

Thinley Tamding
Ama House Restaurant
Majnu-ka-Tilla, New Delhi, India
June 21, 2011
Interviewer: Madison Taylor

00:15 When were you born?

I don't have an exact memory. It was around '28.

1:00 And where were you born?

A place called lo ta**

1:15 Did you have brothers or sisters?

He has only one brother**

1:24 How did your parents earn a living?

They worked as farmers, in agriculture.

1:51 Did you attend school in Tibet?

He went to Tibetan school for 7 years (_____?)

2: 25 Could you tell me about some memories of Tibet?

(Answer inaudible)

5:06— In the monastery they used to have rules and regulations set up by Tibetan government and at that time there were no rules set up by the Chinese so they used to have their own set of rule set by Tibetan government. So every religion, every sect has it's own religion and in their monasteries, every monastery has its own way of ruling, though all the rules are similar (something inaudible).

5:35 How many years was he in the monastery?

He was monk for 20 years, since from (??)

6:01 How many monks lived in the monastery?

They were 250 monks in the monastery (??)

6:18 And does he still have family in Tibet?

He used to have family members in Tibet, but most of them have died. But there are still some family members living in Tibet.

6:45 Do you still have any contact with them?

He was saying that he used to have contact with his family members in Tibet but that's very seldom, almost once in a year. Because the people living in his family's village used to come to the phone and then he often got the opportunity to meet them over the phone. But, you know, it's also very rare because the Chinese are very suspicious about Tibetans who are contacting foreigners, so cannot make contact very frequently. So he used to have contact with his family, but now it's a very rare occasion.

8:17 When did you leave Tibet?

He left Tibet in 1981 or 82

8:57 Do you remember how old you were, when you left?

He left Tibet in 1981-82. At that time he was around 37

10:44 Why did you leave Tibet?

He was born in a village where the Chinese used to have a check** very often because at that time the Chinese forces

were very strong in Tibet. So he, along with his father and four others, were forced to leave the village. At that time the Chinese were very curious about his village because some of its people were involved in political activity. The Chinese were capturing those people so they were forced to leave their country, Tibet, in around 1981 or 82.

12:06 Were there any elderly or children in your party?

He went with his father and his sister and her husband, so only four of them crossed the Tibetan border.

12: 47 From where did you leave?

His village is very close to Bhutan, so he camped in a place called Luna in Bhutan on their way out of Tibet, along with his father and two others.

13:38 How long did your journey take?

He's not exactly sure how long it took, but its around a few months, because they had to walk.

14:55 Did you take food on your journey?

He was saying that they did not bring any food to eat, but he used to beg at any place they came through. He begged the villagers he met for food anywhere they walked through.

15:28 Did you have a guide?

He just came along with his father. They had no guidance.

15:41 Could you describe your journey?

Though he didn't face the possibility of dying, if we look back through history, we used to have a saying that people who come through Luna used to die because of frostbite and other

things. But he was fortunate. He didn't face any kind of frostbite or death of the others on his journey. But he faced the problem of hunger and those kinds of things. He was also very cold sometimes, since Luna is a very cold place. And they used to have to camp through mountain areas where there was lots of snow.

18:23 Where did you stay in Bhutan?

He stayed in the capital city of Bhutan, Thimphu.

18:47 Were you in a refugee camp?

He was staying in a refugee camp in Bhutan at that time.

19:31 How long were you in the refugee camp?

He stayed there in Bhutan for 22 years.

19:49 What did you do for, uh, to make a livelihood in Bhutan?

They made their livelihood by selling cham, a kind of Tibetan beer. It's pretty famous in this area, Majnu katilla. A couple of years ago, it was banned in this state because of some problem. But it's very famous in Tibet, so the (something) people used to send cham, the Tibetan beer, so they made their livelihood by selling cham.

20:41 Could you describe your life in the refugee camp?

There are around 7 thousand refugees in Bhutan, so most of them had menial jobs in road construction and similar things. So most of the refugees were making their livelihood in road construction. But his family was making their livelihood by selling cham. But they used to face certain problems, like the absence of health facilities and those kinds of things. So the memories are kind of sad, because, those were very limiting kinds of work for (?), and the work itself is very hard, like

construction of road and all those things. So he has those kind of memories in Bhutan.

22:12K, could you describe more about how you made this beer, were there a lot of you who did this? Could you explain more of how you made this beer, how you made your livelihood? Were there a lot of refugees who made their livelihood in the same way?

The people used to have different ways of earning their livelihoods, while (Papu la?) was selling cham, some people used to earn their livelihood in road construction. And there were many small traders, you know, they used to run a small shop and sell imported goods from India and other neighboring countries. So people had their own different ways of earning their livelihoods.

23:24And when did you come to India?

I think he misspoke earlier, or there was some misunderstanding. He said earlier that he came to India in the 80's. So I think he must have left Tibet in the 60's, because he went to Bhutan first where he stayed for 20 years.

24:21Did you continue to work making the beer when you came to India?

He has been working in the Tibetan reception in Delhi for the last 20 years, since he left Bhutan. It is in (place?), just nearby (something).

25:05Do you have any family in India? Any children?

He used to have his family here, a wife and four children.

25:29Where are they now?

They are here, in Delhi (Delhitsu?).

25:39 And what do they do here?

They are running a business selling sweaters in the winter and things like that.

26:15 Do you see them much? Do you contact them much?

His son has gotten married and has his own family. He gets together with his son's family often, getting to see 9 or 10 family members together. His son also has children from a previous marriage, so they've created a kind of family chain.

27:08 Could you describe your life in India?

He doesn't have a job right now, so his wife is making their livelihood. He has nothing to do with his life at the moment because he doesn't have a job.

27:47 What are your hopes for the future of Tibet?

He used to have hope that with the help of the United States and the European Union, China will have continuous dialogue with the Dalai lama to resolve the Tibet issue. That hope is a shattered one now, though. It cannot be achieved. But he used to have this kind of hope in his heart that it will be achieved in some way or another.

28:58 Do you think you will ever return to Tibet?

He would want to go back to Tibet if the Chinese embassy guaranteed visas. But visas are very difficult to get right now. Because the way the embassy provides visas is kind of very (?). He just wants to go back to Tibet to meet his family members for (??). So he used to have high hopes for meeting them in Tibet at some point in his life.

30:15 When you were in the refugee camp in Bhutan were you able to make an audience with the Dalai Lama?

When he was in the refugee camp he used to have some contact with the Tibetan government in exile. When they were living in Sikkim, they sent their children to the Tibetan Children's Village, you might know TCV, and the (nursery?). So his children went to those schools though they were living in Bhutan. So they used to have contact with the Tibetan government in exile.

32:18 And do you think that the Dalai Lama will ever return to Tibet?

He says that he is not confident that His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama will ever return to Tibet. What happens is up to the fate of Tibetan people living in Tibet and all over the world. So it's up to the fate of those people; he cannot say that the Dalai Lama will return to Tibet.

33:01 How does your life in exile, in Bhutan and India, compare to your life in Tibet?

(35:23) There's a huge difference between living in Tibet, and then Bhutan and India. The (environment?) itself is very different, because Tibet is a very beautiful country while Bhutan and India's environments have already been exploited in the name of development. There has been exploitation here and in Bhutan for a long time, while Tibet has been kind of remote and is yet to be exploited. Even though it is starting to be exploited now, while he lived there it had a very good environment.

36:01 How do you feel about the Chinese presence in Tibet?

** (He was saying that China has all, totally turned the Tibetans into very different at most (?)** because in pre-China time, we could go anywhere, anytime. But with the presence of China, we are not allowed to go outside without their permission. So even if we had to go somewhere, for example, if we had to go

from here to Dharamsala, we would have to get permission from China's government, because we were not (?). And the thing is that, the village where he was born is very sensitive to this since it is (?) politically very active. So wherever the people want to go they must have the permission from the Chinese government.

37:41 In your village in Tibet what was your personal experience with the Chinese?

The people in his village are very critical of Chinese policy because they have a history of fighting with the Chinese army. By the time of the occupation of Tibet, the Chinese had already destroyed the monasteries in his village, in the U-Tsang region. Tibet is divided into three main provinces--Kham, Amdo, and U-Tsang. And the village he came from is in the U-tsang province. So they were very critical of the Chinese army because they had already exploited his village in many ways.

39:41 The Dalai Lama recently announced that he will retire from political life, how do you feel about that?

He was saying that he wishes the Dalai Lama hadn't said that he's going to step down from political power, because he—(??) whatever the Dalai Lama has done is right.* So he was wishing that the Dalai Lama hadn't said those words(?). Because he used to believe very strongly that whatever the Dalai Lama does is right. He is hoping that he will continue playing a political role (and it won't be kind of like something that will mess up at the end. So he was hoping that, kind of right at moment the future (??))

41:27 And returning once more to your time in exile in India, have you always lived in Majnu katilla?

Since he stopped working at the Tibetan Reception in Delhi, he has lived here in Majnu katilla. By earning, his wife is (??)**

42:15 Do your children live in Majnu katilla?

His children lived in Dharamsala, and one of his children is on a staff and the others might be running a business.

43:23 Are they an active part of the Tibetan community in Dharamsala? Closely involved?

He said that his children are not involved in political activities because they aren't living in Upper Dharamsala, where they used to actively participate. So maybe his children's friends are not actively involved because after all, your circle of friends influence your activities. They used to have good friends who involved themselves in this activity, which, at that point, influenced them to become involved with these activities.

44:17 So do you have any message, then, for the Tibetan youth?

He was saying that he used to have faith that the Tibetan youth would resolve the Tibet issue, but it's up to them whether they will do it or not. He hoped that the Tibetan youth in free countries like India, the United States, or those in Europe could influence the natives of those countries. He hoped that they could make certain changes in the future. But we can't expect them to make a sudden change when it comes to Tibetan issues, because the Tibetan issue is no cup of tea. So he just wants them to make good relationships with others so they can affect long-term, helpful change. But again, the Tibetan issue is an issue that cannot be solved in a short time. When he hoped the Tibetan case would be resolved, his hope reached far into the future.

47:55 Is there any last thing you'd like to say or something that you thought we missed?

He hopes that with the help of the United States and the European countries, one day the truthful struggles of the Tibetan issue will be resolved.

48: 49 Thank you so much for talking with us today.

Thank you.

**I would really like to find out if in the original Tibetan, Thinley was really speaking in past tense about his hopes (as in he no longer has in any of these hopes), or if the translator spoke of these hopes in past tense because Thinley had just spoken about these hopes in the recent past...