

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #32C – Lhakey
October 24, 2016**

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #32C
2. Interviewee: Lhakey
3. Age: 77
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Sakya, Khaphuchay
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: October 24, 2016
10. Place of Interview: Private home, Albany, California, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 51 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Kunga Choeden
14. Videographer: Lobsang Thinley
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Lhakey was born in a small village consisting of seven families near Sakya in Utsang. She lived with her father, two mothers and seven siblings. A younger wife was added to the family in order to help with herding, while the older wife stayed at home to do the cooking and household chores. Lhakey started herding sheep at the age of 5 and explains how the adults and children cared for the sheep and watched for predators, such as wolves and martens.

Lhakey describes the food they ate and the different chores assigned to young boys and girls, such as spinning wool and making shoes. She also had time to play games with other children and demonstrates a game of tossing and catching stones. Her family owned a large farm where they grew vegetables, grains and mustard from which oil was extracted. Lhakey learned to recite Buddhist prayers and believes a devoted practice is beneficial for all sentient beings.

At the age of 18 or 19 Lhakey was married to man who worked as an attendant for Lama Kala, sister of His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya. After the Chinese invaded, Lama Kala was arrested and publicly beaten many times. The villagers were forced to denounce the religious leaders and many others were imprisoned and severely beaten as well. One lama committed suicide by stuffing *khata* 'ceremonial scarves' down his throat. Lhakey and many of her family members managed to flee to India in 1960.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, herding, customs/traditions, Buddhist beliefs, oppression under Chinese, thamzing.

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Interview #32C

Interviewee: Lhakey

Age: 77, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: October 24, 2016

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:06

Interviewee #32C: I am called Lhakey.

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.

#32C: Thank you.

Q: Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#32C: What?

Q: Do you support it?

#32C: [To interpreter] You do not listen when we talk about it. We do speak about the practices in Tibet but [the younger generation] make fun and do not listen.

Q: Well, thank you for offering to share your story with us.

00:02:12

#32C: Thank you.

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

[Interpreter interprets as: During the interview if you wish to go somewhere or drink water, please us know.]

#32C: No, [I] do not need to drink water. Thank you.

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

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

#32C: I am not going to Tibet; will not be going to Tibet. Were [I] to go to Tibet, the Chinese will cause problems. If [I] do not go to Tibet, that is it. Period.

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

#32C: Please use it well. Thank you. Thank you.

Q: Lhakey, where were you born in Tibet?

#32C: [I] was born in Khaphuchay in Sakya. It is a little away from Sakya, around three miles. Three miles.

Lhakang Chenmo is at a distance of three miles.

Q: Do you know what Tibetan calendar year you were born?

00:04:32

#32C: My birth sign? The birth sign is the horse.

Q: What year was that?

#32C: [I am] 77 years old.

Q: No, the year?

#32C: I do not know that.

Q: How old are you now?

#32C: [I am] 77 years old now.

Q: What was the nearest temple...what was the nearest temple to you?

#32C: It was Lhakang Chenmo.

Q: What was your father's name, please?

#32C: Father's name was Norgay.

Q: And your mother?

#32C: Mingdol.

Q: Were they from Sakya or other regions in Tibet?

#32C: My [hometown] is at a distance of three miles from Sakya. One had to travel around three miles from the Lhakang Chenmo of Sakya [to my hometown].

Q: What occupation did your father have?

00:06:12

#32C: [Father] herded sheep.

Q: Sheep farmer. How many sheep did he have?

#32C: There were sheep and farmlands. There were 800-900 sheep. Then there were farmlands.

Q: So your father was a shepherd and he also was a farmer?

#32C: [Father] plowed the fields and herded sheep. When children herded the sheep father worked in the fields. After completing farm work, father went to herd sheep. [He] also went to Sakya to sell *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and fed *tsampa* to the children.

Q: Would you say...was your family average income or very poor or very wealthy, what?

#32C: My family?

Q: Yes.

#32C: [We] were among the middle class, neither very poor nor well to do. The Chinese did not cause suffering [to my family]. The Chinese categorized [my family] among the middle class farmers.

Q: In your village, how many other families like lived nearby your family?

00:08:23

#32C: There were around seven families.

Q: About seven families.

#32C: It was a small village.

Q: If we went to visit your village when you were growing up, what would we see with our own eyes? What did it look like when you went outside the door of your house?

#32C: An open ground. Nearby was a huge enclosure for the goats and sheep, two huge ones.

Q: What?

#32C: Enclosure, enclosure for the sheep. There were two huge enclosures for the sheep and another for the yaks.

And then there was a pen for the *dri* ‘female yaks,’ *dri* that give birth. We owned a large number of *nor* ‘cattle.’ [To interpreter] You would not understand what *nor* is. It is the cow [female] yak but you would not understand. [Laughs]

One cannot call a [female] yak as cow. A *dri* gives milk. It has calves. There was a large enclosure in which were kept the calves. The *dri* were milked every morning. A *dri* cannot be called a cow yak. You would not know these things. A female yak is called *dri* and it gives birth. Its calves are different.

Q: So the *dri* is a female yak?

00:11:03

#32C: It is the female yak. A female yak is called *dri* and it gives birth.

Q: How did the milk taste? What was the milk like?

#32C: The milk was very good. We had three huge pots [makes a circle with arms] of milk from the sheep during summertime.

Then there was curd from the *dri*. There were two pots of curd from the *dri*.

Q: How long does it last when you put it in the big jars?

#32C: It was not kept for long. Milking was done in the morning, [the milk] boiled at noon and left to cool in a row [of pots] upstairs. When slightly warm, a little quantity of curd was mixed to ferment it for a night. This was done by 7 o’clock in the evening.

Q: One yak...how much milk does one yak give each day?

#32C: A *dri* gave only a kilo or a kilo and half in a day.

[Interpreter interprets as: Two pounds.]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Two pounds?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: One and half liters.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: One and half liters, okay.

#32C: It was not milked completely for a little must be left for the calf.

[Interpreter interprets as: We save little bit for our kids.]

Q: For the children in the family or the animal kids?

00:13:35

#32C: For the animal kids.

Q: For the animal babies, I see. How many female yaks did your family own when you were a child?

#32C: Fifteen or 20 *dri*.

Q: Did any of the yaks have names or did they...did you name them?

#32C: [They] were given names. [They] had names.

Q: Did you have a favorite?

#32C: [Speaks before translation] Yaks had names. All had names.

Q: Did you have a favorite one?

#32C: Favorite? Zalu and Detse were there.

Q: Why were they your favorite?

#32C: [Speaks before translation] Zalu were striped animals with stripes running down the backs. Striped ones were called Zalu.

Q: Pretty?

#32C: What?

Q: Was it pretty?

#32C: It was pretty, and then there were *ooril* 'bald head' yaks.

[Interpreter interprets as: Some yaks are without fur.]

Q: Really? Some have no fur?

#32C: There was fur. Oh, there was fur.

Q: But [you] said *ooril*.

00:15:25

#32C: *Ooril* have no horns [laughs], not fur. You do not understand. By *ooril*...[laughs]... How can one without fur be *ooril*? One without fur is not called *ooril*. [They] do not have horns, horns. *Ooril* do not have horns and have pierced noses. We used [them] for plowing.

Q: What was so funny?

#32C: When [I] said *ooril*, you asked if it meant without fur.

Q: That's good. I never heard of a bald yak.

#32C: There are no yaks without fur but without horns. There were no horns.

Q: I want to go back to your family before we hear more about the animals. When you were growing up, how many people in your family?

00:17:32

#32C: In my family? In my family were Father and two mothers. There were Father and two mothers.

Q: And how many siblings: brothers, sisters?

#32C: My mother had seven children. From the seven, I, older brother Passang, older brother Nyima and Palden survive. Four survive from the seven children.

Q: You mentioned that you had two mothers. Were they living at the same time or did one pass away and then another was in the family?

#32C: One was brought in as a *nama* 'bride' and the other as a *chungma* 'younger of two wives' because there was a lot of work to be done at home like herding the sheep, yaks and *dri* and working in the fields. Due to shortage of hands, two *nama* were taken in and not because of death.

Q: Were the two mothers, were they sisters or were they from different families?

00:19:25

#32C: [They] were from different families.

Q: So was the older mother your mother or the younger one?

#32C: My mother was the younger one. My mother always left to herd the animals and did not stay home.

Q: Did the older mother look after the agriculture?

#32C: The older mother stayed home and cooked. [She] was responsible for feeding the many people that came to work in the field.

Q: How many children did the older mother have?

#32C: Two daughters and [counts]... [The older mother] had four children.

Q: Was that kind of typical for a man to have two wives in order to help with the work and the children and the farming and the herding? Was that typical in your village?

#32C: Yes, there were some that had three.

Q: Did...to have more than one wife, does the man have to give a dowry to each family that he married the woman from?

00:21:56

#32C: There was not any entitlement. Clothes were made for everyone equally. There was not any other entitlement. My mother was always outside herding animals for animals were not kept at home.

Q: What was given to your family?

#32C: The other mother stayed home. We had animals at home too and animal herders. The older mother had to take care of them and feed the many workers that worked in the fields. My mother always left to herd the animals and could not remain at home.

Q: The two mothers had their homes...

#32C: My father's home became theirs.

Q: Did anything have to be given to the families of the two mothers?

#32C: There was not need to give anything.

Q: Were there more women in the population than there were men because in some cultures they have many wives and in some cultures they have many husbands. I have heard in Tibet sometimes a wife will have several husbands to help. So I've never heard of it this way.

00:24:00

#32C: There were more boys in our family.

Q: In the village...

#32C: My mother had only one girl.

Q: In the village?

#32C: There were not many girls in the village. In the village there were older brother Nyima's mother—that is one; Ani 'Paternal Aunt' Dawu is two, and then Ani Dachung is three.

Q: In the village?

#32C: Yes, in the village. We were from the same village. There were not many girls. We were around five girls.

Q: So if there are more men in the population, it would seem that...it would be unusual for one man to have three wives and then maybe another man can't find a wife. What made a woman choose to marry or be a second or third wife?

#32C: It was not like that. It did not seem like that. I do not know.

Q: In your daily life growing up, what were your...before you started working and helping, did you play any games? What did you do for fun as a very little girl?

00:26:19

#32C: [I] do not know what games the boys played but the girls played *thepley* 'hacky sack' and *gongdho* 'a game of five stones.' [We] played *gongdho* and *thepley* with the feet but I did not know how to play *thepley*.

Q: *Thepley*?

#32C: *Thepley* is made from bits of cloth and is beautiful. Some can play it many times like 20-30. Some can even do 40-50. I can only do three. I do not know how to play well. [I] very much wished to play but could not.

It is a flat coin, a coin, not a real coin, but a piece of flat metal with a hole. That was what we used to make *thepley* with. Such used to be made.

Q: What's the stone game called?

#32C: In India it is called *apdho* but we called it *gongdho*.

Q: In *thepley*, you took some metal, covered it with cloth and did you throw it in the air? How...what was the point of the game?

00:28:30

#32C: It is played with the foot, hitting it with the foot.

Q: Oh, you kick it around. Did you have to get it away from the other person?

#32C: No, no. One person hits it many times like 20-30. If there were five of us, it was played in turns.

Q: How is it played?

#32C: It is played with the foot. The children in India play it. The children in India play it. [To interpreter] You used to play it. Get up and do it with the foot.

Q: Do you have to catch it from the other person?

#32C: It is not about catching but played in turns. If I do five times, another may do 10. It has to be counted one, two, three and some do it 30-40 times. I can do only two.

Q: I'm not quite sure what the person does with it.

00:30:31

#32C: [To interpreter] You used to play in India.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It's like a playing with the...playing throw...put the *thepley* on the air and then you can like push it by the feet up, you know, keep doing it.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Keep it up! Oh, I know this game.

#32C: Then there is the *apdho*. One takes five stones and play like this [throws imaginary stone in the air] however many times one can do. It is played in turns and the loser gets a smack. An apron is folded like this [demonstrates] and the tip wetted, and then *thwack* and one is brought to tears. [Laughs]

00:31:59

The apron is folded like this [demonstrates] up to here and soaked in water and smacked on the palm, *thwack*. Then one starts crying.

Q: You don't want to lose. Oh, that sounds like fun and dangerous.

#32C: One loved to play it...play it even if one did not know how to play. [I] loved to play it and got smacked many times on the palm and cried *ouch*.

Q: You didn't want the punishment.

#32C: Whether one liked to take the punishment or not, one must accept the smack. One would not be let off. It could be five or 10 smacks and one goes *ouch* and cries.

Q: What was the name of the game again?

#32C: What?

Q: What was the name of the game again?

#32C: *Thepley*.

Q: It was the *thepley*? The other one?

#32C: The other one is called *apdho*.

Q: That was the one.

#32C: [Moves to the right to reach for something]

Q: Okay. What is she getting?

00:33:50

#32C: I will show [you] what is *apdho*.

Q: This is great. Where did you get the stones?

#32C: I use the stones to count Dolma ‘Praises to the 21 Taras.’ It is played like this. [Throws stones about two inches in the air and lets them fall on the back of palm and then catches one.] See, I got one. [Repeats the game but is not able to catch any stone.] Nothing caught so I get to play first.

Q: What is the significant of this game?

#32C: That is a Tibetan tradition. The game is played like this. [Throws a stone around six inches in the air and catches them.] It is played like this.

In Tibet *thepley* and this [*apdho*] are the most played games by girls.

Q: The *thepley* or the *apdho*. Thank you for showing me, very interesting.

#32C: [Nods]

Q: What are the kinds of things...besides these games were there any other things that you used to do as children that you have very sweet memories of and you would like to tell your grandchildren?

00:35:26

#32C: It was a happy time. One quickly completed the work assigned by the parents and ran away to play *gongdho* and *thepley*. And then returned home crying.

Q: I understand that there are three kinds of wheat that were used in Tibet. What were they?

#32C: There were a type of white grain, a brown grain and peas. There were two kinds of peas: a white and a black one.

And then there were radishes—radishes. Radishes grow into a large, round shape. [Makes a ball with hands.] The radishes were not long but round.

Then there was *thulu*—*thulu*. *Thulu* means *shakam*. It is found in India and is called *shakam* or some such thing. *Thulu*.

Q: What kinds of...?

#32C: [Interrupts] There is the *thulu*.

[Interpreter interprets *thulu* as a kind of mushroom, a small white variety found in India.]

00:37:54

#32C: There are not mushrooms...there are some kinds of mushroom called *sersha* ‘yellow mushrooms,’ *karsha* ‘white mushrooms,’ *marsha* ‘red mushrooms.’ These can be found on the hills. Oh, there are many that can be picked on the hills of Tibet.

Q: When you said your father had a farm, what kind of...what did he grow on his farm?

#32C: As I mentioned [Father] grew brown and white barley, and peas, both white and black peas. Then also mustard, which was cultivated for oil. Mustard oil. [We] grew mustard. One had to go elsewhere to extract oil from the mustard.

Q: How big was your father’s farm?

00:39:49

#32C: It was big.

Q: Like, could we compare it to...like you live on a city block here, was it...?

#32C: It was the size of around one *beyar* or around two *beyar*. Most [of the land holdings] were around one or two or three *beyar* and not more than that.

[Interpreter interprets as: It’s like a...more than one square feet or two square feet or three square feet.]

Q: Square feet or square mile?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Square mile, I’m sorry. It’s like a square mile.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It’s like one or two square miles?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes and sometimes three.

Q: How long would it take you to walk from one end of the farm to the other end?

#32C: It was not very big and could be covered in 5-10 minutes.

Q: Oh, really? 5-10 minutes. No, that’s not that big. And then did your father make the oil when you said you raised some plants for oil?

#32C: There was a different place where the extraction was done. We had to go there loading [the crop] on donkeys. Over there was an area to pound the mustard.

00:41:50

In Tibet there are many things to gather on the hills. There’s the *sersha*, *karsha* and *marsha*.

Q: Were the mushrooms for eating or did they have any other qualities?

#32C: Only for eating. One could gather a large basketful, boil it in a big pot and then keep in a basket.

Q: Is *sersha* a kind of mushroom?

#32C: Yes, a kind of mushroom.

Q: Did you dry the mushrooms so they would last a long time or eat them right away?

#32C: [Mushrooms] need not be dried. [They] were gathered on the hills and eaten right away.

Q: Speaking of eating, *ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ we were talking about in the evening when the family was done working, did you have a meal together?

00:43:44

#32C: Everyone got together to eat.

Q: What kind of food was eaten?

#32C: There was meat and *thukpa* ‘noodle soup.’ *Thukpa* was a daily affair. We had a large pot to prepare *thukpa* in. *Thukpa* was cooked every day, in the morning and evening. It was considered bad not to have *thukpa*.

Q: Just for people who don’t know *thukpa*, what is it?

#32C: Every Tibetan knows it. Every Tibetan, even a little child knows it. Foreigners do not know.

Q: So what is it?

#32C: *Thukpa* consists of water in which is added *tsampa*, lard, lamb’s meat that has been dried and ground, and bones. Also cooked barley is added to it. This is boiled and becomes very tasty.

Q: It sounds delicious.

00:45:50

#32C: [Speaks before translation] That was every morning and evening. Otherwise, it was considered bad.

Q: Yes, bad luck. You were telling us a long time ago every day after 5 years old, you would go out and take care of the sheep. How many sheep did you take care of and was it by yourself or did somebody help you?

#32C: There were 700-800 sheep and [I] went along with others.

Q: Your family had 7 or 800 sheep. Did anybody else go with you? Did you take care of 7 or 800 sheep by yourself or other people in the family help you?

#32C: The others were family members. An adult from the family went taking along a child as a *lukyok* ‘sheep servant.’ A *lukyok* was one that was ordered, “Go there. Go there and bring the sheep.”

Then the child went running.

Q: How did you take care of them? What did you do when you’re taking care of sheep? Did you stop them from falling down or running away or protect them from animals? What did you do?

00:47:55

#32C: One followed the sheep, moving wherever the sheep did and looking out for wolves. [There are] wolves in Tibet and one watched out for wolves. One looked out for such.

Interpreter interprets as: I go after, run after the sheep and especially we have to look for the fox, the animal, the wild fox after our sheep. So we are looking like that.

Q: Did you ever see the foxes come?

#32C: Of course. When two wolves attacked a sheep, [they] pulled this side and that side and rend [the sheep] in half and carried it away in the mouth. We, as children would scream but [the sheep] was carried away.

Q: Were the foxes very big or small? What size?

#32C: [The wolves] are fairly big as can be seen on the television. They run and attack like jackals. [The wolves] are that size.

Q: They are size from here to here?

#32C: Yes. [Moves right hand].

Q: ...here, it’ll be this big, as big as you sitting down.

00:50:02

#32C: It cannot be this size. It must be this size [bends down].

Q: As big as you sitting down?

#32C: It must be of this size [keeps right hand on head and left at waist level].

Q: Did you...?

#32C: [Interrupts] When one saw a wolf, one started shivering.

Q: Yes, yes. Do you have any protection like a stick or a slingshot or anything?

#32C: [I] did not have an arrow but a slingshot. There was a slingshot yet [I would] begin to cry. The child would scream in terror. The child screamed in terror. When a sheep was attacked, there was nothing to do but shut the eyes for [the wolf] was certain to eat it. [I] was a little child then.

Q: Was there anything other than a sheep that ever scared you when you were being taking care of the animals? Anything bigger or wilder or more scary happen?

00:51:52

#32C: Another one was the *semong* ‘yellow-throated marten.’

Q: What’s *semong*?

#32C: *Semong* resembles a cat. It is about this size [gestures off camera]. When it attacked a sheep, it caught the sheep by the neck and lay down with the sheep over it, so that it could not be seen. The sheep covered it entirely. As a little child when my mother and I went out, there was a sheep lying down. I chased it but it would not move. Beneath the sheep [I] could see a cat. I screamed, “Mother, Mother, a cat has caught a sheep. The cat is not letting go off the sheep.” Later [I learned] it was the one called *semong*, a *semong*. A *semong* resembles a cat with a tiger like pattern. It is exactly like a cat in shape but bigger.

Q: A *semong*. Is it like a bobcat? I wonder in English what it would be? You don’t know what that is? A *semong*, okay, we’ll find out.

So when you went out with...did you actually take 7 or 800 sheep out every day and how many children were with you?

00:54:09

#32C: There was one adult that came with me, one adult.

Q: And children?

#32C: There were no other little children.

Q: Were you alone?

#32C: Two people went [herding]. I was the *luckyok*. I was the one that ran here and there. There was an adult in charge.

Q: I want to ask what are the...so you did this from the time you were 7 to how old?

#32C: Age?

Q: Yes.

#32C: [I] went herding from the age of 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 until 19. [I] have herded until the age of 17 or 18. From 17 or 18...[not discernible].

Q: When you were a young girl growing up, did you have any wish to do something when you were an adult or did you want to get married and have children or be a sheep owner? What did you want to do?

00:56:00

#32C: It was my objective to make an absolutely white *chupa* ‘traditional coat’ each for elder brother and Father, which [I] did.

Q: Father and who?

#32C: What?

Q: Father and mother?

#32C: Father and elder brother.

Q: That was your big dream and you did make it. Was it for a special occasion?

#32C: It was not anything like that. A girl must do weaving while a boy had to work in the fields, make footwear and such. A girl must do weaving and spinning for unless you made the aprons yourself, there was not anywhere to buy in Tibet. There was nowhere to buy. You have to make everything yourself.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you make this apron you're wearing?

#32C: [Nods and touches apron]

Q: Can you show...?

#32C: [Interrupts] [I] made this in India.

Q: Can you pull it out so we can see it?

#32C: [Displays apron] Here.

Q: Oh, it's beautiful.

00:57:58

#32C: It was made in India.

Q: Did you weave every piece on a weaving machine?

#32C: There is a particular loom on which the pattern is created.

Q: A wooden machine to weave, to make the...

#32C: [Interrupts] The weaving is done with hands. [We] use hands and feet for this work.

Q: Oh, the hands and feet to do it. Was it made...did it take a long time?

#32C: To make one apron? How long would it take to make one apron? It takes around five or six days.

Q: And this apron is worn by Tibetan women. Can you tell us if there are different kinds or what is the tradition? Where does it come from?

[Interpreter interprets as: How is it made? The apron is made by Tibetans, so it is like our...since it's a Tibetan dress, please talk about how it's made.]

#32C: First the yarn is looped after which you created the color combination. You have to create it yourself for there is no particular [pattern]. The yarn is already looped and covered on the loom. There are four on the lower part and four on the upper part. Then one moves the feet and hands. You have to create the pattern.

Q: At what age is a Tibetan woman allowed to have an apron like that?

01:00:28

#32C: Age? In Tibet?

Q: Yes.

#32C: It is worn around the age of 5 or 6. [Tibetan women] in India wear it only after marriage.

Q: If they wear it after 5 or 6 when you are little, but in India you were it after marriage?

#32C: [Nods] In the Milarepa movie you see girls of this size [holds out right] running around wearing aprons. That is in the Milarepa movie.

Q: Small girl, yes. We haven't talked at all about the religious traditions in your family. What religious tradition did you follow? What Tibetan tradition?

#32C: The religious practice was as it is—like reciting the Dolma 'Praises to the 21 Taras' and such. It was reciting the Dolma and those that could read, read the scriptures. The scriptures are the same. Practicing dharma was reciting the Dolma, which we did every day, chanted Dolma every night.

Q: Did you go to school and get any education to learn how to read or write?

01:02:34

#32C: [I] have never been to school.

Q: Was there a school in your village?

#32C: One perhaps belonging to a wealthy family. Children of aristocrats were naturally aristocrats and children of the poor were naturally poor. There were no [schools for the poor].

Q: The monastery nearby you, what tradition was it like? Nyingma, Sakya or Gelugpa?

#32C: Sakya, Sakya Monastery? It was not Nyingma. It was not Kagyu. It was not Nyingma nor was it Kagyu. When elder sister comes [we] will know. I have forgotten. It was not Kagyu or Nyingma. I have forgotten...

Q: What did you practice? What did you learn as a child about...?

01:04:32

#32C: By practicing the dharma, it will benefit all the sentient beings of the six realms. If it is done in good faith it will benefit all the sentient beings of the six realms. Should one do it without thinking and chant mindlessly, it will not be beneficial. That is it.

Q: Please talk a little about the dharma.

#32C: What?

Q: Please talk about your practice.

[Interviewer to videographer]: It's being recorded. So we're going to start over. Do you mind? You can leave it but then put a little break here because I'm going to ask the question.

Q: Can you please tell us in your family what kind of daily prayers or practices did you do when you were growing up as a child and then as a teenager?

#32C: Practicing the dharma benefits all sentient beings of the six realms. If you can practice at home, you will have good fortune in what you do, achieve success and not suffer ill health. Practicing the dharma brings happiness. If one does not practice the dharma, there is no happiness and one feels stifled.

Q: What kinds of obstacles would you hope to overcome in yourself by praying every day?

01:07:24

#32C: [I] did not practice dharma just because of an obstacle. In order to overcome obstacles that come to you, [you] must ask another person to do it. Your practice is for the benefit of sentient beings of the six realms and also at the time of your death...what to say...some take a long time. One prays to prevent such, and also for an easier death because one must die. One must die after having taken birth. Some remain a long time

hovering close to death. To avoid such you must chant prayers from the depth of your heart and pray to God. That is it. This may help a bit in overcoming obstacles but I think it is beneficial if you spend money, though generally it is the same.

Q: What teachings of the Buddha do you want...do you think are the most important for your children and your grandchildren to learn?

01:10:01

#32C: I do not know about such things. The children do not listen if advised.

Q: What's it about the Buddha dharma...the practice about the Buddha dharma?

#32C: Practicing the Buddha dharma benefits all sentient beings of the six realms. By practicing non-Buddhism, it benefits only oneself and not others. That is what I think though [I] do not have anything bad to say about it.

Q: Then after you are done being a teenager, do you get married and how does that happen?

#32C: That was decided by the parents. I did not decide it myself but the parents did.

Q: How old were you?

#32C: [I] was 18...19.

Q: Did you want to get married?

#32C: [I] did not want to but the parents made [me].

Q: You had to get married.

#32C: Father said, "[He] is a good man. [He] is a good man." We were from the same village.

Q: Did you know the man you married?

01:12:11

#32C: [Speaks before translation] [He] was a playmate as children.

Q: What made it difficult to actually think about getting married?

#32C: [I] thought I will get the freedom to do what I want. [I] believed [my husband] would not give me suffering.

Q: So that was the good part of getting married.

#32C: [I] faced a lot of problems after getting married for [we] had to flee from Tibet. Then we remained without sufficient food many a times.

Q: Well, before we get to that important part of the story...when you got married I'd like to go back then, did you stay in your village and what was your married life like for you?

01:13:56

#32C: We did not get married in Tibet but after [both the families] had a talk, Father [interviewee's husband and interpreter's father] used to come sleep over and at times I used to go there. [I] was not given away as a *nama* 'bride/daughter-in-law.' [My] father refused to send me there as a *nama* because there were many daughters in his family and also because 3-4 wives had earlier left Father [my husband].

Q: Who?

#32C: Father [interpreter's father/interviewee's husband]. Three or four *nama* had already left on account of incompatibility with the daughters [husband's sisters]. The daughters were [interpreter's] Ani Tsering and another *ani* that passed away, and then there was Mother [mother-in-law]. Mother was good. Mother was good.

Q: And what kind of work did your husband do?

01:15:30

#32C: Father [my husband] used to serve Lama Kala while in Tibet. [Husband's] father was not there while the mother, poor thing...

Q: What did Father do?

#32C: Father [my husband] served Lama Kala since the age of 15, 16, 17 or 18 it seems. [Lama Kala] was the relative [sister] of [points off camera] the Phuntsok Phodrang [His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya].

Q: What is the name of that high lama?

[Interviewer confuses the proper name Lama Kala with "lama" used for a Buddhist monk.]

#32C: Lama Kala.

Q: And so your father went to this palace. What tradition was Lama Kala in?

[Interpreter interprets as: What practice did Lama Kala do?]

#32C: I do not know what she practiced. [She] would be doing what Sakya lamas are doing now. I do not know.

Q: Did you ever go to the palace where your husband worked?

#32C: [Speaks before translation] We are followers of the Gelug tradition.

Q: Have you been to the palace of Lama Kala with husband?

01:17:51

#32C: [I] have never been—never been.

Q: What kind of duties did he have with this lama? How did he help him?

#32C: When Lama Kala went to Shigatse, [my husband] went along as attendant. While Lama Kala rode a *chipa*, my husband walked.

Q: What's *chipa*?

#32C: Horse, riding on a horse. Lama Kala rode a horse. There were no vehicles.

Q: Where did [Lama Kala] go?

#32C: To Shigatse.

Q: So he's sort of an assistant or a guard or a helper?

#32C: [My usband] was taken along as an attendant, taken along as an attendant.

Q: What was the main duty?

#32C: Attendant is one that serves. Attendant is a polite form while it actually means servant.

[Interpreter interprets as: More like a personal assistant.]

Q: A personal assistant. It sounds like your husband had some education like he knew how to read and write?

#32C: [He] was not educated.

Q: No, he wasn't educated. And did you know this lama yourself? Had you met him?

01:19:46

#32C: [I] have met Lama Kala. The Chinese imprisoned Lama Kala and subjected her to physical struggle. Lama Kala possessed a golden bangle that she wore up here [indicates arm] to hide it from the Chinese during the physical struggle, hoping to give it to Father [my husband] should she see him. And it...[not discernible] to the person beating him in our village.

Q: He wasn't able to. What do you remember when the Chinese first came to the village?

#32C: [The Chinese] ordered us to give opinions, give opinions. I did not have any opinion to express but one had to say something under duress.

Q: About what?

01:21:44

#32C: The opinions were about *tsemay* ‘denouncing’ His Holiness the Dalai Lama and our lamas and such.

Q: What’s *tsemay*?

#32C: To demean, to say bad things. [To interpreter] You do not even know Tibetan, by God. [Laughs]

Q: I see. So the Chinese wanted the villagers to speak against the high lamas and the Dalai Lamas?

#32C: Yes, saying bad things like he is a reactionary and very bad. One must say all the bad things. We cannot say such things.

Q: If you didn’t give anything, was there any consequence or punishment?

#32C: [The Chinese] would not accept [our] not saying bad things. [They] will label us as bad and put us in prison. One must say bad things under duress. [We] were not saying it from the heart. [We] were not saying it from the heart but were forced to say it aloud.

Q: And then did your husband get in any special trouble because of his job?

01:24:30

#32C: [We] did not for the family was humble, very humble.

Q: So did you see any people from a very wealthy background be in trouble with the Chinese?

#32C: Oh my, [the wealthy] were beaten nearly to death. [They] were imprisoned, brought out and all the people ordered to gather. Poor things, then they were beaten so much that blood oozed from the anus.

Q: Did they do the beatings in public so you could see with your own eyes?

#32C: [They] were brought out from the prison among the public that were ordered to gather. The people were forced to do the beating.

[Interpreter interprets as: They just dragged them from their palace and then put it in the middle of the whole village and then they beat it in front of us. I saw that.]

Q: So they just dragged them from their palace and put it...I mean in front of the people and then did the beating?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: I see. What happened? Were there any lamas or monks that were also brought into the public place and punished?

01:26:17

#32C: The lama was beaten twice or three times and then he committed suicide by stuffing a *khata* ‘ceremonial scarves’ down the mouth. The lama was called Sakya Zoepa, who is like the Prime Minister we have now, the one called Sakya Zoepa. He stuffed *khata* right down the throat, died by stuffing *khata* down his own throat.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: This is what she saw with her own eyes. They were so horrified by what was happening to them that they wanted to die at that point. So they self-immolated by putting *khata*s right down their own throat. Were they forced to do it or were they doing that out of to not let this suffering happen in front of the people?

01:28:13

#32C: [They] did so by themselves in the prison. During the day [they] were brought out before the public to be beaten and put back in prison at night. It was then done in the prison. [The people] were made to beat [the prisoners] nearly to death.

Q: Did any of the lamas die like that?

#32C: It did not happen in our village but in the town of Sakya. There the senior leaders were put in prison and the one called Kungo Shapay—who was actually like our Prime Minister and the head of the Phuntsok Phodrang and the Dolma Phodrang—was considered the main culprit and brought out during the day and the people made to beat him almost to death.

Q: What’s the name?

#32C: Kungo Shapay.

Q: Did any other monk die?

#32C: What?

Q: Did other monks do that?

01:30:29

#32C: It happened with other monks, too.

Q: So *ama-la* knows of two people that did that?

#32C: One was an aristocrat, an aristocrat called Chango Dungenyer. [He] was one among the aristocrats.

Q: What other things happened? Do you know any other monks who did that, the number of monks that did it?

#32C: I do not know of any other. The others were imprisoned and beaten, imprisoned and beaten and then were dispatched to Tsarong and to—what is it...Tsarong and—what is it called...the husband of the *chamchung-la* ‘respectful term for mid-level young noble woman’ was dispatched there to Nathang, to Nathang.

Q: Do you remember the name of the other place?

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: Lama Kala. Where did Lama Kala go? Where was he taken?

#32C: What?

Q: Where did Lama Kala go?

#32C: The Chinese arrested Lama Kala. After the arrest the Chinese sent [her] somewhere and later [she] managed to flee. The son of Lama Kala is presently living in Tibet.

Q: How long was [Lama Kala] in prison?

#32C: How many years? Perhaps 10-15 years. [She] endured a great many beatings, poor thing.

Q: Okay. I just want to come back and have that on tape because that’s important.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: So it sounds like Lama Kala, who was cared for by your husband, he was imprisoned for 14-15 years. Did your husband try to go see him?

#32C: One was not allowed to meet. The *ridhon* took place in our village.

Q: What’s *ridhon*?

01:34:12

#32C: *Ridhon* is beating the prisoners. Father [my husband] was told. “You have to beat Lama Kala for you are the attendant.” [Lama Kala] was brought out.

Q: Lama Kala’s father?

#32C: The people told your [interpreter’s] father, “You have to beat Lama Kala. You have served [her] for a long time. [You] must beat him.” There were around five of them, prominent people that were brought from the prison. However, Father [my husband] made

***pa* ‘dough made from *tsampa* and tea,’ added some butter and gave it [to Lama Kala] pretending to scold her.**

Q: Did he get through?

#32C: It seems [he] did.

Q: So he was pretending to beat him, but also trying to give him the butter and the *pa*.

#32C: Yes.

Q: And the *pa* would be like *tsampa*?

#32C: It is made of *tsampa* mixed with butter.

Q: That was such a kind effort on your husband’s part.

01:36:48

#32C: [My husband] did not beat her at all, which surprised all the people. When he was told that he had to beat Lama Kala, [my husband] replied, “There is no reason for me to beat [her]. [She] was very good to me. There is no reason for me to beat [her].”

Q: And Lama Kala was in Nathong. I think that’s right?

#32C: What?

Q: Was Lama Kala taken to Nathong?

#32C: [She] was taken to Nathang. [I] do not know how she escaped from Nathang, but [she] has reached a foreign country.

Q: Did you ever see him again or your husband?

#32C: [Speaks before translation] [Lama Kala] is in Seattle.

Q: Did you see Lama Kala after the escape?

#32C: Yes, [I] saw once. [Lama Kala] came to our settlement [in India].

Q: Oh, he came to Puruwala where you were. So let’s maybe...we’ll move on with your story because you’ve been so patient with us. This is about what year were the Chinese in your village? What year did they start to come?

#32C: The Chinese came in 1959.

Q: Oh, 1959. And when your husband’s lama was arrested and he didn’t have a job—you were married that time. Did you have any children then?

01:38:50

#32C: No.

Q: And you don't have kids. So did anything change? Did you decide to leave Tibet at that time?

#32C: No, we did not have plans to leave in '59. [I] think we came in the year '60. All of us from the village came in the year '60 while my parents were left behind.

Q: Did they want to stay behind?

#32C: It was not that [my parents] wished to stay behind. We used to own five yaks. The five yaks...[To interpreter] You know Bhuluk...[not discernible]. Bhuluk asked my elder brother to come and... Normally [elder brother] used to be called for it, called to...[not discernible]. So [elder brother] left the night before we were [to escape]. Bhuluk took [him] along that night.

Elder brother was gone and we were left without any animals. My father and mother got left behind because there were no animals. My youngest brother stayed back with Father and Mother. One of my elder brothers was given away in marriage to Dekyi and another elder brother was given away in marriage to...[not discernible]. He was the only son at home.

Q: Did they ever leave Tibet?

01:41:34

#32C: Who?

Q: The youngest brother, father and mother.

#32C: [They] were left there due to the non-availability of animals.

Q: Were they okay even during the Chinese occupation?

#32C: Father and Mother were aged and were not subjected to any problems.

Q: When you left, who went with you when you left Tibet? You said the whole village. Did you...were you able to bring any belongings, any money, any animals?

#32C: [I] did not carry any belongings except a little quantity of *tsampa* and an old blanket that was thrown away later. Also brought along were around five large packs of lard; that too was thrown away. [To interpreter] You know Ashang 'Maternal Uncle' Tashi's father? Ashang Tashi's father had stayed back and it seems he took these away so he could eat them. He had a bent back. We...

Q: Who were "we"?

#32C: “We” were Ani Dawa’s aunt and her mother. Ani Dawa was little then. There was elder brother Nyima’s mother. Nyima was age 3 then. Then there were your [interpreter’s] father’s mother and paternal aunt. Everyone came away except my family.

Q: How long did it take to leave your village to get to Sikkim?

01:44:35

#32C: The journey took a day and a night.

Q: Day?

#32C: A day and a night.

Q: From Tibet?

#32C: Yes, from Tibet.

Q: Till Sikkim?

#32C: Until Lachen in Sikkim. The place is called Dugu. One arrived in Dugu after crossing over the Sebobula pass. It took us a day and a night to reach there. [I] almost died due to the hardship.

Q: We’ve been going on a long time *ama-la*, and I know you are weary, but I’m just going to finish by asking a couple of questions like...I wish we had time, first of all to hear most of your story, maybe another time. [To interpreter] Just say that.

So my final questions are: What do you hope for will happen for Tibet? What is your wish or your prayer for Tibet?

#32C: [I] wish that His Holiness the Dalai Lama could go to Tibet but it does not look like it will happen before [I] die.

Q: And what is your...what would you like the children of Tibet to know about their country or to save or remember about Tibet, the children, the grandchildren?

01:46:52

#32C: [I] do not think the children will listen though [I] wish to tell.

Q: What should [the children] know? What would [you] like to say?

#32C: [I] wish to talk about the way of life in Tibet but they will criticize.

Q: What would [you] like to say?

#32C: [I] would like to talk about how things were done in Tibet and what I used to do, like the food and activities. [I] wish to teach these.

Q: What would you like to teach?

#32C: [I] wish to talk about the way of eating, living and what we used to do in the past, but [the children] will not listen.

Q: You want to tell them. Well, you've done a very good...

#32C: [To interpreter] You did not translate everything. [Laughs]

Q: Can you understand English?

#32C: [I] understood. [Laughs]

Q: Lhakey, I wanted to ask, do you think it's important to record these stories of the oldest people from Tibet and why do you think it's important?

01:48:10

#32C: If the younger people know about the way of life in Tibet, [they] will think, "Oh, that was how it was in the past."

Q: Many older people are being interviewed. Do you think it is a good project to do such interviews and if so, why is it important?

#32C: It is good. If this can be known to all communities in the world and should the old and the young come to know, the youngsters will think, "The older men and women have said such during an interview. This must be the truth." Some may think it false for there are many different types.

Q: ...from your words.

Good, very good. So to end, I just want to check one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#32C: I do not have to go to Tibet. I would not be able to go to Tibet. Were [I] to go there, it is certain there will be trouble for the Chinese will arrest me immediately.

Q: Okay, it's fine.

01:50:26

#32C: I went to Tibet once...

Q: Can you...?

#32C: At that time I had not given any interviews or joined any protest marches. So there was no problem when I went to Tibet then.

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

#32C: Of course, it is okay to use the real one. It is okay.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#32C: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW