

through societies such as this, and particularly through this Society, it is possible for those who are prepared to turn their minds to the problems of Central Asia to gain not only the opportunity for enlightening themselves, but also the means for enlightening others.

It is with that in mind that I ask you to rise with me and drink the toast of "The Royal Central Asian Society."

## THE MOSLEMS OF CENTRAL TIBET

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IN the recently published book by Lowell Thomas, Jun. (*Out of this World*, American edition; The Greystone Press, New York, 1950), on p. 182 there appears an illustration showing Lowell Thomas, Sen., shopping for gifts in the Lhasa bazaar. The rest of the caption under the photograph says that "the Moslem merchant is a member of the only minority group in the country; his people have long lived in friendship with the Tibetans."

I believe this to be one of the rare references to Islam on the Roof of the World ever to appear in print, most people being completely unaware that there are Moslems in Central Tibet. Reputedly a land of lamas and of esoteric mysteries into which it would seem paradoxical and incongruous for Mohammedans to fit, the country over which rules the reincarnating Dalai Lama (and into which Chinese Communist troops have now lately marched) nevertheless does harbour quite a sizeable Musulman community, mainly centred in the capital. The late Sir Charles Bell already noted that some Chinese Moslems in the Wa-pa ling quarter of Lhasa act as butchers for the Buddhist population, which, for religious reasons—although meat is eaten freely by all—is reluctant to take animal life (*The People of Tibet*, by Sir Charles Bell; Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1928, p. 217), and Dr. G. Tucci, in a recent article of his ("The Tombs of the Tibetan Kings," *Royal Central Asian Journal*, Vol. XXXIX, Part I, January, 1952, p. 43), fleetingly alludes to a meeting with Lhasa Moslems in the Yarlung valley of South-east Tibet.\*

The Moslem community constitutes the only group in the country which is of another religion than the local people, who, otherwise, are known for their devotion to their faith and for the suspicion and even hostility with which they look upon everyone who is not a *nang-pa* (an "insider," as opposed to outsiders—*i.e.*, unbelievers). Yet, as Lowell Thomas, Jun., has remarked, they are on an excellent footing with the Moslems, who actually seem to have been established among them for a very long time.

Ever since I have been studying Tibetan society (I began with a trip to Western Tibet in 1938), I have taken an interest in these people. During my present stay in Kalimpong, West Bengal, as a participant in the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia, I have been fortunate in obtaining some further information concerning them. Of course, had

\* Since these lines were written, Dr. R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Research Associate of the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, Austria, has drawn my attention to the fact that the account of a meeting with Ladaki Moslems at Tsetang, in the Yarlung valley, is given by Capt. F. M. Bailey and Capt. H. T. Morshead in their *Reports on an Exploration on the North-East Frontier, 1913*, pp. 21 and 64. This is a publication of the Survey of India, printed in Dehra Dun at the Office of the Trigonometrical Survey, in 1914.

the expedition been allowed into Tibet in 1950 as had been requested, more certainly would have been gathered. The Government of India, however, prevented it from crossing the frontier, even as far as Gyantse, the Indian trade mart to which, in accordance with Treaty rights, they normally are entitled to issue passes on their own authority, and I have had to content myself of necessity with the little which I have been able to collect outside.

Although my notes are very incomplete, I am publishing them here in the form of a short article, because it appears to me that the existence of this little-known, remote Islamic community is one of the picturesque features of a land, which, in the present circumstances of its change of fortunes, is destined to lose many of its former peculiarities, and that it is worth recording this one also before it is too late.

From members of the community whom I have recently met here, I have heard that the Chinese Communists, on their arrival in Lhasa, have already declared to them that there are very many Moslems in China and that they should therefore no longer look upon themselves as a minority but rather as one of the major ethnic groups of the motherland. Although naturally flattered by this declaration, the Moslems are reported to have felt all the same, not without anxiety, that it perhaps heralds the end of a state of affairs to which they have become accustomed and which they at heart cherish—namely, a position of trust and affection within the Tibetan nation, that they really would be very loath indeed to give up.

#### I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Moslems of Central Tibet are called *Ka-che* in Tibetan. The name is no doubt derived from *Kha-chul* (*Kha-che-yul*), Kashmir, from where most of them originally came.

They are to be found in the following towns: Lhasa, Shigatse, Tse-tang (in the Yarlung valley), Lha-tse dzong and Dri-kung (north of Lhasa); by far the greater number live in the capital, Lhasa, where there are reported to be three hundred and fifty *Ka-che tem-ba* ("steps"—i.e., houses, families). In Shigatse, the next largest centre, there are approximately one hundred and fifty families, and in Tse-tang, twenty. There are only a few handfuls of *Ka-che* in the other two cities.

While everywhere else than in Lhasa the Moslems are called simply by their generic appellation, in the capital they are divided into two main groups: the *Ho-pa ling Ka-che* and the *Lhasa Ka-che*; the latter are again subdivided into *Ladak-pa* (Ladakis), *Sirig-pa* (corruption of Sikh? These are reputedly people who trace their ancestry back to the Dogra country of Jammu) and Kashmiris. The difference between the two groups is that the first one is made up of Chinese Moslems, originally called Hzo-pa ling, who came to Tibet, some say, as butchers; the Chinese know them by the name of *Hui-Hui*, and the appellation is gaining among the Tibetans. The other group consists exclusively of Indian Moslems, the majority of them (three-fourths) being genuine Kashmiris.

Each of the main divisions of Moslems has a chief responsible for his community to the Tibetan Government. These are appointed by the

latter, but paradoxically by two different departments. Thus, the chief of the *Ho-pa ling*, known as the *Ho-pa ling Pöm-po*, has the title conferred on him by the Department of Agriculture (*So-nam Lā-kung*), while the *Ka-che Pöm-po*, head of the Lhasa *Ka-che*, is designated by the Ministry of Finance (*Tsi-kang Lā-kung*). I was told that the reason for this curious arrangement was that the *Ho-pa ling* first came to Tibet from China during wars with the latter country, and that they were prisoners who were handed over to the Department of Agriculture to be used as labourers in the fields, while the Lhasa *Ka-che* were traders who ever since the very beginning transacted business with the Ministry of Finance. My informants (whose identity I shall refrain from giving, in case it should cause them trouble with the present Chinese Communist authorities in Lhasa) were not able to tell me the name of the current *Ho-pa ling Pöm-po*; but I heard that that of the *Ka-che Pöm-po* of today is Hajji Abdul Kadir (in its Tibetan version: *Hadji Kadi-la*).

There are no Shiah Moslems among them, they being all Sunnis, followers of the Hanafi tradition. In Lhasa there are three mosques, one on the road to Dre-pung monastery at Kendang-gang linka (?), where the Moslem cemetery is also situated (marked on P. Landon's plan of the city in his book *Lhasa* (Hurst and Blackett Ltd., London, 1905), as *Ka-je linga*), one in a town called *Troma Keba*, near the mansions of Kungö Künsang Tse (until lately Commander in Chief of the Tibetan army and a signatory of the Sino-Tibetan treaty of last year), and a third one serving the *Ho-pa ling* community, the *Ho-pa ling masjid*, east of the town, outside the *Ling Kor* (surrounding city). In Shigatse there are two mosques, and in Tse-tang, one; in Lha-tse dzong and Dri-kung there are none. The architectural style of these buildings is, I understand, Chinese in the case of the *Ho-pa ling masjid*, and Tibetan in the other case. Both types have no minarets, and the *muezzin* calls out inside at the appointed hours.

Each community in Lhasa has an *imam* attached to its mosques; in Shigatse there is only one, as also in Tse-tang. The *imam* of the Lhasa *Ka-che* is called Habib Ullah, and is eighty years old. All *imams* fill the rôle of *mufti*, as there is no one else to do so. The position of *kadi* and *mukhtar* are taken by the *Pöm-po*, each of them being seconded by four *lā-cha* (assistants). I was warned, however, not to draw too many parallels with Moslem civil organization elsewhere, as in Central Tibet things are very different and no comparisons can really be made. I was also told that the British authorities had often claimed responsibility for the Ladakis as citizens of India in the past, thus attempting to withdraw them from being administered as above, which had occasionally led to trouble with the Tibetan Government.

To each of the Lhasa mosques, as well as to the Shigatse and Tse-tang ones, Koranic schools are attached, which my informants variably described as *madrassahs* or as *maktabs*. The *imams* are entrusted there with the teaching of the Koran to the children, and there are indications, although it is not sure, that Chinese is used as the medium of instruction in the *maktab* of the *Ho-pa ling masjid*. The Holy Korans, which are all from <sup>India</sup> probably from Bihar, are of course in the original Arabic.

but the commentaries are in Urdu. These are interpreted to the children in Tibetan, as they are too to the people in the mosques, after prayers, for Tibetan is the language of the Moslems of Tibet, and very few of them can speak crude Urdu or Persian. Only the imams know some Arabic, just sufficiently to read the Koran.

Religious endowments (*wakfs*), so marked a feature of Moslem society all over the world, exist also in Tibet. Those of Lhasa are reputedly worth some Ind. Rs. 25,000 and are administered by a Commission of five members, three of which are elected and presided over by the Pöm-po, assisted by the imam in his capacity of head of the maktab. The calendar followed normally is the Tibetan one, but for all religious observances, the Moslem one is naturally adhered to. Because of their life in the midst of an alien people and religion, the Tibetan Ka-che are very strict followers of Islam. Every rule of the faith is scrupulously followed, and those suspected of laxity are severely dealt with.

Means of livelihood are varied. Most indulge in trade, like the Buddhist Tibetans, and many a Lhasa Moslem acts as the agent abroad of large commercial concerns, both lay and clerical. Thus Hajji Ghulam Mohammed (known in Tibetan as Gula-ma) until recently Ka-che Pöm-po, was for a long time representative of the notorious Radeng (Reting) Gompa in China, where he travelled extensively and managed commercial offices for the monastery in Harbin, Mukden, Tien-tsin, Peking and Shanghai. He has had a difficult time since the assassination of the former Regent of Tibet, Radeng Rimpoche, in 1947.

Other professions include that, of course, of butchers, of garment-making (hats, brocade corners for Tibetan women's aprons called *Trok-den*), of shopkeeping for general imported stores mainly from India, of wool-trading as other Tibetans, of musical entertaining, of the running of a cinema hall (bioscope), the only one in Lhasa, and of the importing of tea from China and of cosmetics for ladies of the Tibetan aristocracy from Europe and the U.S.A.

Trades that used to be practised, but which are no longer so now, included the making of brocade (*parching*) on a much larger scale, the manufacture of felt carpets (*namdas*), and the import of cotton piece goods and yarn (*re-cha*) from India. The first of these two industrial activities have since been taken over by the Nepalese of Tibet, while the third has been monopolized by Buddhist Tibetan traders ever since the introduction by the British Government of India during the last war of cotton rationing, regulated in Kalimpong by the then newly created office of the Tibetan liaison officer.

Clothes worn by the Tibetan Moslem men are usually identical with those of other Tibetans. On trek, indeed, when they are acting as caravan-men on the roads to and from India, they are indistinguishable from the picturesquely attired professional Kham-pa muleteers. But at home they usually sport either a Sinkiang Turki skull cap, should they be Ho-pa lings, or a Kashmir *sozeni* (white embroidered cap) if they belong to the Lhasa Ka-che community. On official occasions, when they attend functions of state in the Potala or elsewhere, they don turbans and Kashmir shawls, at least if they are not Hui-Huis. The women are dressed exactly

like Buddhist Tibetan women, but when better attired they sometimes wear a black or dark-coloured hood over the head, which hangs down behind on their back, but does not however cover their face. They are not purdah, and enjoy the same outward freedom as their ordinary Tibetan sisters. They have a strong say in commercial matters.

Food taken by Tibetan Moslems is the same as that eaten by the local people. They invariably nourish themselves on *tsam-pa* (parched barley flour), buttered tea, meat both dried (*sha-kampo*) and fresh (*sha-lömpa*). They do not drink alcoholic beverages however, such as chang and arak, but do smoke cigarettes and very long (*kansa*) pipes, although never *hookas*.

Marriage as far as possible always takes place within the Musulman community. For the women it is always the case, and should one of them marry outside it she will be cast out with ignominy. The man, however, may take wives from the Buddhists, provided these first convert themselves to Islam. Because of the shortage of women, this does take place quite frequently, Hajji Ghulam Mohammed's wife, for instance, having come from outside thus, some twenty years ago. Polygyny is very little practised; polyandry, a Tibetan custom, naturally never; and monogamy is easily the most usual form of marriage. Divorce, although regulated as in other parts of the Moslem world, is rare, and adultery of the wife is as severely dealt with as elsewhere should it occur, which is however exceptional, I am told.

My Moslem informants complained to me that they were unfairly taxed in Central Tibet; more so, they said, than other Tibetans. For each child born to the Lhasa Ka-che community they have, for instance, to pay ten Tibetan *Tankhas* (approx. 3 Indian annas) to the Tsi-kang Lā-kung, which they consider a discrimination against them. This was perhaps the only grievance I heard them express against the Lhasa Government, as otherwise they seemed very pleased with their life in Tibet. It is perhaps significant that when the Tibetan Moslems had to choose, in Kalimpong, if they would return to Tibet occupied by the Chinese Communists and register as Tibetans with the Indian authorities, or give up their Tibetan citizenship and remain in India, every one of them decided for the former alternative, insisting that Tibet was their home.

For the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca—on which many of them go—there is a Lhasa Ka-che delegation in Bombay which helps them embark for Jedda. It consists of six or seven men who are to be found in the Monnara Masjid, and their leader is one Habib Ullah Nizam ed Din. At Mecca they are treated as Indian Moslems, and make use of the little Urdu they know to get on. Recently, since the last war, it seems that two Arab Hajj agents from the Hedjaz, returning from a trip to Sinkiang and Kansu, the aim of which was to collect funds as is the custom with these people when they are in charge of a particular set of Mecca pilgrims, arrived in Lhasa from the *Chang-lam* (northern route) over Nag-shu-ka. They remained in the capital for some weeks, and persuaded some of the Lhasa Ka-che to accompany them back to Mecca. Ghulam Mohammed and his wife were of the party, and that is how he earned the title of Hajji. The fact that Hedjazi Arabs were to be found

travelling in Tibet came as surprising news to me (as it will, presumably, to most readers too). But then, there is much more international movement of this sort in the Land of the Lamas than we are led normally to believe. It is Westerners who find it difficult to go there, mainly because of a policy of mutual exclusion dictated by the power-politics of contending nations.

A word should be said finally about the *Lop-chiak*, or tribute caravan from Kashmir, which every three years, in accordance with the ancient treaty of Tinmogang between the Tibeto-Mongols and the King of Ladakh (1647), makes its way to Lhasa from Leh in Ladakh over the watershed Indus-Tsangpo with goods, and gifts for the clergy of Tibet. This caravan, consisting of hundreds of mules and which takes over two months to reach its destination, is the monopoly of a Moslem family of Leh, of which the present head is Abdullah Shah, the former British *aksakal* ("white beard" in the Turki language of Sinkiang, a title designating in Leh, at least, the agent for traders from Kashgar, Yarkand and Khokand). The latter has many relatives living in Shigatse and Lhasa, so that the *Lop-chiak* is an occasion for members of his family to renew their acquaintance and arrange for profitable commercial deals with them. This caravan, which should have gone to the Tibetan capital last year, was cancelled at the last minute, circumstances being considered inopportune just now. It is to be wondered when it will be resumed again.

## II. HISTORY

I found it a very difficult task to try and establish the history of the Moslems of Central Tibet, my informants having only very vague ideas about the past; moreover, the distinction between facts and myths appeared to be very slender in their minds. Research in Lhasa itself would no doubt yield better results, and it remains a subject of wonder to me that Westerners who had access to the Tibetan capital never took, as far as I know, any interest in this question.

From what I have been able to gather to date, it would seem that, with regard to the Lhasa Ka-che, the tradition of their origins is fivefold. The first theory is that the Great Fifth Dalai Lama applied to the Moghul emperor of Delhi for advisers, and in response received a certain number of Musulmans who set themselves up at his Court. A second theory is that the same Fifth Dalai Lama, desirous of showing that he was the ruler of the Universe and that people from the whole world attended his *tem-del* (levées), caused Moslems to come to Lhasa in a purely representative capacity; a Persian is supposed to have come first, others from India following afterwards. A fresco in the Potala palace is said to represent this attendance of turbaned outsiders on ceremonious occasions.

More credible versions of the early arrival of Moslems in Central Tibet are that they came from Bihar for trade purposes, or for the same reasons from Kashmir through Ladakh, and from small beginnings grew into the present-day community. But the tradition the most in vogue and, actually, also the one easiest to corroborate by facts,

because it occurred in a none too distant past, is that the Lhasa Ka-che are descendants of the prisoners taken by the Tibetans when they defeated the armies of Zorowar Singh in Western Tibet (1841-2).

In the Indian newspaper *The Statesman* of December 15, 1950, a letter to the editor signed Md. Mahmud, Dacca, East Bengal, Pakistan, gives yet another version. I am giving it *in extenso* here below:

"Sir,—As Tibet is very much in the news nowadays, it is historically interesting to recall that she was at one time part of the Moghul empire.

"The Khiljis were of Turkestani origin, and the Moghuls were Mongol-Iranians. It used to be the ambition of warriors of these groups to describe a circle round the Middle East; and they made repeated attempts to complete the remaining one-third of the circle from India to Chinese Turkestan *via* Assam and Tibet. The attempts of Bakhtyar Khilji and Mir Jumla failed because of the difficult jungle terrain, the heavy rainfall and the unhealthy climate of Assam.

"Aurangzeb visited Kashmir from June to August, 1663. On December 9, 1665, the Emperor learnt, from the despatches of Saif Khan, Subahdar of Kashmir, that Daldal Muhamal (apparently a misreading for Dalai Mahamuni), zamindar of greater Tibet, had accepted Islam, that the Khutba had been read in the Emperor's name in the country, imperial coins issued and a high mosque built there. The Khan's troops must have marched to Tibet *via* Ladakh. Yours, etc."

I also heard from my informants that this was not the only conquering army to have entered Tibet from the Islamic world. During the final campaign of Timur (Tamerlane) in the fifteenth century, when he died on his way to attempt the subjugation of China, he is reputed to have sent a detachment of cavalry over the Chang Thang to occupy Lhasa. His men got as far as Dam, just north of the Tibetan capital, where they were overwhelmed by a disastrous snow-storm from which there were no survivors. Their panoplies, bearing well-fashioned verses of the Koran, were taken by the local inhabitants, and to this day the *Dzong-pön* (fortress commander) of Dam wears such a panoply at the yearly festivities associated with *Lo-sar* (the New Year), while in Lhasa the medieval armour and helmets worn at the *Mön-lam* ceremony of the same feast are of similar origin. I was given to understand that one set of these ancient uniforms, taken by troops in Gyantse during the 1904 expedition, is to be seen in the British Museum.

The origins of the Ho-pa ling Moslems are even more veiled in mystery. Quite seriously, I was told that they had come to Tibet in the escort of the Chinese Princess whom King Srong Tsän Gam-po married in the seventh century A.D. Another version was that they had arrived with the Chinese Amban (envoy) who resided in Lhasa at the time of the seventh Dalai Lama. The story of this reincarnation is that the gay and dissolute sixth Dalai Lama, before he left on his fateful journey to Peking from which he was never to return, sensing that he was about to

leave this earth in his present form and assume another body when he came back, left some rice in a house in which he wished to be reborn. Some men from Lhasa went later to this house and, finding there a boy who, in a handkerchief, held rice that boiled without being heated, proclaimed him Dalai Lama. The news of the return of the God King of Tibet was communicated to the Chinese, and an Amban was despatched to Lhasa, with whom came Moslems from Kansu, Yünan and Szechwan.

In the latter story there does seem to be this element of truth that the Chinese Moslems of Central Tibet did very probably come from territories in the Celestial Empire where Islam had already gained a foothold. That they are even today called Hui-Hui by the Chinese in Tibet appears to be a confirmation that they are very akin to those of their brethren living today in the northern parts of the country.

The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia,  
Camp Kalimpong, W. Bengal, India.

May, 1952.

## THE ASIAN FRONTIERS OF KASHMIR

By THE RT. HON. LORD BIRDWOOD, M.V.O.

I THINK it is fair to say that the world of informed opinion thinks of the Kashmir problem only as an issue between two new States of the British Commonwealth, India and Pakistan. Indeed, the Security Council's instructions to Dr. Graham in no way covered the ground outside the accepted pattern of a plan mainly concerned with the withdrawal of rival Indian and Pakistani forces and the staging of a plebiscite. The many stresses and strains within Kashmir which will become apparent when the plebiscite is held have been conveniently avoided. For readers concerned with the affairs of Central Asia certain aspects of Kashmir's internal tension are of particular interest; and it is with these that I am concerned in these brief observations.

The main area of interest and controversy is Ladakh. Until Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu conquered and annexed Ladakh for the Sikhs over a century ago, the Ladakhis had looked to Lhasa for their spiritual comfort and economic support. Politically too they were integrated with their Tibetan neighbours. Since A.D. 400 Buddhism has flourished in Ladakh and Leh has been ecclesiastically subject to Lhasa. Early in the seventeenth century a Moslem invasion of Ladakh by Baltistan, when Leh's temples were plundered and destroyed, successfully confirmed the complete division, geographical and ethnographical, between the Balts and the Buddhists. The legacy of those events is that today Ladakh has made it clear that if there is any question of conditions demanding the area to be handed to Pakistan, the people would abandon both Pakistan and India and return to the ancient association with Tibet. This is the declared intention as defined by the Ladakhis' chief spokesman, the Lama Bakula of the Spitok monastery. Whether or not the choice in that form would ever present itself remains to be seen. The fact is that the links with Tibet present sinister political problems. The hand of Communist China now stretches over the roof of the world to the Indian frontiers. To discover a welcome in Ladakh would be but a logical extension of Chinese hopes. Nor is it possible to dismiss the movement of Chinese armies over high mountain passes and across barren plateaus as beyond the possibilities of planned strategy. The Chinese have shown that we need to revise our concepts as to where armies can move or how long they take in movement.

The position of the Buddhists in Ladakh is therefore not enviable. In the face of Sheikh Abdullah's agrarian reforms the monasteries retain their lands precariously. The Shushok Lama, who attends the Kashmir Assembly on behalf of a flock of about 40,000, carefully watches their rights. He has successfully recruited Ladakhis for the Kashmir State Militia and in return the State representative at Leh sees to it that Ladakh receives a generous share of clothing, sugar and kerosine oil. But