

The Remembrances of a Mongolian Nomadic Herder Woman

The sound of the camels and colts and of my mother singing is all the same to me. The first time I put my feet in the sand and soil was in the Gobi, the place where I used to play with the little colts. I was raised in a camel herdsman family. The camel therefore is an inseparable part of my life, the life of woman, namely a camel herder woman. Some people say that being born in a mountain region as a bull is far better than being born in the Gobi Desert as a human being. I am sensitive to such words knowing that most people do not understand the beauty of my birthplace until they see and understand it for themselves.



Actually, I believe that living in the Gobi is a wonderful thing. When I was a child my mother and father lived the nomadic life, moving from one place to another with their camel caravan, looking for better pasture and land. The rhythm of the caravan movement was like a lullaby to me. We ate and slept on the moving caravan. Sometimes we would see mirages of tall buildings and an unlimited sea. During those caravan travels we encountered herds of gazelles, high and low sand hills with almond, ulmus trees and other natural beauties that filled us with joy.

At night we camped anywhere and in warm weather, slept outside. In the morning I would wake to the sound of my parents herding the livestock. Gers were always readily assembled and breakfast would be served. Father would go to the pasture to look for livestock and mother would lead the animals to water at a hand well as far away as three to five kilometers.

It was usually afternoon before my parents finished their work and arrived home where they took care of the colts, milked the female camels and fed us. It is remarkable how they were able to manage this enormous work without any help. In the evening, after milking, they did leather work from camel skins and sewing by candlelight, because they never had time in the daytime. My mother would take a basket to collect camel droppings and then prepare the dung to be used as a heating material in our small stove.

In the Soviet days, people from the local administrative office would come to check their work. They would take away dairy products for state reserves that my parents had produced by their own hard work. Now I am thinking about my mother and my childhood. The large red sun is shining on the horizon and two camels recognize me and come toward me, all the time, chewing grasses. I have seen the sun rising many times in this place but every time the sun looks more beautiful behind the camels on the steppe. Everything is in such harmony and everything compliments every other thing. In this Gobi pasture and during camel herding, I have found my love and I have a happy life.

The common belief about countryside men and women is that we are uneducated and outworn. That is not true. The difference between urban and rural areas is disappearing because people can call any continent on cell phones, get information on multi-channel television, communicate by internet and drive modern cars – even herd with motorcycles! Herdsmen cooperate with one another to cut grass and shear wool. And they sell their milk and dairy products to the market. The harder the livestock farmer works, the better he lives. The only thing we need is an efficient policy of the state and government to support the livestock and the herdsman.



In parliament, many members do not have experience with livestock or farming and most have no idea about the hardships of rural life. Every time government people come from the city to visit, the local administration prepares one or two herder families for a visit, so the administrative people only see the imagined herder's life of those prepared families. They do not know the real hardships, climate problems or natural difficulties. We hear about financial loans given to herders from the government but in reality, none reach us. Sometimes we think about the possibility of leaving this land where we have lived for generations but it would mean abandoning our livestock and camels and who would do our job?

My mother asked me to take her to her birth place, so we went to *Teegin Buuts*, a winter place on the hillside of Haniin Hets Mountain. We were shocked to discover holes, dozens of meters deep and many trucks at one place where the land has been turned entirely upside down.

I am so sad about what they have done to my mother's land and to the precious pasture. We felt as if nature and the land were asking us to save them. Broken rocks and smashed steppe! Oh my God! Our winter place, where five generations of my family lived, my birthplace, the nearest hilltop, our worship ovoo! My stone toys were all gone! They were destroyed by the heavy machinists and trucks - impossible to recognize. Someone told us that this place was dangerous now and that we should go away. But we did not expect such destruction – such disaster. If our ancestors were to see this, they would weep. Haniin Hets Mountain has a full figure of a bull camel standing, facing west. Our generations lived here and protected our livestock from natural difficulties and climate problems. Now these people have dug out and excavated the belly of the bull camel.



What will we tell the future generations? *Mercy from our state and mercy from God.* Please protect our land!

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