

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #58M – Tendol
April 7, 2010

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #58M
2. Interviewee: Tendol
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1935
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Seralung
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 7, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp No. 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 37 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tendol was the second youngest child in a family of 13 children. She grew up grazing cows and sheep from the age of 10. She learned to milk, make cow dung cakes, spin wool and weave woolen cloth. She talks about how she spent her days fetching water, performing various household chores and reciting a few prayers learned from her mother.

Tendol shares the story about her marriage at the age of 21. Both her parents had passed away by then and her brother arranged a marriage for her. With one day's notice she was married to a man she had never seen before. She moved into his house and performed similar chores as she had done in her parents' home. She relates her experience of her first child birth and the social customs related to the birth of a child.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, nomadic life, customs/traditions.

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Interview #58M

Interviewee: Tendol

Age: 75, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 7, 2010

Question: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ can you start by telling us your name?

00:00:19

Interviewee #58M: Tendol.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans to share with the younger generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and with the outside world to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#58M: [Smiles]

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

00:01:11

#58M: You can use it.

Q: Thank you very much.

#58M: Okay.

Q: If you need to stop at anytime during the interview, just let us know, okay?

00:01:25

#58M: Okay.

Q: If there’s any question that you’d rather not answer, just let us know and that’s fine.

#58M: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la*, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this make a problem for you?

00:01:46

#58M: There will not be.

Q: Okay, thank you very much for coming to share your story with us. Thank you.

#58M: [Nods]

Q: Can you start by telling us a little bit about some of your earliest memories back in Tibet?

00:02:11

#58M: When I was about 17-18 years old, I used to milk the cows, prepare cow-dung cakes and cut grass for the cows and performed those kinds of work. We were like nomads and also cultivated lands.

Q: What were the cow-dung cakes for? What was the purpose of the cow-dung cakes?

#58M: That was to make fire because we did not have wood. Sheep dung was mixed with it and used to make fire.

Q: It was sheep and not yak?

00:03:16

#58M: The dung of goats and sheep. Just like cow dung is flattened here, it was made like that. Then goat dung and [the cow-dung cakes] were together used to make fire.

Q: You also made cow dung [cakes]?

#58M: Yes, [we] did.

Q: Which dung made the best firewood?

00:03:45

#58M: They were the same. They were used together, the cow-dung cakes and the goats' dung.

Q: Did you own animals? How many animals did you own?

#58M: We owned around four cows and 400 sheep.

Q: Cows, actual cows?

00:04:25

#58M: Yes, cows.

Q: Were you involved in looking after the sheep?

#58M: I did not go to graze sheep. Here you can buy cloth, but we [in Tibet] had to weave and spin. At around the age of 18, 19, 20, [I] engaged in weaving and spinning as one could not buy fabric like we do here. One must weave to make one's wear.

Q: How many people in your family back then?

00:05:20

#58M: I will tell you about [the family] I joined as a bride.

Q: No *ama-la*, when you were a little child at home?

#58M: My mother gave birth to 13 children.

Q: And where are you? Are you up here or down here, in the middle? Where are you?

00:05:48

#58M: I was not the youngest but the second among the 13 children.

Q: Being almost the youngest, were you given some special attention by your mother?

#58M: She was very loving.

Q: What do you remember doing? When you got up in the morning what was the first thing that you would do?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: At what age?

Q: Like when you were, maybe around 10 years old.

00:06:40

#58M: When [I] was 10, besides milking the cows and the sheep and weaving, being a girl [I] did not go anywhere else. [We] weaved and spun wool. Water had to be fetched in the morning. We did not have taps close by like we do here. Water had to be carried [shows carrying on back] from a long distance and after filling [the water pots], one milked the sheep and engaged in doing wool work.

Q: Before you did those things, before you went out and did your chores, were there any prayers that you did in the morning?

#58M: The only prayer we did was reciting the *mani* ‘mantra of Avalokiteshvara’ as there was no one who taught us other prayers like the *Dolma* ‘Goddess Tara.’ Our parents recited those [other prayers], but we little children chanted the *mani* as we did the sweeping and cleaning. That was it.

Q: So you would recite the *mani* when you were doing your chores; your morning chores?

00:08:00

#58M: Yes, [I] recited the *mani*. *Om mani padme hum*.

Q: The spiritual instruction that you did receive even if it was limited, who did it come from? Was it your mother?

#59M: The little I knew like the *mani* was learned from listening to my mother recite them.

Q: Were there any grandparents that lived with you?

00:08:52

#58M: Can I talk about the [family] into which I married?

Q: Yes.

#58M: The family I married into had grandparents.

Q: What about in your home?

00:09:03

#58M: There were my parents in my home.

Q: There were no grandparents?

#58M: There were no grandparents, only my mother and father.

Q: So her grandparents had passed away?

00:09:27

#58M: They'd passed away. When I left to marry at the age of 20, my parents passed away.

[Microphone is adjusted]

Q: What did you learn from your mother about just in terms of like general values about how to live? Do you learn the things that were important like morality and things like that from her?

#58M: I learned the *mani* and *Dolma* prayers from my mother, but unlike here, there was no one who taught regularly. In Tibet [people] were busy with field works. There was no one who spent time learning.

Q: Were you taught like not to steal, not to lie, not to kill, things like this?

00:11:24

#58M: Yes, they were taught. When we were small our parents taught us to speak to others in honorific terms and not to steal; not to steal from others and eat.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

#58M: [Smiles] [I] was given away in marriage. Just like people get married here, [I] was given away.

Q: At what age?

00:12:01

#58M: [I] was 21 years old.

Q: Had you seen your older sisters get married?

#58M: I was small then and by the time I grew up—there were only two daughters and [they] were already given away in marriage—they were not home.

Q: So what did you think about marriage then from having seen your sisters go through this?

00:12:43

#58M: [Laughs] That evening I was told, “You have to go away in marriage” and was sent away the next morning. [I] did not have my mother; there was only my father. I was sent along with companions.

Q: The first you heard about it was the evening before the wedding?

#58M: Yes.

Q: Oh, that seems a very short time.

00:13:34

#58M: [Smiles] Yes, [they] told me at short notice, “You have to go to get married.”

Q: So what did you think of that?

#58M: If I refused to go, I did not have my parents and there was the *nama* ‘brother’s wife’ at home. [I] was obliged to go.

Q: Wasn’t your father there?

00:14:01

#58M: [My] parents had passed away then and [my] elder brothers made the arrangement. Here one calls [older brothers] as *acho* while we called them as *chocho*.

Q: If you could have said no, would you have done?

#58M: I did not say so.

Q: But did you feel like you didn’t really want to do this?

00:14:49

#58M: I was about 20 years old then and my friends had already left [married]. It used to be said in our village that it was not good to remain at home once you’d reached the 20’s. [I] thought that it was right for me to leave.

Q: Did they tell you who it was, your husband-to-be?

#58M: Except the village, I had not seen the person. They told me the [name of the] village.

Q: Where you allowed to ask anything about him?

00:15:46

#58M: [I] did not ask much. After [we] reached there, they performed the marriage. One had to travel for a day. It was a day's journey on horseback. I did not ask much. The marriage was performed and [I] was left there. My brothers and others stayed for around two days and then returned.

Q: So you didn't ask any questions, right? But did you have any questions in your mind?

#58M: I wondered what the person was like, what the family was like, as my family was quite good. I thought about what their family would be like. Other than that, as a 20 year old I did not think much.

Q: Were you wondering if he was a good looking man?

00:16:57

#58M: Here [people] speak about good looks, but over there all were nomads and besides wondering if he was handsome, I did not think anything else. [Laughs]

Q: Had you asked your sisters and talked to them so that they could sort of prepare you for what to expect?

#58M: In order to ask my sisters...they lived in a village far away and could not come.

Q: So you hadn't had a chance to really talk to them about married life and what it was like?

00:18:00

#58M: I did not get the chance. [I] was given away in a hurry as the mother of that family was ill and there was no one to do the work.

Q: Sorry, how far away did he live from where you lived?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: One day's journey by horse.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about the journey and how were you dressed on the journey?

#58M: I wore something like this [indicates dress] in black and a long sleeved one which you have in Tibet—these days you see them [dancers] wear those while performing the Porang cultural dance—and a sleeveless one with a shirt underneath. And [I] wore a *pangden* 'striped apron.'

Q: You wore a black *chupa* 'traditional dress' and over it another *chupa* without sleeves?

00:19:02

#58M: Yes.

Q: Did you wear two *chupa*?

#58M: Yes, one with sleeves and a sleeveless one.

Q: And what kind of horse were you riding?

00:19:24

#58M: I rode a sort of reddish colored horse. It was not completely dark but somewhat light [in color].

Q: What things did you take with you?

#58M: In Tibet it used to be clothes like *pangden*, footwear, blouses—we did not own many blouses in Tibet—two blouses, three *chupa* and three *pangden*. That was it. And three pairs of footwear. That was it.

Q: Was there any feeling—did you feel sad at all that you're leaving your family home, yes? And you knew that you weren't going to come back. Did you feel kind of sad about that?

00:20:52

#58M: [I] felt sad.

Q: Did your mother give you any advice?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Parents had passed away.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, both of them had passed away by that time. Sorry.

Q: Tell us what happened when you got to your husband's family home?

#58M: They gave me a new set of clothes to wear.

Q: What clothes were these?

00:21:34

#58M: My husband's family gave me a [dress] like this color [points off camera], another one like this, which is blackish, a *pangden* and a pair of boots. That was it.

Q: Were they outside the house to welcome you when you arrived?

#58M: Yes, they were.

Q: Did they come outside?

00:22:07

#58M: [They] received us. The people came out and lit a fire and received us.

Q: Your husband-to-be was there as well or not?

#58M: In Tibet [the groom] did not come out. When we arrived outside, he was sitting inside the house.

Q: His parents were there?

#58M: Yes, they sat together.

Q: Were you nervous to meet them?

00:22:55

#58M: Yes, I was. [Laughs] One was in a new village and did not know the people. I had never seen the place and wondered.

Q: So when you went inside the house and you got a chance to meet your husband, what happened?

#58M: [Laughs] There was nothing to do. I cried a little and sat beside [him].

Q: Oh, no. Did you cry because he was not good-looking?

00:23:44

#58M: [Laughs] [I cried] because I had left my village and parents [brothers]. [I] did not think anything else.

Q: What was your first impression of your husband?

#58M: [I] did not think anything because I was somewhat young then.

Q: Did you talk to him?

00:24:26

#58M: During the day they played a game of *sho* ‘dice’ and he came and spoke. We spoke to each other.

Q: They played a game of *sho*?

#58M: They spent the time playing a game of *sho*.

Q: What did he say?

00:24:52

#58M: [Laughs] “[You] should not be sad. [You] have to stay here now.”

Q: Did that make you feel better?

#58M: Gradually [I] settled and the children were destined [to us].

Q: Oh, you felt that there was some connection?

00:25:25

#58M: I thought that was my fate and [I] settled there.

Q: Did he seem like a nice person?

#58M: [He] is a good man and [we] are still together.

Q: Oh, congratulations.

00:25:44

#58M: Now I do not have anything else to say.

Q: Tell us about your life then. How was your life from that point onwards?

#58M: I came to their house in the 4th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar. [They] were nomads as well as farmers. I engaged in milking the sheep at their home—milking the sheep and weaving. [I] milked the sheep in the morning and evening. During the day, [I] spun wool and wove just as in my village. There was nowhere one could purchase a pair of footwear. Each one made his own wear. One must cultivate one's own vegetable because you could not buy them.

Q: So was the work harder in your new place?

00:27:13

#58M: Since I was doing the same work in my house, I did not find the work difficult. We were also nomads.

Q: When did you have your first child?

#58M: The first child was born when I was 21.

Q: And do you want to talk about that?

00:27:44

#58M: The pain started at about 5 o'clock in the evening and [I] could not give birth throughout the night. [The child] was born around 9 or 10 of the next morning. When the birth took place, [I] felt a lot of pain at the back and below the bowel as it was my first child. [I] felt the urge to urinate and then at about 1 o'clock in the morning—I told you [the interpreter] earlier about the two balls of butter that were blessed by a lama—ate two pieces of it and it [the child] emerged. The placenta was discharged five to ten minutes after

the birth of the child. There was no hospital one could go to. [I have] nothing to relate other than this.

Q: Who was with you during your first childbirth?

#58M: [My] mother-in-law was with me.

Q: Had she prepared you for what to expect?

00:29:33

#58M: She told me that when you had pain in the back and below the bowel, it was time for the birth. She asked me to walk around. She told me that she had easy births. I had a difficult birth, so she told me, "Move about. It would not do to lie down." The birth happened at around 9 the next morning. [I] ate two pieces of the blessed [butter] and the child was born. There was no hospital one could go to whether one died or not.

Q: Did you get up and take short walks like your mother-in-law was advising?

#58M: Yes, I did. I walked here and there. Then when it [the unborn child] came here [touches navel] I lay down. After sometime mother-in-law told me to eat [the butter] blessed by the lama and after eating two pieces, it emerged. Then the placenta was discharged after five to ten minutes.

Q: Was it a boy or a girl, your first child?

00:31:17

#58M: It was a boy.

Q: So after the boy was born, what happened to the placenta?

#58M: It was wrapped in some rags and thrown into the river.

Q: Into the river?

00:31:49

#58M: There was a huge river in my village. It was thrown there.

Q: Do you know why people do that?

#58M: It was said that it would be eaten by the fish and something called the *nyaram* that was there in the water. Placenta and, in our village, dead bodies were cut up and thrown in the water. Here cremation is conducted.

Q: As soon as your baby boy was born, were there any kinds of prayers done for the baby?

00:33:08

#58M: Yes, the mother-in-law had prayers performed. Prayers were done for the baby and for me too. Here [women] get up soon after giving birth, but in my case I remained a month in bed.

Q: Were prayers performed by monks?

#58M: Yes, by monks.

Q: A month [in bed]? Was there a problem?

00:33:52

#58M: I had had a difficult birth and it was said that if one did hard work, the next births would be difficult as the belly would become very big. It was the custom of the region to rest in bed. I moved out to answer nature's call and did not spend the entire time in bed. I did not do hard work like milking the sheep because the wind would make you sick. Our village was very cold, so I was told to remain that way.

Q: So it seems that you had a very good relationship with your mother-in-law it sounds like. She was looking after you well.

#58M: Yes, it was. [She] was loving. I took care of her and she was good [to me].

Q: When you were giving birth to your first child, was it only your mother-in-law in the room? Your husband I imagine was not around.

00:35:22

#58M: My husband is here [in Mundgod].

Q: No, [I] mean when you were giving birth.

#58M: Yes, he was.

Q: Were you together during the birth?

00:35:28

#58M: He was, but it is believed in my village that if it happens to be a girl, it will be a difficult birth because of shyness. Mother-in-law told him to go outside. "Go outside for if the child is a girl, she will feel shy of her father. If it is a boy, he will be born naturally. If your child is a daughter she will feel shy of you, her father. You should go outside." So he went out the door.

Q: Oh, that's so cute.

#58M: Now I have nothing more.

Q: Oh, really! Okay. That's a lovely, lovely story. Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us at all?

00:36:22

#58M: I have nothing else to say.

Q: Okay. Alright, that was really lovely to hear about your life. It was really interesting because we haven't heard these kinds of stories a lot. We've been hearing a lot about taxes, so this was something very different.

#58M: [I do not know] if the story was good or bad.

Q: I just need to ask you again. If this interview was shown in China or Tibet, would this be a problem for you? I just need to ask you one more time.

00:37:19

#58M: There will not be.

Q: Can we use your real name, *ama-la*?

#58M: Yes, you can.

Q: Thank you so much for sharing your story. Thank you.

00:37:33

#58M: Okay.

Q: We have a small gift for you from the project.

#58M: A gift is not necessary.

Q: Thank you. It's been our pleasure. Thank you so much.

00:37:47

#58M: Please do not mention.

[Interviewee gets up to shake hands with interpreter and interviewer]

#58M: Thank you and hope we will meet again.

END OF INTERVIEW