

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #33U – Dolma Yangzom
April 3, 2017

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #33U
2. Interviewee: Dolma Yangzom
3. Age: 71
4. Date of Birth: 1946
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Palangthi
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 2002
9. Date of Interview: April 3, 2017
10. Place of Interview: Dekyiling Tibetan, Settlement, Sahastradhara, Uttarakhand, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 22 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tenzin Choenyi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dolma Yangzom was born in Palangthi in Kham Province in 1946. Her mother passed away when she was only 6 months old and a paternal aunt raised her after her father remarried. She and her aunt lived alone in a small house and worked hard. Dolma Yangzom began working at the age of 8 as a farmer for the commune, which formed in her village after the Chinese invaded the region in 1954.

When the Chinese first appeared in Dolma Yangzom's village the terrified people ran to Zizi Monastery for safety, but many were shot and killed. The Chinese confiscated land and houses from the rich and distributed these to the poor people. The commune enforced a system of community farming and dining, but only lasted for a few years because morale was poor and harvests were unsuccessful.

Dolma Yangzom recalls that restrictions were imposed on religious practice. Her aunt used to feign illness in order to perform prayers on special days of the month. Only a few monks remained in the area because the majority was forced to become laymen after the Chinese destroyed the monasteries. Dolma Yangzom wanted her sons to get a good education and hired people to take them to India, where she later joined them in exile.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, first appearance of Chinese, commune system, life under Chinese rule.

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Interview #33U

Interviewee: Dolma Yangzom

Age: 71, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 3, 2017

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:11

Interviewee #33U: The name is Dolma Yangzom.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#33U: Yes.

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

#33U: Okay.

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

#33U: Okay.

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

00:01:57

#33U: [I will] have no problems.

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

#33U: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ can you please tell me how old you are now?

#33U: 71.

Q: When were you born?

#33U: Regarding the year of the birth...in those days no one knew that. It was the year of the pig. [I] did not know that in Tibet because the parents were no more.

Q: Okay. What village were you born in?

#33U: Whose name?

Q: What's the name of your village.

#33U: I see. The name of the village is Palangthi. It is Palangthi.

Q: What was the nearest monastery or temple?

#33U: Zizi Datsang. Zizi Datsang. It is very close. We have only one monastery.

Q: What province was that?

#33U: Gelug. Gelug. It is the Gelug sect. It is the Gelug sect.

Q: *Ama-la*, in which of the three provinces of Dhotoe [Kham], Dhoday [Amdo] and Utsang does Palangthi fall? In which part does it come among Kham, Amdo and Utsang?

00:04:04

#33U: It comes under Dhotoe.

Q: You mentioned that you were very young when you lost your mother. How old were you when your mother died, passed away?

#33U: It was said that I was only six months old when Mother passed away. Mother passed away at the age of 32.

Q: Did anyone tell you what was the cause of her passing away?

#33U: After giving birth to me mother suffered a cold, which is known as *bangtsay* 'illness after giving birth.' She passed away not being able to recover from the illness.

Q: What about your father, *ama-la*, what happened to him?

#33U: Father was there then. It seems Father took good care. Mother passed away and later Father took a new wife.

Q: Who raised you after your father remarried?

00:06:02

#33U: Then [I] lived with [my] paternal aunt—paternal aunt. Until around the age of 7 or 8 [I] lived with Father and then Father's new wife had many children. So I was sort of unloved and the paternal aunt took [me] in.

Q: Did your paternal aunt have other children as well?

#33U: No, [my] paternal aunt did not have children, did not have a husband. Paternal aunt lived by herself.

Q: I see. And what are your memories, if any, memories of being a...growing up under her care?

#33U: Yes, [I] do have memories—do have memories.

Q: What can you remember about some of the things you did as a child, *ama-la*? Like what kind of activities, like play or chores? What were some things?

#33U: There was no time for play except engaging in work.

Q: Is that right? At what age did you start working? How young were you when you began doing chores?

00:08:14

#33U: [I] started working at the age of 8.

Q: What was your aunt's home like? What kind of house or property did she live on?

#33U: She had a fairly good house. She was a capable earner and [we] have not faced any problems where livelihood is concerned, and did fairly well.

Q: Did your aunt ever marry or did she continue to take care of you as a single woman?

#33U: [Paternal aunt] did not marry. Paternal aunt never married and did not have children. She lived by herself and took care of me.

Q: What kind of a woman was she? What was she like?

#33U: Paternal aunt lived to the age of 79 and passed away just before 80, passed away in Lhasa.

Q: In Lhasa?

#33U: Yes.

Q: You said that you began working at around age 8. What kind of work did you have to do?

00:10:11

#33U: The work was at the commune and the commune issued stars. [I] have worked everywhere and have been a nomad.

Q: Yes?

#33U: I worked as a nomad for the commune for three years. The commune established a nomad section. It was commune work.

Q: Was your aunt a member of the commune or all the people in your village part of the commune?

#33U: Everyone was a part of the commune. For instance, everyone in Palangthi was a part of the commune and worked there. The Chinese formed the commune. Back home it was called commune.

Q: Do you remember a time when there was no Chinese in your village?

#33U: [I] have a faint recollection of the time when there were no Chinese—have a faint memory of the time before the Chinese appeared.

Q: What is your first memory of seeing a Chinese coming to your village?

00:12:09

#33U: Yes, we were staying at the monastery.

Q: Yes?

#33U: [We] fled from the Chinese and into the monastery—fled to the monastery, to Zizi Monastery and stayed there. People fled in the night before dawn...ran away. In the morning one could see soldiers from the monastery. [We] were scared and stayed indoors.

Q: Within the monastery?

#33U: Yes, stayed inside the monastery. It was said, “People have been killed.” Many people were killed then. [I] can remember that.

Q: About how old were you when that happened?

#33U: [I] was 8 years old, 8... maybe 6 or 7.

Q: And lived in the gonpa, the monastery? And lived in the monastery?

#33U: Yes, all the people hid inside the monastery when the Chinese came, fled to the monastery.

Q: I see. Did the Chinese follow the people into the monastery?

00:14:02

#33U: Later [the Chinese] entered the monastery, gathered all the people and held meetings in the monastery. Then the bodies of those people that had died were taken to be flung in the river. I cannot remember clearly, but have memories of being terrified when the Chinese appeared.

Q: Bodies flung in the river?

#33U: Yes, [I] have witnessed [bodies] being dragged to the river.

Q: On mules?

#33U: There is a place called Tsengul on a hilltop that one can see from the monastery. It was some sort of a security post. [Bodies] were being dragged there.

Q: Do you mean on mules or being dragged?

#33U: Dragged, [bodies] were tied at the legs and dragged.

Q: The bodies?

#33U: Yes, the bodies.

Q: Were the people doing that, were they Chinese or were they Tibetans made to do that?

#33U: The Tibetans were made to do that, Tibetans.

Q: By the Chinese?

#33U: Yes.

Q: *Ama-la*, why were the Chinese shooting the people? Did you have any idea?

#33U: [I] did not understand. [The Chinese] said, “Surrender. If [you] surrender, [we] will not shoot. If not, [we] will shoot.” There were some Tibetans [among the Chinese]. I understood the language, but not what was happening.

Q: And it sounds like if there was shooting the people did not surrender.

00:16:30

#33U: Yes, there was shooting because [the people] did not surrender. Later [they] surrendered. The women screamed and surrendered. Then the Chinese entered the homes. All the people had run away. Some had run away and some were killed. There was no knowing where people had fled.

Q: Were there many Chinese, like were there hundreds or just 20? How many Chinese were coming into your village at that time?

#33U: Oh, there were many Chinese. [I] was a child then and did not know how many but could see a sea of yellow Chinese. [They] entered the large houses and stayed there.

Q: In large houses?

#33U: Yes, the soldiers stayed in the large houses.

Q: When you went to live with your aunt, can you describe her house? Was it large or small? Was she rich or middle income? Can you tell me about her financial situation?

00:18:28

#33U: Paternal aunt's situation was that she owned a small house earlier and lived in the small house. Her parents had let her live separately. It was a small and old house. [Aunt] lived there and later the Chinese appeared and brought about changes. Then [we] lived in Palangthi. The commune was established and later dissolved and privatized. At the time of privatization, there was the commune's storage where things used to be stored. This house had 25 pillars...

Q: Yes?

#33U: It had 25 pillars.

Q: Pillars?

#33U: Pillars. In our hometown [houses] used to have pillars. There was a house with 25 pillars, which was the commune's storage for grains and such. During privatization, [aunt] bought it, bought the house.

Q: The commune at that time...

#33U: The commune was privatized.

Q: The commune was dissolved?

#33U: The commune was dissolved and the lands distributed to the people individually.

Q: Then aunt bought the house...

#33U: Two families bought the storage. The two families paid 1,800 currency units.

Q: When the Chinese came into the village, did they come into your aunt's little house? Did they come after her?

00:20:50

#33U: [They] did not—did not come there.

Q: The Chinese didn't come?

#33U: The Chinese did not come.

Q: So when you ran and hid in the monastery after the Chinese killed people, where did everybody go? Did the commune start right away or did you go back to your houses? What happened?

#33U: The lands were confiscated immediately by the commune. The Chinese were there and some of our villagers became activists or officials. The Chinese appointed them. Lands belonging to the *ngadhak* 'leaders' were confiscated. Then the poor were given houses. Such things were done.

Q: Where did your...what happened to you and your aunt?

00:22:29

#33U: We were given some lands. It was not the poorest of lands but somewhat medium. [Smiles]

Q: Where were you allowed to live?

#33U: Lived in that place.

Q: In the same house?

#33U: Yes.

Q: In your aunt's house, small house?

#33U: Yes, and then the commune was established and when I was around 14 years old, [we] moved to Palangthi. That is where the storage house was that I spoke about, the storage house [we] bought.

Q: Was the storehouse bought to store things or just to live there?

#33U: There were not many things, but it was to live in and for the belongings. Except for some animals, there was not much wealth as such. It was for all to live in, the animals and humans.

Q: How far away did you move from the original aunt's house to the storage house? Was that like a big distance or another village and why did you move?

00:24:56

#33U: The original house was old, small and when it rained, water seeped in. There was not much land. So [aunt] bought [the storage house].

Q: How far was it?

#33U: It was not very far, perhaps five houses away.

Q: Yes?

#33U: How far according to the standard [of measurement] here? Perhaps it was about 10 houses away.

Q: Ten houses?

#33U: Yes, the distance from one house to the other.

Q: The other house was at a distance of 10 houses away?

#33U: Yes.

Q: So you stayed in the same community?

#33U: Yes, it was.

Q: After the Chinese came in and they started a commune, like how long did the commune start after they came in and killed a lot of the villagers, like did it start that year or five years later? How soon did it start?

00:26:40

#33U: [The commune] began after half a year. Initially, we lived on our land. [The Chinese] came in the 2nd or 3rd month and the commune started around harvest time. It was time for harvest....

Q: In the same year?

#33U: Yes, in the same year.

Q: That sounds like less than a year.

#33U: Yes, it was.

Q: Did many Chinese people come in to help you start the commune, you know?

#33U: Not many Chinese came at the time the commune started. There were officials and leaders that said things must be collected. For instance, there are group leaders and many such leaders in India. Officials came but not soldiers. Officials came.

Q: Were the officials Tibetan officials?

00:28:31

#33U: There were Tibetan officials and Chinese officials.

Q: I know you were only a young girl, but do you remember were people worried or afraid or angry at the change that happened to their village?

#33U: It seems in the beginning there was some fear of what was going to happen because everything was collected together. Later everything was distributed among the poor and it seems there was some happiness.

Q: What happened to the owners of those larger houses?

#33U: Those that lived in large houses were made to live in houses that the poor used to live and the large ones were given to the poor. There were very poor ones...

Q: Where did the rich go?

00:30:22

#33U: The poor were given large houses. The rich families were made to move to houses where the poor used to live. Such things were done.

Q: Were your aunt and you considered among the poor or were you more middle class?

#33U: [We] were not among the poor but middle class. [We] were not among those that received houses and other shares. [Laughs]

Q: How did the poor people survive when they took over these houses? Were they happy? Did they make good use of them? What was the feeling in the village to see these poor people move to these beautiful houses?

#33U: They were happy to receive good houses then. Right? [Laughs] Earlier [they] used to live in poor houses like cowsheds. Later when distributed such houses, [they] were happy. As for us, but for aunt's hard work, we did not receive a house or anything.

Q: If I have...is this correct, *ama-la*? It was around 1954 that the Chinese came to your village and so how...when...how long did you stay in that village, until what year?

00:33:25

#33U: [I] remained until the age of 40.

Q: Did the commune system from the time, you know, you were about 14 you said...from 14 until you were about 40. How did it fare? How did it...did it support people? Were there years when it was good or difficult? Can you tell us about commune life?

#33U: The commune was not helpful. When the commune was formed many people had to work together...could not work and there was shortage of grains. One was forced to borrow from other regions. [We] faced great difficulties. ...[not discernible] and the commune had to buy from elsewhere.

Q: Where, *ama-la*?

#33U: There were other regions like Dhiwu and Tsangyenriwu where the commune went to buy grains. These were brought back and distributed to the people.

Q: Bought from where?

#33U: There is a place called...[not discernible].

Q: Because there was shortage of grains in your region?

#33U: There was shortage of grains and the crops failed.

Q: Why did the crops fail because the Tibetans had been farmers from many generations?

00:35:49

#33U: [The Tibetans] were farmers. Right from the beginning the Chinese did not let [the people] sow the right crops and made [them] sow mustard in the fields. You know mustard that is used to make oil? This was sown and different kind of grains. Perhaps people did not work hard because of the large number of people involved. During one year the crops failed. Then the commune had to procure crops from elsewhere and distribute to the people. Such things were done.

Q: Before the Chinese came...I forgot to ask how old was your aunt when you went to live with her?

#33U: Aunt was around 25 years old...no, not 25, but around 30 years old. Yes, around 30.

Q: What did your aunt do for a livelihood before the Chinese came to the village? What did she do?

00:37:48

#33U: She owned a small plot of land that was cultivated. [Aunt] also tilled some dry lands in the hills. [She] did such work.

Q: So she knew how to cultivate lands. So when the Chinese brought the commune in for farming, what was her job or her role in the commune?

#33U: When the restaurant [commune kitchen] started, aunt was the cook there. The restaurant was open for around a year. [Aunt] prepared bread and ground grains in the water mill. [She] did that kind of work and was the one that prepared food for the people.

Q: [Aunt] also ground wheat?

#33U: Yes, ground wheat and there were many like her at the restaurant.

Q: Was food on sale at the restaurant?

#33U: [Food] was not sold but people had to go there to eat during the day. Those that secured first place got big sized breads and those in second place got small ones. *Tsampa* 'flour made from roasted grain' was served in the morning. Such was apportioned.

Q: Breakfast was *tsampa*?

#33U: Yes, *tsampa*.

Q: The bread was for lunch?

00:39:21

#33U: Lunch was bread and for dinner it was *thukpa* ‘noodle soup.’ This was rationed out according to the number of people in a family using a ladle. Such was done.

Q: Was it enough food for people?

#33U: Well, it seemed to be sufficient, as being small [I] did not have a large appetite. As a child [I] saved some and ate it when hungry. [Laughs] It seemed to be enough.

Q: What were you doing when your aunt was working in the kitchen?

#33U: I was living in the little house—was living in the little house, and brought back any leftover food to save and eat when I got hungry. One must gather once in the morning, once in the evening and once at noon.

Q: What? For food?

00:41:38

#33U: Yes, one must gather to eat at the restaurant.

Q: Go there?

#33U: Yes, one left for work and then [went to the commune kitchen to eat] like it was home.

Q: Was there work to do?

#33U: There was work in the fields.

Q: Did you work?

#33U: Yes.

Q: In the fields?

#33U: Yes, in the fields.

Q: The commune fields?

#33U: Yes, went to work in the commune fields.

Q: Were you able to see your aunt then?

#33U: Yes.

Q: This must've been a very big change because Tibetan families usually eat together in the evening and now they had to come to the commune. Was there a lot of unhappiness with this new way of having to live?

#33U: It seemed like I did not know much being a child [laughs]. [Children] were happy where people gathered. There was a lot of clamor where people gathered. [I] cannot recall anything like that.

Q: Was there ever any resistance or opposition to living like that? Would people get in trouble that you noticed?

00:43:52

#33U: Later there were complains that the commune kitchen was not good and the food poor. People grumbled that it was better if the commune kitchen did not exist. So the commune kitchen shut down. The commune kitchen was no longer there and people cooked and ate individually. However, the work was done together, stars were awarded and [harvest] divided. Those that were able to work received a certain allotment as also the number of people [in a family]. Even babies born that day were recorded and given a share.

Q: What was allotted?

#33U: Grains were apportioned. The harvested crops were gathered together and divided.

Q: Was it at the end of every growing season that you were given some? What were you given to eat as a reward for your work?

00:46:02

#33U: Right at the beginning each person was apportioned 18 or 20 *gyama* [equivalent to half kilogram]. This was right at the beginning. Later when the harvest was gathered, the distribution was for a year. Whatever grain was there during that year was divided, whether it was 300 or 200 or 500 *gyama* for a family.

Q: In the beginning the 18-20 was for a month?

#33U: Yes, monthly.

Q: The only time you would get food of your own was once at a certain point. Was it once a year? What was it? What kind of grain was it or what were you given?

#33U: Wheat and barley. There is something called barley and then wheat. Then there is something called buckwheat. Those were the only three. There was not anything else.

Q: And so initially once a month you would get a supply. Was that supply based on how much you worked or whether you're a child or an adult?

00:48:08

#33U: There was different number of stars according to one's work. Those that earned many stars received cash as well as grains, both. Then there was one based on the number of people [in a family]. For those with many children, if the grain was not sufficient, [they] had to give the cash back. Such was done.

Q: Did people ever go hungry?

#33U: No, no one went hungry. You made efforts [to find food].

Q: Was your aunt happy with these changes in her life to have another system imposed on her?

#33U: It did not seem like [aunt] was happy because [she] used to complain it was so difficult. [She] used to complain it was difficult.

Q: Was there...would you get in any trouble if you tried to complain out loud or was there any freedom to complain?

00:50:37

#33U: There was no way to speak so. If you have any problem, you endured it yourself and there was no one to speak to.

Q: Did people get in any trouble if they complained?

#33U: Nothing such happened.

Q: But your aunt was so unhappy. She couldn't have her own freedom back.

#33U: Yes, it was like that. There was no more freedom like before.

Q: Were there any punishments if you didn't do your work or obey the rules of the commune?

#33U: Things like that happened. If one did not obey the rules...For instance, if one read prayers when religious practice was not allowed—[my] aunt was a good practitioner...If one read prayers and such on auspicious days...If the next day was the 15th day [full moon day] one must untruthfully call in sick the day before and stay back. [Aunt] had to seek leave. Otherwise, one was not permitted to stay back and practice on the 15th day. There was no freedom. Aunt would request leave but would not be allowed. Then [she] claimed to be sick and I would cry. Aunt lied because [she] had to read prayers on the 15th day. [She] would seek leave but would not get permission. Thinking [my aunt] was really sick I would cry.

Q: Thinking Aunt was sick?

00:52:51

#33U: Yes. It was necessary to lie. [Aunt] claimed to be sick when [she] was not because [she] had to read prayers on days like the 15th and the 8th.

Q: Wishing to read prayers by herself?

#33U: [For this practice Aunt] could eat only once a day. [She] went to see a lama early in the morning to receive the vow. It seems religious practice was not allowed because permission would not be granted. It was not permitted. I thought Aunt was really sick and cried and requested leave. Then permission was granted and she practiced for a day.

Q: You mean you cried believing Aunt was sick?

#33U: Yes. Actually [my aunt] was not sick but needed to practice on the 15th day. There was no freedom, so that is why.

Q: Where were the monks that used to live in your village or area?

00:54:30

#33U: Long ago there was only a monk or two. There was only an old monk or two who had not disrobed, who used to live in the prayer rooms of rich families. There were not many monks right from the beginning.

Q: Were there monks before the appearance of the Chinese?

#33U: Yes, at that time there were the monasteries. The monasteries were destroyed after the Chinese came. Once the monasteries were destroyed the few monks that were left lived in their individual homes. Otherwise, there were no monasteries. The monks could no longer wear robes, but dress in *chupa* ‘traditional coats’ and live at home. [They] planted saplings and such. The elderly monks were made to do such things.

Q: Were there any public religious ceremonies permitted, any kind led by a monk at the...I don't know the monastery was destroyed? Were there any kinds of religious ceremonies permitted?

00:56:24

#33U: In the beginning...there were just a few monks and one practiced in private for it was not allowed in the beginning.

Q: There were no public practices...

#33U: No, there were no public practices. You practiced and chanted prayers at home. My aunt used to go to receive teachings.

Q: Seek leave?

#33U: [Aunt] went to seek teachings—seek teachings and did not work that day but stayed home and ate only one meal a day.

Q: What about the monastery? Did the people ever try to rebuild it or did they have to...what happened to all the paintings and statues and ornaments in the monastery?

#33U: Do you mean long ago?

Q: Yes, long ago.

00:58:05

#33U: Long ago the people destroyed the holy images, removed the precious items within and wore the embellishments around the neck. It used to be said that such things happened, but I was a child then and had no knowledge about it. Then the *thangka* ‘traditional Tibetan Buddhist painting’...

Q: What happened, *ama-la*?

#33U: ...of Dolma was burned and the precious items within the statues removed. It was said that such things occurred. These were our people and not the Chinese. There were certain people in the region...

Q: ...and these were worn around the neck...

#33U: There were beads of turquoise and corals. It was said that these were worn around the neck. The *kusungthukten* ‘sacred objects symbolic of enlightened body, speech and mind symbolized by a holy image, scriptures and stupa respectively’ were brought down...

Q: Why did you think your people did it?

#33U: [I] do not know. [Laughs] It was using power, using power that the Chinese...

Q: What’s it mean, *ama-la*?

#33U: That means...

Q: Is it misuse of power?

#33U: They did things without thinking of karmic consequences.

Q: Thinking they had the authority?

#33U: Yes, thinking they had the authority.

Q: Now if I understand correctly, you spent about 32 years living in a commune. Is that right?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not exactly because the commune wasn't...the commune was closed later on.

Q: How long did the commune last, *ama-la*?

01:00:25

#33U: The commune lasted for around a year.

Q: Only one year?

#33U: A year or perhaps it was 2-3 years. [I] think it was around three years that the commune lasted.

Q: Only three and then what happened to you?

#33U: Then you had to till your land—the land meant for two people.

Q: So there was no...

#33U: You cultivated your land.

Q: So then you were responsible for your own survival, no more commune?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No more commune.

Q: No more commune, but were the Chinese still in control of your village?

#33U: The Chinese were in control. The Chinese were in control, but once the privatization occurred, you had freedom. You reaped the harvest of your hard work.

Q: Did people...how did you feel when all of a sudden you had more freedom? Did you notice any difference and about what age were you then, about 12?

01:02:12

#33U: I was around 37 or 38 when freedom happened. Around three years after the privatization, at the age of 40, Aunt said that we must go to Lhasa and my elder son wished to go to India. In this way heeding aunt [we] left for Lhasa after leasing the lands and selling off the animals. Bringing along two children and an elderly [I] left for Lhasa.

Q: *Ama-la*, just to summarize: the commune begins around 1960 and it ends around 1982. So about 20-22 years you lived in the commune. Is that about right?

#33U: Yes.

Q: Tell us what happened during those 20 years? Did you get married? Did you meet somebody?

01:04:17

#33U: There was no such...

Q: Did you meet someone and get married?

#33U: I see. My elder son was born when [I] was 25 years old. There was no marriage as such.

Q: But you met someone.

#33U: Yes.

Q: Did you need permission to have a family in the commune?

#33U: There was no need to seek permission. There was no need to seek permission.

Q: Was your husband Tibetan?

#33U: Yes, a Tibetan.

Q: So all those years that 20 years in the commune, did you continue to work, do farming or did you do other kinds of work?

#33U: Work?

Q: Yes.

#33U: There was not any other work, but some nomadic work and cultivating my farm. Until the age of 40 [I] worked in the fields.

Q: Was it farming all year long and how were the crops? Were things growing well? Did people have enough to eat?

01:06:23

#33U: Yes, once everything was privatized. Then one applied manure in the fields and worked hard and the harvest was good. During the commune, the food...one did not work hard and the harvest was not good. Once it became yours, each one worked hard.

Q: When the lands were divided, did the land belong to the people then?

#33U: [The land] became yours.

Q: So did people...In your opinion did they ever want to go back to the old Tibet ways or did they like this new style of living?

#33U: [I] do not know very well. The older ones liked the old way of life and the younger ones prefer this present style. [Laughs]

Q: In Tibet?

#33U: Yes.

Q: If you grew crops, how did you...did you live off them or could you also sell them and go to market with them?

01:08:33

#33U: [The crops] were not for sale. When I was living in the hometown, we had enough. There were some that did not have enough and had to borrow. They borrowed and repaid in autumn and my aunt used to do this. Then there were some that had good harvest. The way of life is different for everyone.

Q: And what about things like education? Were there any schools started in your village?

#33U: A school was started but I have never been to school.

Q: [A school] was started?

#33U: Yes, [a school] was started. Initially [I] wanted to go to school, but there was no one to do the work at home. So [I] was not sent to school. I have never been to school. I have no education and [I thought my] children will also have no education because to seek admission [to any school] one must pay fees. So initially [I] sent the elder one to become a monk and the younger one to India to school at the age of 8.

Q: The elder one?

#33U: The younger one.

Q: The younger one.

#33U: The elder left at the age of 16, went to the monastery at the age of 16, but did not remain a monk.

Q: Didn't continue to be a monk?

#33U: Did not remain a monk. Then [he] joined the army and was there for 21 years and now is back home, and is the one to look after me.

Q: Where [did you send the children]?

01:11:30

#33U: The elder son joined the monastery and later a school in Bir [India].

Q: The younger one?

#33U: The elder one. The younger one was sent to Mussoorie [India]. [He] finished the 12th grade in the school in Mussoorie and then went to college. After three years of college, [he] studied another two years and became a teacher at TCV [Tibetan Children's Village] and was there for five years.

Q: Which monastery did the elder one join?

#33U: Gaden [Monastery] in Mundgod [India].

Q: Are they both boys?

#33U: Both are boys. [I] have only two sons.

Q: *Ama-la*, there was no problem sending your children outside of Tibet for education?

#33U: I worked hard there [in Tibet] while the children were sent here [to India]. I took care of Aunt. I took care of Aunt and after she passed away, I went back to the hometown, applied for papers and came to join the children.

Q: How did your children get out of Tibet? Who did they go with? They were young children.

01:13:47

#33U: Coming here?

Q: Yes.

#33U: They fled through the mountains. [I] paid money to send [the children out of Tibet]. [I] paid money to someone, which was 2,000 Chinese currency units for a little child. The elder son who had left earlier said, "Send [my brother]. [He] must get an education for [life is] difficult without an education." [He] said that. Those that would take [my younger son] along were reliable people that were a relative and another person. So [I] sent [him].

Q: So there was no way to leave freely. You would have to go with a guide or go at night with a monk. Is it okay to ask if you could tell us how your son...how you made your son come?

#33U: There were people that took money and acted as guides.

Q: But these are not Chinese guides. These are Tibetans?

#33U: Tibetans.

Q: I wanted to ask when you were still living in Tibet under the Chinese, were there...could you say prayers publicly? Could you have—I don't know—monks come and pray at your home? Were there death practices like if somebody died? What happened to the body under the Chinese?

01:16:41

#33U: You could hold prayers [if someone died]. This was allowed. [The authorities] did not say anything. If monks were available, one could hold prayers. Religious practice was allowed when I left but [I] don't know much after that.

Q: Was it forbidden to mention His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

#33U: His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

Q: Was there any danger in mentioning the name of His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

#33U: It was said that there was that danger. One should not mention [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] and if one made a call from here, it was better not to say too much.

Q: *Ama-la*, did more Chinese come to your village or did the village sort of stay the same size?

#33U: Long ago?

Q: ...in your hometown, hometown.

#33U: Most of the people were Tibetans in the hometown. There were not many Chinese.

Q: The Chinese didn't come?

#33U: Only Chinese officials came and not a large number. Long ago during the unrest in Tibet many soldiers and such had come, but later there were not many. There were just two or three officials.

Q: *Ama-la*, is there...I do want to understand that...how did you make the decision. You said your children came to get education in India and then what do you decide to do next?

01:19:27

#33U: Then I worked hard for sometime and when Aunt passed away, [I] came to the children and to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama as [I] felt this was better.

Q: Was that recently or what year?

#33U: I came in 2002.

Q: And did you see your sons again? Have you seen them?

#33U: Yes, [I] met both the sons and the younger one finished [his] education. Due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama everything is good now.

Q: Okay. I think that's probably...So we want to go back and say. I think I should ask this again. *Ama-la*, I just want to check again. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

01:21:34

#33U: There will be no problems. My life will come to an end here [laughs] and the children may not go back.

Q: I see. Thank you for sharing your story with us, *ama-la*. It's very helpful.

#33U: Thank you. [Joins palms and laughs]

END OF INTERVIEW