to our home to learn. [Maternal uncle] was the teacher. At that time I learned a little and know how to read and write a bit. Then the Chinese came and they set up a school. Then there was no Tibetan school because the Chinese had invaded Sakya. The Chinese set up their school and [I] attended it for two or three years.

Q: Can you tell us what ages did you go to that school?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: To the Chinese school?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: To the Chinese school.

00:16:19

#12U: [I] went to the Chinese school at the age of 8 or 9 for around three years.

Q: Do you remember what kind of classes you took?

#12U: The alphabet was taught in class; the 30 alphabets were taught. Then the Chinese taught drills. The Chinese did certain drills: *yi, er, san, si, wu, liu, qi, ba* 'one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight [in Chinese].' Their numbers, the Chinese numbers and Indian numbers, are the same. [I] can remember these a little.

Q: What kind of drill?

#12U: The drill is the same as the Indian one. It is exactly the same kind of exercises that is done in Indian schools. The way of marching is the same. Such were taught.

Q: Oh, it was a drill, a marching drill, not a mathematical drill.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, exercise.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Exercise drill.

#12U: It is the same that is taught in our schools these days.

Q: So that's all, the Tibetan alphabet and exercise drill? Those are the only classes the Chinese provided?

00:18:11

#12U: During our time nothing else was taught. Chinese language and Chinese script were taught. Chinese script and Chinese language were taught.

Q: Oh, Chinese...

#12U: [Interrupts] There were Tibetan teachers and Chinese teachers. There were 2-3 teachers.

Q: How did it come about that the Chinese were setting up schools in Sakya? How did that start?

#12U: [I] wonder how it was started...

Q: Was your family accepting of the Chinese in the area?

#12U: Once the Chinese had arrived in Tibet one was forced to accept it. They had occupied Tibet, occupied Lhasa and were in Utsang. We were forced to accept when Lhasa was occupied and His Holiness the Dalai Lama had escaped. The Sakya Gongma Rinpoche had left; the Phuntsok Phodang had left. We that were left behind were forced to accept the Chinese.

Q: Right, but when did you first see the Chinese with your own eyes? How old were you?

00:20:09

#12U: [I] must have been 8 or 9 and can recollect it.

Q: What can you recollect?

#12U: At that time we were children and upon seeing the Chinese...they used to give out cigarettes and candies. We called the Chinese leaders *ponpo-la* 'respectful term for leader' and the children chased and asked for cigarettes and candies. The children ran after [the Chinese]. One did not understand that they had occupied Tibet. One did not understand to feel anger.

Q: Did anything happen to your family under the Chinese occupation? Were all of the older relatives safe or did anything occur?

#12U: In our family, initially our grandfather's [points to photo frame on the ground] wife...this grandfather was the first to be arrested. Maternal uncle was the first to be

arrested and after him, it was the younger maternal uncle followed by another maternal uncle. Then the wife was also arrested. The Chinese captured four members of the family.

Q: So it was your maternal uncle, his...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Three maternal uncles and a wife.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Three maternal uncles.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: And a wife of an uncle.

Q: Why did they capture them?

00:22:09

#12U: They were living like aristocrats in Sakya. That is why they were arrested. First they were asked to come to attend classes. [The Chinese] lied and asked them to come and attend classes. All the aristocrats of Sakya were called to attend classes.

Q: Where?

#12U: In the palace of Dolma Phodang at a place called Nazi. [They] were asked to come there to attend classes. All the people were to attend, the influential people were asked to attend classes and then were captured and not released. [The Chinese] deceived with sweet words in the beginning. All the influential people were called first. All the influential people were asked to come and attend classes. Naturally everybody went.

Q: How old were you when that happened?

00:23:20

#12U: When the maternal uncles were captured I was around 7 or 8, old enough to recollect everything. [I] remember the Chinese sealing the doors.

Q: Sealing the doors?

#12U: They locked all the doors of the house and put their seal.

Q: Did the family have to leave or were you inside?

#12U: The family members...We had a kitchen where the cooking used to be done in Tibet. All of us were kept there. [The Chinese] left a small amount of *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' [We] were left in that situation for around a month.

Q: So when the Chinese came and you were around 7 or 8, they took over the house, and you and your mother and siblings were put in the kitchen area? Is that correct?

00:24:50

#12U: [We] were moved to the kitchen and they left a small amount of *tsampa* and meat. The Chinese locked the rest of the doors and took the keys away with them.

Q: So in effect you were locked inside the house?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The house was locked. The family had to move to the kitchen and stay there.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes, so could they get out of the kitchen or were they locked as part of the house?

Q: You were moved to the kitchen. Could you go outside once you were moved to the kitchen?

#12U: [We] could move about outside. There was freedom of movement.

Q: Could you leave the house?

#12U: There was access to go out of the house [kitchen]. [We] had to go in and out of the house [kitchen] for there were the cows, horses and all the animals then that had to be fed. They [the Chinese] gave some food, but the rest of the house was locked. After a month the Chinese confiscated it. [I] feel sad to talk about this.

Q: Yes, it was a very sad time.

00:26:31

#12U: Exactly. [I] feel sad to talk about this [gets emotional] and it seems like seeing it happen.

Q: *Ama-la*, I'm so sorry to make you sad, but it's also part of the story of Tibet and we want to be able to record it for history, for posterity.

#12U: Yes, of course and I am happy to talk about it. I am happy to talk about it and it is really good that you are doing this.

Q: *Ama-la*, did they do this to all the wealthy families in town? Did they take away their house and make the members move to a kitchen or small area?

#12U: They did this to all the influential, the aristocrats. This was done to all the wealthy and the aristocrats, to those that held ranks, those that held ranks in Sakya.

Q: And it was ranks in government, in the monasteries as well?

00:28:13

#12U: Yes, those that held ranks in monasteries like abbots and *geshe* 'monks with Buddhist philosophy degree' too. They arrested all the good ones. They arrested all those

that were educated and intelligent. The common people knew nothing and they [the Chinese] could do anything to them.

Q: Did the common people, after one month, did anybody move into your house?

#12U: Yes, later the house, lands, cows, horses and donkeys were distributed among the poor people during the Reformation. All the belongings in the house were brought out, everything like grains and *tsampa* were brought out and distributed to the people during the Reformation. My maternal uncle [indicates photo frame] was sent to China. [He] was not there. The two younger maternal uncles were in Chinese prisons. Finally, they sent us out to another person's house. Finally, we were ousted from the house and sent to another person's house.

Q: Are the two younger maternal uncles still in prison?

00:29:51

#12U: [They] have passed away now. All have passed away, are no more. The elder maternal uncle [indicates photo frame] passed away in a Chinese prison. The younger maternal uncle was many years in prison and then the Chinese released [him]. [He] fled in the night without anything along with wife and children. They were three or four people that fled in the night with nothing except a little bit of *tsampa* and no belongings. Everything had been confiscated.

Q: How did you find out about what happened to them in prison? How did you know that?

#12U: Me?

Q: Yes.

#12U: [They] were our family members and [we] had to take food to the prison like *tsampa*. They checked to see if it contained poison. We would not poison our own people! [The Chinese] made us eat first.

Q: I thought they were taken to prison in China?

00:32:25

#12U: It was said that [elder maternal uncle] was taken to China, but did not return from there. We then fled to India and never saw the elder maternal uncle again.

Q: When you were moved into another house, how long did you stay there, *ama-la*, before you fled? Were you there like a month, a year, how long under the Chinese occupation?

#12U: The fields were already sown when we were moved. Then the crops were harvested and the grains made into *tsampa*. So perhaps we were there for around 7-8 months.

Q: Yes?

#12U: Perhaps 7-8 months because in order to leave earlier, there was no *tsampa* for the journey. The crops have to mature once they are sown. So [we] harvested the crops and made some *tsampa* and used the *tsampa* for food during the journey. Then [we] stayed in Sikkim [India].

Q: Was the land that you harvested, was that your land from before?

00:34:25

#12U: Yes, it was land that belonged to us.

Q: Was anybody in your immediate family taken to prison? I mean I know your uncle went to China, was taken to China and others but anybody else in your...like your own brothers or anyone?

#12U: None were taken. My mother had only three children. The elder one was a brother and the elder sister went to construct roads for the Chinese—to construct roads for the Chinese. They called the healthier people to build roads for vehicles to pass. [Elder sister] went to construct roads for the Chinese for a few years.

Q: The elder brother?

#12U: Elder brother also went.

Q: Were they taken from your home? Is that right?

#12U: [The Chinese] gathered all the people from [their] homes to work. They created what we would call groups. Sections were created and then they told all the healthy people to come to build roads and the Chinese paid wages in the form of *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins.’ They paid high wages.

Q: So did people willingly go?

00:36:34

#12U: [They] went willingly, poor things. Without the wages there was no food for everybody. Money was scarce in Tibet. The Chinese had already impounded the Tibetan currency and we were distributed with Chinese money. The Chinese money did not fetch anything.

Q: When you went to school when you were telling us at a little bit younger age, was that before or like you went to school you said when you were 8 or 9. So was that after the Chinese came, took away your house? Is that when you went to school under the Chinese government?

#12U: It was in between. The house was not destroyed, but it was divided and given to the people. There were many people living in my maternal uncle’s house.

Q: Did you attend school before that happened?

#12U: Yes...when we went to school the reforms had already taken place. The Chinese had already confiscated the belongings.

00:38:06

'59, '60, '61, '62, '63...When we left it must have been '61, '62, '63, '64...It must have been '65 or '66 when we left Tibet.

Q: You were in Tibet for a good five years or so after His Holiness left.

#12U: [We] must have remained for four, five or six years after His Holiness left. [I] do not know clearly. Gongma Rinpoche left earlier when the Chinese first appeared. A large number of Chinese troops had arrived.

Q: Did your family stay behind because they were hoping things would change or they needed to prepare? Why didn't they leave along with the Sakya and the Dalai Lama?

#12U: They had already left, but we were unable to escape. [We] needed to escape and it had to be done in the night. The reason we stayed behind was because the younger sibling [points to photo frame] was in the Chinese prison. He had not been released from the prison. In order to escape, my mother...He was my mother's younger sibling. My mother's younger sibling was in the Chinese prison. He had not been released. The day he was released from the Chinese prison, we fled that night.

Q: Did you know how long he was going to be in prison that you waited?

00:40:43

#12U: There was no [fixed] period. [The Chinese] acted according to their strategy and did not mention when [a prisoner] would be released. They had their meetings that were held at night and then they released. He was released in that manner. They made different categories [of the prisoners] depending upon what [supposed] suffering [the prisoner] had caused the people or what [he] had done to the people.

As a leader my maternal uncle had not caused suffering to the people and was just serving the Dolma Phodang. Due to this, as there were no charges, he was released one night. [He] was released in the night and the next day [we] discussed and fled in the night. Staying back would mean another arrest—for [leaders] were arrested again and again. One was released for a few days and then re-arrested.

Q: Do you remember feeling...your mother and your father, did they seem worried or sad about what had happened to your village and your town?

00:42:41

#12U: [They] did and Mother cried a lot. She used to faint due to *lung* 'illness caused by energy currents of the body.' The Chinese had captured all of them and this maternal uncle [points to photo frame] was sent to China and the younger sibling was in the Chinese prison. [Mother] fainted a lot due to *lung* and used to become unconscious because of *lung*.

In Tibet we do a *tsamsur* ‘offering of smoke produced by burning flour mixed with pure food and sacred substances’ with *tsampa*. [We] did such. [I] have suffered; Mother has suffered a lot. Mother was brought along [to India] where she passed away at the age of 62.

Q: Your mother was very worried about her brothers.

#12U: Yes, and used to faint due to *lung*.

Q: *Ama-la*, what happened to the Sakya Monastery? I mean this was the center of the Sakya tradition in Utsang. What happened? Was it a big monastery and what happened to it?

00:44:17

#12U: The Chinese were not able to cause much destruction to the great Sakya Monastery. There are said to be 108 monasteries towards the northern side of the river of Sakya. They destroyed all the 108 monasteries. Not one was left, not one monastery was left in the north towards the river.

Q: Which place is in the north of the river?

#12U: There are the southern and northern parts of the river of Sakya. The Dolma Phodang and the great Sakya Monastery are located on the southern side of the river. The northern part of Sakya lies to the north of the river. On the hill in the northern part of Sakya...Is there not a picture somewhere here? There used to be one here earlier [looks around room].

Q: The 108 monasteries located in the north...?

#12U: The 108 monasteries were destroyed leaving no earth or stones. [The Chinese] were not able to destroy the great monastery. The reason why the great monastery could not be destroyed was because at that the Chinese launched what was called the Cultural Revolution and they held a meeting to destroy the great Sakya Monastery.

When [they] came to destroy the great monastery, a few of our monks remained inside the Sakya Monastery and as the Chinese came to destroy the great monastery, they closed the door of the great monastery and barricaded it using logs like that [gestures off camera] and the Chinese, even after three or four days were not able to cause any damage to it. The door could not be opened. Due to this the great monastery did not suffer any damage. It is said that even if the outer walls of the great Sakya Monastery falls, the inside part will not. Such was the precious monastery. [Becomes emotional]

Q: One hundred and eight?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...smaller monasteries.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: One hundred and eight smaller...all over like Utsang or where?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: These monasteries were located in the north of Sakya, while the great Sakya Monastery was located down south.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And they were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right.

Q: So the Chinese never succeeded in breaking into the major Sakya monastery? Did they not bomb it or take the statues?

#12U: They took away many such things—took away many valuable things from the Sakya Monastery. They took away most of the valuables. The Chinese took away truckloads.

Q: The monastery wasn't bombed or...?

#12U: [The Chinese] were not able to bomb the monastery, but tried to demolish it. On one side of the monastery there was a *penpay* 'Chinese-style parapet/balcony underneath a temple' that is almost one-story tall. *Penpay* is something that is on a monastery like the one on the Sakya Monastery there. There is the dark red line on the top. There was one of *pena* 'tamarisk brushwood.' A small part of one side was destroyed and the *pena* of a whole region was not sufficient to reconstruct it. Such was the monastery that could not be reconstructed.

Q: That must've been an enormous collection of valuables. What kinds of things?

00:48:22

#12U: It was a lot of things. Whatever it was, they took away the silver and the best of things. Everything was loaded on a truck. A little away from Sakya is a river called Yarlung Tsangpo 'Brahmaputra.'

Q: What's the name?

#12U: A little away from Sakya is a big river. The protective deities of Sakya did not let it get away and the truck completely sank in the river. All the silver and valuables that belonged to the monastery were being taken away and the truck sank in the river. Poor things, all those influential people that were in prison, all of them came to help pull it out with crowbars, but the truck sank further into the river.

So they [the Chinese] did not get a penny. The entire thing sunk into the earth. Such was the blessed [items]. As a child I have gone to see this when it was said that a Chinese truck sank in the river. One could not know what was inside for [the valuables] were covered with a tarpaulin and tied with ropes. The vehicle sank in the river.

00:50:28

There were so many silver items in the great monastery and besides, the Chinese took away valuables from the Dolma Phodang and the Phuntsok Phodang. The lamas could not take

anything. The Phuntsok Phodang left from Lhasa and could not return home from the visit to Lhasa, and did not get to take anything.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He escaped right from...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...from Lhasa. So he didn't get to take anything with him.

Q: Yeah, he escaped from there. It became very dangerous. When the truck got stuck, what did the people think of that happening? Not the Chinese, but the people of the village, what did they think?

#12U: Our people thought...[The Chinese] were taking away the precious stones, the valuables and the best of things. These were priceless items that could not be bought with all the money in the world. These were priceless and the very best. It was believed that the *lu* 'naga or powerful long-lived serpent-like beings who inhabit bodies of water' pulled [the truck] down. That was what we believed—that the *lu* pulled it down because [the Chinese] were taking away the most valuable items of gold, silver, copper and pearls, taking away the very best. Besides, they were taking away precious items from within the monastery like the necklaces and such adorning the statues in the monastery. We believed that it was fortunate the *lu* pulled it down and the Chinese did not get to use any of it. [Laughs]

Q: It must've sunk into mud or the river was so deep? Was it on a bridge? How did it fall in? I'm not sure I followed.

00:53:24

#12U: No, [the truck] had to be driven in the river. There was a border, the border of Sakya. If one crosses this threshold [points off camera], one is outside. There was the border of Sakya where a river flowed. The truck had to be driven in the water. It went deeper and deeper into the sand of the river and could not come out. So wooden planks and rocks were positioned. Though a large number of people tried, the truck sank deeper and deeper and could not be pulled out. It did not fall off a cliff nor did a bridge collapse. It sank by itself in the river en route. All the vehicles were moving, but the vehicle loaded with valuables did not make it.

[Interpreter interprets *lu* as the netherworld.]

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Netherworld, it went. I know, I'm just confirming.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Were other vehicles able to cross the river?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean with more goods or just...?

Q: Did other vehicles take that same route and tried to cross the river and get away with the valuables?

#12U: [Other vehicles] crossed and succeeded. It was a main road that the Chinese had constructed. There was a river, which the vehicles crossed.

Q: What about the valuables in your own home that your family had acquired over generations? What happened to them when you had to move out of your house?

00:56:14

#12U: They confiscated; the Chinese confiscated [the valuables]. They took [them] away. [The Chinese] did not return anything. All the grains were brought out and distributed to the people. They took away the few silver items and the valuables things. A building was constructed in which all the valuables were stored, which they gradually dispatched to China in the night. The Chinese are people that devour the world.

Q: So these valuable goods were not shared with the poor of the town?

#12U: [Speaks before translation is complete] ...were distributed. They distributed to everyone. How was it distributed? The valuables were piled; the valuables of the wealthy families were piled. Then there were people that were poor and the beggars; there were different kinds. There were many differences in economic status. [The belongings] were distributed to the poor.

Q: Did the poor get your valuables?

#12U: [The poor] did not, but they [the Chinese] took them away. Why would they give it! They would not give away the gold, silver, copper, turquoise, coral and pearls! They would not! They would not give the gold and silver. Things like blankets and boxes, and cows and horses were distributed, but they took away all the precious items and did not give to the people.

Q: Was your family able to hide anything and keep something for the future or...in terms of wealth, jewelry, gold or did it happen so suddenly they lost it all?

00:58:50

#12U: Did not get the chance; they came suddenly and sealed the doors. They came all of a sudden one day, locked and took the keys away. Some smart people that knew the officials got information and found time to hide [some things]. My family did not get the chance.

Q: Did the...I don't know if you could have noticed this, but did the poor see that they were only getting grains and towels and horses but nothing...no valuables? Did they notice that or did you notice that or was it common awareness among the people of how unfair that was?

#12U: [I] was a child and did not take much notice. In fact, we used to go and watch them. We went to watch our things being given to others, went to see who got what. [Laughs] We were children and did not understand.

Q: What was the reaction of the people when they were getting things?

01:00:51

#12U: They were overjoyed because usually [the poor] didn't have such. If they got a good blanket or some good item [they] exclaimed, "I got this. I got this."

Q: What happened to the servants in your house, *ama-la*?

#12U: We did not have many servants in the house. During summertime there were those that irrigated the fields, but these were hired help that were paid wages daily. There were not many servants and we worked in the fields.

When plowing the fields, there were hired helps called *gawa* that did the plowing. They lived in the house. Then there were those that herded the donkeys called *bongpon*. The *bongpon* looked after the donkeys. Then there were 4-5 horses that we took care of. The maternal uncles took care of them and drove them to the waterhole. Most of the work was done by the family members.

Q: So even though you were considered wealthy, you actually had to work for your prosperity.

01:02:46

#12U: We had to work hard. They left for office in the morning. According to the Indian standard it was 8 o'clock. [The maternal uncles] left for office in the morning. After coming back from office, [they] changed the office clothes and if one's duty was herding horses, [he] went to herd the horses and if one's duty was plowing, [he] went to plow. Taking the *dzo* 'animal bred between a yak and cow' [he] went to plow the fields. One did not sit back as an official and an aristocrat. Each one carried out his responsibilities.

Q: And he worked for the Sakya. He was the head administrator?

#12U: Yes, the Sakya secretary.

Q: The secretary. So he went at 8 am. How long did he stay as a secretary?

#12U: The office got over around 2 or 3 o'clock.

Q: Then he came home and plowed the fields?

#12U: Then worked in the fields and at home.

Q: *Ama-la*, after the Chinese occupied it and you went to school for a period of time under the Chinese, did they bring in any medical aid or inoculations or any kind of help, medical help or healthcare?

01:04:57

#12U: I do not remember the Chinese having done such. On the contrary they showed movies—showed movies. People watched the movies and were deceived. Except for such deceptions they did not build hospitals or bring any progress in the beginning. After we left for India, they destroyed the houses and constructed new ones for themselves.

Q: Okay. Before the Chinese came, what was the health of your community? Were there ever any epidemics or any famines or anything like that? Did people ever get sick from any causes?

#12U: Before the Chinese came it was said that I had this illness [points to face] at a young age. I have these [marks] on the face. It was said that this illness came to Sakya.

Q: Do you know the name of that illness today?

01:06:45

#12U: We call the illness as *lhadum* ‘smallpox,’ *lhadum*. It would be said, ‘The *lhadum* is here.’ It seems Guru Padmasambhava takes in this illness. When someone was afflicted with this illness, in Tibet the treatment was to drink milk and consume pearls. The illness became better by consuming pearls. It seems there was not any other medical treatment at that time. I fell ill at a very young age. Mother told me about it.

Q: You mentioned Guru Padmasambhava.

#12U: Guru Padmasambhava takes in the illness, the epidemic.

Q: It wasn’t an...did many people get sick and did they die from this epidemic?

#12U: I cannot remember if people died, but can recall my being sick and being told by Mother, “People will be infected if [you] go outside. Stay indoors.” [Mother] did not let [me] go outside. I was little and could just about walk at that time. “Your illness will infect others. Stay indoors,” [I] can recall being told this.

Q: Okay, and you said you were advised to drink milk and pearls.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Eat pearls.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Eat pearls.

Q: Where did your family get pearls from?

01:08:57

#12U: Mother had pearls and removed them from her jewelry [indicates necklace] and fed [me]. “You have consumed most of my pearls,” [Mother] used to say. [Laughs]

Q: What about...you said Guru Sambhu...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Padmasambhava.

Q: Padmasambhava took on this illness. What does that mean?

#12U: [I] wonder what it meant. It was said, “An epidemic is coming that Guru Padmasambhava will take on.” [I] can remember the parents saying so.

Q: What happened to the monks in the monastery? I forgot to ask that.

#12U: The monks of the monastery...the Chinese subjected some of the abbots to a great deal of *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions.’ The abbots were captured. The Chinese captured the revered abbots and imprisoned them and some passed away in prison.

Q: Did you ever see any *thamzing* yourself?

01:10:43

#12U: Yes, [I] saw my maternal uncle [points to picture frame on floor] being subjected to *thamzing*. Maternal uncle was imprisoned by the Chinese and being a child, I used to peep and then runaway—peep and run away.

Q: How long did it last do you think?

#12U: They conducted a *thamzing* for 2-3 hours at a meeting of the people.

Q: Did you run away because you were frightened or why?

#12U: [I] was frightened and ran away; frightened and cried and then when the people screamed [I] went to peep.

Q: Did your mother go to witness this treatment of your uncle?

#12U: [Mother] did not—did not go to look at the Chinese but stayed home. I was a child and talked about what happened to maternal uncle and Mother cried and fainted due to *lung*.

Q: Where was your father during all this?

01:12:40

#12U: Father was from the place called Tsethong, while my mother hailed from Sakya. Father was at Tsethong and lived there.

Q: He was not living with the family?

#12U: No, my mother and he had a love affair and I was born. [Father] continued to live at Tsethong. However, [Father] sent Mother everything from there. Grains and everything was sent from there. [Father] sent clothes and everything.

Q: Clothes?

#12U: Yes, clothes for me as well as grains and meat for the home were laden on horses and donkeys and came from Tsethong. He lived in Tsethong. Tsethong is the place of birth of Sakya Gongma Rinpoche. [He] was born in Tsethong.

Q: And then there were two brothers, a brother and a sister in the family?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Your brother and sister, were they the children of another father?

01:14:23

#12U: It was the same father. We had the same father.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, the same father. Okay. It sounds like mother never married the father.

Q: Is there anything else, *ama-la*, that you think we should remember or know about Tibet while the Chinese were there and while you were there that you saw with your own eyes? Any story or memory you could remember now?

#12U: [I] do not have much [to say] because I was a child. That is about what [I] can recall and witnessed.

Q: Right.

#12U: And then we fled to India.

Q: But you said you spent about 8-9 months growing crops in order to have food to take with you on the journey. So did you have to keep that very secret that you were leaving or were people leaving very publicly?

#12U: Many people were leaving. However, it had to be kept very secretive. In order to go to grind *tsampa*, one had to do so unseen by the Chinese. If a large amount of *tsampa* was ground, [the Chinese] claimed, "They are grinding a large amount of *tsampa*. They are planning to escape." We almost fled once but the Chinese came to know and [we] failed. Then [we] stayed for around a week relaxed saying, "We are not running away. We are staying here."

Q: What happened once?

01:16:58

#12U: During the first escape attempt, there were the Chinese' *u-yon* 'Tibetan leaders appointed by the Chinese' that were on duty to keep guard. We owned a horse on which was loaded the *tsampa* and other things. Our house was located near the wall of the great monastery. There was a gate on this side [points ahead] and another this side [points to left] with [our house] in the center near a wall.

They knew [about our plan to escape.] They came there and asked, "Where are you going?" "We are not leaving," [we] lied and were spared. [We] stayed undisturbed for around a week and then fled secretly in the night. So [we] did not get to bring much. At

that time [on the first attempt we] had loaded *tsampa* and many things like blankets but on the latter attempt, [we] fled in the night when there was not a sound of a dog or a human.

Q: How long was the journey, *ama-la*?

01:18:41

#12U: It was very far. It took many days from Sakya to the border of India for one had to walk. It took over a month.

Q: Many months?

#12U: It is said that it took over a month.

Q: Can you remember any part of the journey? Can you remember walking?

#12U: [I] can remember walking on the journey.

Q: Was it cold or snowy or dangerous?

#12U: When we left it was autumn after the crops had been harvested. After leaving Sakya, we spent a night at the place called Khawu—stayed a night in Khawu. From Khawu [we] crossed over the Sebobula pass. After crossing over the pass, [we] arrived in the place called Chuplung. [We] rested two or three days in Chuplung because mother could not walk. Mother was old and grandfather was old.

At this place we found some colleagues who were from Sakya. Everyone lives here now though all the elders have passed away. The younger ones are here. From this place called Chuplung we were in a group of 15-16 people.

Q: What is it...*ama-la*, what is it like to be here in the settlement with people that you lived with back in Tibet? What is that like for you?

01:21:41

#12U: We talk about the journey from Tibet and the difficulties faced during the journey and are very happy now. The benevolent Sakya Gongma Rinpoche established this settlement for us. [We] cultivate wheat and rice in the settlement. Gongma Rinpoche worked hard and spent his own money for this settlement.

Q: What are your thoughts or feelings about the Chinese these days?

#12U: I feel anger towards the Chinese these days. Parents and relatives are scattered. [I] had many relatives when leaving Tibet. The Chinese occupied Tibet and now some of my relatives are in Darjeeling [India] and some in Bylakuppe [India] and everywhere. I am the only one in the Sakya settlement except for my children. Everybody is scattered around. [I] do not like the Chinese even now.

Q: What is your hope for Tibet, *ama-la*? What would you like to have happen?

01:23:46

#12U: The hope for Tibet is independence but the Chinese are not giving it. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is advocating the Middle Way and one has to hope for that. However, it is not possible during our time, but [I] hope that the children can go back to Tibet. There is nothing for us but to die in India. However, if His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives long the Tibetans in India have the freedom to go anywhere in India.

Thanks to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Sakya Gongma Rinpoche the Tibetans can go about proudly anywhere. If His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Sakya Gongma Rinpoche do not live long, the Indians can do anything with us. [I] worry over this. Besides this, [I] do not have any other thought.

Q: In conclusion, *ama-la*, what was it like to share your story, to tell the history of Tibet from your own experiences? How did that feel to do that today?

01:25:48

#12U: It has been good. I have had the chance to tell you about the problems in my heart and also the chance to talk about the situation the Chinese created in Tibet. I have a very good feeling and would like to request you to travel to different places to do more of such and offer my praise for your supporting the Tibetan cause. Please do more interviews with elderly people for they know better. There are people older than me. However, most of the elderly in the Sakya settlement have passed away. It is a very good [project].

Q: Thank you, *ama-la*.

#12U: [Joins palms] Thank you. She [interviewer] is doing this for the cause of Tibet, doing this for the cause of Tibet and the two of you [videographer and interpreter] have come here as Tibetans. From my side I pray that you live long and that you have success in your work and that you can do more interviews. Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

#12U: [Joins palms]

Q: We are very appreciative of your prayers. Thank you.

#12U: Thank you.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#12U: Okay.

01:27:56

[Sings a song]

Shingdhe gyachang shukpa

Kyeda chela dani
Soyalani khuyukla rati shuknila
Shukpa shani yungla yoe
Soyalani khuyukla rati shuknila
Shukpa shani yungla yoe
Sogyala midhe sala
Kyeda chela dani
Soyalani bhumola shapshu shunila
Yabyum shani yungla yoe
Soyalani bhumola shapshu shunila
Yabyum shani yungla yoe

Tashi Delek ‘greetings.’

01:30:46

[Sings a song]

Tinsang riwoe suri surne tay
Tinsang riwoe suri surne tay
Soya soya phayul kypoe rigyue thongne den
Soya phayul kypoe rigyue thongne den
Netsang ama tawa kushunang
Soya soya denchen phama denchung loknay do
Soya denchen phama denchung loknay do
Shasum zamo miktsum loknay do
Soya soya tsikang penda denchung loknay do
Soya tsikang penda denchung loknay do
Kara goram nyoeni loknay do
Soya soya kypay phoetuk denchung loknay do
Soya kypay phoetuk denchung loknay do

Let us all go to Tibet.

01:33:23

[Sings a song]

Khangpala serkhang
Heyla dulashi
Chiway norsangla
Pangayla yuthokla ngonlapo
Serkyila kenza
Heyla tsuklani
Chiway norsangla
Yuthokla jelgala thangdha
Yuthokla pangyi
Heyla thangla
Chiway norsangla

Oluela chondoela shangla yoe
Chondoela namla
Heyla thuklani
Chiway norsangla
Oluela samdhonla duplaso

Thank you.

Q: *Ama-la*, what's the song mean?

#12U: *Khangpa serkhang dushi*
Pangay yuthok ngonpo

It is about a house in Sakya, the house where Sakya Gongma Rinpoche resides in Shithok. The song is about it.

Khangpa serkhang dushi
Pangay yuthok ngonpo

It means that the *pang*, the grasslands, are blue like turquoise. That is the discription.

***Khangpa sekang dushi* means that the house is like gold and the grasslands like turquoise.**

END OF INTERVIEW