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Drepung Loseling Monastery  
Mundgod, India  
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Interviewer: Celi Birke

00:02        Can you tell me when you were born?

I was born on April 15, 1975.

00:08        Where were you born?

I was born in (00:11) Region in the Kham Providence of Tibet.

00:16        Did you have any brothers or sisters?

I actually have three brothers and two sisters. Presently though, I only have one elder brother and one younger brother. The others passed away.

00:28        Do they live in Tibet or in India?

They live in Tibet.

00:32        In Tibet, how did your parents earn their living?

They are farmers, poor farmers.

00:40        Did you attend school in Tibet?

Yes, I did but only for about two or three years.

00:47        When did you become a monk?

In 1994, I became a monk after completing my schooling in India.

00:58 Was that your choice or were you sent by your parents?

It was a mutual decision. Actually, I was sent to India to become a monk. My uncle gave me a choice to attend school or to go to the monastery. Initially, I decided to go to school but later on my grandfather insisted I become a monk. That was not the only reason, I was also keen on becoming a monk. I became a monk without going to college.

01:35 How old were you then?

I was about twenty or twenty-one.

01:44 Could you tell me about your memories of Tibet?

I can't remember much because I left Tibet at the young age of ten or eleven. I do remember the landscapes vaguely, the house settings in my villages, and some childhood friends. School was about one or two kilometers down hill. It was quite difficult to get there. The school was not a very good one. During the daytime we studied and held classes but at night everything, such as cows, were rushing around. There is no proper peace. So, it was like that.

02:43 Do you still have family in Tibet?

Yes.

02:45 Do you speak with them or have contact at all?

Yes, I still have family in Tibet. I came to India at a young age sadly and considering forgot my local dialect. My local dialect is quite different from central, what we speak here in the Kasa region. Therefore, it's difficult to talk to them through that language and through that

dialect. Sometimes, when I meet other people from my native place they help me talk to my family.

03:20 Do you know what their living conditions are? Do you know how they are doing?

When I first came to India it was not that good. Now financially, it's a little bit better but not that much. The main source of income comes from the fields. The money is very scarce. All the food and everything you get is produced from the fields. Considering, food is not a problem.

04:00 Whenever you left Tibet how many people were in your party? How many people went with you?

Actually, I am lucky. At that time, visa restrictions were not very strict so I was able to acquire one. I was very young when I got my visa so my uncle sought the help of a monk who came to Tibet. He brought me and took care of me by helping me to enter India.

04:36 How long did it take you to get from Tibet to India?

First, from my native place we went to a town called (Kathmandu? 4:57) which is a two or three day excursion to Lhasa. From (5:02) we took a flight to Lhasa. At that time, there was an airport at (5:06) which is near Lhasa. We stayed in Lhasa for about two months. After that, we came to the Nepal border. Since I didn't have a Nepalese permit I needed to obtain one or else I couldn't pass through. Even after disguising as a Nepalese twice, the border patrol just recognized me and sent me back. I had to accompany other people for two nights. We walked during the day and we took shelter in between the border. It took two days and two nights to reach (Kathmandu? 5:53).

05:54 Did you walk through Nepal at night?

Yes, between the Nepal border and this one.

06:07 What year was that?

It was in 1984 at the end of December.

06:18 What kind of food did you take?

Do you mean during journey?

06:22 Yes, during journey.

After crossing the Tibetan border, which is presently the Chinese border, we camped. They made a noodle dish called thenthuk. We didn't have to take that much care of our food and we knew that we didn't need much. The people in my group knew that there was some way in between the border that would allow us to stop and camp there. We didn't have to worry about taking food.

06:57 Were there any elderly people or children...

Elderly means elder people?

7:00 Yes.

Sorry. Yes, there were monks along with other elderly people.

07:06 Were there any children?

There were between thirty to forty elderly people.

07:10 Where there children?

No, there were no other children besides myself.

07:13 How old were you again?

I believe I was eleven.

07:20 Why did you choose India to become a monk? Why did you decide on exile?

In 1982, my uncle came to visit. The liberal policy and comparative policy was started in 1979 under (7:49). At my native village, there was no monastery or proper school. I think that my family sent me to India for several reasons. My father passed away after the birth of the youngest child, a son. My uncle saw the hardships placed on my mother having to raise her children by herself. My uncle thought of relieving her burden. I don't know how my family choose or how I was chosen exactly. My grandfather had always wanted me to become a monk and I was also keen on being one. There were no opportunities to become a monk in my village so they thought of sending me to India.

08:59 Were any members of your family monks or nuns?

No.

09:09 Did you face any hardships during your journey to India?

I didn't encounter many hardships. I had a visa that covered me up to the Chinese and Nepal border. From there, I had to travel through the Nepal border. I tried to cross twice but I was sent back. For two nights, I had to travel with other people. As I said earlier, I didn't face much hardship. I went to school in Delhi and walked up and down long slops to get there. The slopes provided good training.

09:59 So physically, for you, it was not very challenging?

Correct, it was not challenging. I did see, with my own eyes, people who were scared. They were running here and there with barking dogs trailing them. It was frightful.

10:15 Where did you arrive when you entered India?

Actually, I came through Nepal at the beginning of 1985 and stayed there for three days. I arrived in Delhi by a bus from Nepal. There, I met up my uncle. Then he sent me to South India where the monastery is located. At the time I arrived, school was off for winter vacation so I had to go for a vacation.

10:57 When did you arrive at Drepung Loseling Monastery?

I arrived at Drepung Loseling Monastery after taking my exam. After taking my exam, I just thought of becoming a monk. This occurred at the end of April 1994.

11:20 Could you remind us of how old you were then?

Pardon?

11:22 How old were you then?

I believe I was about twenty or twenty-one.

11:33 Can you compare, with what knowledge you have and what memories you have of Tibet, could you compare your life in Tibet with your life in India?

Considering that I didn't have much time in Tibet, only up to age eleven, I was mainly engrossed in playing and running here and there with friends like any child would be. With the environment as such, it was really not good for education. We attended school but when parents needed their children for anything the child would skip

school. This happened often because parents didn't understand the importance of education. School in Tibet was not tricky so a child could skip school a lot. In Tibet, school is like that. There was not much concern for education back then. In India, school is different; it is more regulated and very good.

12:48 Could you also describe, to the best of your ability, the Chinese presence in where you were living in Tibet? Also, how did that presence affect you and your family?

My village was nestled on top of the hill. The Chinese presence was minimal here. The only thing I remember is the presence of Chinese carpenters and Chinese professionals. They came seeking jobs and professionally they were good. They made things such as cupboards and folding chairs. In a town that was close to the river and also my village, Chinese officers were present. In my village though, there was not much of a Chinese presence.

13:57 How did the Chinese professionals who lived there get along with the Tibetans who lived there?

The Chinese professionals came for only a few months and then would leave. They lacked proper accommodations. Pardon, what did you say?

14:18 How did they get along with the Tibetans?

What does get along mean?

14:26 Was it friendly?

It depended but for the most part it was friendly. From my memory, I don't know whether or not the elders were fearful of showing hatred for anyone. I know they were just trying to show special feelings or hatred towards the

Chinese. Being a young child, you don't have knowledge of the past so naturally you don't have this special hatred for them.

15:14 Do you know what the current conditions are in the region of Tibet you were from, outside of just your family I mean?

As I said before, I do call my family but mostly I listen to other people who know my local dialect. They tell me everything like what news is going around our native place. They have said that financially and politically things are getting better. Many of the younger people are now going outside to search for jobs and greener pastures. People leave for different ventures such as business. As a whole, they are getting better housing. They are very much obsessed with their new homes. They tend to repair often and needlessly.

16:33 What is your hope for Tibet's future?

His Holiness The Dalai Lama aspires for his vision and I hope that in the future this vision will be fulfilled. The vision aspires for a peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit with China. In the present situation, we feel it is very hard. Seeing the changes that are happening globally around the world gives us hope that there will come a time when we can return to Tibet.

17:24 Do you think this will happen in your lifetime?

Of course I do.

17:36 Do you think that monks and nuns should become politically involved with the Tibetan situation?

Yes, I think so. The Tibetan issue is not just related to fighting for political issues. We think it's related to the preservation of the precious Tibetan culture that has



originated in India. It's a rich culture of Indian tradition and also the diverse culture of Tibet. We feel that it is very necessary to keep that tradition alive largely because it has a great scope for world peace and harmony. In trying to achieve that goal, there is no problem or anything wrong with monks and nuns being a part of this noble cause. Actually, they should be more involved because they do not have family concerns. Being free from all these things allow them be more focused. They don't have to be concerned with unnecessary things. Provided the monks and nuns are sincere and devoted, I believe they can do a much better job.

19:31 What do you feel is the most effective movement or tactic for monks and nuns to be involved in Tibet's struggle?

The most important thing is that we try to keep our culture preserved and also, if possible, innovated. What did you say?

20:16 What do you feel is the most effective method...

Method you mean?

20:19 Yes.

Being among such spiritual people, a person has many connections even with the Chinese. We do not have anything against the Chinese masses. We are only against them regionally. There are many spiritual aspirations in China and we have a special and important role in trying to breach the mistrust that has occurred between us. Tibetans and Chinese should trust each other. For this to happen, monks and nuns have to have a connection with religious matters and teachings. We should help His Holiness The Dalai Lama in breaching this gap between Tibetan and Chinese people, common

people. If that happens, we can hope that the policy makers will bring change as well.

21:50 In what ways do you feel the principles of Buddhism play into the way monks and Tibetan laypeople feel about the Tibetan struggle?

The most important thing, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, is that philosophy is interdependent. Behavior, such as nonviolence, is also interdependent. Everything is interdependent therefore nothing comes by one single cause. Nothing is independent. We have to look at different angles so we do not just start at a single point. It helps to see things in a wider perspective. Studying Buddhist philosophy has shown me that we should not get discouraged because things are not permanent. Things can be solved this way or that way, there is not just one way. We are not the only ones suffering. Familiarity and awareness with philosophy helps in tackling many problems.

23:33 In what ways do you feel the Dalai Lama is especially influential in helping you keep that mentality about your struggle?

I think that he has mastered Buddhism. Most importantly, he practices what he preaches. There are no contradictions in what he preaches or what he practices. Naturally, his greatness along with his practices mesmerize you. We all look up to him and think that what he says is right and what he is doing for us is most beneficial. In no incident has he been proven wrong. Everything he has done in his past has been proven right. We have faith in him one hundred percent and we feel that he is doing what is best for our own sakes. That is why we are one hundred percent loyal and ready to do whatever he says.

25:35 Do you feel that all Tibetans, especially those in exile, have this opinion?

Maybe some of them do but there should be some different opinions depending on ones mentality and how they were raised. I think that there are certain sections that have different views especially in regards to the Middle Way and independence. I think that they are not seeing the whole picture and they are thinking that we were free once so we should be free again. What His Holiness seeks is not idealistic but practical. We should strive for what is there and not ask for what we had in the past.

26:36 What, in your opinion, would be a satisfactory future of Tibet?

If we are given an alternate way to practice and given basic human rights like everywhere else in the world, that would be a good future.

27:10 How did you learn English?

In fact, I don't know English. After coming into exile in 1984 by the grace of His Holiness The Dalai Lama, I started to attend the Tibetan Children's Village. At that time, The Dalai Lama's younger sister, Jetsun Pema, ran the school. I was fortunate like all the other young children coming from Tibet. In 1985, I was enrolled in the TCV and continued my stay until 1994. I learned a little bit of English and Hindi.

28:16 Are you in contact with any of the students with whom you were in a family group with at the Tibetan Children's Village?

Yes, of course we keep in touch through Facebook, the telephone, and by emails.

28:28       Where are most of them living?

Mostly they are serving in schools and giving back. Two of them are serving as principles of schools. Many of them are also teachers. Some even started off working at the Tibetan government of exile, which has various departments and opportunities. Many of them have gone to the U.S. for further studies and have settled there. Also, some of them are in Nepal. We are all quite scattered.

29:06       Did you find it helpful to have a family group whenever you were in school and away from your family?

Yes, of course. By communicating and writing them, I could minimize the loss of my language and the recovery of my English. I practiced my language with them through writing and speaking because I could not use it here. I have a great appreciation for them because they went to the U.S. for themselves and also the majority of them are back at the TCV serving at different capacities. It is really good to give back.

29:59       What city is that in?

Pardon.

30:02       Can you tell me where the TCV is located?

Initially, The Tibetan Children's Village was started as a daycare center. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's elder sister was in charge of at that point. At that time, when Tibetans first arrived in India, there were only road camps. Parents didn't have time to look after their young children. The daycare center provided a place for the children to be looked after. The center started off with fifty-eight children. Later, the center grew so much that it became a schooling center called The Tibetan Children's Village. It was

started in Tibet and moved to lower Dharamsala and then got shifted to upper Dharamsala. The Tibetan Children's Village now has around ten branches. Each school has about two to three thousand students which makes for a very large family.

31:32 Is there anything else you would like to say about your life in Tibet, your journey into exile, or your life now in India?

It's hard to pick. What should I say?

31:56 Anything, Nothing.

I don't have anything to add. During my childhood I was under the care of others. My parents took care of me and after that I had little interaction with them and the rest of my family. I don't have a close relationship with my family. I was taken care of by the TCV and this monastery most of my life. What I wish is that, as soon as possible, I will be able to reciprocate to some degree the support and kindness they have given me. Its very moving to see how the schools and monasteries are working for us. They help us stand on our own feet and become contributing members of society. It's not only done for Tibet. They also do it for world peace and harmony as a whole. In that case, I feel that I have done very little up until now. I wish to do more.

33:52 Thank you so much for your time. We really value it so much, thank you.

