

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #2N – Drukdam
April 7, 2015

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #2N
2. Interviewee: Druk dak
3. Age: 67
4. Date of Birth: 1948
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Sok Tsendhen Gang
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1983
9. Date of Interview: April 7, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 07 min
12. Interviewer: Katharine Davis Samway
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Henry Tanenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Druk dak was born in a small village called Sok Tsendhen Gang in Kham Province. He describes their livelihood as *samadok* ‘farmers and herders.’ They reared yaks, sheep, goats and horses in summer and grew crops like barley, turnips, wheat and radish in springtime. He recounts life as a young boy herding the animals and describes the dangers from wild animals in the mountains. He also had to protect the crops in the village from the livestock.

Druk dak describes the salt gathering expeditions to the north of his village. It took them around three months to travel and harvest the salt. He explains the two kinds of salt they collected and how the young men on horseback transported the salt on yaks to the village. He also gives some insight into village doctors and how ailments and injuries were treated.

Under Chinese occupation Druk dak witnessed the destruction of monasteries and holy images, and of lamas and monks being subjected to *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions’ and imprisonment. The Chinese barred Tibetans from chanting prayers and seeking an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Druk dak felt that he could not live without access to the Dalai Lama and religious freedom. For that reason he fled from Tibet.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, farm life, nomadic life, life under Chinese rule, destruction of monasteries.

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Interview #2N

Interviewee: Drukdak

Age: 67, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Katharine Davies Samway

Interview Date: April 7, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:10

Interviewee #2N: Drukdak.

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?

#2N: [Nods]

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let us know.

#2N: Okay.

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

#2N: Okay.

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

#2N: There will be no problems. It can be shown.

Q: Thank you.

00:01:57

#2N: [I] speak the truth.

Q: Thank you. We are honored, very honored to record your story and really appreciate your participation in the project.

#2N: [Silent]

Q: How old are you?

#2N: [I] am 67 now.

Q: And where were you born?

#2N: Sok Tsendhen Gang.

Q: Was that a village or a town...?

#2N: [Speaks before question is translated] [My] hometown is Sok Tsendhen Gang.

Q: And which province is that?

#2N: It is in Dhotoe.

Q: Where was the nearest temple or the nearest monastery?

#2N: The nearest monastery...It is about five hours journey from my hometown to Sok Tsendhen Monastery.

Q: Walking?

#2N: Yes.

Q: So the community where you lived, about how many people lived there?

00:03:47

#2N: There were around a hundred people in the village. It is like Boudha here and there were around a hundred people. Nearby were a few villages.

Q: What was your father's name?

#2N: Father's name was Yongphel. [He] is dead, passed away.

Q: And your mother's name?

#2N: Kyekar. [She] has passed away.

Q: You're married?

#2N: Yes.

Q: How old is your wife?

#2N: [She] must be around 73 or 74.

Q: Was she born in Tibet also?

#2N: Yes, same [as me].

Q: In the same community? Does she come from the same area?

#2N: Yes.

Q: When your father and mother were alive, what did your father do? What was his livelihood?

00:05:23

#2N: [He] was both a farmer and nomad, rearing animals in summer and cultivating lands in winter. [He] was a *samadok* ‘farmer and herder.’

Q: In the summer did you go up high and in the winter come down low?

#2N: Yes.

Q: What did you herd? What animals?

#2N: Yaks and sheep, and goats. There were horses, too.

Q: The yaks, sheep and goats, did you rear these to eat them or to sell them? What were you rearing for?

#2N: There was no trading in our region. [The animals] were for consumption. When [they] reached old age, [they] were killed and consumed.

Q: What products did you get from your animals?

00:07:15

#2N: After milking the *dri* ‘female yaks,’ sheep and goats one got butter and cheese. The horses were not reared for meat or milk; horses were only meant for riding like the motor cycles here if one needed to move around, carry loads and ride. Horses were used for that. From the *dri* and sheep one got four items: curd, milk, butter and cheese.

Q: Curd, butter...?

#2N: Milk.

Q: Cheese.

#2N: Cheese.

Q: How old were you when you first rode a horse on your own?

#2N: [I] rode a horse as a small child. Every nomad family owned horses similar to motorcycles and cycles we have here. You could ride them anytime.

Q: So would you ride on your own from the age of 2 or 3 or 5 or...?

00:09:26

#2N: One could go riding from the age of 10.

Q: Was this a full size horse or was this a pony, a smaller?

#2N: A grown horse.

Q: So when you...For what purposes did you ride horses?

#2N: One must ride between the nomadic site and the village. Then visiting neighbors and friends like we go on motorcycles now. It was similar to that, and to go to monasteries to see the deities and lamas.

Q: And then you said in the winter you planted crops, what crops did you plant?

#2N: It is not winter. You sowed during springtime, growing barley, turnips—you may not know what a turnip is but will know barley--wheat and radish. We grew four items in our fields. Because of the high altitude there were no fruits, potatoes or green vegetables.

Q: If you didn't have fruits, did some of the other foods provide the nutrients that fruits give you?

00:12:13

#2N: They are available these days but not during the time of our parents.

Q: Meaning fruits?

#2N: Yes. [Fruits] are available now. These days there are roads everywhere after the Chinese arrived. Trucks ply and [fruits] are available.

Q: So when you were a young child in Tibet could you get fruits?

#2N: There were none then.

Q: Can you take me through a year in the life of your family in terms of what you did, you know, where you had to go season by season?

#2N: One went up the nomadic site and then reared goats, sheep and yaks. Then came down and farmed the lands. It was like that and other than that the Chinese did not permit one to go anywhere else.

Q: Cannot go elsewhere?

#2N: Cannot as the Chinese stopped you. The Chinese are powerful and we had no power.

00:14:18

We desired to go to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama but they did not permit. [The Chinese] would not allow you to see His Holiness; they stopped you. They did not allow you to even give the name of His Holiness.

Q: What would happen if you did?

#2N: We would be penalized. You are not to utter. The Dalai Lama is a *dawor*.

Q: Yes?

#2N: The Dalai Lama is a *dawor* for the Chinese.

Q: What does *dawor* mean?

#2N: *Dawor* means enemy, opponent.

Q: Enemy.

#2N: Yes. We, the people of Tibet cannot survive without the Dalai Lama. So [we] are not allowed to talk [about him]. One cannot utter.

The Dalai Lama is our heart and [we] cannot survive without. I swear [we] cannot. One will get food to eat and clothes to wear but there will be no happiness. [To interpreter] Translate that well.

Q: So how did you sustain your connection to the Dalai Lama when the Chinese were there?

00:16:15

#2N: Unable to survive, [we] came away, could not suffer any longer, could not survive.

[To interpreter] Please translate well because they will be broadcasting this everywhere.

Q: I would like to come back to when you left Tibet and what caused you to, but for now, could you tell us some of your memories of your childhood when you were up in the mountains, when you were herding?

#2N: We set out around 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning to graze the animals in the mountains, the cattle and sheep. Then prevent them from being attacked by wild animals and bring all of them safely back home. [We] must do like that.

Q: How was it done?

#2N: None of [the animals] must be left behind. The animals must be brought back home.

Q: [You] brought them back in the evening?

#2N: Yes, all must be.

Q: Did you ever have any encounters with wild animals?

00:18:19

#2N: While grazing the animals, if you did not watch out well, wolves would attack them. There were many wolves that were huge and could run well. Then there were Tibetan brown bears. Then there were leopards.

Q: Leopards?

#2N: Yes. Then there were cougars and lynx. There were many wild animals. The shepherd must be able to prevent all these and the weather was very cold. It did not rain like it does here. In the country of Tibet there was only snow. In such conditions one must prevent the animals from being killed.

Q: Did you ever have an incident with one of these wild animals like the brown bear or the leopard or wolf?

#2N: [I] have encountered. One could chase a wolf away since they feared humans. You ran away on encountering a *dego*. *Dego* eat humans. [Laughs]

Q: *Demong* 'Tibetan brown bear'?

#2N: Yes.

Q: Did you run away from a brown bear?

00:20:25

#2N: [I] fled. [I] have run away.

Q: You could run faster than a brown bear?

#2N: One must make an effort. [I] just about managed to escape.

Q: What happened to your animals?

#2N: [Speaks before question is translated] If you did not flee, it would eat your sheep, goats and you.

Q: What happened to your animals when the brown bear chased you?

#2N: The animals were not harmed. The animals managed to escape.

Q: When you were taking care of the animals, were you on your own or were you with other children or other people?

#2N: There were others. The neighbors, they also owned animals. [We] went to the mountains together.

Q: So how many children would be there?

00:22:03

#2N: There were two or three children that went as herders.

Q: And how many animals?

#2N: Each child would have over a hundred animals.

Q: I'm imagining a hillside with lots of animals and three children, 2-3 children and I'm trying to imagine how the day passed. What did you do when you were out from the morning until night?

#2N: [We] ate food. [We] would eat in the morning [at home] and brought lunch [to the grazing area].

Q: What?

#2N: One brought meat and *pa* 'dough made from roasted barley flour and tea.' [We] ate those and grazed the animals until sunset. Once home, there was food kept ready.

Q: I'm trying to imagine how you spent your time while you were up in the mountains.

00:24:15

#2N: There was a large herd of animals and one must watch out that wild animals did not attack them all. One circled around as the animals grazed and stopped and then moved again. That is how time passed.

The animals need grass and water.

Q: Did you play any games while you were up?

#2N: Sometimes one played with white and black stones and at times made drawings on rocks. And sometimes played dice. That is how it was but there was not much time for play because the animals were in large numbers. Wild animals could attack them and they must be guided to the grass and water. So there was not much time to play.

Q: About how old were you when you did these, this kind of herding?

#2N: [I] must have been around 15 or 18-19.

Q: Oh. So you were a young man.

#2N: Yes.

Q: In my country England, there are people who have lots of sheep and the shepherds use whistles and calls to control the sheep. How would you control your animals? How did you shepherd them?

00:26:53

#2N: She [interviewer] is right. [We] call and whistle. It is the same, really.

Q: Can you give us a...show us a whistle?

#2N: What?

Q: How did [you] whistle?

#2N: Now [I] cannot whistle as [I] do not have teeth.

Q: What about the call?

#2N: One has to make a call to come back.

Q: Please make a call that [you] make to the sheep to return.

#2N: One must call *kee hee hee*.

Q: Pretend that we are three of your animals and he's going there and she's going there, I'm going there. What would you do?

#2N: Then there is the slingshot, slingshot. When a slingshot is used, the animals fear it and stay put, really. It makes a similar sound to a gunshot. They stay put out of fear.

Q: But how would you make sure they didn't just keep on running?

00:28:57

#2N: [The animals] did not run away. They stayed put out of fear having been trained at a very young age.

Q: Was this work done just by boys or girls also do this herding?

#2N: It was similar for boys and girls, depending upon the number of people in a family. Boys did it and girls did it. However, it was just girls that did the milking.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

#2N: [I] had. All of them have passed away.

Q: I'm sorry. Were they younger than you or older than you?

#2N: All were older to me. I am the youngest.

Q: So the herding experience you just told us...are you tired?

#2N: [I] am not tired, not at all.

Q: The herding experience you just told us about this was when you were 15-18. When you were younger did you have responsibilities within the family?

00:30:54

#2N: One was given responsibilities of the animals because [our] livelihood depended upon the animals and farming.

Q: What kind of responsibilities?

#2N: Like adding manure to the fields, removing rocks and leveling clumps of earth, preventing *sa* [birds?], *tso* and all.

Q: Preventing what?

#2N: *Sa*, *tsowa* and such that ate [the crops].

Q: What are *sa* and *tsowa*?

#2N: These are animals that must be stopped.

Q: Was this the yak and horse manure?

#2N: The manure was from horses, yaks and sheep.

Q: Horses, yaks and sheep?

#2N: Yes.

Q: So you would have to go out into the fields as a young child and what did you do to protect the crops?

00:32:30

#2N: You circled the fields once or twice a day and prevented goats, sheep and yaks from entering.

Q: Where was the nearest school to your settlement?

#2N: There were no schools then.

Q: The people of your generation who stayed in Tibet until when you left, did they ever bring schools into your area? If they had children could their children go to school?

#2N: Later there were schools.

Q: If you got sick what would happen? If you got sick what would happen?

#2N: There were Tibetan doctors in the village if one got sick. They checked pulse and the medicines were plants that grew in the region. Such were gathered and dispensed. [The medicines] were helpful.

Q: Were you ever sick?

00:34:40

#2N: [I] was a little bit sick and have taken medications, which helped.

Q: What was wrong with you?

#2N: [I] had jaundice, headache and blood pressure that [medications] helped.

Q: If you broke your leg, how would you be treated?

#2N: If one broke a leg, a stick would be tied with a string on the outside, and a cloth.

Q: If you got appendicitis how would that be treated?

#2N: Nothing of such used to be heard of. [I] have not suffered it nor heard about appendicitis.

Q: Do you recall anyone who needed surgery and if so, how was that treated?

#2N: Then [the sick person] would have to die. There was not anyone who could perform surgery.

Q: What other memories do you have of your childhood?

00:36:49

#2N: [I] do not have anything else.

Q: Was there anything that your family needed that wasn't available in the village that you had to go for, you had to search for?

#2N: We had adequate amount of meat, butter and grains that there was not any need to search from outside. *Sha* was available on sale.

Q: What?

#2N: *Sha*.

Q: What's *sha*?

#2N: *Sha* to drink.

Q: *Ja* 'tea'?

#2N: Yes, that could be bought and then salt was available. [We] have to go to gather salt. Without salt we cannot eat food.

Q: That's very interesting. Where did you go to gather the salt?

#2N: One must go to the north. There are no humans or living beings of any kind in the north.

Q: I have seen saltpans where saline water evaporates and the salt is left behind. What was it like where you gathered your salt?

00:39:07

#2N: From the day you left home, it took us around two months and 20 days to get salt. It took a month and 10 days to get there and then likewise to return. Once one got there, this much [gestures off camera] of the saltpan was all mud. One must enter the saltpan naked except for a pair of short pants. Up to here [indicates 3 inches above ground] was mud and the salt is formed above the mud. The salt is formed up to here [indicates a foot above ground] and above the salt is water up to here [indicates knee height].

As I told you [interpreter] earlier, a flat wooden board about the size of this paper, similar to tool used during road construction, is used to bring out the salt. After that you cleaned the salt and washed the mud from your feet so that it doesn't develop sores. That is the number one salt. The salt is tasty and enriching. Nearby the mud and water, at the edge of the saltpan is formed another kind of salt similar to snow. There is no need to go into the water or mud. This salt tastes poorly unlike the salt from within the water. This can be gathered and it is easy.

Q: The not-so tasty salt, how would your family use that? What was it used for?

#2N: The uses were the same. The uses were the same but the salt from the water, if you used a spoonful of that, it was sufficient to bring out taste and the dry salt that lies out of the water, even two spoonful would not give that much taste. That was the difference.

That is the difference. It was very difficult for us to gather salt. They must be transported on yaks because there were no vehicles.

Q: Did your whole family go to do the salt collecting, salt harvesting?

00:43:52

#2N: No. You asked how many people were there in the village and [I] answered that there were around a hundred. From the hundred people, one or two young men ventured with

each man driving 25 yaks. Each one took a horse for riding. Hence, two men must take control of 52 cattle and horses. Then there were big rivers to ford and there were unfortunate cases of many people drowning.

Q: So was it just the men who went to seek the salt?

#2N: Only men as women cannot do it.

Q: How young would the youngest man be?

#2N: Those that went were around the age of 20 or 25, 24, or maybe around 30.

Q: So you went to collect salt?

00:45:58

#2N: [I] have been.

Q: Can you tell us maybe some occasions that stand out to you?

#2N: One must ford huge rivers. There was a lot of fear and panic that you might get swept away. Sometimes you rode yaks and sometimes horses. [I] managed to go across. There were such difficulties and dread.

Q: Were you ever personally in danger of being swept away?

#2N: [I] was not at risk of being swept away as [I] had good yaks to ride.

Q: How deep was the water and was it very steep, the river or very wide or...?

#2N: The river was swift and wide. When a yak was ridden in it, one could not see anything but the yak's snout and the tips of its horns.

Q: Can yaks swim?

00:47:58

#2N: [They] swim. Yaks and horses swim well.

Q: Did they sometimes have to swim over these rivers rather than, you know, being up to here just walking through the river?

#2N: [The yaks] were moving all their legs [in water and swimming].

Q: Thank you. Why did it take over two months to go and collect and bring back the salt?

#2N: The journey took that long, as [the saltpans] were located at a great distance.

Q: How many days journey did you have to go to reach the salt?

#2N: It took around a month and 10 days.

Q: To just get there?

#2N: Yes. From the day you left to your return it took about two months and 15-20 days.

Q: How long did you stand harvesting the salt?

#2N: Harvesting salt for the 50 yak-loads would take around 10 days. Ten days were sufficient.

Q: So it took about four and half months to go harvest the salt and come back?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It didn't take four months, right? Two months?

#2N: No.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, it's one month 10 days one way and the second, return journey would take that many. So over two months.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But then 10 days to...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Gather?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: That's almost like three months.

Q: It's like three months because 10 days are spent on harvesting the salt.

#2N: Yes.

Q: About three months? Thank you. That sounds like a lot of work.

#2N: Right.

Q: Were there people from other villages doing the same work there?

#2N: [We] did the same kind [of work].

Q: From different villages?

#2N: All semi-nomads did the same.

Q: In the same location?

#2N: Yes.

Q: How many communities might gather at the same time?

#2N: Oh, many would gather. Gathered from various [places].

Q: Were there ever any conflicts between communities?

#2N: No, there was plenty of salt to be gathered. One could even gather a hundred or a thousand trucks in a day.

Q: I'd like to go back to what you were saying about when you left. How did the Chinese occupation affect you and your family?

00:53:09

#2N: We could not endure the suffering inflicted by the Chinese. We were not allowed to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama nor give his name. Because His Holiness the Dalai Lama was not allowed to live in the Potala Palace it caused us great suffering, to all the people of Tibet. Had the Dalai Lama been living there, we would not come here. [To interpreter] Please translate this well. [We] will not stay without the Dalai Lama.

Under the Chinese there were no monasteries to be seen. One cannot chant the *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara.' There was not a single lama or monk to be seen. [To interpreter] Please translate this well. There was not a single deity or lama to be seen.

We fled not because we did not have wealth or finance. [To interpreter] Please translate this well. We were not allowed to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama, see or hear [about him] and fled in desperation regardless of whether [we] died or lived with the hope to see His Holiness. It was the same for all of us, the Tibetans. Please relay this.

00:55:06

Otherwise, in our hometown we did not have any worries about food and clothing and did not have to depend on anybody else. [We] earned a living that was sufficient.

Q: So although you lived in a fairly remote area it sounds like to me, you still felt the impact of the Chinese?

#2N: Yes.

Q: Did the Chinese actually come into your village?

#2N: [The Chinese] arrived due to which we could not survive. There was no religious freedom, not a monastery was to be seen, not a single lama or monk was to be seen; one was not allowed to chant *mani*.

We could not survive without His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [He] is our heart.

Q: I understand that it must've been very difficult for you.

#2N: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us about when you...when the Chinese came into your village? How many people? Were they soldiers? What did they do?

00:57:14

#2N: [The Chinese] were all soldiers. There were Chinese soldiers and there were Chinese leaders. [They] destroyed all the monasteries. Our various holy images were burned, broken and thrown away in drains. None survived. We were not permitted to lay eyes on them.

Q: What did you see with your eyes?

#2N: [I] witnessed monasteries being destroyed. [I] witnessed monks and lamas being subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.' Many monks and lamas died.

Q: Where was this that you saw this?

#2N: It was in our country of Tibet, in Kham, in Tsendhen Gang.

Q: Was that close to your home?

#2N: Yes.

Q: How close was it?

#2N: It is close.

Q: How close?

#2N: It is about 2-3 hours away.

Q: Why had you gone to that region, that place?

00:59:16

#2N: We had to go there to see the deities and lamas. There I saw them destroying monasteries and subjecting lamas and monks to *thamzing* and imprisoning them. Most people died from starvation. [I] saw these with [my] eyes.

Q: When, what year about was this?

#2N: I cannot remember. It was '83 when I came here.

Q: How long was it before that?

#2N: Must be the 50s.

Q: When you were 50 years old?

#2N: Yeah. I cannot remember the year. Prior to that the Chinese came to Lhasa and launched the Cultural Revolution and His Holiness the Dalai Lama had to escape. [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] fled. It was around that time.

Q: In what year did you leave Tibet?

01:01:05

#2N: [I] came here in '83.

Q: How old were you round about?

#2N: [I] must have been around 30.

Q: You actually lived under the Chinese occupation for quite a long time. I think the Chinese entered when you were about 10 or 11 and you left when you were about 30. So was there an incident that caused you to say, "I've got to leave"?

#2N: [Speaks after question is partly translated] I was around that [age of 10 or 11] and seeing Chinese we used to run away out of fear. I swear.

That was because we could not see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If we were allowed to see His Holiness and if His Holiness was living in the Potala Palace, we would never come here.

Q: So he left in 1959...

#2N: [Interrupts] Now we are happy to have the chance to see the Dalai Lama and will not go back to our hometown leaving the Dalai Lama here. One can return to the hometown.

Q: Why won't you go back to your village?

01:03:35

#2N: [I] will not go back leaving His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: Would you like to tell us about the preparations and actually leaving Tibet?

#2N: The story about coming here is because of the suffering on account of His Holiness the Dalai Lama not living in Tibet.

Q: What preparations did [you] make?

#2N: There were no preparations, as [we] did not have any money then and came begging along the way.

Q: From the hometown?

#2N: Yes.

Q: Until where?

#2N: Until [we] reached here, until [we] reached Nepal. We made the decision to go and see His Holiness the Dalai Lama whether we died or survived. Not just me, it was the same for all the people of Tibet.

We escaped without the knowledge of the Chinese. Had the Chinese known, they would have stopped and imprisoned us. [To interpreter] Please translate this.

Q: Thank you very much for sharing such a moving story with us.

#2N: Okay. You can broadcast my story in China or anywhere. [I] have spoken the truth and it can be shown anywhere.

Q: Can you speak in brief what life was like under the Chinese Government?

01:06:03

#2N: Life was terrible under the Chinese. I swear. It seemed like nighttime with no happiness whatsoever. It was like being in prison from morning until night. And inside [me] was the suffering that [I] could not see His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

That is all. Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much. I just need to ask you two questions. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would there be a problem for you?

#2N: There will be no problems at all.

Q: We can use your name, your real name?

#2N: Yes.

Q: Thank you very, very much.

END OF INTERVIEW