

# THE ORAL HISTORY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY MONGOLIA



## Osor

### Basic information

Interviewee ID: 990296  
Name: Osor  
Parent's name: Dondov  
Ovog: Hongor  
Sex: m  
Year of Birth: 1955  
Ethnicity: Halh

### Additional Information

Education: elementary  
Notes on education:  
Work: herder, race-horse trainer  
Belief: none  
Born in: Saihan sum, Bulgan aimag  
Lives in: Saihan sum (or part of UB), Bulgan aimag  
Mother's profession: herder  
Father's profession: herder

### Themes for this interview are:

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**[collectivization](#); [authority](#); [repressions](#); [belief](#);**

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**[airag](#); [privatization](#); [gambling](#); [drinking](#); [boredom](#); [expropriation](#); [lamas](#);**

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### Translation:

*Khishigsüren* -  
We are at the Onon?

*Osor* -  
Orhon.

*Khishigsüren* -  
We have come to visit the family of Lhamjav guai's youngest brother Osor at their summer pasture on the shore of the River Orhon, at the mouth of the River Ugalz...

*Osor* -  
Yes, at the river mouth, at the confluence.

*Khishigsüren* -  
We are continuing with the interviews taken in Saihan Sum in Bulgan Aimag, Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed.

*Osor* -  
I have to thank you. I am delighted to have been included among your interviewees.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Let's begin the interview with this topic.

*Osor* -  
Yes.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Could you please talk about your family and your elder brothers and sisters? Could you please introduce yourself and your family and tell me about your life and work?

*Osor* -  
All right. I was discharged from the military in 1976.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. Until 1976 you lived with your parents...

*Osor* -  
I lived with my parents until 1976, and from 1973 to 1976 I served in the military. In 1978 I married and from '78, from '76 to '88 I herded horses. I herded the horses of the cooperative.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
Did I herd horses for 12 years? Yes, for twelve years, then I herded camels for a year and in '91 with the privatization I got my own animals. We were among the first 13 families that left the cooperative. We were such a family. Until today we are managing on our own.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. I would like to know the details of your story.

*Osor* -  
All right.

*Khishigsüren* -  
How did the children, who were born in the 1950s and 1960s, grow up? Your parents were cooperative herders. How was your life compared to that of the children of other families?

*Osor* -  
When we grew up, well, my parents were herding cooperative livestock.



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*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
Because they had cooperative livestock they usually didn't have time for us, so we were chased to school. We were wearing deels and had bags made of cloth. The dormitory looked like a big hall and it was full of children who studied there. But what did we study? I didn't learn anything. And today's children? Those born in the 1990s all live in apartments, in beautiful private houses. They can't be compared with us. Today's pupils, they are still children but they ride Yawa motorcycles. Compared to us they live in luxury. In the '70s we would work a whole year to earn the money for a motorcycle, you know. Today's children buy not only motorcycles with their parents' money, but jeeps and they race with them. Compared to us, their lives are luxurious and wild. We really had to work an entire year to earn the money for one Yawa motorcycle. Today's children live on their parents' wealth of livestock.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
There are people who drive jeeps. My parents herded cooperative animals until they were sixty and when they retired they received a pension of 60 tögrög. A sack of flour cost 75 tögrög and red tobacco cost 10 tögrög. Such was their life. When we were young, our parents really worked very hard. Of course I don't know anything about their youth. The told me that they owned their own animals and that they were confiscated when the cooperatives were first established.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Osor* -  
That's what they told me. Today's youth really live in luxury. Our life in the cooperatives, instead, was really hard. To use harsh words, it was almost like in prison. In general.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. You herded cooperative livestock?

*Osor* -  
Yes, I did.

*Khishigsüren* -  
When I interviewed herders who lived and worked in cooperatives at that time, they...

*Osor* -  
Yes.

*Khishigsüren* -  
So you herded cooperative livestock...

*Osor* -  
Thinking about it now, I did that for a long time. I spent my best years working for the cooperative.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Osor* -  
Of course there are people who spent even more years in the cooperative than me. How old was I in 1991? Generally speaking, I spent the time of my life in which I was young and healthy in the cooperative. Had I been as young and able to work as I was when I worked for the cooperative in the democratic period, I think I would have had a wonderful life. Anyway, life in the cooperative wasn't all that bad. I tended about 500 horses and in one year we produced more than 1000 litres of airag. My wife and I we just lived a normal life. Things were all right at that time, I think.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ahaan. Z.Osor: Then democracy came and the privatization of the cattle was carried out. Then I realized how we had been treated. I understand it. Ya.Hishigsüren: When you looked back? Z.Osor: Yes, when I looked back. Ya.Hishigsüren: Ah.

*Osor* -  
At that time people weren't aware, we were simply living our lives and thought that things were all right. When the cooperative leader came we were scared stiff 'Oh dear, what shall we do? The darga has come, a darga has come from the aimag center. What now?' Today people just play and have fun. 'An important darga has come? A wealthy man has come?' And they just sit there with the intention to get something out of him. At that time, if we were playing games when the darga visited we hid them out of fear of getting punished.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Osor* -  
Young people today, they just keep on drinking and playing no matter who comes. And they criticize their superiors to their face. They are completely different, they don't know how to be embarrassed.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
Today is the time when one can just feel at ease and go at one's own pace.

*Khishigsüren* -  
When I interviewed Bavuuhav ah I thought that even though I grew up in this sum, I don't know how many families were herding horses.

*Osor* -  
Ah.

*Khishigsüren* -  
I don't know why these big animals were tended in herds as large as sheep flocks. Is that different from sum to sum?

*Osor* -  
Well, this was a local characteristic. Here in the eastern provinces, for examples, we milk mares, but in the western provinces people don't.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Right.

*Osor* -  
They don't milk mares, only here we milk mares. We milked about 100 mares. We had planned production targets. In addition, local people drink a lot of airag. We were usually given a target of thirty mares and of 350 litres of airag per mare. Later it became 370 litres. We would tüühirүүлj three times a day.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Түүhirүүлне?

*Osor* -  
Түүhirүүлне means to churn airag, each time for at least two hours.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Wow! That means that you churned for eight hours a day.

*Osor* -  
Right. At that time the airag has not yet fermented. Three times a day means churning for six hours, but such a strong

person does not exist. There were only the two of us and our children were still small, so we would just stir it for a while and then leave it. That airag didn't really turn into airag.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
Today it's the same. Wife: There was nobody who had time.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Let me ask you a question. As I understand it, herders usually don't think about their children, they forget them. They only thought about the cooperative animals, but not about their children. How was it in your family? How did you raise your children when they were still very young? Herders' children didn't go to the kindergarten, right? There was no such thing, before going to school children would stay at home. Could you talk about that?

*Osor* -  
One autumn we were milking along the River Orhon, just the two of us.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
How old was my eldest daughter? Twelve months, maybe a little bit older?

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
The two of us had about 100 mares. We tied our daughter to a 40-liter milk can, or a 38-litre can, where we tied the horses. When the child cried, a mare turned around, because she were interested in her. That's...

*Khishigsüren* -  
Did she run her over?

*Osor* -  
No, she didn't. She walked around the crying child and it looked as if she was going to trample on her with her front hooves because she was crying so much. In this way my eldest daughter grew up tied to a milk can surrounded by yellow horse droppings. In the end they were all fine. By the end of the '80s they had become really experienced. They had acquired the character of the horses. Once in a while we settled together with another family. At that time, when families with sheep lived together with a family with horses, they wouldn't get a certificate for the year and if an animal died it was their loss. So they didn't have another choice but to relocate. This is how we lived in the cooperative. We worked for the cooperative for more than ten years. I quit school when I was 14 or 15, and I grew up herding cooperative horses next to my elder brother Namhai. Generally that's how it was.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Do you like to tend horses?

*Osor* -  
Yes, I do. Because of the horses I have lost the use of my legs. The man sitting in front of you has forgotten how to walk

*Khishigsüren* -  
What do you think? People in the socialist system...How did people's position change?

*Osor* -  
Well, I think that, first, people were generally very disciplined in the socialist period. There were no drunkards. When I see young people today, some of them don't seem to care very much about their lives. They have this wonderful freedom, but I really think that they use it in the wrong way. As for myself, I have more freedom than before and I like living according to my own wishes. However, with regards to those young people, it really seems that it would be good to put them back into cooperatives.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Why do you say that they should be put back into cooperatives?

*Osor* -  
They generally don't manage their business properly and they are boastful. They go bankrupt. That's why I would like to put them into some kind of prison.

*Khishigsüren* -  
(laughs)

*Osor* -  
In this way they would do their work. Under pressure. Without pressure people don't know how to live.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
That's how I understand it.

*Khishigsüren* -  
When you were working for the cooperative there were specific kinds of pressure. Would you please talk about this? Was the quota for airag a burden?

*Osor* -  
It was really difficult when the 500 cooperative horses were let loose. One spring, when the grass had just started to grow, we fenced in some of the mares during the night and when I went to let them free in the morning there was a '69' truck standing near the fence.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
Our enclosure was rather big and had a gate on the eastern side. That's where we kept the horses.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
I saw a man who looked like a darga walking back and forth.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
So I adjusted the pace of my horse and since he seemed like someone who would rebuke me, I wanted to go eastwards and let the horses out from the eastern side while he was walking westwards. However, when I got there he shouted from afar 'Come here! Who are you?' I went over to him. 'Who are you?' he asked me. I answered that I was a herder of the brigade and that I tended the horses. He asked me why I had fenced in the cooperative animals and I told him a lie. I lied, at that time. I told him that I had rounded up those horses in the middle of the night and fenced them in at midnight. Of course I hadn't done it at midnight but in the evening at sunset. If I hadn't told him a lie he would have rebuked me for fencing them in so early. So I lied. One autumn we had let the mares free and if they told us to do so we had to do it.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor -*

It was a fixed period. My brothers and I, the nine of us would ride on nine mares among the horses. In order to fulfill the airag quota, we didn't even keep the airag of our own nine mares. And who was the darga who had come from the sum or the aimag? It was a guy called Raash.

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

He was from the department, he came with the leader of our party cell. I had dropped by a family, where I had a bowl or two of airag and then I wanted to let the mares free. The period had already started. I thought that for sure he had come because of the mares and I told my wife.

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

I lay down and I told her to say that we were going to mark the foals in case they asked why we still hadn't set them free.

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

And I said 'If they ask why I am lying here tell them that I am sick'. And I was lying there in fear.

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah

*Osor -*

I was lying when they came in. They seemed to have greeted. They asked why we had not yet let the mares loose and my wife said that we were going to mark the foals, as I had instructed her.

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

Then they asked 'What happened to your husband'. She said 'He is not feeling well. He has just taken some medicine and fallen asleep.'

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

They talked and then they said 'Make him get up.' I got up as if I was really sleepy. What else could I do since I had been pretending to be asleep?

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

After having greeted me they rebuked me and asked why I was not setting the mares free. I said 'We are nine of us. Our own mares are among these horses, but we have never kept their airag for ourselves. We have always given it to the cooperative together with the airag of the cooperative mares. For the Tsagaan Sar I am going to keep 100 liters of airag for myself.

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah

*Osor -*

I said that it was airag for the Tsagaan Sar. At that time we didn't wash the airag bowls like the bowls for tea. It has been a long tradition. So I put some airag into a bowl, but the darga wouldn't drink it. He said 'Before you offer it to people you have to wash the bowl. Go and wash the bowl.' My wife, poor thing, took the bowl and was about to wash it, when I started to bluster. I took the bowl and said angrily 'Don't wash that bowl, it has always been like that and nobody has ever gotten sick. Don't drink if you don't want to!'

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

The other one got mad and my mother who was over 80...no, she was over seventy.

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

My mother was there and she said 'They will tie you up and take you away on their '69' truck.'

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

I expected them to do that. And then my mother threatened them 'If you do that to my son I will go together with him.'

*Khishigsüren -*

Hmm.

*Osor -*

We were afraid and embarrassed. I was kind of wild when I confronted them. That's how it was.

*Khishigsüren -*

You communicated with those in power every day. Well, maybe not everyday. The darga in charge of your work was the brigade leader.

*Osor -*

Yes, the brigade leader.

*Khishigsüren -*

And the leader of the cooperative.

*Osor -*

Of course.

*Khishigsüren -*

How was the relationship between the brigade leader, the cooperative leader and the herders?

*Osor -*

There was a really big difference. At that time the cooperative leader and the brigade leader would come in and say 'Today you go and make the horses get their injection and check their fetuses.' And we would do as they had told us.

*Khishigsüren -*

Ah.

*Osor -*

We would go haymaking when they told us to do so.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
Today it's different, you know. Today they say 'Hello Osor guai, how are you?' 'Fine.' 'Our bag is having a meeting tonight, please come.' Today the relationship is completely different. Today they say 'The brigade vet has come to drench the sheep. The drench is there and the dipping will be there. Please go.' Before the vet would say 'Go and administer the drench. If you don't we won't give you a certificate for this year.' We would be scared you know. There is a big difference between these two attitudes. What should one be afraid of today? We go, drench the animals and everything is all right. If the horses are decent the procedure is not too bad, we just go and have it done.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
We get the medicine and get it done. There is a huge difference between the two, you know.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. Did the socialist leaders exert their power also in other ways in addition to using authoritarian methods? Our leader was a good person, he knew life...

*Osor* -  
Of course there were such people. But there wasn't much leeway. The leaders could exert pressure whenever they wanted, you know.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Osor* -  
They had the power, that's how it was. But at least they made somebody be present when the geldings were drenched.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
That's an example of how it was.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Did they always make people do what they said they would make them do?

*Osor* -  
Yes, they didn't care about a person's family situation.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
They always followed the plan. It was impossible to reason with them.

*Khishigsüren* -  
What about today's leaders? Have they become the slaves of the people?

*Osor* -  
Today there are very quiet. Today's leaders are very quiet, they are quite decent.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
Since the beginning of the democratic system I haven't been rebuked by a leader once. Well, I haven't done anything that they could have rebuked me for, but I am not afraid of them anymore like before.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
That's how it has changed.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Let's talk about this now. Are you called Zorigoo of Burd?

*Osor* -  
Yes, I am.

*Khishigsüren* -  
That's how people say, you know. 'He is still herding in the democratic system...'

*Osor* -  
Right.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Have you been in Burd Sum?

*Osor* -  
I have been in the Burd Brigade.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah, so the brigade was called Burd?

*Osor* -  
Well, what happened is that in autumn 1990 people began to talk about democracy. Right? They started to talk about it in autumn, at the beginning of winter. The next spring the situation became more tense, when Baabar's writings were spread in the newspapers. Our elder brother Namhai said that the cooperatives would be disbanded. They started to say that in spring and through Namhai we got books and newspapers.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Osor* -  
I used to read them to people. I would say things like 'Now we need to do this. It is something like this. Democracy is necessary, wonderful things are developing.' So my coevals made fun of me and called me Zorig of Burd. That's how it was.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
In spring Namhar ah organized a meeting in order to disband the cooperatives. It was in spring, at the end of the winter. We were in Meerents in the countryside and nobody was interested in the meeting. They weren't interested because they had been criticized at cooperative meetings. But then Dugar, who is a year or two older than me, came with his tether tied to the saddle and told us that it was about disbanding the cooperatives. He meant to stay at the brigade overnight expecting that the meeting would drag on.

*Khishigsüren* -  
(laughs)

*Osor -*  
He came with a tether tied to his saddle.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
Then they asked whether there was anybody who wanted to leave the cooperative.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
The brigade members raised their hands, you know.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
But when the brigade leader wanted to write down their names, they became weak and took down their hands.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Hmm.

*Osor -*  
They were scared of getting into troubles like in the old days. Others had their names written down and I was one of those who kept their hand raised. In the end, was it in autumn? No, in spring I got 70 heads of livestock from the cooperative. Adults got 18 heads, which meant that my wife and I together received 36 heads. For each of our four children we got 10 heads, so all together 76.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
I was the first to leave the cooperative with 76 heads of livestock.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah. What did you expect from the democratic system in the beginning?

*Osor -*  
I wanted to have my own private business.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
What I thought was that I wouldn't have to work under anybody's pressure anymore, I can milk the mares and the cows whenever I want.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Did you think that you would be able to manage on your own?

*Osor -*  
Yes, I did. But I had been thinking a lot, like where to get money from and how.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
I thought that as long as Namhai ah and Lhamjav were there and things were going like that anyways, I might as well try to get rid of the cooperative livestock and live in peace with my own animals no matter whether I would earn money or not.

*Khishigsüren -*  
How was the time after you had left the cooperative with your private livestock and you didn't receive your share of the cooperative profits anymore?

*Osor -*  
At that time every family generally had to deliver 50 heads of livestock, you know.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
33 small animals. Then how many are missing? Is it 17? Yes, 17 large animals. 12 cows and 5 horses. It was like that. But I am not sure whether that is the correct number. Maybe there were more large animals. And at the times of the cooperatives, we also had to deliver 100 liters of milk per cow, in addition to the mare's milk.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
So if you had five cows you would have to deliver 500 liters of milk. We couldn't beg the milker to do it. We had to ask somebody else, or we had to stay close to the factory and bring the milk there tied to the saddle. I used to do that kind of job.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah. Let's continue with this question. How did people in your sum accept democracy? There were people who understood it and reacted to it with self-confidence. What did people think about those who were against democracy? How did they oppose democracy?

*Osor -*  
The Revolutionary Party is saying terrible things. Maybe it agitates people a little bit?

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
I think that in the old days the Revolutionary Party was a party for thieves.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
If you committed a crime you were expelled from the party but you didn't go to prison.

*Khishigsüren -*  
Ah.

*Osor -*  
They made people work by agitating them and then they would give them some money or a certificate. That's how it was. With democracy people started drinking a lot and they began to be rude to each other. Some people dislike this very much.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah. Were any new technologies introduced among herders in the countryside during the socialist period? Was there any possibility for new technologies to arrive? Today technological developments have a great impact on the lives of herders. There are windmills, satellite dishes and so on. You can live quite comfortably. People have mobile phones. They look after their sheep with the help of mobile phones. During the socialist period...

*Osor* -

We had never had that, you know. We didn't have any technologies. But since the 1990s, people have jeeps, two three cars parked outside, they have mobile phones and they watch TV. These people are happy.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

In the old days, having a TV set was unthinkable.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

People in the countryside didn't watch TV. Once in a while they would watch TV in the center if there was no blackout. Since we didn't have anything to watch, in summer and in winter we left the horses on their own and spent our time visiting people and gambling. That was our only entertainment.

*Khishigsüren* -

I heard that even teachers were gambling.

*Osor* -

If you were caught gambling you would be punished, you know. You wouldn't go to prison, but you would be fined.

*Khishigsüren* -

When the people of my father's generation were young, the teachers used to gamble in the attic of the school day and night. Clandestinely...

*Osor* -

Yes, they did. I know. That's how it was.

*Khishigsüren* -

He said that it was the only entertainment they had.

*Osor* -

Now, there's no need to gamble.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

Today there are so many forms of entertainment.

*Khishigsüren* -

At that time...

*Osor* -

There was only gambling. Gambling....

*Khishigsüren* -

Where did you gamble and how? Please tell me.

*Osor* -

We'd go to somebody's place and lock the door, you know.

*Khishigsüren* -

In somebody's home?

*Osor* -

Yes, we would go to somebody's ger and lock it from the inside. We would even get alarmed when small children came in, thinking that they were spying on us.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

When there was a knock on the door...

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

We stopped the game.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

If, for example, we heard a '69' while gambling at somebody's place in the countryside, we would immediately hide under the bed or in the haystack, because there couldn't be five or ten people in the same place or we would be suspected of gambling.

*Khishigsüren* -

But you wouldn't sit together and drink, right?

*Osor* -

No, we didn't, we didn't think of doing that.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah. What was the reason for that? Was it because alcohol was a scarce good? Or was it because of the authoritarian regime? Or because of people's education?

*Osor* -

I guess it was because of people's education, no?

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah. Why do you think so?

*Osor* -

At that time people generally didn't drink. There were only a few alcoholics, but they drank as much as today's ordinary young people do. Ganzoo guai was said to be drinking. But people didn't drink infinite quantities. At that time, about ten people finished a box of arhi in seven to eight days. Today ten people finish it in two hours.

*Khishigsüren* -

(laughs).

*Osor* -

Young people today do that, I guess.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
There is a huge difference, but I don't know why. I guess it's that people's education has changed a lot.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Why do you think has people's upbringing changed for the worse?

*Osor* -  
I don't know. Maybe it's that happiness doesn't stick with bad people.

*Khishigsüren* -  
I would like to know something. This big airag bowl that is there in front of you.

*Osor* -  
I can't talk about it. Namhai ah will talk about it.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Why it is here?

*Osor* -  
I'm the youngest son in the family.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Osor* -  
That's why they left it to me.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. Your parents left it to you?

*Osor* -  
Yes, I'm the hearth of the family so to say.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. Is this ger also theirs?

*Osor* -  
No, it isn't. My mother had a relative who was a monk. His father's name was Avirmed.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
It is their ger. I took it.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. I would like to talk again about the privatization. We talked about it only briefly. When the privatization was first announced you got a small share of livestock before the cooperative was disbanded, right?

*Osor* -  
Yes, 76 heads of livestock.

*Khishigsüren* -  
So you left the cooperative even though you didn't get your full share?

*Osor* -  
Right.

*Khishigsüren* -  
What impact did the privatization have on those who remained? How did the remaining people divide the livestock? How was the immense property of the cooperative sold?

*Osor* -  
Well, among those who remained were some who gained and some who lost. I think it was different for everyone.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
I don't know very well about it. The fact is that everything just disappeared. Those who knew that the cooperative would be disbanded and acted smart, I think they got something out of it.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
Those who didn't act were left without much. The leaders of that time probably got a lot because they took whatever they could.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. What possibilities did the leaders have to misappropriate property?

*Osor* -  
Common people didn't have any authority over the capital of the cooperatives.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
The leaders knew that the cooperatives would be dismantled, so they swallowed quite a lot.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Osor* -  
This is how they took so much.

*Khishigsüren* -  
You got your own animals. How did people who started herding on their own generally do? Did they all manage to multiply their herds and to have a good life? Or was their situation different? Z.Osor: Well, generally they are doing all right. Most have multiplied their herds and are living well. But of course there are also some, who have lost their animals and whose lives have been deteriorating. There are people of all kinds, you know. Ya.Hishigsüren: Ah. I see something hanging from the wall of your ger. Is this a talisman? What is it?

*Osor* -  
It is my youngest son's amulet.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. It seems to be very old.

*Osor* -  
It is. I had a son, who was born in 1980.



*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
I lost my son in 1997 when he had an accident, and later in 2000 another son was born.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
I went to see a lama to get an amulet for him with his name. It's that amulet.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Is it old?

*Osor* -  
Yes, it is very old.

*Khishigsüren* -  
How did you get it?

*Osor* -  
A lama called Hairhany Davaatseren gave it to my son. It seems to be very old. It has a dragon and it carries the marks of time.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Right. It was that lama's, right?

*Osor* -  
In 2000 it was his.

*Khishigsüren* -  
This is really interesting. Namhai ah, I would like to ask you something. I asked Osor ah about the big airag bowl standing in front of him and he said you know better about it. From which period is it?

*Namhai* -  
I don't know the period. The script is Chinese or Manchu. I guess it says where it was made. Its owner was Chin Van Handdorj, the noyon of the Halh Province.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
In 1928, 1929, when the nobility was expropriated, also Handdorj Van's son Jambaldorj Van's property was confiscated and sold at the market.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. At the market in Ulaanbaatar?

*Namhai* -  
No, it was confiscated and sold in Bulgan.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
A high-ranking lama from the Ugalz River, who was called Chültem or Tall Chültem, bought it.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
It has a capacity of 8 liters. There is also a 6-liter höhüür that goes into it. Tall Chültem bought the two and came here.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
About ten years later, in 1937, when the lamas were arrested and expropriated, Chültem was arrested too.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
My father bought it after it had been confiscated.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Did those who carried out the expropriation sell the confiscated items?

*Namhai* -  
Yes, they did.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
It was sold at an auction. He bought it there. And I saw that the bowl was of the highest quality.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
In the spring of 1963, a man called Dugain Baasan who lives north of Saihan Sum celebrated his 70th birthday. They took our bowl to the celebration and used it to offer airag to the guests.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
They wanted to appear beautiful at the celebration.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
But some careless people dropped it and it got two long cracks right through middle.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
They also broke off the rim. At that time there we had nothing to glue it with. So they simply melted a comb to fix the broken part and gave it back to us like that, but it always came off. I came to the countryside in 1966 and fought with them because they had broken an valuable item. At that time people didn't know and cherish the value of things.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
They answered back, took out 25 tögrög and threw them at me.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
They said it was a shabby black bowl ...

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Namhai* -  
Then the crack was repaired and ...

*Khishigsüren* -  
It was repaired?

*Namhai* -  
Yes, it was repaired. Do you see this little yellow line?

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
It was fixed with porcelain cement, it's very good.

*Khishigsüren* -  
So your father had a new rim put on it?

*Namhai* -  
Yes, he had it done by the Skilful Jamts in 1967.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
The rim is very thin, so it is very pleasant to drink airag from it. It is nice to drink airag from such a cup.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
It was oiled with birch bark so that it doesn't break, that's why it's so glossy.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
The one that was inside didn't break. My cousin Jambal has it. They live 5-6 km from here.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
It's the bowl of the Hand Van.

*Khishigsüren* -  
How much did it cost?

*Namhai* -  
I didn't ask. It might be that when the property of the nobility was confiscated it wasn't very expensive. But it doesn't matter. We have a lot of airag here. Hand Van and Chin Van Handdorj were famous not only here, but in the entire Halh, and my father used to say that it is auspicious to take the things of noyon.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
That's the story of the bowl. I can't read the Chinese script on the bottom. One of our girls wanted to ask someone to read it.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah. Did they ask somebody?

*Namhai* -  
The bowl was made in the Manchu period. It was made in China during the Manchu dynasty. That means it was made about 300 years ago.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
That's what they said. They said that the porcelain is covered with glass so that the paint doesn't go off. Maybe it is glass indeed.

*Khishigsüren* -  
This is a really high technology!

*Namhai* -  
Yes, indeed.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
There is this child, right?

*Osor* -  
It is said that the bowl wasn't supposed to come here. It's strange, it wasn't supposed to cross the border...

*Namhai* -  
Of course Hand Van would bring some nice bowls across the border during the Manchu period. Generally here in Saihan...

*Khishigsüren* -  
It is said that the Chinese never reveal the secret of their Chinese porcelain.

*Namhai* -  
There are big bowls here in Saihan. There are, everybody knows. This one is called Dragon Bowl, the meaning is clear. Then there are bowls with fish. There are those called tsülger. The biggest are called tulgat, they have a capacity of 16 liters and they have a pedestal made of dark-brown sandalwood.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
It is so big that a person cannot lift it, so it is placed slightly tilted on a pedestal made of dark-brown sandalwood.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Osor* -  
You know our River Ugalz, right?

*Khishigsüren* -  
Everybody here is from the Ugalz River. What kind of people were living along the Ugalz River and who was living in this province?

*Namhai* -  
What kind ...

*Khishigsüren* -  
People here talk about each other in ways like 'Those of that brigade are very industrious. Those instead are really lazy.' That's what I meant with my question.

*Namhai* -  
I don't know. People from the Ugalz River have horses. They don't steal. They don't lie. They live in their own way. There are no incredibly rich people, but there are no terribly poor people either. There were only two wealthy families.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
For many generations.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
The two rich families were that of Bayan Jam'yan and of Baldan Havan.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
Well, they had a roof and walls. The herding families were exhausted. They were impoverished due to political pressure and the terrible rules. It was in the 1950s, right? Young animals had to be given to the cooperatives once they had reached two years of age and a lot of animals died.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
Those who had many heads of livestock were suffocated by heavily increased taxes. Average people just managed to fulfill their duties, and the poor were left with left with a single ram left to them by the cooperatives, which they valued far too much. That's what people said.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Namhai* -  
People say that they were suffocating under the pressure. It was like that.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
That's how it was.

*Khishigsüren* -  
What kind of children did Chin Van Handdorj have?

*Namhai* -  
I don't know well. Jambaldorj Van is said to have been the one who inherited the title. He was born in 1900, in the year of the rat. My father was a respected man, too. He told us that he met Jambaldorj Van several times and talked with him.

*Khishigsüren* -  
How is he connected to a man named Batmönh?

*Namhai* -  
The dayan haan?

*Khishigsüren* -  
No, no. I met a man called Batmönh, who said that he was the descendant of a man called Batmönh and that Batmönh had been related to Chin Van Handdorj

*Namhai* -  
I haven't heard about it. I just heard that Jambaldorj was his son. I don't know who else remained.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
I remember hearing from someone about a noyon in the province who took a bride.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
He gathered innocent girls from the province and took one as his wife. When he chose among the most beautiful girls of the province something unforeseen happened. The commoners thought that he would marry a certain girl, but he didn't, because his people examined her and found she was sterile.

*Khishigsüren* -  
How did they know?

*Namhai* -  
Later it turned out to be true.

*Khishigsüren* -  
How did they examine her?

*Namhai* -  
I don't know. Many important people examined her. Probably they had some standards.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Namhai* -

They knew that she would not give birth to a baby.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Namhai* -

I have heard about it but I don't remember when and where.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah. Let me take a picture of the bottom of this. *Namhai* ah's snuff-bottle is very interesting. I will put it next to this bowl and take a photo of both.

*Namhai* -

It's just a bowl used to drink in between milking the mares.

*Khishigsüren* -

Used by one person?

*Namhai* -

Yes, by one person, but I have seen many people drinking from it.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Namhai* -

Tsevegjav guai, our gavj, used to drink from it. A man called Shavad guai used to drink from it. Many people. The last one was rather young, a guy called Tüme, who was the leader of the Union. That's it.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

And then there was Mijiddorj's sister, who drank in between milking the mares.

*Namhai* -

Really? Do you mean Davaahüü guai?

*Osor* -

Yes, Davaahüü guai.

*Khishigsüren* -

A woman drinking?

*Osor* -

She is an old woman. She started drinking after she had become old. It was the festival of the horse herders and we were in Har Mod. Davaahüü guai came to visit us, we are relatives you know.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah

*Osor* -

There was Baljinnyam ah, the accountant of the cooperative.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

: He had an 'lj-2'.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

He went to bring Davaahüü when she wanted to come to visit us. We put a ten-liter bucket full of airag there and drank it. My mother and my wife took out the colored bowls to offer airag to the guests.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

Baljinnyam ah said 'How can this old woman finish all this airag? I go to the center and come back tomorrow? Shall I pick you up tomorrow morning? Well, I'll go now.' Then we went to milk those 100 mares. When we went back in after we had finished, they had drunk it all. Baljinnyam ah said that they had two, three of these bowls. Even an old woman drank airag. In 1980, we set up our ger at Shine Us. There was that yellow bowl from which they drank with our Baljinnyam ah. It was smaller than this one, it had a capacity of maybe six liters. The ger was full of people. We took the bowl in turns with both hands.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

Give three or four bowls to good drinkers, what does matter if three, four people drink all day long. I drank too, I think I am just like the others. You know, we Saihan people really...

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

I think that we people from Saihan drink really well. Three, four people and if one of them is a woman they offer her to drink anyways. That's how they drink and that's why I think that our Saihan people drink particularly much.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

I watched Shadav guai drinking winter airag. Summer airag is different, you know. Winter airag doesn't go down that easily.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah.

*Osor* -

The winter when we celebrated the Dalain Bayar, Shadav guai visited us and he drank his bowls.

*Khishigsüren* -

Ah. Just look at this. I have seen that all families use their buckets like this. It's because they can't use ladles, right.

*Osor* -

Yes. When milking the cooperative mares you need very big scoops. If you use a ladle to fill the buckets with airag, it will take a very long time.

*Khishigsüren* -

Right.

*Osor* -  
That's why we have to use very big scoops.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Sure if you have to fill bowls like this (laughs).

*Osor* -  
Before joining the cooperative we had a scoop made of horns of argali. The horn was cut like this and a handle attached to it at the top. We didn't know that it was a rare and precious thing. Since we had it, we thought that there was one in every household and then it disappeared.

*Khishigsüren* -  
There is Namhai ah's snuff bottle. I hear that it is also very special.

*Namhai* -  
My snuff bottle is very famous, it's called Usan Siizen. At the beginning of the 19th century a famous lama and outstanding artisan called Shijree brought it from the Halha Bogd Monastery in Bogd Sats.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
Shijee said an awe-inspiring child had found it at the Gandan Monastery.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
One morning the highest-ranking lama of the Gandan Monastery went to turn the prayer wheels when he saw an eleven-year old child sleeping on the prayer wheel.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
When he asked what he was doing there, the boy answered that he had come from the countryside to the Bogd Lamasery to study.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
He lama asked 'Do you like to study?' and the boy replied 'Yes, I do.' So he took the boy home. Later he became a very erudite lama, his name was Choigoryn...

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
His name was Choigoryn ...Agiramba, he was very famous. In 1904, 1905 when the 13th Dalai Lama came to visit the Halh, Dandar Agiramba became his disciple. Dandar Agiramba's own disciple Gudembe, Navaan Gudembe, was a very rich man. He founded the lamasery here in Saihan Sum.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
He came here following his teacher. After Dandir Agiramba's death, he honoured him in his monastery and he preserved his mummy. There were mummies in Mongolia.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Hmm. What year was that?

*Namhai* -  
Apparently Dandar Agiramba died in the 1910s. In the 1940s, the buildings of the Rashaant Monastery were demolished and the place cleaned from debris. The only thing that remained was the little wooden shrine in which he had been preserved. There was a fire on the Rashaant Mountain. One member of the provincial Revolutionary Party Committee, a man called Tümendemberel, was around during the fire and he found the tomb...

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
They destroyed the tomb and threw away the mummy. Underneath was a bar of silver. When the dried mummy was unearthed, local people who had worshipped it for generations, thought it was very bad. Three young men cut off his head and kept it. It's easy to preserve the head...

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
Then the three young men burnt the remaining body. People were glad about this and said that they had done a very important thing. Just recently the head was still at a family's place, maybe it's still there. When I was the sum leader, my driver used to say that somebody had placed it on an ovoo.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
Well, in 1933 religion was severely repressed as a result of the New Turn Policy. It was forbidden, now we have religious freedom. Well, Luvsanjamts Agiramba was a man from our Ugalz River, who resided in Shadiv lamasery, which belonged to the Rashaant Lamasery that had been established by Gudembe. He came from the Bogd Monastery to hold a ceremony for the Düiher Van, it was no problem to hold a ceremony for Düiher Van in a small countryside monastery.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
Düiher Van wanted to be taught the scriptures by somebody with a vast religious knowledge. When Düiher Van performed the ceremony, many local people went there..

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Namhai* -  
The worshipping and teaching continued for several days. The local lamas were very proud and overjoyed.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
Then Navaan Gudembe passed away and this snuff bottle was found among his belongings.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
What to give to this great man who had held a ceremony for the Dūiher Van? What is worthy enough? Would this snuff bottle which had passed through so many teachers' hands satisfy him? So they wondered and they gave it to him. It is said that Luvsanjams Agiramba took it with him when he went to prison. To have such a precious snuff bottle in prison, surrounded by nasty people, probably made him feel uncomfortable, so he gave it to Haliun Yondon gavj, when he was released. He was from the south of our area and had been imprisoned earlier, so he was released earlier. In the 1930s people who sold items belonging to lamas were likely to get into troubles.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
Especially those belonging to important lamas. He sold it immediately. One of the teacher's disciples bought it, and when he came out of prison he gave it back to him. So he was released from prison. All his belongings were confiscated. Agiramba, this great lama, had to pay terribly high taxes, if he didn't he had to go back to prison, and this is why he sold the snuff bottle again.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
It seems that the former had been rather well off. He bought it again and gave it back to the teacher around 1961. Agiramba lived in our Ugalz area, when we were born people asked him what names to give to their children. All the children called him bagsh, you know.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
We used to visit him before going to school. He would give three tōgrōg to children going to the sum school, five tōgrōg to children going to the aimag school, and ten tōgrōg to those going to school in the city. The teacher must have been a really rich man, you know. We visited him in order to get the money. He knew very well to which school Zanduin Namhai was going and gave the right amount of money.

*Khishigsüren* -  
He never got confused?

*Namhai* -  
No, never. Then the teacher died. His disciple was a man named Gombo. I asked him several times around '69, '70 whether I could take the snuff bottle, but he never answered. One day when I went to visit lama Gombo guai there were a few people there. 'This Namhai has kept on asking me whether he could take it, so we have to give it to him', he said. 'However, I really can't give you my teacher's snuff bottle, really I can't. I have about ten snuff bottles, choose one of them, except for the one of my teacher.' I was about to agree, but my brother-in-law Pūlee, whom you wanted to interview, was sitting next to me and pinched me. So I went out.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
He went out after me and said 'Ok, he is giving it to you. I said we would buy it and there are snuff bottles everywhere, so they are cheap.' At that time they were generally cheap indeed.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
He said I should tell you, he will give it to you. So I went in, sat there for a while and then I asked him. Lama Gombo guai remained silent. Two months later I visited him again. He rummaged in his chest and took out a pouch with this snuff bottle. The pouch had four lions on each corner and two elephants on each side, so eight animals.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah

*Namhai* -  
It was embroidered with a golden thread. On the outside it had yellow circular patterns with dragons, and on the inside it had sky blue circular patterns with dragons. He gave me a snuff bottle with such a pouch. I was young then and I rode horses. I was riding a famous ambler, and I kept the pouch, which was hundreds of years old, in the pocket on my chest, and while I was galloping it tore apart.

*Khishigsüren* -  
It was torn apart?

*Namhai* -  
Yes, it tore apart and now we keep it in our chest. Some rich Halh wanted to buy my snuff bottle. I told them that I would sell it at a very high price, I told them it was too expensive for them. Then they wanted to buy the pouch, but I told them that I wouldn't sell it without the snuff bottle.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Ah.

*Namhai* -  
This is how it was.

*Khishigsüren* -  
Let's continue the interview with Osor ah.

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