

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #23U – Dhoga
March 30, 2017

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #23U
2. Interviewee: Dhoga
3. Age: 78
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Tehor
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: March 30, 2017
10. Place of Interview: Gepheling Old People's Home, Rajpur, Uttarakhand, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 1 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tenzin Choenyi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dhoga was born in Tehor, Kham Province in 1939. His family grew crops and raised a small number of animals also. They lived in a large house with the animals on the lower floor, the family on the middle floor, and they used the upper floor for storing the barley crop after harvest. They also used the roof for threshing the grain.

Dhoga's family co-owned the water mill in his village, which was used by all the villagers to grind barley into *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' Nomads came to the village each year to barter dairy products for barley. Dhoga describes the nomads' methods of slaughtering animals for meat.

Hoping for a happier life, Dhoga chose to become a monk and joined the local monastery. Tradition dictated that each monk study for a three years in one of the great monasteries in Lhasa. When Dhoga was threatened by the Chinese to join their army, he quickly left to join Sera Monastery in Lhasa around 1957. He was unable to complete his three years of study because the Chinese seized Lhasa in 1959. Dhoga briefly joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] during his escape. After arriving in India, he relocated several times before joining the Indian Army, which he served for 24 years.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, farm life, monastic life, customs/traditions, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #23U

Interviewee: Dhoga

Age: 78, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: March 30, 2017

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:10

Interviewee #23U: My name is Dhoga.

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?

#23U: Yes.

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

#23U: Okay.

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

#23U: Okay.

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

#23U: Okay.

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

#23U: There will be no problem whatsoever because it ceased since I escaped.

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

#23U: [Nods]

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' first of all let us begin...let me ask what year were you born, *pa-la*?

00:02:21

#23U: The year was around 1939.

Q: Where were you born?

#23U: The name of the place is Dhargay Gonpa.

Q: What region was that in?

#23U: Dhargay Gonpa falls under Karze. Dhargay Gonpa is in Kham. Among the Tibetans, the people of Kham are distinct because the Khampa... We are called Tehor Khampa because in ancient times it came under Hor. There were 13 monasteries in our region. There were 13 different monasteries in the Tehor region of Kham, namely Dhargay Gonpa, Karze Gonpa, Nyarong Gonpa, Tongkong, Tawo, Minyak, Dango, all these came under Tehor.

Q: When you say... What did your family do for a living in this region?

00:04:28

#23U: To earn a living we owned a house and farmlands since a long time ago.

Q: How did your family make a living?

#23U: It was mainly farming. These days my elder sister has three children of whom one is a monk, the daughter stays home and the elder son is a nomad. He herds animals and is a nomad.

Q: Presently?

#23U: Yes.

Q: Is your sister living in Kham?

#23U: [My] elder sister lives in the hometown.

Q: Was your family very wealthy or moderate income or what?

#23U: We were among the moderate.

Q: Did you own many animals and if so, how many?

00:06:15

#23U: There were 12-13 animals at home. They were *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and cow,' *dzomo* 'female *dzo*,' cows and goats. There were no sheep.

Q: Twelve to 13?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, and horses.

Q: *Pa-la*, in your immediate family how many people lived there in your house?

#23U: When I was very little there were my father and mother; Father passed away. Then there was a paternal aunt, an elder sister and an elder brother. The elder brother was a monk. We were that many.

Q: Can you please describe what was your house like inside, like how many rooms did it have and how...Could you describe it for me?

#23U: In comparison to this house [looks around]...the house was large. The house was very large because there was a large yard to tether the animals; there were many horses then. The house was not located with others; our house was isolated.

Q: How far away was like the nearest monastery?

00:08:37

#23U: The monastery of Dhargay Gonpo was only a furlong away.

Q: From your house...

#23U: From home to the monastery was only a furlong.

Q: Furlong? Kilometer?

#23U: Not kilometer. There are 10 furlongs in a kilometer. It was around 1,000 meters.

Q: In the house, was it like a two story house? What were the rooms for in the house? Give us a description, please.

#23U: In the house was an area for the family members to live in that also housed the shrine and storage. On the other side was stored the food supplies. There was a large kitchen. There was one room to store hay for the animals. The house was partitioned into smaller rooms. In our hometown houses were measured on the basis of pillars called *gangnyi*. Perhaps there were around 80 *gangnyi* in the house. A *gangnyi* is about this size [looks around room]. There must be at least 80 such.

Q: A *gangnyi* is about this size?

00:10:30

#23U: Yes, one *gangnyi* is this size, about the size of this room. In the olden days, the standard measurement of a room was the length of one beam. Whether it was [a stack of] hay or firewood, they were sold on the basis of *gangnyi*. When buying something it was said, "This haystack is this many *gangnyi* and it costs this much money." It was like that.

Q: Was [the house] one or two stories, *pa-la*?

#23U: There were two stories...there were three stories. There was a middle floor and an upper one where one kept...[not discernible] during autumn. The animals were on the lower floor and people lived on the middle story.

Q: What was there on the upper story?

#23U: Right on the top was a structure. This was not in use until after the harvest.

Q: What kind of harvest was stored in the upper story?

00:12:36

#23U: The main crop for us in Tibet was barley. If there were peas, these were left on the lower floor, but all the barley was stored on the top.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Harvest of what?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Peas, pea.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, peas, lower level.

Q: Was there a reason why the harvest was stored above...at the highest level? Did it help keep the house warm or what was the reason?

#23U: The reason for storing [harvest] on the top was that if there were not many hands in the family, this had to be kept for a long time. Since it had to be kept for a long time, the stalks of barley were piled around the top story of the house with the ears of grain facing outwards and the stalks backwards. In this way even if it was kept for a long time, it did not spoil. Then it was gradually threshed on the top. In the case of Lhasa, *eka* was followed which is the method of threshing using animals. We did not use *eka* but threshed on the top story.

Q: So the roof of the house was used to beat the grain?

00:14:38

#23U: The beating was done on the top. Our roof was flat and not sloped. The roof was plain.

Q: Was your house considered a moderate house or a very wealthy house in the community?

#23U: The house was perhaps considered among the best. The houses of the taxpayers were connected to each other. Our house was not connected but independent.

Q: Had that house been in the family for a number of generations?

#23U: Yes, it was there since long ago, perhaps 20-30 years.

Q: 20-30 years?

#23U: Yes, round about that time because when I was 17 years old, there was a maternal uncle and it existed since his time. It must have been in existence for 50-60 years.

Q: I see. Do you have any happy memories of living in that house? When you think back what are some of the most pleasant things you can think of?

00:16:49

#23U: There is not much feeling presently because I left at the age of 17 and have not returned home until now when am 78 years old. Except for my niece that lives in the house, all my siblings have passed away. There were elder brother and elder sister who have passed away. Now there are three nephews and niece living in the house and no one else. [They] said, “[We] have demolished the old house and built a new one. You should come back. Elder brother is a nomad. If you return, [we] are not doing poorly. We have enough to pay for you passage back to India if you so wish.” [The nephews and niece] said so but I am not capable of going back. Even seeing a Chinese makes me feel scared.

It is very difficult to go under such circumstances. Whatever it is, due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama [I] am happy and there is freedom. One can live freely as one wish to. By going back to Tibet I have nothing to expect. The Chinese will not give any entitlement and I do not believe that I will get any entitlement because the Chinese are the real enemies and not just any enemy. It is the Chinese that destroyed families. It is the Chinese that destroyed parents and siblings. It is the Chinese that forced us to flee. There is none worse than the Chinese.

Q: Before we get into the Chinese, let me ask you something about your property. Did your parents, did they work the land just the few family members or did you have help to do the farming?

00:20:04

#23U: There were two maids to help. We had provided them with an acre of land each and housing as well. The two maids came to work for us on alternate days. Later, when the Chinese caused suffering, they did not say anything bad about us because my elder brother and others were not harmed much. Had they said something bad, our...However, my elder brother—the Chinese imposed liberation in our hometown in 1955 and my elder brother lived until 1985. He was a monk and lived as a monk until he passed away.

Q: Oh, really! So your older brother became a monk?

#23U: Yes.

Q: Did you ever become a monk?

00:21:59

#23U: I was also a monk. The reason I left in the beginning was because our monks had to spend three years [in a monastery] in Lhasa. Then when you returned to the hometown you

were a real monk without any duties at home and joined prayer assemblies and practiced the dharma. There was not anything else to do besides this [for monks] in our hometown.

Q: Is it typical that more than two men from a family could become monks? I thought it was just one son.

#23U: The reason was my sibling...I had a maternal uncle who was going to bring home a bride for him. He was told that being a rich family, a bride must be brought in. Then he ran away. He ran away at night to become a monk at a monastery [in Lhasa]. Later when he came back, the maternal uncle who was going to bring home the bride had passed away.

After maternal uncle passed away, my sibling was the one in authority in our house. He used to tell me, "You should not do anything bad. Do not run after women. Please do the best you can." So I replied to elder brother, "Elder brother, you need not worry. I will not run after women. I will not remain a layperson because you became a monk not wanting to be a layperson, which I will follow. I will become a monk." I said that to [my] elder brother. My elder brother did the best for me.

Q: Why did you want to become a monk?

00:24:42

#23U: The reason I became a monk was as a layperson, one must plow the fields, harvest the crops and take care of the home. It was a difficult job. So I was determined to become a monk believing that I would be happier, and became a monk.

Q: Did your parents give you permission?

#23U: The parents already had that wish. They did not raise any objection to whatever the son chose to do because I was the only child in the family for elder brother and others had grown up. There was only one child for Mother and I was free to do what I wished and there was no one to control me.

Q: Where did you become a monk?

00:26:24

#23U: Initially, I was a monk at the monastery.

Q: Where?

#23U: A monk of Dhargay Gonpa and then left for Lhasa and entered the great monastery where one must remain for three years and then return home. However, [I] could not. I left hometown in 1957 when I was 17 years old and then I was in the great monastery for three years and escaped in '59. [I] never got to see the hometown again. I never set eyes on my hometown from 1955 to this day and why was that? That was because of the Chinese that pursued and forced me to escape. That is what happened.

Q: *Pa-la*, so before we talk of your life as a monk, could you go back and tell us something about the water mill that the family co-owned? I heard that you mentioned that before.

#23U: Since the time we settled there, two families co-owned the water mill. The water mill belonged to the richest family, the leader of the village and our family. [We] were co-owners, partners. Therefore, we ran it for a year and then they ran it the next year. Without this water mill, there was nowhere to make *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ in our region.

In those days there were no machines. So all the people made *tsampa* at this water mill. There were four large water mills near a large river. Each family had a flour miller to make *tsampa*. One ground flour there and paid in the form of *tsampa*. There was not any other way in the old days in Tibet. Whether it was *tsampa* or...anything edible had to be made at the water mill.

Q: So can you describe the mill, what it looked like?

00:30:14

#23U: The water mill...The Indian machine flourmill rotates below while in the case of the watermill of Tibet, it is the upper portion that rotates—the upper portion. The Indian machine flourmill rotates below and it is not the upper portion that rotates, the machine rotates below. Our watermill has a metal fixed underneath, which helps the rotation. Below the watermill was a big log attached with blades made of wooden boards. Water came down in force on it through a groove, which we call *wa*. It is a large gutter for the water. This powers [the blades] to rotate. It rotates clock-wise.

There were two such watermills. If this was the house, there was a watermill here [indicates right] and another watermill here [indicates left]. There were wooden boards fixed and the *tsampa* ground. Then the *tsampa* emerged and was collected below. There was no end to the grinding and it went on day and night because there were no machines and all the families had to come there to grind *tsampa*.

Q: Interesting. Had that mill been in the village for generations or was it something new?

00:32:25

#23U: The watermill had been in existence since the village came into being. It was not something new.

Q: I see and how about how the animals were slaughtered in your area because you lived on the products of meat of the animals for food. How were they slaughtered?

#23U: The nomads slaughtered in a strange way. In general, animals were slaughtered through smothering by tying up the snout. When the nomads came, they tied the legs and brought [the animal] down and tied up the snout. As little children we did not know and used to go to watch. That is how the slaughtering was done.

Q: How do you smother an animal? Do you put something on its face or head?

#23U: Tied with a rope...they tied the snout with a rope.

Q: Was that considered a better way to kill an animal than with a knife or a...?

00:34:36

#23U: In our hometown nobody slaughtered using a knife. There were certain nomads that killed by stabbing on the head [points to top of head] with a knife. We were little children and when nomads came...If this was [our] house, the nomads stayed out in the open. When it was said that the nomads had come, finding them strange, little children used to go to watch. They sort of stabbed on the head and the animal died.

Q: You both lived in the Kham region. So the farmers, were they not as friendly with the nomads?

#23U: Just after harvest in autumn and when the crops were being threshed the nomads came because they had to collect barley for the winter. When they came to get barley, the nomads brought meat, butter and cheese. They did not have *tsampa*. We farmers gave them grains. They took it to use as food for the winter. We did not possess many animals, no yaks and no *dri* 'female yaks.' The nomads possessed yaks and *dri* but not *dzo* and *dzomo*. That was the difference between nomads and farmers.

Q: Was it a friendly exchange?

00:37:12

#23U: Yes. They came from there and...For instance, if I am a nomad and knew just two people [in the farming community] I would set up camp near their house. Then they would tell [the other farmers], "We have a nomad who is staying near us. It is good to do business with him. He has meat, butter and everything." So connections are set up. Later, when you went to the nomadic site, you went to him and not to some other nomad.

Q: I see, nice. And then I know you wanted to talk...also continue your talk about the monastery and we have to do that right now. So how old were you when you left home to join the monastery?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In Lhasa?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: In Lhasa.

#23U: 17 years old.

Q: Was that your first time to Lhasa?

#23U: Yes. I fled when the Chinese began to cause suffering. The reason I fled at the age of 17 was that the Chinese told me, "Will you join the army?" "If all the monks of Dhargay Gonpa joins the army, I will too. If all the monks do not join the army, there is no reason why I should join the army." He was some sort of a policeman and immediately pointed a

gun at my heart and threatened, “Will you go or not?” I told my mother what the Chinese had told me and that I might be taken to join the army. My elder brother was there then but he was in retreat. However, he was informed, “It is better to send [him] away from home else the Chinese will take him to the army.” They made preparations for around 15 days and I was sent away from home. Then I went to Lhasa.

Q: Your mother was worried that you would be in trouble with the Chinese?

00:40:56

#23U: Yes. If the Chinese take me away, I would become a Chinese. So they made preparations and sent me to Lhasa.

Q: *Pa-la*, how old were you or what year did you go to Lhasa?

#23U: [I] think it was '57.

Q: Oh, in '57. What did you see in Lhasa when you looked around? Did you see the presence of many Chinese?

#23U: There were many Chinese in Lhasa. However, they did not make any enquiries in the hometown when I left for Lhasa. Most of our people fled from the hometowns and all those in the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] had revolted against the Chinese in [their respective] hometowns and fled. Therefore, most of the people of Kham do not have family, not even one family member and were single. [They] were without parents and siblings and the reason being that [they] had fled from the hometowns and when Tibet was lost—when Lhasa was lost—fled to India. It was like that. First, [they] fled from the hometowns to Lhasa and then when Lhasa—Tibet—was lost, everybody fled to India.

Q: What monastery did you join?

00:43:21

#23U: It was the Sera Monastery. Once at Sera Monastery, one must find a teacher. A relative in the hometown had given me a letter for a friend of his who was a monk in Sera Monastery. When [I] handed over the letter, he helped me join Sera Monastery and found a teacher and someone who would provide food. I was supposed to stay in the monastery for three years but before the three years was up, Tibet lost independence and I fled to India in 1959.

Q: How did you... What were the circumstances under which you left Sera Monastery? What happened?

#23U: The circumstances were incredibly sad because it felt like a nightmare and we never imagined we would suffer so much—never thought we would lose our country. However, due to destiny one had to flee. [I] believed [we] might get to return the next day, but that was not to be and the day moved further and further away—day by day—and [then we] were in India.

Q: And what happened? How did you finally leave your monastery?

00:45:54

#23U: Initially, at Sera [Monastery] we wanted to fight and went to the Potala Palace to fetch guns. It was said one could get guns there. We got the guns and stayed atop a hill in the night to protect the monastery. The next day there was no need to protect the monastery because it was said that...had surrendered. "You need not protect your monastery, but take care of yourself. There is nothing else to do."

Then I took off the monk's robes, donned layman's attire, carried the gun—there was no horse then—and walked for around two days. Then [I] got a not so good horse from the villagers and met up with the *Chushi Gangdrug* on the way. In the *Chushi Gangdrug*, they provided food and other provisions. [I] did not get to fight much while in the *Chushi Gangdrug* and had to escape to India.

Q: What happened to you next then, *pa-la*?

00:47:55

#23U: Then [I] fled and reached the place called Assam. I could not remember the name of the town earlier. It is called Tuting [India].

Q: Tuting.

#23U: [I] reached the place called Tuting where [I] surrendered the gun to the Indians. Then those people that were unable to walk were taken in an airplane while those that could walk, walked for two days. Perhaps it was Calcutta from where [we] were sent to Missamari, Assam in a ship.

Q: Calcutta, that far down?

#23U: No. After walking for two days from Tuting there were Indian soldiers at a post. It was the border area between the tribal area and India. From there the government sent us to Missamari in Assam in a ship.

Q: Wasn't it Calcutta?

#23U: It was not.

Q: Did you ever rejoin a monastery or did you remain a layperson?

00:49:52

#23U: Then at Assam, most of the monks, monks who had studied more were taken to...[I] cannot remember the name of the place.

Q: Buxar?

#23U: ...were taken to Buxar. We, who were in lower grades, were left in Missamari. One day in Missamari, a list of names was being drawn to join a school in Mussoorie. [I] enlisted but was not accepted. [I] do not know why. When [I] could not join the school in Mussoorie, there were 30 of us that were dispatched to a place called Nahan. It seems there was an iron factory. There were 13 of us monks while some were laypeople. From the group of 30 people, 13 of us were monks.

There we were told to work in the field. We replied that we did not know farming. So the forest department people made us join them in digging the earth in a flower garden—worked in a flower garden. Then one day a senior official of the forest department said, “You have to do well and gradually you will receive caps and belts and become forest officers.”

We did not stay there but escaped to Shimla. At Shimla [I] worked as a coolie constructing roads. As [I] was working as a road crew, one day some people came from the Tibetan Government to draw a list saying, “If you join the [Indian] army, you will be given training for six months, including food and clothes. After the six-month training you must go to the border of Tibet and fight the Chinese.” After that not just six months, [I] was in the army for 24 years.

Q: Twenty-four?

#23U: Yes.

Q: Did you ever go back to the border and fight the Chinese?

00:54:12

#23U: No, we did not get to go there because we continued to remain in Chakrata. Then [I] was at the border for 5-6 years and gave some training and such. [My] main job in the army was working as a trainer in rock climbing for around 15 years.

Q: Well, your story...certainly there's much more to tell, but I also know that we have an obligation to stop at this time for your schedule. So is there anything...First of all, I want to thank you for your story. Is there anything that you would like to add before we finish?

#23U: There is nothing left to say because the story is almost at an end. What is left of the story is that I suffered and then met a woman. The Tibetan Government is most helpful and took us into the Home for the Aged and provides food. There is none happy like us—with not a care. We do not have to spend any money; there are no fields [to cultivate]; there is no rent to pay for housing; there is no worry about food. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been so benevolent. There is nowhere better than this for us. [I] have no regret if [I] die. Thank you.

Q: What is your hope for Tibet? Can you just share that with us?

00:56:46

#23U: [I] have great hope. I wish [I] could go to Tibet before death and be able to leave my body there. [I] think of this a lot, but thinking is useless for I am not capable. For one, [I] have no education and secondly, I am old and the body is incapable. It is a sorry state of affairs. If one's body is capable, one can attempt anything. I cannot walk due to knee pain. It is a sorry state.

Even being in this sorry state, one is fortunate for the Tibetan Government is providing for us. There is nothing more benevolent than this. If one's body is incapable, thinking is useless. If one's body is able, what one thinks about can be accomplished. For instance, in a fight, without physical strength it is difficult to fight someone. If one has to go somewhere, without good health it is difficult to go anywhere. Whatever it is, if one's body is not healthy, it's a sorry state.

When one was younger, on seeing old people one teased, "What has happened to you? What ails you? Show me." One used to say such things, but now when you are old, what you used to tell others has happened to you like knee pain and such. Then you feel sad. However, on the other hand His Holiness the Dalai Lama advises, "Do not feel sad. Be happy. If one is happy, you are happy and others are not harmed." [His Holiness] always says so. One cannot heed His Holiness' advice a hundred percent, but [I] try to follow a some by being happy and minimizing anger and such. It is certain that one cannot heed [His Holiness' advices] a hundred percent, but it is good to heed some of His Holiness' advice.

Our being happy presently is the benevolence of His Holiness and none else. It was not left by the parents nor was it the help of the siblings and relatives. It is only His Holiness the Dalai Lama that provides us refuge. It is His Holiness who is the refuge in death, and in this life; he is the one that provides food and shelter. If not for His Holiness, India may not allow us to live here.

Q: Well, we wish you well and that your body continues to get...to feel okay. I'm sorry for your pain. [Bell rings] That's the dinner bell. So I just want to ask the following again. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#23U: Yes?

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

01:01:17

#23U: There will be no problems whatsoever. In fact I will be happy if the Chinese hear about this and [I] do not think of it as a problem.

Q: So can we use your real name for this project?

#23U: [Nods and joins palms]

Q: Thank you so much, *pa-la*, for sharing your story.

#23U: [Nods]

END OF INTERVIEW