

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #16U – Tenzin Bhuti
April 2, 2017

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #16U
2. Interviewee: Tenzin Bhuti
3. Age: 72
4. Date of Birth: 1945
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Kura
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 2, 2017
10. Place of Interview: Tibetan Women's Centre, Rajpur, Uttarakhand, India
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 59 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tenzin Choenyi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tenzin Bhuti was born in Kura, Dhingri in Utsang Province in 1945. She is the eldest of six siblings and her family owned a farm and 3,000 sheep. The family lived in a two-story home and grew barley and vegetables. At the age of 12 or 13 Tenzin Bhuti went to the fields daily with the shepherds. She describes the family's winter clothing made of sheepskin and custom-made boots.

Tenzin Bhuti's family hired people to make their *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and work in the fields. Their herders transported water to them daily in containers filled at the river. Tenzin Bhuti's father was a third generation doctor, a profession that is passed on from father to son. Her father treated patients in his home or theirs using his stock of herbal medicines. The family also consulted with a medium once a year to learn about their future.

Tenzin Bhuti experienced a grand Tibetan wedding that went on for two or three days. She served as a *bayok* 'bridesmaid' and stayed with the bride for a month to support her during the transition. She was only 14 years old when her family left Tibet and moved to Nepal.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, herding, customs/traditions, medical treatment, shamans/mediums.

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Interview #16U

Interviewee: Tenzin Bhuti

Age: 72, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 2, 2017

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:10

Interviewee #16U: I am Tenzin Bhuti.

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.

#16U: [Nods]

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

#16U: Yes.

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

#16U: Okay.

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

#16U: Okay.

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

#16U: I have no problem.

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

#16U: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la* 'respectful term for mother,' can you please tell me where you were born?

00:02:18

#16U: It is called Kura in Dhingri. Dhingri Kura.

Q: Is that in Utsang?

#16U: It is in Utsang.

Q: And how old are you?

#16U: I am 72.

Q: *Ama-la*, what did your family do for a living?

#16U: There was not any special work, but the usual ones like household chores...Some worked in the fields, while some herded sheep if there were sheep, and some herded yaks if there were yaks. Besides that, there was no special work.

Q: Did your family have...what amount of land did your family have for farming?

#16U: [The family] owned a good amount of land.

Q: How large was the land?

#16U: The size of the land...We had plots of land of which there were 10-20.

Q: In the community were you considered very well off or middle income or low income?

00:04:27

#16U: [We] were among the rich in Tibet.

Q: In Tibet.

#16U: Yes, in Tibet.

Q: How many people were in your family, *ama-la*?

#16U: When [I] was little, there were Father, Mother and we were...at that time in Tibet there might not have been many children. The number of children when in Tibet...we are four...five there. There were around six...there were around five in Tibet.

Q: How many children did your father and mother have?

#16U: There were at least six children.

Q: Where were you in that line up of children? When were you born?

#16U: I am the eldest, the eldest.

Q: How many boys and girls in the family?

00:06:12

#16U: We are four girls.

Q: Two boys?

#16U: Yes.

Q: If you were among the rich in the family...in the village, did you have servants or did you have to do all the work yourself?

#16U: In Tibet there were shepherds that grazed the sheep and yak herders for the yaks. Yes, there were helpers.

Q: How many animals did you have? How many sheep and how many yaks?

#16U: Since the time I can remember there were not many yaks. There were a few yaks since the time I can remember. However, there were many sheep, perhaps 3,000.

Q: Three thousand! That's a lot of sheep.

#16U: Yes, it is.

Q: So about how many helpers did you have to hire to take care of the sheep?

00:08:06

#16U: There might have been two helpers. There might have been two shepherds. I have also been [to graze sheep] long ago.

[Raises right hand to a height of three feet]

Q: When you were this big?

#16U: Yes.

Q: What age maybe was that?

#16U: I was around 13 when in Tibet. When I completed 13 and was starting 14, I left Tibet to come here.

Q: What age did you start helping take care of the sheep?

#16U: [I] was around 13 when [I] went with the shepherds...13, around 13. Then at 14 [I] came here.

Q: At what age did you begin to graze sheep? Was it at the age of 13 or younger?

#16U: When [I] initially went with the shepherds [I] was young. Perhaps [I] went at 12, perhaps [I] went at 12.

Q: What did you do during the day as a young shepherdess? What activities to take care of the sheep?

00:09:58

#16U: One let the sheep move to a place where the grass is good, and then stay at this place the whole day. One must stay on the hill until around 5 o'clock—must stay on the hill. One took some *pa* 'dough made from roasted barley flour and tea' and ate it on the hill.

Q: And did other children go with you or were you the only child with the shepherds?

#16U: There were none else. There were none else. You must accompany the shepherds and no one else came.

Q: Did you like doing that work?

#16U: It was not about liking [it], but the family sent [me] to keep an eye on the shepherds, to see what [the shepherds] did or if [they] grazed the sheep correctly.

Q: So you were observing the work of the shepherds?

#16U: Yes.

Q: And so did you...what seasons did you do the grazing in?

00:12:07

#16U: One must graze sheep both in the summer and winter, must go both in summer and winter. The sheep gave more milk during summertime. There cannot be much in winter, but I have very little memory.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you graze the sheep in winter? Did you go with the other shepherds in winter?

#16U: One must go during the winter, too.

Q: Can you describe the clothing you wore to stay warm?

#16U: Okay. We called the winter [clothing] *lokpa*. *Lokpa* is sheepskin that is cured and is very warm. The *lokpa* is stitched with sleeves and everything, which one wore in winter. Then [looks down] the *zontha* 'footwear' is called *kotso* that is made of leather and is thick.

Q: For the feet?

#16U: Yes, for the feet.

Q: What's worn on the feet?

#16U: The one on the feet is called *zontha kotso*.

Q: Yes?

#16U: *Zontha kotso*.

Q: *Zontha*?

#16U: *Zontha kotso*.

Q: *Kolo*?

#16U: *Kotso*.

Q: *Kotso*?

#16U: *Kotso*. The footwear is called *zontha kotso*. It reaches up to the knees.

Q: Tell me more about the shoes. How are they made?

00:14:46

#16U: The description goes like this. First rags or pieces of old *chupa* ‘traditional dress’ are joined together and stitched with thread to create the sole. Then it is covered with leather and stitched using something that is called *ralu*. *Ralu* is the hair of goat—the hair of goat. There is goat hair and yak hair. It is covered with leather and sewn using goat hair. Then cloth is used to extend it up to the knees. There are [boots] in foreign countries that reach up to here [gestures off camera] and some that reach up to here [gestures off camera]. [*Zontha kotso*] reached up to here [indicates knees].

Q: *Ama-la*, who made these shoes? The family makes them or did special people make them?

#16U: There were special people. They were invited to the house to make these.

Q: Did everybody in the family have shoes like that for wintertime?

00:17:01

#16U: Yes, these were made for wintertime.

Q: *Ama-la*, you said your family was well off and so can you describe your house? What size was your house and how many stories did it have?

#16U: In our part of Tibet [the houses] had only one top floor. Three-story houses were not constructed, but two-story. There were only two stories, one ground floor and one upper floor with nothing on top.

Q: What were the different rooms used for?

#16U: There were 4-5 bedrooms for the family members. Then there were separate enclosures for the cows and sheep.

Q: How did the house stay warm in the wintertime? What did you use for fuel?

00:18:54

#16U: For that purpose there was a type of meadow similar to the pastures here during the summertime. Little pieces are cut away from this pasture and placed upright like this [makes a triangular shape with fingers] into an ember stack in the middle of the room.

Q: Were there embers within it?

#16U: Yes, there were embers. It was an ember stack. There is a name for this pasture...[I] have forgotten it. An ember stack was formed. There is a name for the pasture but [I] have forgotten it...

Q: Was it kept in the house?

#16U: Yes, it was kept inside the house.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Burning ember?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Ember, coal?

Q: What were the other...you were taking care of the sheep but was anybody tilling? You had much land. Did the 10-20 plots of land...what did the family grow on that land?

00:20:55

#16U: The crops...there were not any in the summertime. When is the sowing done? I cannot remember the period. It was only once a year. The sowing season was...only one cultivation was carried out annually.

Q: What were the crops?

#16U: What were the crops sown? Here there is wheat in the fields. Here it is called wheat while there it is known as barley. We grew barley, peas, *thulu*, which is a turnip and can be eaten raw. Turnip is called *thulu* while the Indians call it *shalgam*, the one that can be eaten uncooked—and then radish. Those were grown in our region.

Q: Did the family eat these vegetables or did they also sell them?

00:22:46

#16U: We consumed these ourselves. We grew [the vegetables] ourselves. Everyone owned lands and hence, we grew ourselves. As for fieldwork, we did not do it ourselves but called helpers—called helpers. However, we grew the turnips and radishes ourselves.

Q: I see. You did the turnips and radish. I see and did you grind your own...did you have to grind any of this, like the barley?

#16U: There are special people that did the roasting who are known as *yoemay*. *Yoemay* is one that roasted the barley by making a fire. *Yoemay* must be called [to roast] the barley to make *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley.’ Such a person is called *yoemay*.

Q: Did they come to your house and take your barley and bring it back to you after they roasted it?

00:24:31

#16U: It was done like this. There was a large, long stove built at our house. We had a long one in the house. Then a *zelang* like the clay pots found here—in Tibet it had handles while there are no handles here—sand was poured into it and then the barley. The one that did the roasting was called, but the roasting took place at your house. *Tsampa* was consumed everyday.

Q: Did you like *tsampa*?

#16U: Yes, [I] like *tsampa*.

Q: So they came to the house and roasted it, and then you ate it everyday.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: And the grinding?

Q: They did the grinding too?

#16U: No, now [the roasted barley] must be taken to the watermill. Young men loaded these onto yaks and *dzo* ‘animal bred between a yak and cow.’ In Tibet we called it *gyap*. *Gyap* is one pack here [lifts right hand] and one pack here [lifts left hand] loaded on yaks or *dzo* and it must be taken to the water mill to be ground.

Q: Was there a watermill nearby?

00:26:39

#16U: The watermill was nearby.

Q: *Ama-la*, how did your family get water for cooking and cleaning?

#16U: In Tibet one got water from the rivers called *tsangpo*. There are different rivers and different water sources created in every region. Rivers flowed; water flowed. Water flowed but there were no taps. Water flowed. River water flowed.

Q: Did somebody have to go to the river from your house to get water every day?

#16U: One must go to get...go to get [water]. Whether there was one river or two rivers flowing in the village, one must go to fetch water. The water container was a special one

called *zom* that was made using wooden boards. One must go to get [water] carrying this on the back. Some transported on cows.

Q: And how did your family do it with individuals or did you put it on cows?

00:28:47

#16U: It was done like this: In Tibet if [the river] flowed close by...you had a small container called *zom*. By present standard, a *zom* could hold about 10 liters. This was carried on your back. Some loaded [the *zom*] on cows.

Q: How did your family do it?

#16U: We had shepherds and yak herders in the house. In the morning before leaving, they were sent to fetch water. [They] were sent to fetch water and the water stocked in the *chura*, which is a very large [water container].

Q: That was a lot of work to get that water every day.

#16U: Yes, one had to do it every day.

Q: And what about...speaking of water, what about bathing? Did the family take any time to bathe during the wintertime or was it mostly summer that people took baths or did washing? How did that...how was that handled, for your personal body and then for clothing?

00:31:00

#16U: Bathing was done more often in the summertime and less in the winter. You had to use the water that you had fetched to do it. During winter one had to do it by heating the water while it was not necessary during summertime in Tibet.

Q: And what about toilets? Did people have to go far for toilets or were they next to the house? Was anything...was human waste used for fertilization as some countries do use it? Did Tibet use it or did they only use yak and cow waste?

#16U: Both were used. Animal waste was used; human urine and feces were collected at the toilet and used as fertilizer.

Q: How far away was the toilet from your house?

00:32:34

#16U: Our toilet was at the house; the toilet was constructed close to the house.

Q: In your house, did your family have anything, since your family was a little bit well off, did they have any valuables that the family treasured in the house and what were they? What kind of things?

#16U: Well, valuables...there would be jewelry on your body and that was considered important, and the ornaments were turquoise and coral.

Q: Had these jewelries been in the family for many years?

#16U: Yes, it was like that. My father was the third generation—the third generation. There happened to be one called Kura Amchi ‘Doctor’ and from then [Father] was the third generation.

Q: What’s the name? Kura?

00:34:26

#16U: It was Kura Amchi. Right in the beginning there happened to be one called Kura Amchi, who was the first generation. Then came the second generation and my father was the third generation, the third.

Q: *Amchi* meaning doctor?

#16U: [Father] was a doctor.

Q: So your father was actually a doctor?

#16U: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about his practice? Did people come to your home? Did he go to their home and what kind of treatment did he give people?

#16U: It was like this: When in Tibet, at times [Father] was called to visit on horseback and at times [the patients] came [to our] home.

Q: What kinds of illnesses was your father, was he asked to treat? What kind of problems were people having that they called him?

00:36:21

#16U: [They] came for any kind of illness. Whatever illness it was and whether [the patients] came home or [Father] visited, [he] checked the pulse [holds wrist of left hand with right] and according to that Tibetan medicine was dispensed.

Q: Did your father, if somebody like broke a bone or had a like a big cut, did he treat that kind of injury?

#16U: Those that had a broken hand, it was joined like this [holds left wrist with right hand]. In Tibet there was a certain ointment— it has got a name—this ointment was used and then [the hand] bound. You used a wooden splint. If [the broken bone] could be fixed back, it was and if it was broken, a wooden splint was bound. Such was done.

Q: *Ama-la*, when women had many...when they had babies, did they call the doctor? Did the male doctor ever help or was it only other women that helped deliver the babies?

00:38:21

#16U: Father was not called to deliver babies—was not called. You had to endure...in Tibet there were no hospitals you could go to like here. You had to endure the labor pains whether it was for two or three days and stay put whether you died or survived for there were no doctors you could go to.

Q: Where did your father learn medicine? How did he know how to be a doctor?

#16U: [Father] studied in Tibet itself.

Q: Did he go to a monastery or study under a famous doctor?

#16U: Under a famous doctor. [Father] was a third generation doctor, which I spoke about—the third. The first doctor was Kura Amchi and when this generation ceased it was taught to the son, the second [generation] and my father was the third.

Q: So your father then taught his son? Well, he learned from his father?

00:40:14

#16U: It was not his father, but there were other doctors, other doctors in Tibet. In the beginning Kura Amchi's descendants...the sons are called doctors. If my father had not passed away, my father's son would be called a doctor.

Q: The son must learn from the father?

#16U: Yes, learn medicine. [He] would be the fourth generation doctor. If all of them had sons, [they] would be the first, second, third, fourth, fifth [generation doctors]. If no sons were born then it ends. It was like this in Tibet.

Q: So women were never allowed to be doctors?

#16U: No [shakes head]. [Women] did not.

Q: In your house, if your father was a doctor, did he have a supply of herbal medicine and plants that he used for healing?

#16U: Oh, there was a large stock of this. When [we] left Tibet and came to the place called Solukhumbu [Nepal], we were carrying 2-3 loads of this. Father continued to work as a doctor after leaving [Tibet] at the place called Solukhumbu.

Q: Oh, that was a very good gift to help people.

#16U: [Nods]

Q: When you said when father left, was that when your family fled from Tibet?

00:42:40

#16U: Yes.

Q: I see. Well, okay. I think I'm going to back up a little bit. I guess I wanted to know more about...let's see...when you were a young girl, what kind of...did you have any dreams about what you wanted to do with your life? Did you want to always be a shepherdess or have a family? What was your hope and dreams?

#16U: It never occurred to me.

Q: Yes?

#16U: I did not have such thoughts, no such feelings occurred.

Q: Did you ever help in a wedding, of somebody else's wedding or did you participate in another young lady getting married?

00:44:14

#16U: Yes, once. I attended the marriage of my father's sibling.

Q: Can you tell us about the preparation?

#16U: Grand preparations used to be made in Tibet in the respective regions. It was about a day's distance from our place...not a full day, but about half a day's journey where the girl was given away. I went there once. The celebration took place and I stayed there for around a month.

Q: Before or after the wedding?

#16U: Yes, [I] stayed there [after the wedding].

Q: How old were you when you did that, *ama-la*?

#16U: That was before I left Tibet. Perhaps [I] was around 13, perhaps 13, perhaps at the start of 13, perhaps turning 13 from 12.

Q: You went to the wedding. What do you remember about the preparations for the wedding? What did...what were they doing to help the bride get ready for the wedding?

00:46:40

#16U: Preparations like food, accommodation and such had been made for there were many people attending the wedding [from the bride's side]. After two or three days these people that came to the wedding left and I stayed back.

Q: What was your...why did they want you to stay? Were you there to keep the bride company in her new...was she in her husband's family? Is that where the bride went?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Were you supposed to, kind of be her support and her relative to keep her comfortable in her new home?

#16U: Yes, it was like that. It was like that. [The support] is called *bayok* ‘bridesmaid,’ *bayok*.

Q: Did you have a special dress, clothing to wear?

00:48:33

#16U: Yes, one wore the finest clothes.

Q: Did it make you want to become a bride yourself some day?

#16U: [Laughs and shakes head]

Q: No?

#16U: [Laughs]

Q: Why no? How come? What did you find out?

#16U: [I] did not think that. [I] was a little child.

Q: How old were you when you did get married?

#16U: After coming here...I [got married] here in this place. I was around 26.

Q: Maybe I want to ask you, *ama-la*, is there anything that you think would be interesting you could tell us about growing up in Tibet as a young girl that you would want, you know, your grandchildren and other children to know about Tibet? What do you think we should tell them about Tibet that they might not know or understand?

00:50:31

#16U: I tell my children how things used to be done in Tibet. However, the children do not understand much and they cannot keep it in mind. It is like that. Children of the present day do not have much interest. [They] do not.

Q: I know, I know. Well, maybe when they are older they will. So that’s why we want to make sure that we have their story down. Then they will want to know more when they get older what was your life like.

#16U: [Nods]

Q: I hope so. You know, your father was a doctor I wonder did you or the family ever use a kind of a divination for guidance during an illness? Can you tell us about any experiences like that?

00:52:09

#16U: In Tibet we had special ones that were mediums. We used to invite a medium named Tseten to the house to do a divination.

Q: What kind of questions would you ask Tseten?

#16U: It would be about illnesses in your family or whatever there was that you wished to ask. The divination was consulted once a year.

Q: Was it for like a premonition about what was going to come in the next year? Is that why you would ask?

#16U: It must be something like that but I was small then. It must be that and also about what illnesses might occur. Then you asked the medium about what prayers to conduct during the year. Such things could be asked.

Q: In your own house, did you have an altar and a prayer room that the family used?

00:54:16

#16U: There was an altar.

Q: Did the family pray there every day or on special occasions?

#16U: One prayed every day after making water offering. You made the water offering and then prayed.

Q: So besides praying, what about like entertainment? Did you have...did you sing when you, maybe you know, worked in the fields? Was there any singing and any happy times when people would sing together and have a good time?

#16U: I cannot remember much about such things.

Q: Do you know any songs that you sang as a child?

#16U: [Speaks before translation] One went to other regions to watch singing and such. We went from our region of Dhingri Kura to the place called Langkor to watch a show where there was much singing and dancing. There was not anywhere else to go watch.

Q: I wanted to ask your family home, were there many other homes around or was it a very open area?

00:56:32

#16U: There were many neighbors; there were many.

Q: Oh, many neighbors. So you were close together to other neighbors?

#16U: [Makes a circle with arms]

Q: Like this [gestures off camera]?

#16U: Yes, there were.

Q: So when you looked out your door, your window, what did you see with your eyes? What did you see?

#16U: You could see the gate and people outside and if one looked at the distance, one would see the hills. Other than that what was there to see?

Q: At a distance were the hills...

#16U: The hills.

Q: And nearby?

#16U: Nearby you could see the yard and plains. There was not much to see.

Q: What are some of your favorite memories of Tibet? When you think of your growing up there, what do you remember? What do you love remembering?

#16U: [Smiles] Now [I] am almost forgetting all the places in Tibet. [Shakes head]

Q: Yeah, it's hard to remember.

00:58:12

#16U: Yes, it is.

Q: Well, maybe it will come back. I hope.

#16U: [Nods]

Q: I hope so.

#16U: [Nods]

Q: I think it's a good time to say thank you for all of these wonderful stories and maybe I just want to conclude by asking you just one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#16U: What problem will I have? I am almost dying.

Q: You don't look like you're dying.

#16U: [Smiles]

Q: *Ama*-la, thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

#16U: Okay. [Joins palms]

END OF INTERVIEW