

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #64D – Rinzin Dolma  
May 17, 2012

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #64D
2. Interviewee: Rinzin Dolma
3. Age: 90
4. Date of Birth: 1922
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Sakya
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: May 17, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Bir Guest House, Bir, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 25 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Rinzin Dolma, who just turned 90, is from Sakya in Utsang province. She says that they were a farming family who grew barley and wheat and also spent time weaving and tailoring clothes. Rinzin Dolma was able to escape to India while on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, but the Chinese killed all her family that remained in Tibet.

Rinzin Dolma expresses her strong devotion to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and her daily prayers. She speaks about her religious beliefs, of which she feels the most important things are chanting the *mani* mantra, *Om mani padme hun* 'Hail the Jewel in the Lotus' and praying for the well-being of all sentient beings. But she chooses to leave out the Chinese from her prayers because of the suffering they have caused to the Tibetan people.

Rinzin Dolma arrived in India at the same time His Holiness the Dalai Lama and recalls being granted an audience with him at which time he cured her eye problem. As a refugee in India she and many other Tibetan refugees worked as coolies at road construction sites. She has memories of Tibetans dying during those early days as refugees.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Childhood memories, Buddhist beliefs, life as a refugee in India.

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## Interview #64D

**Interviewee: Rinzin Dolma**

**Age: 90, Sex: Female**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: May 17, 2012**

Question: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ please tell us your name?

00:00:13

**Interviewee #64D: My name is Rinzin Dolma.**

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 people 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?

**#64D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] His Holiness the Dalai Lama advises—[I] take refuge in him—that everyone must do good and that everyone must achieve happiness. [I] am very happy that they [interview team] are doing this by following the advice of His Holiness. It will [benefit] both this and the next life. It is certainly beneficial in this life and will be in the next. This [project] is extremely good. [To interpreter] Please mention that I said so. If they [interview team] carry out the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, there is only one way that one can go in this and the next life. Please say that this is good. I do not have much to say.**

Q: Thank you.

**#64D: It is extremely good. There is no other lama like His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the world. There is none to be found. One must pray to His Holiness at the time of going to sleep at night and in the morning when one wakes up. There is no other way except this. [Laughs] There is a good way to this and the next life. There is an extremely good way. If one cannot pray like this, there is the risk of going to hell, right?**

Q: Do you give your permission...

**#64D: Yes?**

Q: Do you give your permission for this interview?

00:02:37

**#64D: One must be compassionate to all sentient beings. Irrespective of any animal, one must not say, “Kill this. Sever it. We must eat it.” Should one come across an insect, one must not tread on it, but pick it up and place it elsewhere.**

Q: *Ama-la*, do you give permission for the Oral History Project to use this interview?

**#64D: They can do whatever they want to with this.**

Q: If you wish a break, let us know or if you don't want to answer a question, please let us know.

**#64D: Okay. I cannot answer because my memory is not good. [I] could do so earlier. My husband passed away recently and I am still in shock.**

Q: I'm sorry.

**#64D: It has been three months.**

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

00:04:25

**#64D: There will not be.**

Q: We're honored...

**#64D: [Interrupts] There will be no problem if one prays to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There will be a way that leads straight up.**

Q: We're honored...

**#64D: [Interrupts] Sorry, I am unable to say much.**

Q: *Ama-la*, what would you like to tell us about Tibet?

**#64D: About Tibet? It has been so many years now. While farming, unlike India, we did not have different kinds of vegetables. [We] grew barley and wheat. That was it. Presently the Chinese are manufacturing various things, but back then, those were not available. Due to the grace of God, there was enough to eat, drink and also a surplus.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: After you finish telling me that, tell *ama-la* that we need to take a little break, so you can tell me.

Q: *Ama-la*, can you tell us what did your family do for a living? What kind of work?

**#64D: Besides farming there was not anything much to do. One spun wool and did weaving. That was it. One spun wool like this [shows action of using spindle], wove cloth**

and stitched *chupa* ‘traditional dress’ and overcoats. And in the fields...[gestures off camera]. I did not know anything else.

Q: *Ama-la*, this is very good what you are telling us.

**#64D: [Joins palms]**

Q: How many...

**#64D: [Interrupts] That is all I know. Let us take a photograph together of you [interviewer] and me.**

Q: How many...

00:07:18

**#64D: [I] am very old. I turned 90 recently from 89.**

Q: 90?

**#64D: [I] will die soon.**

Q: Not yet.

**#64D: I will pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama until my death. [I] circumambulate everyday and recite *mani* ‘mantra of Avakokiteshvara.’ [I] pray every day that no sentient being undergoes suffering.**

Q: *Ama-la*, when did you leave Tibet? What year?

**#64D: What should I say? It has been so many years.**

Q: You could give a description...

**#64D: When His Holiness the Dalai Lama arrived in Mon Tawang [Arunachal Pradesh, India], we were already in Simla [Himachal Pradesh, India]. We came through Mount Kailash. We had been on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash and as soon as we heard about the arrival of the Chinese, we left [for India]. His Holiness had arrived in Mon Tawang. At the same time we arrived here.**

Q: *Ama-la*, where was your family born? Where were you born? Where did your family live?

00:09:10

**#64D: Me?**

Q: Yes.

**#64D: Wonder where [I] was born. [I] was born in [my] village.**

Q: Doesn't the village have a name?

**#64D: No.**

Q: You were born on a farm though. Were there many children in your family?

**#64D: There may be a few living in Darjeeling or Kalimpong [West Bengal]. [I] do not have any [siblings] here.**

Q: Long back in Tibet?

**#64D: [I] had many in Tibet but they are dead. I had an older sister, an older brother and a paternal uncle. The Chinese killed them all.**

Q: How many siblings did you have?

**#64D: [I] had an older sister and an older brother. All of them were killed. There is no one left.**

Q: Did you get married and have a family in Tibet?

00:10:16

**#64D: Yes.**

Q: And how many children did you have?

**#64D: [I married] at the age of 18 or 19.**

Q: Who did you marry and how many children?

**#64D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] His Holiness came to Dharamsala from Mon Tawang. There was a dilapidated house up the hill where His Holiness stayed and we received an audience. I was pregnant with my son then. [His Holiness] was living in a derelict house and was 25 years old then.**

Q: Here in Dharamsala?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In Dharamsala.

**#64D: [I] received very good blessings. I was suffering from an eye problem and related it [to His Holiness]. He blew on it and blessed me on the head. These days the monks do not allow one to have a good audience but push you away.**

Q: He blew in your eye. What does that mean when he does that?

00:11:55

**#64D: By blowing the illness will be cured. The obstacles are removed. The obstacles are removed immediately. All the bad things in your mind will be obliterated and you will not be sick.**

Q: It looks like it worked. You are now 89 years old...

**#64D: [Speaks before statement is interpreted] If one does not bear it in mind, if there is no belief in the mind, it is useless.**

Q: *Ama-la*, how many children did you have?

**#64D: Four. Only two survived. Two sons passed away. [I] have a son and a daughter.**

**Soon after Tibet was lost, we did not have anything to eat and faced great difficulties. We worked as coolies for a long time receiving a *rupee* [Indian currency] and half [a day] and only 45 [*rupees*] a month.**

Q: Where? In India?

**#64D: Yes. [I] worked as a coolie for a long time. When many people arrived from Tibet, there was no work and the Indians employed us as road crew.**

Q: Was it in Simla?

00:13:15

**#64D: It was in Simla and in Kulu Manali. It snowed in Kulu Manali killing many Tibetans.**

Q: *Ama-la*, how did you get from Tibet to India? How did that happen?

**#64D: [We] came through Nepal from Tibet to come to India. [We] arrived in Delhi from Nepal and then went to see Mount Kailash from Delhi. That was it.**

Q: *Ama-la*, where were you living before you left Tibet and came to Nepal?

**#64D: Yes?**

Q: Where were you living in Tibet before you came to India?

**#64D: Before coming to India, [I] left Tibet to go on a pilgrimage.**

Q: No, where did you live in Tibet?

**#64D: [I] lived in Sakya.**

Q: What's Sakya like? You describe it to me.



00:14:50

**#64D: How should [I] describe Sakya? At that time, the Sakya Rinpoche was not the present one. There were his father and older brother who were the lamas. The present Sakya Rinpoche was very young then. There were teachings and *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks.’ When the *shaje* was practiced certain women who were afflicted by harmful presences...Aristocratic women performed *cham* alongside [the monks]. [They] were like demons. Lately this is not being practiced.**

Q: Do you remember any stories about Tibet, any old fairy tales or stories that are traditional stories? Can you tell us any stories?

**#64D: Killing people, you mean?**

Q: No, no, stories. Do you remember any stories that were told to children?

**#64D: [I] do not know what that is. [I] have no knowledge.**

Q: Did you tell your children any stories when they were little about Tibet?

**#64D: To the children?**

Q: Yes, to the children.

**#64D: In Tibet?**

Q: In India.

**#64D: In India? To the children? They would know stories because they are educated.**

Q: Did you tell them stories?

**#64D: No, I did not. Thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama they have been taught Tibetan script and the dharma. They would know everything. They would know whether to go up or walk on the ground because these are mentioned in the books.**

Q: *Ama-la*, you know about the Buddha dharma. Why is the Buddha dharma important? Why should we study the Buddha dharma?

00:17:38

**#64D: The majority?**

Q: The Buddha dharma. Why do you think it is important?

**#64D: That is important as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says so. It is very important. Chanting the *mani*, *benza guru* ‘mantra of Padmasambhava,’ *Sangay choedhang tsokyi chok namla*, *Jangchup bardhu dhakni kyapsu chi* and besides that, there is [this prayer]**

*Magyur sa dhang nyampe semchen thamche jangchup nyingpola shue the  
Dinchen tsawa dhang gyuepa chaype palden lama dhampa namla kyapsu chiwo  
Yidham kyilkhor kyi lhatsok khordhang chaypa namla kyapsu chiwo  
Sangay Chomdhendhe namla kyapsu chiwo  
Dhampe choe namla kyapsu chiwo  
Phakpe gyendhun namla kyapsu chiwo  
Pawo Khandro Choekyung Sungme  
Tsowo yeshi kyi chendhang dhenpa namla kyapsu chiwo*

Yes, that is it. [Laughs]

*Jangchup nyipo* in the dharma means all sentient beings.

Q: What are the three jewels of the Buddha?

[Discontinuity in video]

**#64D:** That is about it now. There is nothing much to talk about now. We are speaking of this but they [interview team] must be more knowledgeable. You must be more knowledgeable than me.

Q: *Ama-la*, what are the three jewels of the Buddha dharma?

00:19:30

**#64D:** The *kyapnay kunchok sum* ‘three jewels [the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha]’ is the Buddha dharma. *Om mani padme hun* ‘Hail the jewel in the lotus.’ *Om mani padme hun*. That is the refuge in the Buddha dharma.

*Om mani padme hun*. It is a must to recite the ‘*hun*.’ Just chanting *Om mani padme* is not enough. One must recite ‘*Om mani padme hun*.’

Q: *Om mani padme hun*.

**#64D:** Yes, that is it.

Q: *Om mani padme hun*.

**#64D:** *Hun*.

Q: Thank you. I got it.

**#64D:** His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that it is very important to chant the ‘*hun*.’ *Om mani padme hun*. The ‘*hun*’ will direct one away from the path of hell. [His Holiness] says that one need not go to hell. Otherwise, one would have to go to hell for the sins one has committed. Now I want to go to circumambulate.

Q: *Ama-la*, thank you so much for coming.

00:20:48

**#64D:** *Kyapnay kunchok sumpo khen*  
*Lamala kyapsu chiwo*  
*Sangayla kyapsu chiwo*  
*Choela kyapsu chiwo*  
*Gedunla kyapsu chiwo*  
*Lama yidham gyalwe kyilkhorla kyapsu chiwo*  
*Om mani padme hun*  
*Om mani padme hun*

*[I take refuge in the three jewels*  
*I take refuge in the Buddha*  
*I take refuge in the Dharma*  
*I take refuge in the Sangha*  
*I take refuge in the mandala of the lamas and tutelary deities*  
*Hail the jewel in the lotus.*  
*Hail the jewel in the lotus.]*

Q: First of all I just want to say thank you for sharing some important prayers with us. Thank you.

**#64D:** After chanting the *mani*, one must pray that the *mani* will help all sentient beings: the worms under the ground, the birds in the sky and all those who are dead and alive; I pray that my *mani* benefits all. It is not right to pray that “I” benefit. It is not right to pray that “I” benefit. When you pray for all sentient beings, you are included.

Q: Do you pray for the Chinese people?

**#64D:** Yes?

Q: Do you pray for the Chinese people?

**#64D:** The Chinese?

Q: Do you pray for the Chinese people?

**#64D:** No, [I] do not. I pray that the Chinese die. When they appear on the television, [I] spit at [them]. When I see a Chinese, I spit and exclaim, “Cannot the Chinese die?”

Q: But you just said you pray for all...

**#64D:** [Interrupts] What should I pray for the Chinese? Those terrible Chinese—the dog-eating Chinese are dirty.

Q: But aren't the Chinese sentient beings too?

00:22:39

**#64D: How can the Chinese be included? There are many sentient beings, the Tibetans in Tibet. We pray for them and all those who have died. One will not pray for the Chinese. The Chinese have killed many [people] for whom we pray. One will not pray for the Chinese.**

Q: *Ama-la*, what do you pray for Tibet? What do you want to happen in Tibet?

**#64D: I pray this—that His Holiness the Dalai Lama should have a long life, that [Tibet] get independence immediately, that the Buddha dharma should flourish, that His Holiness can go and sit on the golden throne, that the golden sun shines on the world and that all sentient beings who suffer should attain happiness. That is about it.**

Q: *Ama-la*, would you go back to Tibet if His Holiness goes back?

**#64D: To Tibet? I do not think I will be able to, though of course, my mind will. Wherever His Holiness is...For instance, if His Holiness passes away, wherever he is reborn, I pray that I will be there. [I] pray that [I] will be born there.**

Q: That's a good prayer. That's a good prayer.

**#64D: [Laughs]**

Q: I think *ama-la* said she wants to go and circumambulate. So thank you so much for this interview.

00:24:45

**#64D: There is nothing more than this that we can pray for, right?**

Q: *Katinche* '[we] are grateful.'

**#64D: Okay. There is nothing but to pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. That is it. Where is the camera? I need to go to circumambulate.**

[Interpreter to interviewer]: She wants a photograph with you.

**#64D: Okay.**

Q: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW