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# TIBETAN MUSLIMS A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY From a Kashmiri Muslim Immigration to Tibet to A Tibetan Muslim Forced Migration to India

Fabienne Le Houerou

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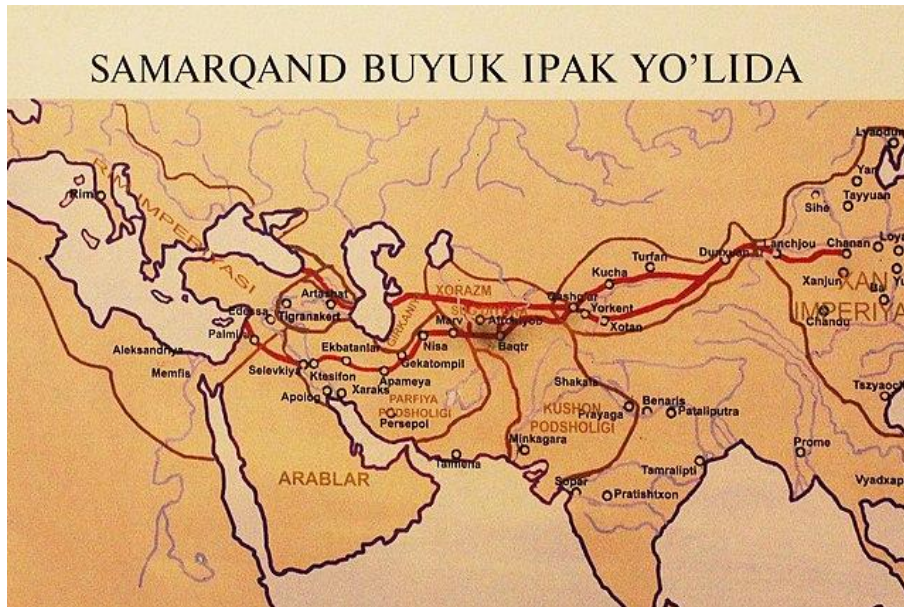
# TIBETAN MUSLIMS

## A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY

**From a Kashmiri Muslim Immigration to Tibet to  
A Tibetan Muslim Forced Migration to India**

**Fabienne Le Hou rou**





**Figure 2: Silk Road**

Source:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=silk+road+map&title=Special:MediaSearch&go=Go&type=image>

See **Figure 1 : Source: Artificial Intelligence Application**

[@Fabienne Le Houérou](https://labs.openai.com/e/yU1IIBZ9OWOYD9U3oG9jKszL/4uS1emPRqJeCF030pOZYFGgt)

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**Figure 3: Lhasa Great Mosque**

Size of this preview: [503 × 599 pixels](#). Other resolutions: [201 × 240 pixels](#) | [403 × 480 pixels](#) | [645 × 768 pixels](#) | [859 × 1,024 pixels](#) | [2,389 × 2,846 pixels](#).  
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lhasa\\_Great\\_Mosque](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lhasa_Great_Mosque)



**Figure 4: Kashmiri merchant on the silk road**

Source:

[@Fabienne Le Houérou](https://labs.openai.com/e/yU1IIBZ9OWOYD9U3oG9jKszL/uP8t8bMgqSBatamIvD9wpITf)

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This book is dedicated to Yussuf Naik.



**Figure 5: Yussuf Naik in Deradun (India), April 2017**  
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**Abstract:**

Following the first study, *Behind the Bridge* (LIT Verlag, 2019) which presented through a visual perspective of the general context of Tibetans forced migration to India, this second publication focusses on a minority of the Tibetan Diaspora, Tibetan Muslims. Most people automatically associate Tibet with Buddhism and the Dalai Lama who has become the main voice of the exiled Tibetans in India. As a religious and political leader, he is a physical embodiment of the Tibetan space, territory, population, religion, and identity, who has helped create the impression among the Western public of a monolithic vision of a pure Buddhist Theocracy. Layers of migration by Christians and Muslims have nevertheless impacted Tibet. This book is based on field research and focusses on the Tibetan Muslim Diaspora. The number of Tibetan Muslims living in North India is less than 3,000, two-thirds of whom live in Kashmir. Tibetan refugees in India, estimated at less than 100 000, form one of the largest populations of refugees from Tibet, and are mostly Buddhist. The Muslim minority within this refugee population comprise no more than three hundred families. The Tibetan Muslims are thus an important minority within the minority communities of Tibetan refugees in India. This study invites readers to listen to the Muslim communities' narratives about the genesis of Islam in Tibet and their exile experiences. Originally from Kashmir, Muslims settled in Lhasa and then migrated in the sixties to India following the Chinese invasion of 1959. My book emphasizes the hybridization of Tibetan Muslims' culture which we can see and understand by means of Deleuze's concept of "rhizome." People's narratives of uprooting and settling, of a Tibetan cultural Buddhist heritage combined with Kashmiri Muslim rituals

creates hybrid cultural practices and traditions explained as rhizomic. I use Deleuze's concept to explain the multiple cultural roots as they combine and mutate in episodes of exile and in diasporic lives.

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## Preface

Originality of the subject

In Tibet, they were called *Kache* (Kashmiri), a name that designates the original land of the Muslim immigrants in Tibet. They were deeply rooted in the country and completely assimilated as urban elite and followed the Dalai Lama in exile in the 1960s but did not really get them absorbed in Kashmir. They were settled in Kashmir in the 1960s and despite their ancestral Kashmiri origins, and the shared Muslim religion, they did not melt, dissolve and fuse with local inhabitants of Srinagar. This shows a paradox in the two migrations. The first wave of Kashmiri migrations to Tibet from 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century led to deep fusion of the immigrants in Tibet while the second forced migration of the Tibetan Muslims to India in 1960s did not attain this assimilation. This first book on Tibetan Muslims is an analysis of what are the pushing factors for a hybridist process highlighting the interstitial spaces between the new migrants and their host society to understand the logical process of a social fusion. It also focuses on the variety of migrations and argues out the difference between a forced migration and a voluntary migration in term of an “accepted” or “rejected” exile. The present manuscript is also based on original sources. Fabienne Le Houérou did her research on this subject during 2017-2019 in India and met one key witness who experienced the forced migration to India. Yussuf Naik, the man in question, is a major source for this historical and unknown human adventure. He belongs to a famous Muslim Tibetan family in Tibet who

lived there for centuries. He testified about his father's life story in 1995 in *The Tibet Journal* in a short memorial report of 4 pages. When I met him for an interview in Dehradun in 2017, he handed over to me the unpublished manuscript on his memories and demanded that I publish it. Unfortunately, his ill health in the few years after that interview did not give me the opportunity to publish it. Doubtlessly, the manuscript is a precious testimony of a Tibetan Muslim immigrant in India in the 1960s.

## **Introduction**

### **Meeting the Tibetan Exiles in India**

I am in Dehradun, in North India, a three-hour drive from the Indian capital, New Delhi, joining the beginning of the Himalaya range<sup>1</sup>. Dehradun is closed to Rishikesh the very well-known capital of Yoga in India. I am about to meet a retired Tibetan gentleman who had important responsibilities in the Tibetan Government in Exile in Dharamsala until he retired in 2008.

Since the 1960s, the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetan Diaspora reside in Dharamasala, India. Most members of the Diaspora live near the Tibetan Government in exile at Macleod Ganj. In total, there are less 100,000 exiled Tibetans in India. Citing the latest 2019 census from the Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC), India's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has stated in its recently submitted annual report for 2020-21 that the population of Tibetan refugees in India as on Dec 31,2020 was 72,312. It has added that most of these refugees had settled themselves, either through self-employment or with Government's

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<sup>1</sup> The Distance between Delhi to Dehradun by road is 249 KM. The aerial distance from Delhi to Dehradun is 205 KM.



assistance under agricultural and handicrafts' schemes in different states of the country.

Together with their Buddhist brothers, almost 300 Muslim Tibetan families (almost 2,000 people) followed this forced migration to India. Yussuf Naik was one of them. His father stayed 17 years in custody in Tibet when the Chinese took over Lhasa (capital of Tibet) and colonized the country.

Mister Yussuf Naik is waiting for me in the hall of my hotel in Dehradun, on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2017. He is a kind, gentleman with this courtesy and elegance, which is, in many ways, in essence, the “*marque de fabrique*” of the Tibetan Muslims.

As a member of an ancient and well-known Tibetan Muslim family in Lhasa, he is the main testimony of the story of a Muslim Migration to Tibet of the Silk Road in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Tibetan Muslims belong to the urban elite of Lhasa known as *Kache Yul*.

Zaffar Naik, his nephew, is affiliated to the second generation of the Tibetan Muslim migration to India. He is the second voice and testimony of this magnificent human experience. I met him in Katmandu at Hotel Tibet in June 2018. He was born in India and spoke about the origins of the Tibetan Muslims in Tibet. I was quite curious to understand if the Tibetan Muslims were really seen as *fully* Tibetans by the mainstream Tibetan refugees in India. Tibetan Muslims were called “*Kache Yul*”. The word *Kache* is related to “Kashmiris”. It is a term that came to be a catch-all for

Tibet's Muslims, wherever they hailed from. The genealogy of the name “Kache” emphasizes the Kashmiri roots and ancestry of the Tibetan Muslims. It translates immediately the reminder of Kashmiri origins of this population. Tibetan Muslims are thus amalgamated to Kashmiris, the short-cut *Kache* is still a designation today for a population of Muslim Tibetans perceived as “semi-refugees”. Not fully refugees because they possess the Indian nationality and not completely Tibetan because of their Kashmiri Muslims ancestors. The denial of “complete” Tibetanness was a sociological and anthropological issue very interesting to observe during field research. It raised the question of identity in exile and exile and purity.

These observations follow the research of *Behind the Bridge*, published in 2019, on the Tibetan Diaspora in India 1959-2017<sup>2</sup> The conclusion of this opus underscored the Tibetan complex identities of diverse groups, such as Muslims or Christians Tibetans partially neglected by Tibetologists who focus on mainstream Tibetan Buddhists.

*“The name of Tibetan Muslims is Kache-Yul or “Lhasa-Khazi”.*  
***Yul** means land and **kache** is related to Kashmir and means the*  
*land of the Muslims. It concerns any Tibetan following Islam.*  
*Even people coming from the Middle East were called that way.*

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<sup>2</sup> Fabienne Le Houérou, *Behind the bridge, The Tibetan Diaspora in India 1959-2017*, Lit Verlag, Zürich, 2019.

*Any trader following the Silk Route. They were not only trading they were also spreading the religion.” (Zaffar Naik, 2018).*

Following the silk road, these immigrants illustrate the pattern of a “circulatory territory” as theorized by Alain Tarrus (1993, 2010, 2014). According to the French sociologist such a space is marked by accumulation of memories (memories of migration, travels, historical spots of transit) shaping the immigration wave with *a nomadic immigrant identity* of “Kashmir trader”. The silk route is thus a key Asian spatial “mobility turn” (John Urry, 2005) with heavy memorial signification. A place accumulating plural memories with intense aggregation of souvenirs of travelling experiences.

Merchants, nomads, missionaries, warriors, and diplomats were following a long distance of 6,400 kilometers (4 000 miles) trading route transporting material items, goods, silk, jewelry, but immaterial items as well like ideas, theories, scientific discoveries, poetry, music, meditation, and religious beliefs, bridging the East to the West through a complex network of 40 different countries active for 1 500 years, from the second year BCE to 1453. The network started with the Han dynasty and declined during Ottoman empire. The layers of historical duration are extremely important and thus the corridor was a crucial spatial link between the Indian continent, central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. The space was characterized by intense circulation and meets Tarrus

definition of a “circulatory territory” with ancient and deep historical roots and cultural thickness “épaisseur”.

Mostly traders these Muslims immigrants were associated to wealth and knowledge. As all written and oral sources admit it, the Tibetan Muslims in Tibet constituted a privileged community, mainly based in Lhasa. The following research focuses on the Muslims Tibetans and their history of migration to India in 1959, when China colonized Tibet. The Tibetan Muslims in India call themselves “a minority within a minority”. Thus, the title of this book is directly inspired by one of my interviews with a well-known Tibetan Muslim family. It’s important to repeat, at the beginning, that the number of Tibetan Muslims is no more than 3,000 in North India forming a small and original group of refugees or “semi refugees”.

The project to publish this study came from a critical internet discussion following an interview posted on my YouTube channel, *Cultura Mundi* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_xhTMSkWMQ&list=UUR4CI04PAXCMepdo\\_yyGCiw&index=21](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_xhTMSkWMQ&list=UUR4CI04PAXCMepdo_yyGCiw&index=21))

Zaffar Naik, a Tibetan businessman from Nepal, invited me to interview him in June 2018 in Katmandu, where a community of Tibetan Muslims is peacefully living. I do thank him and his family very warmly for their hospitality and willingness to help me to understand the specificity of this “minority” (using their own words) and the ambiguous situation of being an Indian Muslim

National with a Tibetan Cultural identity. This dual identity was emphasized during the interview with Zaffar and his uncle, Yussuf, whom I met in Dehradun in 2017. The written riposte of the Tibetan Diaspora in India to this interview is transparently available on my YouTube channel. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_xhTMSkWMQ&list=UUR4CI04PAXCMepdo\\_yyGCiw&index=21](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_xhTMSkWMQ&list=UUR4CI04PAXCMepdo_yyGCiw&index=21)).

The bitter answers of some of the Tibetan Diaspora in India underscore how delicate the position of being a minority among a Buddhist majority remains. The Dalai Lama, very regularly, (since the sixties) came to visit the Tibetan Muslims communities in India and has always expressed his solidarity and the importance of a diverse Tibetan and multiple religious identities. At the margin of Tibetans in exile, one can find a minority refusing to see themselves as full Tibetans, thus demonstrating the religious and political dimension of a national identity.

The controversial thesis of Tibetan identity was clearly expressed in response to an interview I posted on my YouTube channel (Cultura Mundi<sup>3</sup>). Few commenters engage with the substance of the interview. Instead, there was a vehement response to deny any Tibetanness to the Muslims Tibetans. Commentators denied their Kashmir origins or the fact that they were Indian Muslims. Other,

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<sup>3</sup> See the You Tube channel Cultura Mundi and the comments on the interview made by the Tibetan community in India, available here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_xhTMSkWMQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_xhTMSkWMQ).

more neutral, ask if they are Indian or Tibetans, which show how difficult it is to distinguish a single identity in the lived histories of migration. Rather, there is a tendency in national polities to deny multiple layers of identity. This attitude could be observed in many other cultures showing how complicated it is to accept hybridity<sup>4</sup>. Inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophical studies (*Mille Plateaux*, 1981), I assert that there is a rhizomatic identity in exile. Different forms of exile lead to fragmented identities. In a French publication, *Poussière d'exils* (Le Houérou, *Dust of Exiles*, 2021), I explore the multiplicity of partial identities and demonstrate that myriad experiences of exiles are more complex than just the strict definition of an exile related to a foreign country, culture, or geography (Le Houérou, 2021). One can feel exiled at home in much the same way that they feel excluded from mainstream work and social organizations in large part due to histories of race, social class, or economical stress. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994) argues for a theory of cultural hybridity. He invokes concepts such as mimicry, interstice, and liminality to exemplify that cultural production is the fruit of certain ambivalence. His complex theory of agency follows the pattern given by Deleuze of the rhizome.

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<sup>4</sup> See Fabienne Le Houérou, *Revue Science and Video*, n° 9 , décembre 2019, "Les migrants, ces nouveaux héros. Quête de l'ailleurs, quête de soi et créations filmiques, Migration, mixité, hybridité et images : un exemple d'écriture « rhizome » avec le Film *Angu, une Femme sur le Fil(m)*", <http://scienceandvideo.mms.h.univ-aix.fr/numeros/9/Pages/09-06.aspx>.

A rhizome (from Ancient Greek: *rhízōma* “mass of roots”, from *rhizōō* “cause to strike root”). In botany and dendrology a rhizome is a modified subterranean plant stem that sends out roots and shoots from its nodes. Rhizomes develop from auxiliary buds and grow horizontally. The rhizome also retains the ability to allow new shoots to grow upwards.

Deleuze uses the morphology of a *rhizome structure* plan to explain a horizontal epistemological paradigm opposed to the vertical frame of a hierarchy. The orchid is an emblematic rhizome (with aerial strike roots embedded in the tree) as opposed to the vertical roots of a tree giving a model of top-down vertical frame. The *rhizome* grows in apparent chaotic expansion contrary to the tree giving a perfect graphic of a vertical hierarchy. Most human organizations and companies including the academic world meet the arboreal system of pyramidal frame with the director (or board of directors) at the top and the employees at the bottom. A lot of societies mentally frame the order as a pyramid in a top-down organization. Related to cultural identities, the model is again interesting to observe. It is uneasy for Oriental and Western societies to think out of a pyramidal order and to conceive a horizontal order. Oriental and Western societies have this mental map of leadership in common. Sultans, kings, or Dalai Lamas share an agency of order in a vertical position, such as in a tree structure. The primary societies as the Aborigines or other African

populations, relatively small in demography, offer other more *rhizoidal* models.

It was widely observed that small scale-societies were more egalitarian than large –scale societies:

*“Hunter-gatherers tend to be egalitarian. By ‘egalitarian’, anthropologists generally mean equal rights and privileges among group members, though women and children tend to have lower status, on average, compared to adult men (Fried, 1967). Both ecological and institutional forces help maintain egalitarianism. In the absence of significant material wealth or storable or predictable food packages, widespread resource sharing emerges to buffer risk in production and creates interdependence among families (Cashdan, 1980; Kaplan & Gurven, 2005; Winterhalder, 1986). To express commitment to sharing, individuals criticize those who brag and successful producers deprecate their own achievements (Lee, 1979). Humility is not optional but is normative. There are also checks on individuals acquiring coercive influence over others. Coalitions of subordinates will ostracize or, more rarely, execute individuals who display dominance (Boehm, 1999).”*  
(Von Rueden C, and Van Vugt, M, 2015<sup>5</sup>).

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<sup>5</sup> Von Rueden, C., & Van Vugt, M., *Leadership in small-scale societies: Some implications for theory, research, and practice*, The Leadership Quarterly (2015). Available at:



Scholars have stated in various studies that leadership in small-scale societies is more egalitarian and thus less hierarchical. Rather, large-scale societies do not easily accept a horizontal legacy, which is perceived as unfit and undisciplined. Most social orders demand discipline, self-restraint, and limitations. From multiple observations in different continents of the world, I have witnessed a universal resistance to accept plural identities or a group of roots *rhizōma* “mass of roots” feeding the individual with diverse branches.

The Tibetan Muslims are an illustration of that theory and thus have difficulty to be accepted by a section of the mainstream Tibetans Buddhist as “full” Tibetans. Social, racial, and religious miscegenation are subject of resistance. Today’s world’s is far from accepting the blending. I documented in my film *Angu, a woman on the edge*<sup>6</sup>, which showed “*métissage*” or *cross breeding* in the Tibetan Diaspora is not easily admitted and more likely assimilated to a *blood pollution*.

There is an illusion of purity in exile confirmed by interviews that I analyzed in my previous book, *Behind the Bridge* (2019), particularly in a chapter related to memories in exile, idealized and manipulated memories. From this perspective, Tibetan Muslims are

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.10.https://www.professormarkvanvugt.com/images/LEAQUA-S-15-00449.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> The film can be seen on the link: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2g236p>.

seen as beneficiaries of Indian passports and nationality who give them many benefits, especially when travelling out of India.

Tibetan refugees did not enjoy these advantages and prerogatives before 2017. In a decision issued in March 2017, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) accepted a Delhi High Court ruling from September 2016 to allow Tibetan refugees born in India between January 26, 1950, and July 1, 1987 to apply for Indian citizenship and hence receive Indian passports. Since 2018 the Indian authorities are facilitating Tibetan refugees born in India and their children who has been declared Indian citizens by birth to get and Indian passport. ([https://passportindia.gov.in/AppOnlineProject/pdf/CIR\\_0192077\\_Y.pdf](https://passportindia.gov.in/AppOnlineProject/pdf/CIR_0192077_Y.pdf))

Tibetan Muslims in India are not juridical refugees but do feel as an exiled community. They possess Indian citizenship before 2017, and this status demonstrates a juridical gap between the two situations or refugees and citizens, thus hardening the distinctive identities. The interview with Zaffar Naik is very clear on this matter.

When Tibetan Muslims came to Tibet they did not come as Tibetans, but they arrived as Kashmiris or Ladhakis.

*FLH-When your family came to India, did they arrive as Kashmiris?*

*ZN- They came as Indians. Let me kind roll the story. This is very important, and a lot of people don't understand this part. In some ways people are not sensitive enough and people may think we are also those guys we were Tibetans by citizenship. It's not so. Let's get back to history again. So, if we go back to history, a bunch of people, and families, especially men, as traders, came over and move to Tibet, then were married to women from another country. If you investigate history to any kind of world its normally the women who takes over the citizenship of the man. When they came, they were not Tibetans they were people who merged into the culture. However, people knew that they were not the actual settlers of Tibet. (...)*

*FLH-So, they did not have the Tibetan Nationality?*

*ZN-Yes, in some way, this is true! And it's not that they were looking for Tibetan nationality. They still have their names registered in the Embassy.*

*FLH- Were they registered at the Indian Embassy? I mean back to history? Your ancestors?*

*ZN- Back to history, our ancestors, this interesting part is to note within these Tibetan settlers... If you go back a hundred years ago, things were not that bad, people were not bothered to register in an embassy, because no one is talking about it. You don't have to go for these democratic rights, nobody was chasing them away.... Nobody would tell you are Tibetan, or you are not Tibetan.*

*Nothing about what you see around the world (now)! It was wonderful! People who were well educated that would come to India study and come back they had to kind of question themselves whether we are here or there? Now that you don't want to be in Tibet, but then they were, that what it's interesting, they could risk staying in Tibet because they have their roots back in India.*

This portion of interview was the most commented upon section on my YouTube channel *Cultura Mundi*. It was followed by bitter words denying Tibetan Muslims the full Tibetan identity, not so much because of their religion, but mainly because they were registered as Indian at the Indian Embassy.

In exile in India, this status created a distinction that is perceived as an otherness. Even though these Tibetan Muslims are originally from Kashmir, they have been married to Tibetan women for centuries and are no more classical Kashmiris. Long term crossbreeding with Tibetan women, in centuries, have had a profound impact on this male migration.



# Chapter 1

## How European Orientalism shaped representations of Tibet

**Abstract:** My first chapter is historically recalling how Europeans portrayed Tibet during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It follows the introduction and the problematic of a “pure” Tibet invented by Europeans travelers. The French orientalists will be studied as the main *promoters* of such caricatured narratives.

**Keywords:** pure, virgin, orientalism, colonial, Alexandra David-Néel, father Huc.

### The paradigm of a virgin Tibet

There is a plethora of narratives related to Tibet during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and after during the first decades of the twentieth. Each portrayed Tibet as an idealized untouched land “the roof of the world”, symbol of snow and purity. The widespread references can be classified as “orientalists” and “colonials”. Edward Said depicts the ways people from the West represented the East characterized

by otherness that could be defined as relying on stereotypes as a lens of a dominant civilization and condescending representations to reinforce otherness.

In his introduction to *Orientalism*, Said defines his theory of a European invention of the Orient. He writes:

*“The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences”* (Said, 1979, p. 1).

The European idealization of Tibet, as a romanticized space, meets Said’s conception of an invented oriental world. A non-existing Tibet, a land depicted, by French writer Alexandra David Néel, who fashioned herself as the first woman in Lhasa. Her depictions offer the readers a paradigmatically orientalist view of the “roof of the world” by representing the space as exotic. Her books were sold as documents but were almost novels. She stressed the mystical side of an unknown land and invented a mysterious otherness that gave her a large following in France. She used to focus on her extraordinary experiences when travelling to Tibet, alone with a young monk that she adopted (but was used as a translator), disguised as a Tibetan beggar.

To travel disguised as locals is paradigmatic to the orientalist approach. It emphasizes the exotic other and the position of the European observer as a cultural spy by hiding who she is for

getting more information. On my view, this dissimulation is a paradigmatic status of a colonial view. The postcolonial approach is totally contrary to this disguised and hidden agenda. No academic, after the sixties, would ever take this position, but we must recall that she travelled in Tibet during the first decades of the twentieth century. She arrived in Lhasa in 1924. It is important to underline this historical dimension. It is obvious that she is situated in the logical continuity of the tales and stories given by the French Missionaries in 1846. Even the ways she disguised herself can be inspired by the stories of travels of Huc and Gabet. They also dressed up as Tibetan Lamas when travelling to China, Mongolia and Tibet. These authors recall in their book the urge to change clothes. There are continuities between Huc and Gabet and Alexandra David Neel's *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhasa*, published in Paris, London and New York in 1927.

Let us recall the story of Evariste Huc (translated in English):

*"The missionaries who reside in China, all, without exception, wear the secular dress of the people, and are in no way distinguishable from them; they bear no outward sign of their religious character. It is a great pity that they should be thus obliged to wear the secular costume, for it is an obstacle in the way of their preaching the gospel.*

*Among the Tartars, a black man — so they discriminate the laity, as wearing their hair, from the clergy, who have their*



*heads close shaved — who should talk about religion would be laughed at, as impertinently meddling with things, the special province of the Lamas, and in no way concerning him. The reasons which appear to have introduced and maintained the custom of wearing the secular habit on the part of the missionaries in China, no longer applying to us, we resolved at length to appear in an ecclesiastical exterior becoming our sacred mission. The views of our vicar apostolic on the subject, as explained in his written instructions, being conformable with our wish, we did not hesitate. We resolved to adopt the secular dress of the Thibetian Lamas; that is to say, the dress which they wear when not actually performing their idolatrous ministry in the Pagodas. The costume of the Thibetian Lamas suggested itself to our preference as being in unison with that worn by our young neophyte, Samdadchiemba.*

*We announced to the Christians of the inn that we were resolved no longer to look like Chinese merchants; that we were about to cut off our long tails, and to shave our heads. This intimation created great agitation: some of our disciples even wept; all sought by their eloquence to divert us from a resolution which seemed to them fraught with danger; but their pathetic remonstrances were of no avail; one touch of a razor, in the hands of Samdadchiemba to sever the long tail of hair, which, to accommodate Chinese fashions, we had so carefully cultivated ever since our departure from France. We put on a long yellow*

*robe, fastened at the right side with five gilt buttons, and round the waist by a long red sash; over this was a red jacket, with a collar of purple velvet; a yellow cap, surmounted by a red tuft, completed our new costume. Breakfast followed this decisive operation, but it was silent and sad. When the Comptroller of the Chest brought in some glasses and an urn, wherein smoked the hot wine drunk by the Chinese, we told him that having changed our habit of dress, we should also change our habit of living. "Take away," said we, "that wine and that chafing dish; henceforth we renounce drinking and smoking. You know", added we, laughing, "that good Lamas abstain from wine and tobacco". The Chinese Christians who surrounded us did not join in the laugh; they looked at us without speaking and with deep commiseration, fully persuaded that we should inevitably perish of privation and misery in the deserts of Tartary." (Huc, 1987, p. 19-20).*

Father Huc used to disguise himself as a Chinese merchant (when he was travelling) as it can be seen on his own publication: "*R.P Huc, Souvenir d'un voyage au Thibet et en Chine, Plon, 1926, Paris*". Like the French missionaries during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Alexandra David-Néel, would adopt a similar approach in 1924, when she would don local clothes. In fact, she cites the missionaries in her edition at the beginning of her story, noting that

Huc and Gabet were the only travelers who reached Lhasa in 1846 (Néel, 1927, p. 9).

*La question posée par cette femme me laissa très préoccupée. Ainsi, en dépit de la peine que j'avais prise de me poudrer avec du cacao mélange de braise pile, malgré mes jolies nattes en crin de yak, je ne ressemblais as suffisamment à une Tibétaine. Que pouvais-je inventer de mieux?*

“The question asked by this woman left me very worried. Thus, in spite of the effort I had taken to put cocoa powder mixed with piled ash, despite my lovely mats in yak hair, I did not look sufficiently Tibetan. What else could I invent?” (Néel, 1927, p. 71).

She used cocoa powder as makeup to look Tibetan and furthermore, she explains that her *accoutrement* is rather useful to resemble a modest Tibetan to misguide humble Tibetans to represent her as “one of them” (Néel, 1927, p. 138). David-Néel is also very cautious to hide any golden item to dissimulate her wealth (Néel, 1927, p. 147).

It is obvious that Néel was inspired by the stories told by Huc a half of century before her travels. Huc describes that honorable Tibetan women coat their face with a sort of black jam to look hideous and repulsive to men when they get out of their houses (Huc, 1926, p. 141).

As the reader may see in the reference section, David-Néel produced several publications. Not only are these publications widespread, but also inspired many biographers and narratives showing the fascination and impression she still has on the French public. The latest book published about her Tibetan epic in Tibet was released in 2018.

The romantic effect of her prose should not be underestimated in the way Tibet still appears in European imagination.

*“J’ai vécu plusieurs années, au pied des neiges éternelles, comme dans les solitudes herbeuses de la région des grands lacs, la vie étrange et merveilleuse des anachorètes tibétains.”*

I lived many years at the bottom of eternal snow, like in herbal solitudes from the great lake’s region, the strange and wonderful life of Tibetan anchorite. (Néel, 1927, p. 47).

In her publication *Voyage of a Parisian in Lhasa* (1927), Alexandra David-Néel presents herself as having directly experienced the “eternal snow” of a “strange and wonderful life of a hermit”. These expressions are paradigmatic of orientalist self-fashioning. Everything is pictured as gorgeous, magic, and mysterious. Her chocolate makeup trying to hide her white carnation did not protect her enough, and she was eventually unmasked by the governor of Lhasa and was forced to leave Tibet.

Her return to France on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1925, generated a lot of public interest that granted her fame and prestige. Magazines detailed

exploits of her adventure. Her romanticized representation of Tibet meets the public expectations of a Far Eastland the fact that she is a female also played into public intrigue of her travels. I do not want here to minimize her courage (travelling alone in 1924 was not something common or easy) or her talent as a writer, but I think it is representative of the pervasiveness of orientalist representations in the early twentieth century. Her narratives are the fruit of a historical moment that show the typical ways the West is looking at the Orient. Today we look at it as stereotyped elements, but they were very originally perceived during that time. Few women were that intrepid, audacious, or daring. The French magazines were enthusiastic to relate her adventurous travels and she became an important icon of female freedom.

Copying her style from the French missionaries, she can be seen as an emblematic orientalist as a landmark of a specific style to portray a virgin Tibet still circulating in representations today in Europe, even though this Tibet has never existed.

I could directly measure the effect of this traditional orientalism on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2014, when I participated to a Tibetan Film Festival at Aix-Marseille Université<sup>7</sup>. A documentary with ethnographic intention was projected at Aix-Marseille-University during a

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<sup>7</sup> Aix-Marseille université. Vendredi 17 octobre 2014 à 15h45 à Marseille, Espace Pouillon des épreuves de tournage du film– *Angie, une femme sur le fil(m)*, en présence de la réalisatrice Fabienne Le Houérou (2014); <https://iremam.cnrs.fr/spip.php?article2500>.

cultural festival organized by a professor of Tibetan language. The documentary tells the story of a Tibetan refugee woman in exile living at the edge of the Tibetan colony in Delhi. The film was portraying a sick mother living at the margins with an African partner. The film is freely available on Dailymotion (<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2g236p>).

It was shot in 2013, issued in 2014 and screened at Harvard University in May 2016. This documentary explored gender roles and the violence against women in exile through an original life-story of a Tibetan woman on the edge, in India, who was living with an African partner. The film was also questioning the reality of an accepted mix breeding and the limits of cultural amalgamation in our postcolonial world. The Tibetan colony condemned the Afro-Tibetan couple and few Tibetan refugees in the film expressed racism related to the color of the “half cast” baby, who was deemed too black by the Tibetan refugees in New Delhi.

Clearly the film explores the margins of the Tibetan colony in exile in India. The tensions in the film tell us much more about rejection, marginality, racial disregard, and community scornful judgment on the African partner of Angie, who was disparaged as a “violent beast”. Contemptuously seen as evil, the colony told me different horror stories about him.

The film was not advertising for a magical compassionate Tibet or a pure land and thus the audience was amazed and offended by the new migratory reality this documentary was presenting. They reacted very violently to the images and accused the author of filming “the worst of humanity” and to exhibit the most “horrible” side of the Tibetan community, ignoring the magnificent Tibetan culture. Other Tibetan filmmakers presented at the show tried to defend my point of view, arguing that I have filmed “the truth about today’s exile in India”. I realized that I was criticized for facing a contemporary Tibetan exile they refused to admit or perhaps, did not want to confront. This depiction contradicted the European imagination about a magical culture and an untouched land full of philosophical compassion. The audience was in majority studying Tibetan language and despite the beginning of defense from the Tibetan artists (present that day), this reality remained unheard, unspoken. This refugee situation was opposed to their imagined representations of a past Tibet, and thus, had to be negated.

This narration illustrates the impact of French orientalism on the ways the public still portrays the “Orient” in Europe. This anecdotic account highlights how the Orient was an intellectual invention (Said, 1979, p. 1) and a current lively construction still very strong in the European imaginary. This representation of course influenced the way that Tibetan Muslims were invisible, unconsidered and were denied as object of scientific interest and

research. Tibetans refused to protect an idealized Tibetan dream of purity, whereas Europeans clung to such representations

The idea of purity in exile is a very heuristic orientation of research, especially in refugee studies. Liisa H. Malkki's *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* shows that purity narratives are useful collective tools for keeping a diasporic ethnic identity alive, tightly connected, and politically united<sup>8</sup>. The promotion of purity can mask a hidden agenda for creating a political strength. In my latest publication, *Behind the Bridge* (2019), I argued that memories can be manipulated for this purpose and are ideal instruments for creating an identity. Cultural narratives are lively objects in constant evolution of the political situation and ambitions of the Diaspora in exile.

This clear goal of keeping an imagined community (Anderson, 1983<sup>9</sup>) in a pure cultural bubble, out of a far more hybrid reality, is combined with a lack of reliable sources concerning the Tibetan Muslims. The more I collected sources the more it was obvious that most authors were copying each-others (sometimes using the exact

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<sup>8</sup> This study focuses on Hutu refugees from Burundi, who were driven into exile in Tanzania after their 1972 insurrection against the dominant Tutsi was brutally quashed, Liisa Malkki shows how experiences of dispossession and violence are remembered and turned into narratives, and how this process helps to construct identities such as "Hutu" and "Tutsi".

<sup>9</sup> An imagined community is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book, *Imagined Communities*. Anderson depicts a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group.



words), especially concerning the historical events of the Muslim migration to Tibet. Most authors do identify two step migrations on the eighth century and seventeenth century. These historical stages are well expressed by Zaffar Naik in his interview that corroborated by his uncle Yussuf Naik's personal memories<sup>10</sup>. These are widely shared by journalists and authors like Arif Qazi or Robit Singh. These writers and figures recall that the first links between Islam and Tibet were retraced during the seventh century when the Arab armies are facing the Tibetans. The first Arab armies used to refer to Tibet as "Tibbat". All sources recognize that serious information is historically situated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>10</sup> Yussuf Naik transmitted a manuscript written in English related to the Muslim Tibetans retracing the genesis of Islam in Tibet in Deradun where I interviewed him in April 2017.

## Chapter 2

### Genesis of Islam in Tibet

**Abstract:** The second chapter explores the genesis of Islam in Tibet and tends to retrace the main Kashmiri migrations to Tibet. It will also study the key position of the Kashmiri merchants in Tibet who came along the Silk Road with business purposes and with no intention to spread the religion.

**Keywords:** Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, European sources, Yussuf Naik, Father Huc travels, China diplomacy during 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christian missionaries, Kache diaspora in Tibet.

According to the British orientalist sir Arnold, the annals of Kwangtung during the Tang dynasty in China record of the first Muslims into China (Arnold, 1913, p. 294). Arab traders entered to Tibet through China (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 48), coming via Samarkand, Bukhara, Kashghar, Chinese Turkestan, and Ladakh.

These central Asian sites have come under the influence of Islam and the relations between these countries and Tibet were quite closed. Arnold also recognizes these dynamics, when he explains that Islam came to Tibet from Iran and the Chinese province of Yunan. Sir Arnold also stresses that Islam was carried into Tibet proper by Kashmiri merchants (Arnold, 1913, p. 293).

Badrudin Chini<sup>11</sup> asserts in his book *Chini Muslaman* that the contacts between Arabs and Tibet happened long before the introduction of Islam, but major contacts with preachers came during the reign of Tai Chung in 205 Hijri and one preacher established himself in Canton. An old mosque known as “Wai Shizi”, founded by Saad Bin Aliqas, was the center of his preaching, and still stands in Canton (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 48). That geographical point was the first anchor for the spread of Islam in south China. Yussuf Naik cites Badruddin’s references to the 18<sup>th</sup> century writer, Lui Tchu, who mentioned the preaching of Saad in Canton, where he died and where you can find his grave (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 48).

Yussuf Naik recalls:

*“It all started in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when a hardy band of 25 Kashmiri traders from Kashmir crossed over Nepal and headed north to Tibet. They settled in different towns of Tibet like*

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<sup>11</sup> Text is available at: <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/cheeni-musalman-badruddin-chini-ebooks>.

*Lhasa, Shigatse and Tsetang, and married Tibetan women. Centuries later, the expanded Tibetan community approached the fifth Dalai Lama for a place for a mosque and a burial ground. It is said that the fifth Dalai Lama shot an arrow and decreed that the place where it fell could be owned by the Muslim community”.* (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 55).

Most articles focusing on Tibetan Muslims rely on interviews given by Yussuf Naik. All sources confirm that everything formal started with the construction of the mosque and the burial ground during the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617–1682). Gyatso was the first Dalai Lama to wield effective temporal and spiritual power over all Tibet. Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso is often referred as the Great Fifth, being a key religious and temporal leader of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibet. Gyatso is credited with unifying all of Tibet under the Ganden Phodrang after a Mughal military intervention which ended a protracted era of civil wars. As an independent head of state, he established relations with the Qing Empire and other regional countries, as well as met early European explorers. He also wrote twenty-four volumes of scholarly and religious works on a wide range of subjects. Written sources about the Muslim Community are to be found during this period even though Kashmiri merchants were present in Tibet few centuries before.

Original written sources came with the Jesuit missionaries of the seventeenth century, then with the Capucines in the eighteenth century, and finally with the above cited father Huc in the middle of the nineteenth century (Gaborieau, 1973, p. 14). Gaboriau's 1975 history, *Récit d'un voyageur musulman au Tibet*, authored by Ghulam Muhammad, offers useful insights into the history of Islam in Tibet. The French researcher published a manuscript found in Katmandu, then translated the text from Urdu into French. The text follows Merchant Ghulam Muhammad, who narrates his travels to Tibet in 1882-1883. Eleven pages concern his visit to Lhasa (p. 115-137) (Gaborieau, 1973, p. 14). The manuscript found in Katmandu offers an original version of a direct witness of a Muslim merchant (with Iranian origins) about the Kashmiri Migrations to Tibet and the way Muslims Tibetan organized their life in Lhasa. This major testimony is heavily cited among French researchers, but less among English-speaking authors. Primary sources must be privileged from secondary sources because they are immediate and constitute first-hand accounts from travelers who had a direct connection with the Tibetan Muslims in Tibet.

It is important to stress that a primary source is a firsthand account and Yussuf Naik text is to be considered as a genuine testimony from a key member of the Tibetan Muslims community who migrated in the sixty to India and who was a key witness of this migration. This is the reason why the memories of Yussuf Naik are

precious and original. Furthermore, he belonged to a well-known family established in Lhasa for many generations.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I met Yussuf Naik in Deradun in 2017. He worked for the Department of Health in Dharamsala in the government in exile, the Central Tibetan Administration (Central Tibetan Administration) from 1972 to 2007. He had a key position in the Tibetan administration in exile and was close to the Dalai Lama. He confessed that he lost both his parents at an early age, both of whom were victims of Chinese “colonization”. A letter from the Dalai Lama introduces his manuscript in 2012 and the date gives an indication of the period when this manuscript was written. Chapter II of the manuscript concerns the Muslims of Tibet.

*“Although Tibetan Muslims followed a different faith, they lived in close harmony with their Tibetan Neighbors and their way of life, the way they dressed, the way they arranged their houses and so forth closely followed the local Buddhist culture (...)*

*When I escape into exile in 1959, several Muslims followed me, being no less loyal to the cause of Tibet than other Tibetans. Several have given long service to the Tibetan government in exile, Yussuf Naik the author of this manuscript among them.”*  
(Dalai Lama foreword October 5, 2012).

The position of the Dalai Lama is clear and his support for the variety of religions and philosophies was also expressed in different occasions as Yussuf Naik remembers (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 29).

The interviews with Yussuf Naik and his nephew Zaffar Naik should be expanded into a genealogical study of the of the Naik family<sup>12</sup>. Doing so offers the necessary understanding of their importance among the Tibetan Muslim community of Lhasa and contributes to a study of genealogy of the Tibetan Muslims. In that perspective, studying the Tibetan Muslim elite would expand the academic knowledge of this original migration.

For that purposes a prosographical research on this family would be very useful for progressing in the documentation of the settlement of the Tibetan Muslims in Tibet. Prosography has the goal of learning about patterns of relationships and activities through the study of collective biographies. It collects and analyses statistically relevant quantities of biographical datas about a well-defined group. A better knowledge of The Tibetan Muslims in Lhasa could highly benefit by such research. Prosography is one of the auxiliary sciences of history but to emphasize on multidisciplinary

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<sup>12</sup> Prosopographical research has developed over time tracing genesis of well-known social elites, many of whom were already well-known historical figures. Genealogies and kinship studies allowed for an analysis of how "power elite" emerged over time".

approaches could be very heuristic tool for better measuring the family dimension of that migration. It also illustrates the rhizome model of approaching migration studies.

In his manuscript, Yussuf Naik assures that very few Muslims are aware of the Tibetan Muslims Community. He explained that he made the effort to write his memories to offer the world a better awareness on his community. He interpreted the lack of information related to the history of the Tibetan Muslims because the most important texts were written by Christian missionaries (Naik, 2012, p. 47). These sources enjoyed a wider circulation due the major progress of European printing press in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **European sources are more important during the nineteenth century**

I will go back to these Christian sources to analyze Father Huc's representations of his travels to Tibet during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Father Huc's travel narratives call attention to Chinese/Tibetan relations in the middle of nineteenth century. China was already very much in control of Tibet, the Chinese ambassador in Lhasa retained a powerful voice and influence. Huc and Gabet, the French missionaries, who reached Lhasa in January 1846, were rejected



from Tibet at the hands of the Chinese Ambassador, despite the blessing of the Tibetan authority (Huc, 1926, p. 154). Pekin dominated on matters of ordinary life in Tibet by imposing its will over the local Tibetan authorities. Political views on Tibet and games of mastery under the Chinese Emperor were already very strong in 1846 by the time Father Huc arrived. Under the pretense of protecting the Dalai Lama, the Chinese embassy in Lhasa managed to have a great impact on political matters.

Huc also stresses that Tibet was never- as it is often presented - a land of purity and that the Muslims were very much present and numerous. They were called *Hoeï-Hoeï* (*Huei Huei*) in China and supposed to have penetrated the country under the Tang dynasty in 618 and lasted in 907. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Tibet was seen at “the end of the world” and far from any multicultural hybridity. It is interesting to read that Huc considered Lhasa as cosmopolitan Asian city.

## **Cosmopolitan Lhasa**

*“Trade and devotion attract a great number of foreigners in Lha-Ssa and make this city as a rendez-vous of all Asiatic populations, streets are always crowded by merchants and pilgrims, and you can notice a great variety of physiognomies,*

*costumes and idioms. (...) Composed by Thibétans, Pébouns, Katchis and Chinese.*” (Huc, 1926, p. 139).

Father Huc indicates numerous precious details of the Muslim community called Katchis in his book. Three pages offer direct testimony in the middle of nineteenth century on this subject.

Huc considers the Muslims as one of the most numerous foreign communities and depicts them as *very kind*. In particular, the governor of Kashmiri people was very close to the Tibetan authority and who translated the discussions he had with Tibetan authorities. He does not give the name of the head of this Kashmiri governor, but he depicts him as a highly educated gentleman. The missionaries were very impressed by him. We can therefore interpret, from these precious depictions, that the Kashmiri’s Muslim Governor of Lhasa stood with the Tibetan regent, in his immediate circle of advisers, and was clearly hostile to the Chinese ambassador and Chinese ambitions in Tibet. This political proximity is suggested in all the pages related to the conflict between the Chinese ambassador and the French missionaries. (Huc, 1926).

### **Kashmiri in the eyes of Christian missionaries**

Huc pictures the Kashmiri community as a privileged group of traders specialized in drapery.

*“After the Peboun we notice in Lhasa are the Katchis, Muslims, originally from Kashmir, their turbans, long beard, severe and solemn gait, their physiognomy (feature) full of intelligence and majesty, their cleanliness and precious clothes, are in contrast with populations of inferior races where they are mixed with.”*

(Huc, 1926, p. 151).

The Christian missionary Huc portrays local elites as expressing dignity in all kinds of interactions. He mentions that he is quite intimate with the governor of the Muslims (Ibid, p. 152). This governor is familiar with the Tibetan authorities and serves as well as Pacha and Mufti (Ibid, p. 152). A very long interview and discussion between Huc and the Muslim governor shows that they came to Tibet few centuries ago and did not want to go back to Kashmir because of the British rule (Ibid, p. 152).

Huc estimates that the Kashmiris are the “richest traders” in Lhasa. (Ibid, p. 152).

*“They possess stores of rayon lingerie and all objects of luxury and toiletries; they are also stockbrokers, are trafficking gold and silver. This is the reason why you find most of the time Farsi characters on Tibetan money. Few of them travel every year to Calcutta for commercial operations.”* (Ibid, p. 152).

The religious observations of father Huc contradict what tends to be used to describe the Tibetan Muslim religiosity. Most of my Tibetan Buddhist interviewees (2017-2018) suggested that their faith was very much shaped by Tibetan Buddhism and that they were karma believers and thus, did not contradict Metempsychosis. Huc noted that “Katchis” have a mosque in Lhasa and were rigidly observing the law of Mohamed; they ostensibly showed contempt for all Buddhist superstitious practices.” (Huc 1926, p. 153).

The first *Kache* arrived in Lhasa took Tibetan wife’s who were obliged to renounce their religion and embrace Mohammedanism.

*“Now, as a rule, they contract alliance only between them; thus, they constitute, imperceptibly, at the heart of Tibet, like a group of people group of a part (separated), who do not have the same costume, the same customs, the same language nor the same religion as the indigenous people.”* (Huc, 1926, p. 153).

The facts concerning intermarriages are confirmed and triangulated by Yussuf Naik, Zaffar Naik, and Arnold (Arnold, 2013, p. 293). Kashmiri merchants married Tibetan women. Huc reveals that during the nineteenth *Kache* also still spoke Farsi. During the twentieth century, most Tibetan Muslims spoke Tibetan, while a few knew the Farsi language.

My interview with Zaffar Naik corroborates the two elements of knowledge given by father Huc concerning the marriages and the

wealth of the Kashmiri traders. Zaffar Naik introduces a very important fact concerning the social strategies of the traders in choosing women from poor and unfortunate origins. The traders did not select Buddhist aristocracy for not hurting the society, but married women “who needed a support”.

Anthropology is a central discipline for understanding the social importance of wedding strategies. In most Asian societies, women are exchanged “or sold” by their families. Levi Strauss (1949) would insist in his thesis on the “prix de la mariée”. Picking out the needy women among the poorest was certainly a pragmatically intelligent plan to be well admitted and respected in the ancient feudal Tibetan society.

*Zaffar Naik: “And during this course of time, a lot of people from Kashmir decided to stay in Tibet and would marry and start a family there and that’s how 95 per cent of families is all being men marrying Tibetan Women. I don’t know how far it is true, but you know, to some extent, a lot of people think that the Tibetan women who got married were not really belonging to a higher society.”*

*They married disadvantaged Tibetan women. “I would not call them maid or servant but someone in need of a support system. So, you marry those women .... Because as an outsider you come, in a very short time marry an aristocratic or high ranked*

*woman if you look at it anthropological aspect it's too difficult to get accepted. So from that context, you know, conversion was easier (...) What's interesting, I think, the only Muslims who came from Kashmir, and elsewhere as well, were brought with a high sense of understanding education, brought in a certain amount of civilization which had its roots in Islamic tradition, and the Tibetans in general, Tibetan Buddhists, started to appreciate that, and in a very short time, I believe, the Tibetan Muslims started to get a lot more leverage mixed within the society... They were highly respected. Much for the food, the trading, morality, education, and the way they brought up their children. They are lot of anecdotes when it comes to how Tibetan Buddhists who looked at Tibetan Muslims. There is a famous saying telling "Don't look at Tibetan Muslims and make judgments, look at the food and make a judgment, look at the doing and make a judgment!"*

Another element of Father Huc's explanations of the wealth of the Kashmir trading migrants in Tibet and their importance in banking was also confirmed by Zaffar Naik. Travelling very often to India, these Kashmir merchants were a fundamental economic connection (*trait d'union*) between Tibet and the rest of Asia. Thus, they played a crucial role in creating connections to Tibet; a land on the roof top of the world isolated behind mountains too difficult to cross for ordinary traders. They had specific financial connections with the institutions affiliated with the Dalai Lama and became

privileged financial partners of the Tibetan government as Zaffar Naik recalls:

*“Tibetans Buddhists were very spiritual people, which means in a family of ten members you were probably send 8 or 9 members of the family to the monasteries. Which meant in a country’s perspective; if you look on an economic perspective you put ten efforts and 8 people in spirituality and only 2 people making money, earning for the family? In contrast of that, most Tibetan Muslims were actually very active, doing trade in India and different part of the world.” (Naik, 2017).*

FLH- *Were they rich?*

ZN- *They were rich in a sense that, yeah, they were doing pretty much more of trading families, unlike the early ancestors who came from the Middle East their intention was spreading religion. People from Kashmir were more about trading and of course Islam is part of the life so there is no way of cutting from it.*

FLH-*So the first wave of migrants was more religious than the second wave. The second wave was much more an economical migration: opening roads!*

ZN- *Yes, it was economical, they were traders. But having to have said that you must understand that Islam sets at the center of a belief system in all aspects of faith so obviously even when they were trading the practices, the way they conduct their*

*businesses, the way they conduct their social life, Islam dominated a big way even though they would not project that out in bringing changes in the country.*

*FLH-Like borrowing money without interest. In Islam it's quite clear. Maybe the absence of interest in loans explains why the Tibetans Power at the time, the Dalai Lama institution found it very useful to deal with this Kashmir merchants for their financial needs?*

*ZN-This is possible, this financial connection. They had narrow financial connections with the Dalai Lama institution and became privileged financial partners.*

*ZN- You must understand the context their lifestyle again their way of looking at things. They are very high spiritual people, a lot of the members in the family would be committing efforts in monasteries the country needed financial stability, economic sight, cycling the economic outcomes. Right? In the other hand you had this group of families who basically were traders, very honest people in one way, they would supply this money, in some sense it was important for the Dalai Lama that there was this section of people in essence these traders had a Tibetan culture. Their faith was different. In full essence they were basically cycling the economic currency around and connecting with other worlds as well, especially with India, for that matter.*

*FLH- So, these Muslims traders were needed and useful.*



*ZN-Very much needed and useful. History proves it. When the Chinese took over the Chinese really wanted the Tibetan Muslims to stay back. Stay back in Tibet. In fact, they would not let us go and they are so many stories were people were put in jail. They did not want us to live Tibet.*

The above interview (Katmandu, 2018) stresses clearly, like other testimonies that the Chinese power in Tibet was mindful of all the advantages given by the dynamic social group of the Kashmiri traders and their key economic importance for their new colony. In that perspective, they acted to keep the Tibetan Muslims inside Tibet and prevent them from migrating out of the country.

### ***Kache* organization in Lhasa**

According to Sir Arnold they were two thousand *Kashmiri's* (*Kache*) families in 1896 in Lhasa (Arnold, 1913, p. 293). More than ten-thousand members of the community only in the capital of Tibet. It was one of the most important foreign communities in Lhasa. The British orientalist Broomhall<sup>13</sup> notes that (Broomhall, 1910, p. 206) that converts “are being won from among the Tibetan

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<sup>13</sup> Marshall Broomhall particular interest was the conversion of Chinese Muslims to Christianity to this end he authored the first book written in English about Chinese Muslims. “*Islam in China: a neglected problem*, Morgan and Scot Limited.

inhabitants” (Arnold, 1913, p.293). Kashmiris were thus not the only Muslim community in Tibet, but the largest population and the one that possessed the highest cultural and economic impact.

The *Kache* burial place for the Muslims in Lhasa was appointed by the highest Tibetan authority. The Dalai Lama offered land to the Kashmiris, where they built a mosque and kept a garden. They organized themselves in an elected committee called the “*punch* committee” (committee of five), which organized for the Muslim community. *Punch* is an Urdu/Persian word meaning five referring to the number of the leaders.

The fifth Dalai Lama granted the *Kache* special concessions in laws with a formal written document under its own seal and signature. An important freedom was the privilege to adjudicate their own issues with its own juridical body formed by the punch committee, which ruled on minor offenses (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 56).

As we have seen previously with Father Huc, turmoil in Kashmir related to British rule led to permanent residence of the *Muslim communities in the nineteenth century*.

The Dalai Lama gave official patronage to fourteen elders and fifteen young men and who were provided with legal concessions. The Kashmiris could own property in addition to homes, open shops and create business in and out Lhasa, but because of their status as foreigners and not citizens, and they were exempt from paying taxes. In the 1840’s the eleventh dalai lama, Khendrup

Gyatso, granted the *Kache* (as the Tibetans Muslims were known) passports with which they could travel to Calcutta to make hardware and textile purchases (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 55).

These transformations are corroborated by Father Huc, who asserts that *Kache* travel every year to Kashmir through Calcutta in his 1846 text.

Muslims were granted a series of benefits in Tibet. For example, they were allowed to eat meat during Sakadawa month (the month of Buddha's birth); in Buddhist tradition consuming meat during this period is prohibited. Muslims were also exempted for certain chores Tibetans did in service to the lamas (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 56).

The *punch* committee implemented *sharia* law within the community and the Tibetan government did not interfere with these laws, except in situations of serious offenses. The head of the *punch* was named *mian* and nominated by the Tibetan government (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 56).

*"Members of the punch committee could attend government functions and sat among nobles and aristocrats during local festivities, garbed in fez caps and Kashmiri shawls. But only the mian was given special honors that were equivalent to high officials in the Tibetan Government."* (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 56).

Father Huc's prose authenticates these findings in his account of the meeting between the Tibetan Regent and the Chinese ambassador. In this meeting, he confirms the high position of who he called the "*Governor of the Muslims*" and the crucial role and vital influence they had compared to the Chinese authorities. It was necessary to underscore that Tibetan *punch* committee through the *mian* had an extremely important political position as precious allies against Chinese domination. This alliance was crucial to thwarting Chinese attempts to undermine the Tibetan government in delicate situations, like in diplomatic matters and relations with the outside world. As frequent travelers, the Muslims traders had a valuable experience of getting outside Tibet and thus being in contact with multicultural worlds, such as Indian, Russian, British cultures.

Yussuf Naik was told by elders in around the 1950s that during the Reting Lama (regent of Tibet), the document signed by the fifth Dalai Lama addressing the Muslims in Tibet was burned. As a result, the document is no longer available as a source to be consulted. However, even without the presence of this key document, the Muslims in Tibet continued to enjoy the same privileges (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 57).

According to Arif Qazi<sup>14</sup>:

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<sup>14</sup> Arif Qazi, Tracing the genesis of Islam in Tibet, *HazanaI slamicus*, July to Dec 2014 (3-2). Available at: <https://iri.aiou.edu.pk/indexing/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/16-tracing-the-genesis-of-islam.pdf>.

*“The arrival of Muslims was followed by the construction of mosques in different parts of Tibet. The fifth Dalai Lama provided land for the mosque. Before 1959, there were four mosques in the capital Lhasa, two in Shigatse, and one in Tsethang and a few in Silling.” (Hazara Islamicus July to Dec 2014, pp. 2-3).*

*“Each mosque had a committee who looked after their respective mosque. This committee, headed by the Imam of the mosque, arranged all the religious functions in a year. Every Year, the Muslims celebrated the two Eids with great pomp and show. The Eid prayers were offered at the mosques in the morning. Special feasts were prepared at home to which many Buddhist brethren and friends were invited. Besides daily prayers, special prayers were also offered at the mosques of the whole night on the other religious occasions. (...) During the holy month of Ramadan, the Muslims used to gather at the mosques for at the sunset which was arranged by the mosque committee. The mosques were maintained well and were the centers of the Muslims social life in Tibet. As the Muslim community grew, Madrasas were set up in which children were taught about Islam, the Quran (...) Urdu language was also a part of the curriculum. There were two such Madrasas in Lhasa and one in Shigatse. In Tibet, the interaction between the Buddhist and Muslim Tibetans in their day to day economic, social, and cultural life and even in ceremonial affairs was in*

*vogue. Due to close association and integration with the locals the Muslim Tibetans shared many cultural traits with their Buddhist neighbors. However, at the same time, they also maintained a clear social boundary and religious cultural identity through their own social and religious institutions. Further, the Muslims contributed to the growth of Tibetan culture and civilization by virtue of economic and cultural roles played by them in the Buddhist land of Tibet.”*

Most articles, like the portion of text mentioned above, are inspired by Yussuf Naik’s four-page publication in the *Tibet Journal* in 1995. He was frequently interviewed by researchers, but never published his full reflections. The whole manuscript he handed to me in Dehradun recalls his experience in exile. In this manuscript, he outlines the genesis of Islam in Tibet, a topic on which there is a severe shortage of reliable sources. All sources confirm that everything began with the construction of the mosque and the burial ground during the fifth Dalai Lama during the seventeenth century.



## Chapter 3

### Kashmiri community in Tibet

**Abstract:** The third chapter details where and how the *Kache* organized life in Tibet and through the process of assimilation. The chapter will focus on marriage strategies of the Kashmiri immigrants to integrate to Tibetan society and form urban elite through business. This chapter insists on the reciprocal influence of the Kashmiri Migrants and the Tibetan Buddhist host society to detail the different interstitial spaces between the two communities (Buddhists and Muslims). This demonstrates that real predominance was based on long term roots established by a volunteer exile. Assimilation was the fruit of a range of durable influences.

**Keywords:** Chosen/volunteer migration, *Kache*, organization, punch committee, mosques, religion, madrasa, assimilation, intermarriage, interstitial spaces, reciprocal influence, culture, hybridity, economy, cultural hybridity, language, food, fashion, music, arts.

Yussuf's memories were more reliable when it concerns the organization of *Kache* Muslims during the beginning of the



twentieth century. His father, Haji Abdul Ghani, had direct organizational responsibilities in the community as a famous family gathering for both religious and secular powers inside the community. Haji Abdul Ghani remained in custody for 17 years by the Chinese when they took over Lhasa. He passed away when Yussuf was only aged seven years old. His memories were dedicated to him and to the *punch* committee during the Chinese invasion.

Yussuf's father belonged to the committee of Tibetan Muslims:

*"They were no specific restrictions pertaining to age or educational qualification in the selection of the Punch Committee members. The Muslim community would nominate the members based on a person's commitment to the community (i.e., in social services, objectivity, impartiality, etc.) and its social/economic development. This committee incorporated resolutions based on the Islamic laws old conduct, in its quest to preserve the Tibetan Muslim community's heritage. All Punch Committee members' election proceedings needed the final legal approval of the Tibetan Government through the Kashag Office. Nominations were held every three years. After the election of committee members were finalized a Mian (Chairman) was chosen from amongst them, and other appointments were made as well. Members of the elected group had fixed service to do but to ensure the maintenance of the community funds,*

*properties, mosques, graveyards, the Kyantangang garden (opposite to Norbulingkha) and Madrasa (School). Every three years appointments were made regarding the administrative maintenance of Madrasa. The Punch had the right to act against anyone who was found guilty of committing crimes against the laws of Islam, sharia.” (Yussuf Naik, 2012, pp. 57-58).*

This special magisterial power given to the *punch* Committee last until the Chinese invasion and the author of the above stresses that equivalent respect was also offered to other religions and similar treatment was granted to the Nepali official in Tibet (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 58).

A group of Muslims currently lived in Tibet according to *sharia* law. Tibetan Muslims in Tibet formed an urban community and we found no significant sources offering testimonies of a Muslim rural presence in Tibet. The other mosques were also built-in cities, and the mosques were the heart of spiritual and material organization of the Muslims communities in Tibet during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

There were five mosques prior to the Chinese invasion in Tibet: two in Lhasa, two in Shigatse and one in Tsthang. They were connected to both cemeteries and madrasas, while also serving as key sites of social gatherings for the Muslim community.

The main mosque was located at the heart of Lhasa on the right side of the well-known Potala palace of the Dalai Lama. The

interior was richly decorated with chandeliers and *costly rugs* (Naik, 2012, p. 60). It is worthwhile to underline that the land given by the Tibetan government was not at the periphery of the town or in the poor suburbs of the Tibetan capital, but in the most centrally located place in Lhasa. As much as space and geography is concerned, this fact is a very important sign of the immediacy of the *Kache* with the center of Tibetan power. In his manuscript Yussuf Naik provides pictures of the mosque and the rich decorations, especially in Gyangtagang mosque. The images show the colorful decorations of the pillars of the mosque, which could be compared to monasteries, showing a clear cultural Buddhist influence in the arts.

## **A Kashmiri hybridity in Tibet**

### **Tibetan Muslims Juridical Affiliation**

The majority of Muslims in Tibet hailed from Kashmir. Thus, the religious culture of these Muslims was influenced by Kashmiri traditions. Tibetan Muslims adhere to Sunni Islamic tradition. The first preacher of Islam in Kashmir known as Bulbul Shah (Syed Sharaf Al-Din Abdur Rahman) came on the 14<sup>th</sup> century and was originally from Central Asia. He followed the Hanafi School of

jurisprudence. Consequently, he preached Islam according to the Hanafi juridical affiliation. His successor, Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, a Sufi preacher, even though belonging to the Shafi School, transcended scholastic controversies and respected the rooted Hanafi school (Mustaq Ahmad Wani, 1999).

During the Mughal Empire, the dispensation of justice was done under the influential Fiqh-i-Hanafi in Kashmir. The jurist who founded the Hanafi School of jurisprudence had Persian origins, his school started in Iraq, but spread to Central Asia.

The most important saint in Kashmir is the founder of the Rishi Sufi order Shaik Nur Al -Din Noorani. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Kashmiri Sufis had an enormous influence especially the Sufi poets influenced by Persian poetry (like Jalal al-Din Rumi, as an example). Islam in Kashmir and consequently Tibetan Muslims were deeply influenced by central Asian and Persian scholars at large.

Tibetan Muslims were originally influenced by Sufi traditions and when they travelled to India for business, they visited the dargahs, graves of saints like the very well-known tombs of Hazrat Makhdoom Shah, Baba Rishi, and Amir Syed Ali Hamadani. Thus, the link with Kashmiri traditions was alive in Tibet, where you could also find dargah, such as Pir Paraola, where the believers visited to request favors. According Mushtaq Ahmad Wani

dissertation (1999) the islamisation of Kashmir was carried out by central Asian Sufis.

*“While surveying the development of Islamic sciences in Kashmir, it can readily be understood that the islamisation of Kashmir has been initiated and carried out by Central Asian Sufis and scholars. Bulbul Shah and Shah Hamadan have played pioneering role in this regard. Subsequently, hundreds of Central Asian Sufis have carried out the task of teaching and preaching the fundamentals of Islam to the people of Kashmir. While Sufis belonging to various orders have come from Central Asia, a local order 299 known as Rishi order also played a significant role in the process of islamisation of Kashmir. Thus, the impact of Sufism on Kashmir has been the most profound. Shah Ramadan's writings« hagiographical literature from Central Asia and Persian Sufi-poetry have largely determined the values and beliefs of Kashmiri Muslims as well as their approach to and understanding of the Islamic discourse. Subsequent work done on Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh and Tasawwuf has also been largely inspired by scholars from Central Asia and West Asia, wherefrom, the original collections and compilations on Islamic sciences did reach Kashmir.” (Wani, 1999).*

The majority of Muslims in Tibet came from Kashmir, which influenced the religious culture of the Tibetan Muslims. For example, they employed Kashmiri names for the prayers. Even though *haj* is a very important Islamic duty, it was very complicated for the members of this community to complete the *haj* to Mecca. Sailing across the Indian Ocean was not an easy venture. The journey was costly, and they suffered from dehydration. Yussuf Naik admits that many travelers were not able to finish their pilgrimage in the harsh climate between Tibet and Mecca. However, the Addul Ghani, the father of Yussuf Naik, was lucky enough to accomplish Hajj two times. Yussuf emphasizes how precious this was for the head of the community to meet other Muslims scholars from India and to be in contact with the rest of the Muslim World (Naik, 2012, p.59).

It's quite remarkable to focus on the isolated dimension of the Kashmiri Diaspora in Tibet. Only the heads of the *punch* committee (a group of 5 leaders) and the richest heads of families could afford the very expensive pilgrimage to Mecca, which Haj Abdul Ghani accomplished two times. This speaks to Haj Ghani's prominent role among the Kashmiri Diaspora, which in turn, explains why he was jailed by the Chinese authorities after the invasion of Tibet. He was asked to cooperate with the Chinese government, but Haj Abdul Ghani remained loyal to the Dalai Lama. And thus, the Chinese policy to use Tibetan Muslims against the Tibetan government failed. In the spirit of his father's legacy,

Yussuf Naik followed the Dalai Lama in exile and took diasporic responsibilities among the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGE) in Dharamsala, India.

The Chinese were also willing to keep the Tibetan Muslims inside the country for economic reasons. Zaffar Naik analyzes: *“The reason is not to hold someone as a political or criminal or so-called political ground. They wanted them to stay back because they needed native to circulate the economy.”* (Zaffar Naik, 2018).

One of the consequences of this isolation is the importance of crossbreeding between Tibetan women and the “Tibetization” of this male migration. In a few centuries, the physical and cultural acculturation became more and more effective. The interview with Zaffar Naik highlights this extremely interesting mixity and hybrid dimension. He reveals further:

*“In a certain way, you have generations and generations staying in Tibet. They have a different name, they have a different faith, they look like Tibetans, they speak like Tibetans, and they eat like Tibetans .... The Chinese. They knew that the Tibetans Muslims were, from on an economic perspective, they were the ones who were doing well trading etc... so that is one element it's often talk about. It's not about the fact that they wanted them to hold them up. They saw that. That's one thing.”* (Zaffar Naik, 2018).

Thus, the Kashmiri men became known as “Tibetan Muslims”. It was a long process of crossbreeding and hybridity from the origins in Tibet. Let’s go back to Zaffar words to understand this historical evolution of this male migration to Tibet.

*“We may have a different history, in some ways, almost for thousands of years, but that overlap of almost thousands of years, is not one brush! People coming from the Middle East of Kashmir, they are a lot of other things happening in between. If you look on Tibetans Muslims you might feel a little bit Tibetans by features, but I have a couple of uncles who look very much like Kashmiris again.” (Zaffar Naik, 2018).*

The history of this combination of different lineages created a new group of people who cannot be considered as Kashmiri immigrants at the time of Chinese invasion in 1959. At the time, they created new roots in Tibet. The genealogy of this cosmopolitan group stresses the long process of an original human coalescence and congruency. The gradual spectrum of differences was amalgamated into a new “rhizomatic” branch. The rhizome model presented in my introduction serves as a structural approach to the notion of hybridity with multiple roots spread in different directions with no top-down hierarchy. Brigitta Frelo clarifies this phenomenon:

*“The concept of (cultural) hybridity has gained prominence within a broad range of cultural and social theories since the 1980s, most notably within postcolonial studies, cultural studies,*



*and globalization theory. The importance and influence of hybridity theory is thus closely related to an increased awareness of global cultural flows, influences, and interdependences, both historically and contemporarily. Furthermore, focusing on hybridity and hybridization is a way of conceptualizing difference that aims to avoid and undermine ideas of boundedness and closed identity and hence also avoid the essentialism that haunts theories of multiculturalism for instance.” (Brigitta Frelø, 2012).*

This theory is not limited to contemporary observations on a globalized world that started in the 1980s. Rather, hybridity is as ancient as the origins of mankind. We can observe deep-seated acculturation in the Tibetan Kashmiri’s migration to Tibet. Most Muslims (Kashmiris, but also Ladakis, Nepalis, and Chinese Muslims) came to Tibet during the seventeenth century.

The migrants that came during the seventeenth century are no more the same people in 1959 in the twentieth century. Yussuf Naik specifies:

*“Tibetan Muslims take extraordinary pride in their Tibetan heritage and contributions to Tibetan culture: in the way of cuisine, elegant conversation. Quite a few of their educated young men worked in the Tibetan government in exile and some still do. There was also a small community of Chinese Muslims (Hui) who had their own mosque, and who ran the butcher*

*shops. Not only is there no record of persecution of Muslims in Tibetan history, but even in few accounts by Muslim scholars nothing of the kind is even hinted at.” (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 65).*

Yussuf Naik’s memories alleged that not all Muslims from different communities massively married and merged with each other. There were community frontiers and Chinese Muslims would rarely marry Muslims of Kashmiri origins. More important, the Kashmiri merchants married ex-Buddhist Tibetan women who converted to Islam. (Broomhall, 1910). There was a preference to rather marry Tibetan than Chinese women. Hybridity is marked by its limits and no source indicates that all Muslims in Tibet became one group. Religion was not an indicator of total fusion. “Muslim amalgamation” never existed in Tibet. Cultural bonds and frontiers were complex and remained very strong among different cultural communities. The rules of marriages should be explored anthropologically to understand the limits of crossbreeding. Pragmatically, observations suggest that boundaries were never fixed, but the result of constant negotiations. The concept of ambiguous limits and ambivalence, such as that explored by Homi Bahbha (1994), remain useful for analyzing the historical process of hybridization. Tibetan Muslim identities, like other identities shaped by histories of migration, are thus products of constant transformation.

Homi Bhabha uses concepts such as mimicry, interstice, hybridity, and liminality to argue that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent. This is particularly true when the influences of diverse cultures are connected through conflicting dynamics. Cultural circulation does not lend itself to clearly defined borrowing, but rather, is a historical production of influences blurring in times opposed or running contrary to this fusion. In my view, the interstice concept clarifies the intermingling of Kashmiri Muslims with Buddhist culture with notions of Tibetanness.

### **The contributions of Kashmiris to Tibetan culture**

The *Kache* came to adopt local Tibetans customs and contributed in relevant ways to the Tibetan culture. Important contributions were bringing herbal medical treatments, Persian medieval architecture, and special Kashmiri cuisine. Food was prepared according to *halal* rules and thus you could find many *Gya Kache* restaurants before the Chinese invasion. Tibetan Muslims also spoke a very distinguished Tibetan language, needed for their business. One of the more prominent sites of cultural influence was music. They brought the Nang-Ma operas from Kashmir.

The *Nangma* genre has its origins in Persia. The word *Nangma* derives from the Persian word *Naghma*, meaning melody and came to Tibet through the Tibetan trade links with Kashmir, Persia, and Turkistan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many composers and performers came from the Tibetan Muslim minority in Lhasa. The sarangi Maestro Muheuddin, the flutist Mohammed Iqbal, and the flute player Izzat Bibi were famous and played during special occasions for nobles and aristocrats in Tibet.

*“They were given nicknames Mandi-la, Bai Iqbal and Acha Azza, and these were the names by which they were known among upper-class Tibetan society. One of their most popular acts was the musical, “Shashi Blo”, which staged by Muslims actors. In time, Buddhist actors learned these instruments, but its origins remain the Islamic cultural tradition.”* (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 74).

According to Yussuf Naik, the most important cultural heritage was in poetry. A very famous compilation of proverbs, called *Kache Phalu’s Namthar*, was translated by the Tibetan Library. This book was written by Fayez Ullah, a scholar, during the nineteenth century. The opus was a Tibetan translation of three Persian poems, called Gulestan, Bostan, and Pantanama. These texts were didactic tools for teaching Urdu to children. The poetic style progressively turned to be very popular in Tibet.

An open dispute emerged when Tibetan Lamas claimed that the book was originally written by a lama. However, Panchen Lama determined that the book was written by a Muslim author in 1981 (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 75).

The publication outlines the virtuous behavior one should have and reveals the shared traditions between Buddhism and Islam. A dual religious culture necessitates sharing norms concerning what is a good or a bad behavior for the two religions for both Muslims and Buddhists children.

*“Composed in central Tibet in the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is a collection of advice both spiritual and practical. The identity of its author is unknown, though it is a matter of much speculation. The tone is a unique blend of formal and literary language, rich with colloquial idioms.”* (Bommarito, 2016, p.61).

The dispute concerning the origins of this book highlights the conflictual dimension of cultural borrowings. It was a challenge to certificate and convince that the author of the artwork was a Muslim, because this compilation had enormous impact on Buddhist children’s education. As a result, the lamas tried to appropriate the book. It became a Muslim/Buddhist issue during the nineteenth century and the intervention of the second highest religious authority, the Panchen Lama, in the late eighties, had the final word in clarifying the Muslim author. Even though, as most

authors narrate, Tibetan Muslims and their Buddhist neighbors lived in peace, social harmony, and respectful cohabitation, issues emerged on occasion. In any case culture, is always the fruit of rivalry. Even inside a full Buddhist tradition, schools, and monasteries were also competing for getting the best educational positions. As a key educational tool, the issue of the book would be a very interesting object for further research.

From a theoretical perspective, the book could be seen at the interstice of a Buddhist and Muslim religious culture, because the ethics were at the crossroad of common beliefs regarding manners and social behaviors. This demonstrates that there was a degree of agreement based on morals among the two faith traditions. Being polite, honest, and respectful to elders was at the heart of these ethical norms in both religions.

There is an English version of the book written by the well-known researcher Dawa Norbu, published in 1986 by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala. It is a translation of the Tibetan Cultural Printing Press edition entitled “Kha che pha lu’i nam thar” (1980).

*“There are several theories about the identity of the author, Khache Phalu. The word ‘kha che’ may refer to his Kashmiri origin. ‘Kha che yul’ was the Tibetan name of Kashmir, but at the same time it was commonly used as a synonym of Muslims in Tibet who had arrived from Kashmir or China. Most likely,*

*'Khache' refers to a Muslim who came from Kashmir. Nevertheless, the word 'kha che' of Persian origin ('khwaja', respectable man or rich merchant) can refer to a trader. According to interviews with Tibetan Muslims, the origin of the second name 'Phalu' can be a misspelled, strongly Tibetanized name of Fazur-alla, Faidhullah or Faizullah which they wrote down as 'pha lu 'ju' in the first chapter since Tibetan carvers often lacked the knowledge of the correct spelling of Muslim names. Dawa Norbu met one of the supposed relatives of Khache Phalu, who showed him an Arabic-Tibetan manuscript of his ancestor with a signature: Khache Phalug's Zui and Khache Phalu' Zui." (Szabo, 2006, p.3).*

It's interesting to read the analysis made by Kataryna Szabo and her observations related to the interstitial spaces between the two religions (Buddhism and Islam).

According to Szabo, *Khache Phalu's* work was written in a playful folk style. The author gives advice about living a virtuous, modest life by following the Buddha's teachings and, at the same time, embracing the monotheism of Islam.

*"The poems describe a balanced life where Buddhism and Islam are equally represented. For the reader, it seems obvious that the author was a Muslim who was deeply interested in Buddhism and Tibetan culture. Khache Phalu refers to Tibetan customs, herbs, and literature in perfect harmony with the*

*Muslim diet, praying, burial customs, etc. Except for the first chapter, all contain verses of 9-syllable lines. The comprises 12 chapters of various length: Introduction, where the author emphasizes the Buddhist origin of the book. The importance of religion and religious practice. The Buddhist notions of impermanence, body, and mind; the significance of the Buddhist Dharma. Ethical rules, modesty; observance of laws. Satisfaction with one's current living conditions; harmful desires. Advice on right speech. Advice on right action. The necessity of moderation. Advice on right diet. The significance of the education and literacy of children. Advice on child rearing. Gratitude and respect for parents. The Impact of Islam on Khache Phalu's work There is strong evidence that the author was a Muslim. Khache Phalu mentions God as Allah several times in his work: he uses Godhar (in Tib. go brda) as one of the numerous names of Allah. 'The most precious One' or 'the Only one' refer to Islamic monotheism: "To go from such a place to an even better one, I prostrate before the Chief of all chiefs! In Tibetan He is "the most Precious One". English translations of Khacha Phalu Rnam Thar by Dawa Norbu. And in our language "Godhar"!" Chapter 3 contains an interesting mix of Buddhism and Islam. It discusses reincarnation and Muslim burial rituals." (Szabo, 2006, p.6).*

Chapter 3 of *Khache Phalu* is particularly interesting and can be seen as an original syncretism. The impact of this spiritual



“interstice” is – in my hypothesis – very relevant and might explain why so many Tibetan refugees interviewed in India were convinced that Tibetan Muslims believed in Karma. Metempsychosis has to do with the religious belief of transmigration at death of the soul of a human being or animal into a new body of the same or a different species. Today (in 2019-2023) I have not met any Tibetan Muslim who believed in reincarnation. The renewal of the Islamic faith, of the Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir, through the teachings of the Tablighi movement (since the eighties) has definitively driving away such credence. In the past centuries (19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>) the Tibetan Muslims were very much connected to Sufism and were under Buddhist ascendancy for decades. The forced migration to Kashmir had numerous consequences on their religious practice and the desire of purification from Buddhist effect. This ancient spiritual mixity – during the period of *Kache Phalu* – had consequently changed and evolved toward a new form of religious identity closed to international and universal forms of Islamic traditions enlighten by the Tablighi.

**Fashion** is another interstitial space between the two communities, and even if Kashmiri was a marginal group, they had a high social standing in Tibet. When Father Huc visited Tibet in 1846, he noticed that all fashion shops in Lhasa were owned by *Kache*. They used to bring items from Calcutta and off-load wool in Kalimpong,

India. In Tibetan cities, and especially Lhasa, the *Kache* specialized in making traditional Tibetan clothes and hats. Yussuf Naik enumerates that the primary imported goods for “*trade were saffron, Indian silk and brocade from Kashmir, musk, gold dust and medical herbs from Tibet*”. (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 71).

Tibetan Muslims were also very famous jewelers, who specialized in ornaments based on imported pearls from China and India.

Father Huc reports that everything related to beauty was to be found in *Kache* shops, often kept by women. Yussuf Naik remembers special families famous for producing hats, some of them residing in Bhorangsha in the Bharkhor marketplace (heart of Lhasa). He specifies that the “*hats were appreciated by both genders*” and worn during special occasions such as marriages.

Some of the *Kache* pursued this profession after migrating to Kalimpong or in Kathmandu. And these decorated hats such as *Yangsha, Neysha, Paksha* were manufactured by Tibetan Muslims in Tibet.

Members of the Tibetan Muslim community were master tailors. One of the favorite hobbies of Muslims merchant families in Lhasa was to picnic (*lingka*). Yussuf Naik collecting his souvenirs mentions a very beautiful experience of these families picnicking under a tent. Dignity and wealth were obvious visual observations one could make from such situations. Tibetan Muslims also stayed

away from the city for three days, especially during special events such as marriages.

The cuisine was another interstitial space of cultural mixing. Tibetan Muslim restaurants were very much appreciated as cultural crossroads in Lhasa, especially for meat eaters. Consumption of meat was frowned upon in the Buddhist religious tradition. As a result, many special Kashmiri dishes were also prepared without meat to be appreciated by different sort of communities in Lhasa. The *Kache* also brought their special bread. My exchange with Zaffar Naik clarifies some of these foods.

*ZN- The Tibetan Muslims brought their culinary traditions. There is a couple of Tibetan breads, different Tibetan breads essentially from us.*

*FLH- Tsampa. Timommo?*

*ZN-No, Tsampa... is basic flour. This is another thing. We don't make it so much at home these days.*

*FLH-Timmomo?*

*ZN-It's a standard one... we brought in another one. It's called soofali and Sangafalee.*

*Sangha bhaley* is a favorite treat for Tibetans from Lhasa. *Sangha bhaley* means “one *srang* bread”. A *Sang* (*srang*) is a pre-1959 silver Tibetan coin. The name of this bread was coined from once sold for a *srang*.

Language could also be considered as interstitial space with many sources confirming the elegant version of Tibetan language spoken by the Kashmiri merchants. Father Huc emphasizes this in his book related to his travels in 1896. He recounts a discussion that he had with the “Muslim Governor”, who impressed Father Huc with manners and courtesy in contrast to other impolite interlocutors.

Yussuf Naik underscores that the community spoke a pure Tibetan Lhasa dialect. This Tibetan dialect remains perceived as distinguished in the Tibetan Diaspora in India.

*“It is considered an honor to speak in such form with special pronunciation that only the population within the four walls of Lhasa city does speak.”* (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 85).

The way of speaking was different from the Tibetan people of Amdo and elsewhere in the countryside. It was considered a sign of aristocracy to use this Tibetan Lhasa dialect. Just using this style of language shaped the treatment experienced as a social courtesy. Exchanges in this dialect were an art of “gentleman manners” when dealing with others for business. This offers insights into the interactions this community had with the rest of Tibetan society. The language was obviously a social sign of distinctiveness.

The way of putting things, diction, and phraseology reflects your social status – who you wish to resemble – and the choice of an elegant Lhasa dialect is far from being neutral. It was a social choice that conveys a message about one’s place in the society.

Phrasing and manners not only reflect society, but it also shapes it. A distinctive identity is expressed by one's speaking style. A delicate prestigious idiom is a marker of the position one wants to occupy in society. Just by using the *Kache* dialect was a technique to impose a social distance and ethics of business transactions. Rudeness and vulgarity were avoided, and respect was imposed through such exchanges.

*Kache* attitudes demonstrated that Tibetan Muslims did not constitute a dominated group at the margins of Lhasa. Rather, they formed self-conscious urban elite very cautious to occupy the social and geographical space, thus showing the dignity of their privileged status and major role in Tibet.

*Kache* adapted their names giving them a Tibetan sound and accent. Zaffar Naik points out:

*"A lot of Muslim names twisted to meet the Tibetan tone and the tongue. For example, my dad's name is... Gunam Muhammadin ... Muhammadin. Nobody could pronounce it, and everybody called him Mandela. My sister Maryam, they could not pronounce her name and was called Maryam-la."* (Zaffar, Naik, 2018).

Father Huc notices that backbiting and gossiping were common between *Kache* and the rest of mainstream society. In Tibet, during the past centuries people were showing their tongue at each other as a sign of respect. In front of the *Kache*, people would show their

tongue as a manifestation of regard but behind their back would criticize them. Most of the Tibetans demonstrated appreciation in public “*because they were rich*” (Huc, 1926, p. 153) but showed disregard in private or behind their back.

At the same time, social hypocrisy existed in Lhasa, like everywhere else in the world. Financial fortune led to ambiguous interactions oscillating between respect and jealousy. I would like to insist on the ambivalence because of daily social interactions (Goffman, 1959). Face-to-face intercommunications were often the fruit of ambiguous relations, especially when it concerned interactions between members of a majority and a minority.

Even though Yussuf Naik’s memories emphasize *excellent synergy* between the Muslim minority and Buddhist majority, in many points, I would suggest that these good associations were “normal” interactions with existing tensions that should not be minimized or exaggerated. For example, Ian Buruma assured that “Muslims were persecuted in the past by Tibetans who wanted a pure Tibet”. In his memories Yussuf denies such situations (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 65). It was very common to find *Kache* with Buddhists in their families. When marrying Tibetan women, Tibetan Muslims became bound with Buddhist families. Most of their commercial successes gave them access to mainstream Buddhist society in Lhasa. In fact, one Muslim owned the first cinema hall in Tibet and possessed

“extreme pride on their Tibetan heritage” (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 65).

The reality of everyday life, as stated by most of my sources, was marked by social harmony, which does not necessarily mean an idyllic situation. Education was a site of diverse views and experiences. This was observed in the discord regarding the influential book used for the education of children. There were two madrasas in Lhasa, Chhota Masjid and Aghon Masjid (small mosque and big mosque). In the first one, children learned how to read the Quran. In the second school, the second largest madrasa, children were taught the Quran, Urdu, and Tibetan script as well as mathematics.

To gain more cultural influence, the Chinese opened schools in 1950s and introduced a policy of scholarships. The main goal was to introduce Chinese language to encourage students to go to China for further studies (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 87). Most families preferred to send their children to India instead. The competition should be thought of as an India-China rivalry rather than a Buddhist-Muslim opposition. The Chinese ambitions to rule Tibet were clear since the nineteenth century, and education played a role in these ambitions.

*“Evidence that scholars, philosophers, historians, sociologists, and educators have attempted to relate the behavior of youth to the characteristics of culture is present from the earliest of*

writings. Plato sought to correlate the behaviors of the youth of his day with the failings of government and society. Crediting his teacher, Socrates, Plato postulated that where there was too much societal freedom, the educational environment suffered. The teacher came to fear his own pupils and, in the philosopher's words, "fawns upon them" (Plato, 562). Pupils held their teachers in low esteem and were inclined to "contend hotly with them in words and deeds" (Plato, 563-e). The father of Western philosophy indicated that societal norms, educational relationships, and the behaviors of the young were all linked." (Medway & Cafferty, 1992).

A link between positive results in K-12 schooling and success in adulthood has long been acknowledged. For example, although a cause-effect relationship has not been proven, there is a positive correlation between low educational levels and imprisonment (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). (Linda Cox Story, 2010, p. 12).

Tibetans Families resisted the Chinese cultural domination, and the *Kache* played a major role by importing Indian cultural influences along with sending their students to India, specifically in Deoband, Kolkota, and Islah. The *punch* committee before and during the Chinese occupation sent sixteen students to India. The choice of India was far from neutral; it was a political choice in accordance with the Tibetan government and the clear recognition of the Chinese threat. Currently, Tibetan education remains an important



issue for Tibetan society. To learn Tibetan properly, Tibetan children in China are sent to boarding schools in Dharamsala, India. The Dalai Lama's strategy was to maintain Tibetan identity alive through education. In one of my films, *Les sabots roses du Buddha*<sup>15</sup>, one student in the Tibetan school expresses this strategy by explaining that "education is the best tool to fight China." Education is thus interpreted as a cultural weapon to reduce Chinese impact on the society.

The Tibetan Muslim minority had an important role between the mainstream Tibetan power and China. Tibetan Muslims played a key political role in diminishing the Chinese influence and the Tibetan *punch* committee remained loyal to the Dalai Lama. As a result, members of this community were taken into custody. Yussuf Naik's father was a member of the *punch* committee. His father's story illustrates the role that the minority of Muslims played for Tibetan independence and security. Mentioning his genealogy, Yussuf expresses that:

*"Abdul Ghani was a Muslim whose ancestors had lived in Tibet for generations until 1959. Born in Lhasa he lived at the heart of the Muslim Tibetans area called Barkhor, the center of the marketplace. He did not go to university but went to elementary school where he learned Tibetan, Urdu and the Quran,*

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<sup>15</sup> The film is freely available at: [http://www.film-documentaire.fr/4DACTION/w\\_fiche\\_film/37100\\_1](http://www.film-documentaire.fr/4DACTION/w_fiche_film/37100_1); <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xd94rf>.

*fundamentals enabling him to trade. He was travelling to India for long journeys (one month or so) on horseback.*

*Abdul Ghani lived in Barkhor very closed to Jorkhang, were they rented a house attached to a shop. There he sold Tibetan styled pearls, rings, watches, earrings, fabric for clothes and so on (...) his wife used to sit in the shop and barter with clients. It was common for the women of the Tibetan Muslim community to mind the stores, while their husbands went on trading expeditions for commodities to other places in Tibet to India and elsewhere. He had a big family of 13 children.” (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 90).*

Yussuf father's, Addul Ghani, was rich enough to go to Mecca twice for the pilgrimage and when he came back from *haj*, he realized that his wife passed away during his absence.

In 1959, Muslim *punch* community leaders were imprisoned by the Chinese during winter. In spring the committee approached the Indian consulate for aid. As their ancestors were from Jammu and Kashmir, they sought permission to return to India. They hoped to facilitate the migration of the whole Tibetan Muslim Community to India. Knowing the Muslims wanted to leave Lhasa and escape to India, the Chinese authorities warned them that “*they would be shot if they were heard repeating any words indicating their desire to leave Lhasa*” (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 92).

With the support of Indian diplomacy, the Chinese Government finally allowed the members of the community to enter India. Yussuf Naik narrates: “Rather than living under Chinese occupation, they opted to move to India, claiming Indian citizenship on the basis of their Kashmiri ancestry” (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 94). The repatriation was organized by the Indian authorities and is appreciated by the informants as a “smooth” migration.

## Chapter 4

### Tibetan Muslims in India

**Abstract:** The fourth chapter studies the second migration to India and will narrate how the Tibetan Muslims were resettled to the land of their ancestors in Kashmir in 1960. I will question this migration; can it be considered as a planned-smooth displacement as it is confirmed by my sources? Underlining the major role of the Indian authorities in protecting the Tibetan Muslims community, we could appreciate it as a soft migration. Nevertheless, the socio-economic consequence of this displacement is far from being comfortable in Kashmir. The “semi-Tibetan Muslims refugees” face many challenges in their settlements. The chapter offers a synthetic view of this migration and the problems faced by the Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir.

**Keywords:** India, Kashmir, forced migration, smooth displacement, Kashmir, Srinagar, Refugee camps, identity crisis, legal status, access to property, education, limited assimilation, economic difficulties

The Tibetan Muslim migration to India was planned and well organized. Resettlement was characterized by my interviewees as a “soft” migration. A reception place was granted for them in India, and they were welcomed by the Indian authorities at the border. We

cannot consider this migration wave as a classical forced migration like the migrations in previous work, such as the migrations from Ethiopia to Sudan (Le Houérou, 2004) or the Sudanese migrations to Egypt (Le Houérou, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009) which took place at massive scales with unorganized waves. Small groups of 129 families were resettled in an organized fashion.

*Zaffar Naik (ZN) - When my grandfathers had to leave Tibet, it was a smooth migration with all the documented paperwork. We also had an Indian minister waiting at the border to ensure safety of our people.*

*FLH- Nehru ?*

*ZN- Yes, under Nehru's directions. He suggested two places for settlement. One was in Kashmir.*

*FLH- Nehru himself was at the border in Kashmir?*

*ZN- No, not himself. He suggested settlement areas. The other place chosen was either Bangalore or areas close to Bangalore. Bangalore, because he thought the weather conditions would be suitable for us.*

The migration was in essence a safe movement. The conditions of security were remained for Tibetan Muslims, and thus this displacement should not be considered a humanitarian crisis. The families left Tibet in batches, while five members of the *punch*

committee were arrested and kept in custody by Chinese authorities.

The Indian Minister Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda led a delegation to Kalimpong to organize resettlement in India. A list of the educated members of the community and the school-going children were compiled. This enabled the younger generation a seamless transition to continue their studies.

When they arrived in India, the families gathered in Kalimpong, while six members of the community were selected to visit the places in India to be resettled. It is very interesting here to consider the respectful way they were welcomed by the Indian government, which offered a group of migrants the choice of locations for establishing themselves and their families. Having in mind that Kashmir was their ancestral home and the location of their roots, most of the Tibetan decided to go to Kashmir. They choose to live in Srinagar and the Tibetan Government in exile assisted them in that purpose.

*“Today more than 1,200 live in Srinagar. While approximately 500 are living in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. A few families have settled in Nepal, Saudi Arabia (17 families) but could not adjust and only 3 or 5 families remained there.”* (Yussuf Naik, 2012).

Kalimpong and Darjeeling were chosen by 30 families, but the majority of Tibetan Muslims, 100 families, as mentioned above,

preferred Kashmir & Jammu. Now the total of these families is above 300 (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p. 107).

The repatriated Tibetan Muslims in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir settled in three batches by the government of India.

*“They were first accommodated in tents in summer and winter they were given shelter in an Exhibition stall. In 1962 & 63 the government constructed 3 double store building, namely A, B, C blocks, comprising 40 houses in each block with 3 toilets for men and 3 for females with just two water taps to manage with. The first batch comprising 135 persons including males and females reached Srinagar on 1/4/1961.”* (Yussuf Naik, 2012, p.107).

Yussuf Naik recalled that moment of resettlement vividly, as he traveled with the third group to the Old Delhi railway station. He remembered that he was told that they were welcomed warmly by the locals in Kashmir with food provided on their arrival and employment at a silk factory and transport office.

The Tibetan Muslim community was an educated minority that contributed to the CTA (Central Tibetan Administration) in Dharamsala. This was at a time when few Tibetan Buddhists were educated. Thus, Tibetan Muslims served in the CTA from 1961 to 2008. Yussuf Naik mentioned the names of nine Tibetan Muslims who contributed to the CTA in different departments. Yussuf Naik

counted these individuals as colleagues in his work, although many of these Tibetan Muslims have passed away by now.

This clear commitment offers insights into of Tibetan Muslims' Tibetanness and loyalty to the Tibetan authorities in exile. Exiled as Tibetans, the Tibetan Muslims contributed to the larger community of all Tibetans in exile in India. Their role should not be obscured or forgotten.

A group of Indian citizens were granted asylum as Indian Tibetans taking refuge in India, even though their status was not that of a legal refugee. An exiled identity is not limited to a juridical status, but broadly also a cultural and social identity. Tibetan Muslims in India were thus an exiled community with a different culture than the local Kashmiri culture and still live with signs of cultural distinction. From this perspective, the political dimension remains minor considering the larger vision of what is an identity in exile.

### **Tibetan Muslims organization in Kashmiri's settlements in India**

In Kashmir the Tibetan community is scattered in Hawal, Eidgah and Gulshan Colony of Makdoom Sahib. As soon as they reached Kashmir in the sixties, the Tibetan Muslim community formed a committee named the "Tibetan Muslim Welfare Association". The



task was to obtain land and to build funds for housing at first. Subsequently, the advocacy would shift to gaining Indian citizenship, organizing schooling for children, and in seeking job opportunities for adults. The first job occupied by the community was selling Kashmiri hats and wool sweaters in the markets. In 1969 and seventies, Usman Goona set up an embroidery shop. It was a successful venture, and the office of the Dalai Lama granted them a loan of 30,000 rupees. The Dalai Lama visited the Eidgah colony in mid-1970 for the first time. A plan to grant land was set up during that visit with the aim to construct individual houses. He took the financial arrangements with the help of Saudi Arabia, which granted the funds for the construction of 144 houses in the colony.

The Indian government wanted to resettle the community in villages like other agricultural settlements. However, discussions with the Dalai Lama argued that the Muslim community in Tibet was one of businessmen, who had no experience in the agricultural work. Thus, their request was to be resettled in a city as they were essentially an urban community. In this context with the voice of the dalai lama, this community succeeded to be heard by the Indian authorities, and was granted a place in Srinagar in *Hawal, Eidgah*

*and Gulshan colonies*<sup>16</sup>, the three main settlements, with schools, houses, clinic, and mosques.

A primary school was started in a rented building facilitated by donations in 1975. The welfare association owned eight offices looking after the affairs of the community with the assistance of the Tibetan Youth Association, which plays an important role in constant contact with the Tibetan Youth Congress. The department of Health in Dharamsala also built a clinic.

The total population of Tibetan Muslims in India is approximately between 2,000 and 3,000 souls with the largest population living in Srinagar (Kashmir) with almost 1,200 people and 210 families today. It is said that 3,000 Tibetan Muslims still reside in Tibet ([www.everymuslim.net](http://www.everymuslim.net)).

The community in Srinagar inspired a few academic studies by scholars, like Afdar Shah, (2012) who examined the change and continuities of the Tibetan Muslim minority in Kashmir and followed by another student Alexander Gaute (2015). Of particular interest were their socio-economic challenges and the social transformation after four decades of resettlement in Hawal. Shah assumes:

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<sup>16</sup> The location of Hawal can be found here: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Hawal,+Srinagar/@34.1088585,74.8030366,16z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x38e1856a58bc55ab:0x40a0caa233d6c1c0!8m2!3d34.1090671!4d74.8075766>.

*“The social transformation which this community has undergone is somewhat different as compared to those which are residing elsewhere. Their pattern of change is in that sense a unique phenomenon. This paper is an endeavor to explore this less known Muslim Tibetan refugee community and to discuss their sociological profile to see the level of pattern change, adaptation and conformity with the local culture, socio-economic change, and development, etc.”* (Shah, 2012, p. 1).

In 2012, the community was engaged in the textile business. As Yussuf Naik mentioned, numerous Tibetan Muslims made handbags for garment businesses or were shopkeepers. The unavailability of land pushed the community to develop trade as their main occupation. They remained attached to their mother tongue and spoke Tibetan even though they are very often fluent in Urdu. The Farsi that they spoke seems to be declining with subsequent generations.

In Darjeeling, after interviewing Kashmiri merchants downtown, my own research led to this statement: Tibetan Muslims were culturally Tibetans, religiously Muslims and nationally Indian (Le Houérou, 2019, pp. 130-131). In Darjeeling, there are around five hundred Tibetan Muslims and around forty families. Most of them are hotel and restaurant owners. Their activities are comparable to those living in Delhi, Dharamsala, Dehradun, Shillong, Gangtok or Rishikesh. Whenever there is a place for business, one would find a

Tibetan shop in India. In Darjeeling, Tibetan Muslims remain active traders, as mentioned by Mr. Rashid in an interview in 2017 (Darjeeling 8<sup>th</sup> April 2017). This interlocutor portrayed the Tibetans as “*kind, courageous, and hard workers*”, regardless of whether they were Muslims or Buddhists. He affirmed “*They were beggars when they first came to Darjeeling in the sixties. In 2017 you could not find one beggar*” (Mr. Rashid, 8/04/2017). He insisted on the entrepreneurial skills of the Tibetans, despite challenges, such as harsh climates and unforgiving terrain. My conclusion of the community in Darjeeling is far from what Afdar Shah observed in Kashmir in Srinagar. My observations in Darjeeling are corroborated by Amal Roy who conducted academic research in 2001 and noted that:

*“Economy of the Darjeeling and Sikkim region has been changed a lot for last fifty years. With the march of time Tibetan refugees have also been changing in the region. In the early times when they started their journey as refugee the first-generation Tibetans did not have much work experience according to the occupation over here at the region. In traditional Tibet the main occupations were farming, pastoralism, animal husbandry and trade and barter. Agriculture and animal husbandry were the stable economy of the Tibetans and 90% of the population depended on these two sectors (Saklani 1984, p.193). But where Tibetan refugees got their settlement in the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalaya no such*

*scope was there for farming as because of land crisis or the amount of land they got from the Indian government. For earning they had to engage themselves as labor or in the jobs that were available. Gradually the picture started to change when they began small business, making handicrafts at home and then selling, established hotels and restaurant at the local areas. Most of the people were uneducated or little educated as the traditional Tibetan education system. But their knowledge was not suitable or effective over here. The Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalaya is famous for tourism and each year huge number of visitors travelled the region. Tibetan refugees got the scope and concentrated to business that was very common in traditional Tibet. Darjeeling and Sikkim region gives the Tibetan refugees a big scope to be settled as a satisfied income group. In a study at Kalimpong town on Tibetan refugees Amal Roy in 2001 I observed that the Tibetan refugees were engaged in all spheres of economic sectors. Educated persons having a graduation and master's degrees involved in teaching profession, in business, tailors, handicrafts shop, service sectors both in government and private sector and the other jobs like physical and mountaineering trainer, restaurant, grocery keeper. The most significant picture is the role of Tibetan women in business especially in selling of sweaters in different parts of the country in winter season. This was started in the early face of their settlement when Tibetan women started*

*selling home-made woolen sweaters at local market. In case of second, third and fourth generation Tibetans over the Darjeeling and Sikkim region having education they prefer both government and private sectors job. Women are busy with restaurant, handicrafts, shop keeping.” (Roy, 2001).*

The reason advanced by Afdar Shah at Kashmir University relates to the residential problems born from the fact that they cannot own land or a house. Being obliged to rent a house or business is interpreted as an obstacle with many consequences for Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir. Shah observations are corroborated by the paper published in 2019 by Suheel Rasool Mir, Shameem Ahmad Ganayee and Towseef Ahmad Wani “The Tibetan Diaspora in Kashmir-The ignored Underbelly” in *Migration and Diasporas: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. The authors stress the paradox of a diaspora entitled to vote but who do not live with a permanent resident certificate (Suheel, Shameen, Towseef, 2019, p. 150). The study reveals a marginalization of semi-refugees Muslims Tibetans excluded from the mainstream society. The absence of permanent resident certificate hampers their economic growth and education opportunities. (p.151). This statement is cross-checked by four different university sources.

In other places, Tibetan refugees possess their own properties or refugee camps. The distinction between property ownership could

be a direction for future research on migrant's integration to the host country economy.

Places, such as Dharamsala, the residence of the Dalai Lama, have become a site for a wide range of visitors. These tourists hail from around the world and must be both hosted and fed. Accommodations for tourists provide the refugee community with a compelling business opportunity. In Majnu Ka Tilla, the area where the Tibetan refugees were resettled by the Indian government became famous for its satisfactory accommodations and honest prices. The reputation of Majnu Ka Tilla, as a very welcoming place for foreigners and businessmen, with incomparable prices, also played a role in its economic wealth. Further research is needed in the economics of these industries to better understand flows of investments in refugee communities. In Delhi, for example, Tibetan refugees resettled in America or Australia; do invest in India particularly in Majnu Ka Tilla. They transform and modernize their old refugee houses into modern hotels and invest important foreign currencies to rebuild and to renovate old houses of the colony. Alternatively, the small, humble houses are being leveled to construct residential and commercial towers.

As noted above, the land offered by the Indian government in the 1960s cannot be extended and is limited by clear frontiers that the refugees cannot exceed. These urban limits in Majnu Ka Tilla were

observed and analyzed in the book mentioned *Behind the Bridge* (Le Houérou, 2019). The iron bridge is an ethnic frontier separating the colony from the rest of the city. In Delhi, like in Srinagar, the families expanded and became more important and the solution available for the refugees was to destroy the old houses to build higher buildings.

It was also an opportunity for business and real-estate investments in the colony. The rental prices have consistently risen in the limited area of the colony in Delhi. Thus, Majnu Ka Tilla became a very active competing business place. In that case the role of the Tibetan immigrants in the west played a major role.

Indeed, the main problems faced by the community include home and land, according to Shah. They kept small portion of land since their installation in the three locations: Badamwari, Eidgah, and Gulshan Mohalla settlements of Srinagar. The two-hundred and twenty families are accommodated in poor, narrow plots with dwellings that do not permit expansion for better sanitary standards. Thus, the community is hindered by cramped, crowded living conditions that inhibit their wellbeing. Shah's field observations are as follows:

*“They hardly have a courtyard or parks in front. Even there are no fire gaps between these small houses. Also, these houses are too small to provide adequate accommodation to the families. Proper sanitation care is also not provided by the Municipal*



*authorities and drains, and lanes are hardly mend and constructed when damaged. Drains, lanes and streets are in a dilapidated condition.”*

More importantly, even after being in Kashmir for seven decades, since 1960, they do not receive a domicile certificate, despite being subjects of the state. The precarious residency status presents barriers and obstacles for the assimilation process. This explains the low degree of economic integration of the community in Srinagar, as is evidenced by the high levels of unemployment among the youth and lack of access to higher education. The inability to obtain this legal certificate makes it next to impossible to obtain different job opportunities.

“They are devoid of a permanent “rashan card”, which is a serious problem of the community and has not been addressed so far.” (Shah, 2012). The unwillingness to address this issue by the local authorities means that the community remains in a state of precarity, because they cannot be employed in the public sector. The absence of state subject certificates had become a hindrance to rights. Members of the community feel alienated on all grounds and have failed to adjust themselves in prevailing chaotic atmosphere.

Bijli accounts that they prefer to be called Kashmiri Tibetans and Shah considers that this labelling is creating troubles in the first place, since they cannot figure out if they are Kashmiri or Tibetans

(Gaute, 2015, 7). Shah traces the identity crisis to their feeling of discrimination by the state government, something that hinders their seizure of the Kashmiri identity. Gaute studying the same community in Srinagar develops an interpretation more connected to our theory of Rhizome. In his view religion propose a key resilient force as he stresses that religions are dynamic and not static (*op. cit.* p.7). Like identities in the migration process the faith and the rituals have largely changed from their installation in Srinagar to our days.

After living in Kashmir for more than sixty years, the state government refuses to grant Tibetan Muslims permanent resident certificates. As Afsnat Bhat explained, “*we do not enjoy the same rights as those of the natives of Jammu and Kashmir*” (Bhat interviewed in 2013 By Afsnat Bhat for the Global Press Institute<sup>17</sup>). Refugees and descendants cannot acquire their own property, renting is the only available choice. Once the number of family numbers increases, space within the allotted flat shrinks. Despite the premium on space, all members of the family live together in an accommodation provided by the government. They cannot attend state universities, but only apply for private universities or leave Kashmir to attend Indian universities which do

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<sup>17</sup> Kashmir excludes descendants of Tibetan refugees from education, employment, Global Press Institute, 4th June 2013. Web ref: [https://www.upi.comTop\\_News/WORLD-NEWS/2013/06/04/Kashmir-excludes-descendants-of-Tibetan-refugees-from-education-employment/6101370370376637/](https://www.upi.comTop_News/WORLD-NEWS/2013/06/04/Kashmir-excludes-descendants-of-Tibetan-refugees-from-education-employment/6101370370376637/). Consulted on the 13th August 2018.

not require applicants to be citizens<sup>18</sup>. Afdar Shah observes an emerging identity crisis among the young generation that I have also noted in Darjeeling during fieldwork in 2017.

Gaute's observations and interviews highlight the fact that coming to Srinagar the Tibetan Muslims discovered that they were not "pure" Muslims and that their practices were stained by *Bidda* practices (innovation) and realized that their imams in Tibet were ignorant. (Gaute, 2015, p 41). One testimony interviewed by Gaute expresses it clearly

*"When we were in Tibet, we were not knowing about Islam completely, we did not have good Imams over there. We had Imam's but their knowledge was limited. They did not know that much (...) when we came in here in Kashmir, we became more Islamic, we tried to be more Islamic because we got a lot of knowledge."* (Gaute, 2015, p.41).

The Tibetan Muslims were re-islamized in India by the well-known school Tablighi Jamaat who changed their relation to the religion. Especially on the ground of authorized or non-authorized behavior.

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<sup>18</sup> Web ref: [https://www.upi.comTop\\_News/WORLD-NEWS/2013/06/04/Kashmir-excludes-descendants-of-Tibetan-refugees-from-education-employment/6101370370376637/](https://www.upi.comTop_News/WORLD-NEWS/2013/06/04/Kashmir-excludes-descendants-of-Tibetan-refugees-from-education-employment/6101370370376637/). Consulted on the 13th August 2018.

Notions of *hallal* and *haram* are thus key notions that have changed the perception of the religious sphere in the community of Srinagar.

*halal* is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permitted. In reference to food, it is the dietary standard, as prescribed in the Qur'an (the Muslim scripture). The opposite of *halal* is *haram*, which means unlawful or prohibited. *halal* and *haram* are universal terms that apply to all facets of life. These terms are commonly used in relation to food products, meat products, cosmetics, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, food ingredients, and food contact materials. While many things are clearly *halal* or *haram*, questionable items are identified as *mashbooh* which means doubtful.

The Tablighi has reframed their relation to their faith to a certain point, for example the Tibetan Muslims Women were rarely veiled in Tibet (only rich women used to wear a scarf or mantilla) nor were they all veiled when they arrived in Srinagar in the sixties. The new teachings from the Tablighi changed this cultural behavior and in 2019 most of the Muslim Tibetan women are covered.

Unless the *Kache Yul* ancestors in Tibet, they do not worship the saints anymore. Tibetan Muslims in Tibet were highly impacted by Sufi Kashmiri traditions as it is well documented by Gaboriau. According to this scholar they kept their veneration for the popular Kashmiri saints such as Sayyid Ali Hamdani and Makhdoom Kashmiri (Today in Srinagar, the shrine of Makhdoom Kashmiri is

situated only one kilometer from the Hijra Masjid and the center of the Tibetan Colony or Maulvi Munshi Bashir Ahmed, Peer Puruala and Hazrat Shah Khair-ud. In Darjeeling a Kashmir merchant that I interviewed affirmed that the Kashmiris (in Darjeeling) demonstrated more interest in Sufi traditions than the Tibetan Muslims who refrained any devotion to saints. An attitude coherent with the Tablighi vision of Islam and their allergy to “intermediaries” between God and Humans. In the Tablighi vision, Saints are viewed as a frontier between God and humans and thus as a pollution. In their view, God should be directly in contact with humans with no need for intermediaries. Intermediaries (Saints) are thus amalgamated to separatists.

*“Nevertheless, the movement (Tablighi) soon took great hold in the community and has been mentioned by all the interviewees as important to the formation of Islam in the Tibetan Muslim community.” (Gaute, 2015, p 50).*

The Tablighi influence is connected to the migrating experience of the community: *“that travelling religions as missionary movements directed toward the existing religious community, trying to convert people within an existing faith to ‘bring them back’ to proper religious practice. Nadwi recognizes that the Tablighi movement most definitely has had a big impact on the community, describing them as loud and clear and missionary, almost aggressively missionary in their approach. Nadwi further describes the Hijra*

*Masjid as very Tablighi in its approach, owing most probably to Imam Sahab who is especially learned in the teachings of the movement.”*

Gaute highlights that the most interesting fact about the coming of the Tablighi movement and the change in religious practice by the Tibetans, is that this change did not take place because of interaction with the Kashmiri society. Rather, it was brought into the community and affected it through networks of global and transnational character (Gaute, 2015, p51). The Tibetan Muslims adopted new methods of practicing their religion when they came into diaspora; however, it was not the community to which they came that affected them. Instead, the new networks that they built with Muslims on a transnational level were the force that would change their understanding and practice of Islam (Gaute, 2015, p 51).

Let's remember who The Tablighi Jamaat (Society for Spreading Faith) is. It's a Sunni Islamic missionary movement, founded in 1927, that urges Muslims to return to a pure form of Sunni Islam and be religiously observant, especially with respect to dressing, personal behavior, and rituals. The founder, Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi, completed his education at a Deoband *madrassa*, and while working among the people of Mewat, often questioned how Islam could be renewed.

As far as I have appreciated the religious dimension of the diaspora in Darjeeling, I would interpret their choice to change their practice and move from a traditional Sufi practice to a Tablighi vision of a “purified Islam” renouncing to any adoration to Saints because of their migration. In my view the new religious changes play as a resilient force due to their situation and identity crisis. Not being completely Tibetan or full Kashmir pushed the community to reinvent their religious identity.

## **Culturally Tibetans**

Members of the Tibetan Muslim community still speak the Tibetan language amongst them. The continued use of Tibetan language reveals, after sixty years of presence in Kashmir, the profound attachment to the Tibetan identity and culture. Afdar Shah interprets this connection as follows:

*“Despite the long Kashmiri cultural encounter, Tibetans passionately feel that they are different in every way, culturally, linguistically, racially, and even temperamentally from the native Kashmiris. Though they claim Kashmiri ancestry and origin and in the local context they have proved it by many evidences like resembling of names which are Kashmiri type, castes which are again Kashmiri type like Bhat, Ganie, Wani,*

*Shah etc, some prior relations in Srinagar and the Govt. white paper which contains 129 names of the Tibetan families...Tibetans have a strong sense of their national identity and retain their cultural identity despite living in an alien environment and even after the settlement of more than 40 years in Kashmir, they still love to speak Tibetan with one another, have Tibetan furnishing at homes, Tibetan dress pattern occupational by new changes, and still retain Tibetan material culture like pictures, utensils, vessels, crockery, bedding, food habits etc.Young Tibetans are fed up with the word refugee. They never like to be called refugees whether in India.” (Shah, 2012).*

This question of Tibetan or Kashmiri identities is a persistent consideration for Tibetan Muslims. Their attachment to Tibetan cultural practices, food, marriages, and use of language could be seen as obstructions to an assimilative process. However, this interpretation fails to consider that cultures are more cumulative and iterative than replaced by new practices. Anthropologists refer to this as layers of cultural identities. The fact that they physically “look” Tibetan more than Kashmiri give Tibetan Muslims a sense of distinctiveness. Afdar Shah asserts that the response of Kashmiri people to the Muslim Tibetan migration is varied:

*“Local native Kashmiri response to the Tibetan settlement is a mixed bag, while most of the locals speak good about them, a*



*proportion of the populace is not happy of their settlement in Srinagar. People are negating their Kashmiri origin. However native youths are in favor and say that Tibetans are highly polite, hospitable, sociable, and more religious in their approach.” (Shah, 2012).*

Local critics challenge the Kashmiri origins of Tibetan Muslims. In the past, this in part contributed to marrying within the community. However, this pattern is changing, as more Tibetans Muslims tended to marry outside their group in more recent years. Illiteracy among women in the community has grown as an issue among the Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir, which prompted a sense of discrimination. The most significant issues across the community are housing, education, employment at a very low level. Shah stresses:

*“Elder women and elder men are poor and are not provided with old age pensions, funds, and other facilities which other elderly are enjoying in the state. The Tibetan community is not able to avail different schemes and provisions of government meant for people. They have a strong feeling of being discriminated on many grounds by the state government.” (Shah, 2012).*

Most Tibetan Muslims hold on to the hope of returning to Tibet one day. This dream remains an active connection among the community in Srinagar, although it is indicative of a lack of

assimilation to Kashmir. With the dream to return to Tibet, Tibetan Muslims emphasize that Tibet remains the “*mother land*” like Buddhist Tibetans. Tibetan Buddhists and Muslims share similar nostalgia for a lost country occupied by China, a common sentiment among virtually all Tibetan Diaspora. This is a similar sentiment held by the Tibetan community in Darjeeling. The Tibetan Hotel of Darjeeling is next to the Tibetan Muslim Mosque. Giant posters of Lhasa picturing the Potala palace greet visitors upon entry in much the same way as other Tibetan hotels owned by the Diaspora in India. The iconic Potala is a symbol of Tibetan nationhood and liberty in much the same way that a flag represents a nation state.

From this perspective, Tibetan Muslims do not differ from the other Buddhist refugee communities in India. The main distinction is to be found of the poor level of economic integration of the Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir economy. Afder Shah detected the unlikely potential for a return migration to Tibet and the potential alienation of their presence in Kashmir:

*“Most of Tibetan Muslims want to return to their homeland along with their Buddhist Tibetan brothers and few of them are slowly migrating to Nepal and other regions from Kashmir and many of them are even now getting married to local Kashmiri girls, and tying wed knots in Ladakh, to avail state benefits, which they were deprived of till the recent past. Tibetan-*

*Kashmiri Youth feel alienated on all grounds and have more or less failed to adjust themselves in prevailing chaotic atmosphere. Most of them do needlework like embroidery, etc.”*  
(Shah, 2012)

The evolution of this community tends to prove that they have the desire migrate to other regions of the country for economic and educational opportunities. Due to the challenging circumstances, there is a growing number of marriages outside the community (Zargar, 2019).

*“Kashmiris have accepted them and in the last six decades they have lived here, there has been no friction between local Kashmiris and them. They have mixed with the local community but there’s still a gap. They think they are distinct; that’s why they are distinct. Otherwise, total cultural assimilation is possible in such a time”.* (Shah told *The Diplomat* during an interview).

One indication of that gap finally being bridged is the increasing trend of cross marriages between local Kashmiris and Tibetan Muslims. According to the community members, more than half a dozen such marriages have taken place in recent years (Zargar, 2019).

Tanka Subba’s book on the Tibetan Diaspora portrayed Tibetan refugees as successful refugees (Tanka Subba, 1990). My publication in 2019 with Lit Verlag editions follows this

interpretation due to the economic integration and prosperity as well as the high degree of assimilation for the Tibetan Diaspora in New Delhi and Dharamsala. This economic success is particularly true for hotels and restaurants (Le Houérou, 2019, pp. 72-73). While I will not copy my observations, I would like to recall the Tibetan Refugee economical activities as a sign of their successes in the two locations mentioned above. The boom in both the construction and tourism sectors are keys to understand the achievements of this community. In Majnu Ka Tilla, Tibetan Buddhist refugees-built hotels with elevators, rooms equipped with giant televisions with sweeping views on rooftops, spas, gymnastic clubs, and excellent restaurants offering all type of European and Asian food (Chinese, Korean, and Indian).

During ten years of field research in Majnu Ka Tilla, the constant evolution of the hospitality standards was noticeable. The first time I went to Majnu Ka Tilla, there were only two hotels and most of the time there was no electricity and no internet. In 2010 you had more than 10 hotels and in 2019, there were a few dozen modern hotels and Wi-Fi was available everywhere.

There are several reasons exiled communities do not have the same economic progress and market integration in India. Why does Srinagar not offer opportunities compared to New Delhi, Dharamsala, Darjeeling or Kalimpong?

The living standards of the Tibetan Muslims in Kalimpong are very different than the one observed by the scholars who studied the community in Kashmir (Shah, Bijli, Gaute). A recent study made by Rubia Biswas in Darjeeling confirms that:

*“The socio-economic conditions of the people are good. Tibetan Muslims have been able to preserve their social, cultural, and national identity despite their settlement in a new environment. Backwardness in education and economy is an essential dilemma for their development. Unemployment is a big problem in the hills. But the Tibetan Muslim community also advanced for their own character. In West Bengal all the Muslims are under in the Other Backward Groups (OBC) but the Tibetan Muslims are under in the Scheduled Tribe groups. The education qualifications are better than the other Muslims in the state as well as all over the nation. They are extremely hard-working people and most of them deal with garments business. Youth are mostly associated with embroidery. Most of the Tibetan youth are in business and stitching work, needle work, brocading and other embroidery works. This community engaged in their traditional occupation like trade and they are also famous for it. Males and females are also engaged in this traditional occupation. Much of the elderly stock is emancipated and well educated, especially in the area of religious education. The monthly income is better than another Muslim people in the hills.” (Biswas, 2019, p 327).*

In my view, the poor conditions of living concerning the Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir are due to the place itself and the policies regarding both status and access to properties, citizenship, and education. It is also crystal clear that the “identity crisis” observed by a few scholars (Bilji, Shah, Gaute) of the Muslims exiled Tibetans is stronger in Sri Nagar than anywhere else in India and thus related to the socio-economic conditions of the community. My hypothesis is to consider their recent attraction for the Tablighi’s message and the evolution of their faith into something “purified” and more rigid than it used to be at the beginning of the twentieth century is to be linked to their uncomfortable position in Kashmir and the painful question whether they are Tibetans or Kashmiris. The interview on my documentary channel “Cultura Mundi” shows the bitter comments few Buddhists Tibetans, made about the existence of Tibetan Muslims (certain Tibetans still ignore their existence). Few appreciations of Buddhists Tibetans are strongly aggressive and refuse to consider the Muslims as pure Tibetans. One of the following critics posted on the channel was denying the Tibetan Muslims any Tibetanness:

*“Tibetans Muslims are two faces, in India, they said they are not Tibetans but Kashmiri and demanded citizenship n got one too. So why call yourself Tibetans????????? That is a fact, you are not Tibetans.”*

([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_xhTMSkWMQ&list=UR4CI04PAXCMepdo\\_yyGCiw&index=22](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_xhTMSkWMQ&list=UR4CI04PAXCMepdo_yyGCiw&index=22))

There is a recent disqualification of this Muslim community from a minor branch of the mainstream Buddhists exiled Tibetans that I could not date very precisely. Even though this disallowance is not approved by the Tibetan Central Administration, and the Dalai Lama, who are constantly striving for creating unity in exile, there is a minority of refugees who blame the Tibetan Muslims for not being full Tibetans. What Yussuf Naik used to observe in the pre-exiled community (harmony between Buddhists and Muslims) has changed through the experience of migration especially in places where the living standards are poor. Notions of nationhood, identity, religions, motherland, have come to break up identities and create separation following a new logic of fragmentation. This logic of fragmentation did not exist in Tibet. In that sense, a migrating experience can reshape a community on a divided line opposing purity to impurity. Migrating has reinvented a myth of “*genuine-ness*” that has never existed in Tibet. This dream of purity is the fruit of an exiled imagination (Le Hou  rou, 2019). The diaspora needs to create a mythic land, a territorial anchoring. My hypothesis is that the separation line is the consequence of existing living standards which led the refugees in Srinagar to adopt a new form of faith reshaped by the Tablighi movement. The consequence of a marked religious frontier has pushed the communities in distinctive paths. The policy adopted by a place, the importance of

a regional context is, in this perspective, a determinant factor for the existing coping strategies. It is also fascinating to note that the ancient migrations of Kashmiri merchants to Tibet were attached to Sufi Islam and linked to the Rishi Sufi order and that the Tibetan Muslims used to worship the Sufi Saints tombs (darga) venerated in Kashmir by the generations of Yussuf Naik fathers in the nineteenth century and before. The most important saint in Kashmir is the founder of the Rishi Sufi order Shaik Nur Al -Din Noorani. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Kashmiri Sufis had an enormous influence especially the Sufi poets influenced by Persian poetry (like Jalal al-Din Rumi, as an example). Islam in Kashmir and consequently Tibetan Muslims were deeply influenced by central Asian and Persian scholars at large.

The new generations born in India in the sixties do not seem to be strictly related to Sufism but more integrated into new religious movements such as Tablighi. Our hypothesis is thus linking migration contexts and economic adaptation to religious affiliation. The crisis of identity could have led to new types of faith. The ancient migration wave of Sufi Islam, before 1959, was following the silk route. The commercial route was also a spiritual path. The mystical faith of Islam embodied in Sufism was traditionally following routes, itineraries, paths, and “*lieux de mémoire*” in Asia with global patterns of expansion observed elsewhere in Africa. What Alain Tarrus cite as “Circulatory Territory” (2014), is a concept quite relevant for the Asian context of migrations. Born in



India the Tibetan Muslims were cut from this tradition of voyage and had to reinvent and exiled religious identity in India.

Let's remember, as I mentioned previously, that the main Muslim text written during the end of the eighteenth century "*kache Phalu*" – which became a Muslim bestseller in Tibet – contains in Chapter 3 an interesting mix of Buddhism and Islam. It discusses reincarnation and Muslim burial rituals." (Szabo, 2006, p.6). After the uprooting from Tibet and the resettlement in India we can observe that such hybridity and diversity between Islam and Buddhist faith is less relevant today than it was in the pre-1959 period. The flexibility of the faiths appears to have been much more accurate before the forced migration to India. Today Tibetan Muslims claim that in the past centuries they were very ignorant about Islamic culture and had no imam with strict and serious scholar background. The temptation to interpret karma and metempsychosis with Islamic lens is nowadays vanishing inside the Tibetan Muslims communities in India for a more uncompromising interpretation of the Quran under Arabic influence. Local saints have less impact than they had during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



## Conclusion

**Abstract:** My conclusion is an attempt to answer the question of purity erected in the introduction. It discusses the “identity crisis” that the second generation of Tibetan Muslims is currently going through.

**Keywords:** Accepted exile, rejected exile, purity, impurity, Diaspora, wedding strategies, identity crisis, love migrations, rhizome model.

My previous academic research on migration studies since 1989 covered refugees in Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, India, and France. A persistent discourse on purity recurred in each of the exiled communities. This discourse was similar among Sudanese Diaspora in Egypt as it was the Ethiopian exiled community in Sudan (Le Houérou, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). This continuity across cases was part of keeping collective narratives of a shared historical experience that brought together common cultural and familial bonds toward an aspiration for a resolution to the challenges faced of living in exile.

There is a need for exiled communities to maintain an essentialist discourse that was part of collective action. Doing so is to not only maintain a sense of community, but also to possess an efficient

political tool to shape both members and events external to the community. I witnessed this in different exiled communities, in refugee camps and ethnic enclaves (Wilson and Portes, 1980). Shared tales create strong links inside the community and tend to be an instrument of cohesion to give strength to a community. Creating a strong bond is an absolute necessity to face the challenges imposed by a host society on the lived experience of communities living in exile. The message conveyed across these cases was “*together we feel stronger*” by the self-fashioned unified narrative. This sense of shared experience also implies a second message, “*you are not alone*”, that is shared by minority groups. A larger community creates a sense of security, being alone to face another society gives a feeling of vulnerability. By considering the different fieldworks with different Diaspora situations across the world, I interpret this search of an imagined purity as a social strategy for self-protection and security.

The Tibetan Diaspora in India, like other exiled communities, does follow different coping strategies, comparable to other exiled groups in different continents. This necessary fiction of purity is limited by other coping strategies, such as finding ways to escape refugee situations by marrying partners from the countries where they plan to be resettled. The documentary film shot in India in 2014 *Angie, a woman on the edge* (previously mentioned) is an example of the boundaries of wedding strategies. The Tibetan colony critiqued the poor judgment of Angie, a Tibetan woman in

Majnu Ka Tilla, for marrying a humble African man for partner. He was viewed as not helpful for the aim of being resettled in America or in Europe. Similarly, travelling to Africa was not seen as a winning option. I have observed that marriages with Westerners were positively accepted as potential overtures for migrating to the West by the refugee families. To do so was to escape a “purity discourse” and was not a subject of social judgment. On the other hand, Angie’s partnership with an African man was perceived as a danger for the entire community and migrations strategies.

In the case of the Tibetan Muslims, my informants described the clear strategy of the first migrants from Kashmir to come to Tibet in ancient times for commercial purposes with no intention to spread the religion. The project was to create positive business conditions in Tibet and thus, marrying Buddhist women was the best choice for an integrative strategy in the country. These women had to convert to Islam if they wished to marry immigrants from Kashmir. The marriage between Buddhists and Muslims implicitly accepted a conversion to Islam. At the time, the Buddhist society did not show any negative signs toward such social exchanges. My informants underscored a trend of rich businessmen marrying local women with poor social backgrounds. This implies that both groups had an interest in the exchange. By marrying a Buddhist Tibetan, the Muslim migrant became deeply rooted in Tibet and was in position of being comfortably situated for his business. In return, the Buddhist woman was presented with an option for

escaping an underprivileged social condition. Both parties gained advantages in such a wedding arrangement. This follows Levi Strauss' claim in his doctoral thesis that women are "*exchangeable*" and marriage is anthropologically one of the most important social exchanges (Levi Strauss, 1949).

All my research in different geographical and cultural spaces confirmed that marriage were the most important social strategies for exiled communities. A union with a "stranger" is something that is carefully considered. In the case of the Tibetan Muslims, in the space of Srinagar, these marriage strategies did not follow the rest of the Tibetan mainstream Diaspora, who showed a preference for marrying Westerners more than getting married with Indian nationals. Even though Tibetan Muslims shared the same religion as the local Kashmir citizens, the exiled community preferred to marry within the ethnic enclave. Exogenous marriages are a more recent trend observed by Afdar Shah. Marriage practices between the exiled communities and members of the host society could be one focus for further research on the coping strategies. Such a study could compare the strategies of Tibetan Muslim Diaspora in Srinagar with the Buddhist Diaspora in other parts of India.

According to my interviews, Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir have few opportunities for changing their situation. Their overtures to

Kashmir society recently changed with intermarriages. For six decades, the Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir married within their community and thus, were geographically consigned to the enclave. As noted, this was a serious obstacle to their professional development as a community in contrast to both their historical integration in Tibet and to the rest of the Tibetan Diaspora in locations, such as Dharamsala, New Delhi or Daradun (Le Houérou, 2019).

Refugee communities in various sites around India maintain the legal rights to own property, to hold citizenship, and to pursue higher education. These rights are fundamental to economic success or failure of a community in exile. Marriages outside the community are viewed as a socio-cultural threat to communal purity and thus, are still perceived as dangerous to both individual and collective identity.

The English synonyms, such as unchastely, unrighteousness, or immodesty, show how negative the English words associated with impurity. At the opposite end, synonyms for purity are chasteness, innocence, and virtue. This simplistic opposition lacks the nuance of the wide range of variables faced by exiled communities, such as the Tibetan Muslims.

These lexical caricatures are also translated to a form of social representation of crossbreeding and hybridity processes. This is

more to be openly and positively appreciated by intellectual elite than wider swathes of these communities. However, the day-to-day interactions for diasporic communities challenge the notion that integration is something to be aspired to or even exists, as notions of hybridity would suggest. If you go deep down in the ethnic enclaves and document day-to-day interactions between the host societies and the migrants (or forced migrants), one finds the persistence of less idealistic segregation where myths of purity remain more influential than generally understood by the academic world (Le Houérou, 2006). Filming exiled communities in different part of the world in Asia, Europe, Africa, Middle East, proved, in modest ordinary interactions, that identity crises are very often present for the migrants, but are often ignored by the researchers.

The myth of purity finds its limits with instrumental “love migrations”, which creates a series of possibilities, such as economic and educational opportunities. Such situations challenge the narratives of purity. From this perspective, wedding strategies trace the frontiers between an accepted exile and a rejected exile. Inter-marriage has thus become the means to transform a forced displacement into a desirable rooting process that anchors individuals to a location. This flexible transformation of an imposed displacement into a desirable situatedness suggests that



frontiers between diasporas and host communities are always negotiated.

This fluidity imbues the notion of rhizome (as presented in the introduction) with relevance to such situations. Roots constitute a mass of rootlets that can grow in many directions which are not necessarily opposed, but can coalesce, merge, melt, meet or contradict each other on a horizontal level. The horizontality of the process is maybe more appropriate than a top-down vertical tree-like design model, thus demonstrating the utility in Deleuze's rhizomatic model as a pertinent analytical tool for studying migrations. This is not only a model of knowledge, but also a model of society and a heuristic tool to describe a theory allowing multiple and non-hierarchical forms of data. The model challenges a vertical hierarchy with a binary structure. Rather, the rhizome model works with planar and multiple connections with no beginnings and no ends.

*“As a model for culture, the rhizome resists the organizational structure of the root-tree system which charts causality along chronological lines and looks for the original source of 'things' and looks towards the pinnacle or conclusion of those 'things.' A rhizome, on the other hand, is characterized by 'ceaselessly established connections between semiotic of growth and propagation.”*

*“In this model, culture spreads chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.’ Rather than narrative history and culture, the rhizome presents history and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a ‘rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, The planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system like the surface of a body of water, spreading towards available spaces or trickling downwards towards new spaces through fissures and gaps, eroding what is in its way. The surface can be interrupted and moved, but these disturbances leave no trace, as the water is charged with pressure and potential to always seek its equilibrium, and thereby establish smooth space.” (Massumi, 1987, p. 12).*

Even though the present book presents two waves of Muslim migrations to India to clarify the genesis of Tibetan Muslims, there is a need to acknowledge the incommensurability of these waves. The first settlement of Kashmiri merchants in Tibet took a few centuries between the twelfth century and the nineteenth century. These historical landmarks are not precisely and scientifically documented by written sources. Thus, Muslim settlement in Tibet is as ancient as the beginning of Islam. The temporal regime here is

related to a thousand of years, which can be considered as a prolonged duration. Assimilation is thus a process with multiple stages with a Deleuzian profile that defies any tree-like hierarchical model. Rather, a spreading influence, like water is more appropriate to account for the variance of flows.

The second wave of migration of Tibetan Muslims' displacement to India occurred very fast. Within the span of sixty years, there was a Tibetan Muslims settled in India. However, this does not provide the necessary historical and temporary distance needed to account for processes of acculturation. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to compare across these two migrations.

This field research has highlighted the distinct regimes of historicity of this migration. This case demonstrates that a migration can start as a volunteer movement and evolve as a forced migration. Showing that the frontiers between volunteer and unvolunteered displacements are not always crystal clear. A chosen step migration of merchants from Kashmir to Tibet (spread over several centuries) was followed and transformed into a forced migration of Tibetan Muslims in India in only one displacement in 1959. The Kashmiri men who arrived as merchants in Tibet with the silk road changed status and identities when they became "Tibetan refugees" in India during the sixties.



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## Appendix 1

**Interview with Zaffar Naik**

**Hotel Tibet, Katmandu, Nepal**

**June 18, 2018**

**10.30 am to 13.30 pm**

Fabienne Le Houérou (FLH) – The first part of my interview will focus on the historical dimension and the second part will be more interested in your family and cultural and religious aspects of Tibetans Muslims in India. Most of the sources I have for the moment provide from the Indian press and a hundred articles on the subject. History takes us back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the fifth dalai lama who welcomed Kashmir traders who followed the silk route. These merchants were first called *Kache-Yul* or “*Lhasa-Khazi*”. They were a privileged community in this statement all sources do agree. But these privileges lasted until the Chinese took over Tibet in 1959. They got married to Tibetan women and these ladies converted themselves to Islam. Progressively, slowly by slowly these Kashmir merchants became physically very similar to Tibetans culturally and physically.

Zaffar Naik (ZN) - The meaning of Tibetan Muslims concerns any Tibetan following Islam. Before - 7<sup>th</sup> century it was not so much

Kashmir people but -people coming from the Middle East. (On *the 8th century Caliph Omar send Abdallah Hanafi to Lhasa*). They used the Silk Road to propagate the religion (like it has been the case for Buddhism). Not only for trading but also to spread Islam. But they were very small in number. Yul means land and *kache* means Muslims, which means the land of the Muslims. If you look back further -during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, that is the time we had had a lot of penetration of Kashmir to Tibet. The intend was more for trading rather than spreading the religion. That's my belief. So obviously when you go back to those days, travelling was not that easy. - One was covering up a huge piece of land on foot-the terrain was very, very difficult. You had to cover up the Himalayas. So, each journey would take about a year, two years, or three years. When they landed in a place like Tibet they could not just -get back to their families right away. They had to stay away from their families for a very long time. And during this course of time, a lot of people from Kashmir decided to stay in Tibet and would marry and start a family: 95 per cent of families are a case of men marrying Tibetan Women. I don't know how far it is true, but to some extent, a lot of people think that the Tibetan women who got married were from humble background – not from affluent families

FLH - High ranked?



ZN - They married women who needed support. I would not call them maids or helpers but someone who needed a support system (eg: widow or poor economic background). Marrying such a woman to start a family was easy. If you look from anthropological aspect, it's too difficult to find a suitor as an outsider and conversion was easier when marrying women who were economically challenged. Muslims who came from Kashmir, and elsewhere, brought along a high sense of understanding and the importance of education, they also brought along a civilization which had its roots in Islamic tradition. Tibetans in general - Tibetan Buddhists, started to appreciate that, and in a very short time, the Tibetan Muslims started earning appreciation in the society. They were highly respected - much for the food, trading, morality, education, the way they bring up their children etc. They are lot of anecdotal pieces as how the native Tibetan Buddhists would speak of Tibetan Muslims- "*Don't look at Tibetan Muslims and make judgments, look at their food, their way of conducting business*". Another very important aspect is, prior to the 14 th centuries to 12 th centuries, Tibetans Buddhists were very spiritual people (even now), which means in a family of ten members you probably send 8 or 9 members of the family to the monasteries to fulfill spiritual obligations. This meant from an economy standpoint, this was unproductive for the land. In contrast, Tibetan Muslims were mostly traders, who helped strengthen the economy

and relationships with neighboring countries (especially India) through trade and commerce.

FLH - Were they rich?

ZN - They were not very wealthy but very productive in income generation unlike the early Muslim travelers from the Middle East, their intent wasn't about spreading religion. People from Kashmir were primarily traders but of course Islam impacted all their activities. Men dominated trade activities (at that time), so obviously a family without a male figure (father, son) were not affluent.

FLH - The first wave of migrants was more religious than the second wave. The second wave was much more an economical migration: opening roads.

ZN - Yes, it was driven by economic needs. They were traders. But having said that you have to understand, Islam sits in the center of their belief system in all aspects of livelihood so obviously even during trade and commerce, business and social activities were conducted within the framework of Islamic culture. Islam dominated every aspect of their functioning of life and does even now.

FLH - Like borrowing money without interest. In Islam it's quite clear. Maybe the absence of interest in loans explains why the Tibetans Power at the time, the Dalai Lama institution found it very

useful to deal with this Kashmir merchants for their financial needs?

ZN - Yes, this is absolutely possible!

FLH - They had narrow financial connections with the Dalai Lama institution and became privileged financial partners.

ZN - Absolutely. As a lot of the members in the family of native Tibetan Buddhist were committed to monasteries and spiritual aspects, the country needed financial stability, economic balance, cycling the economic outcomes. So, a group of Muslim families who basically were traders – trustworthy and honest people could have been an alternative for the Dalai Lama for balancing the economy and connecting with other worlds as well, especially India.

FLH - Yes. Tibet was very isolated at that time!

ZN - Yes.

FLH - So these Muslims traders were needed and useful.

ZN - Very much needed and useful. History proves it. When the Chinese took over Tibet, the Chinese really wanted the Tibetan Muslims to stay back in Tibet. In fact, they would not let many of our elders leave. They are many stories of people who were put in jail. They did not favor us leaving Tibet.

FLH - Is this the story of your uncle Yussuf Naik?

ZN - Not exactly my uncle, but his father.

FLH - He was in jail because he wanted to leave Tibet!

ZN - The reason was not to hold someone as a political criminal or on political grounds. They wanted them to stay back because they needed native settlers to circulate the economy.

However, it must be brought attention, that some of the Tibetan Muslims people who stayed back (held by Chinese) fought against the Chinese regime in their own way.

FLH - The Chinese?

ZN - Yes, the Chinese. They knew that the Tibetans Muslims were merely an economic pillar. Tibetan Muslim had generations and generations staying in Tibet. They have a different name, they have a different faith, they look like Tibetans, they speak like Tibetans, they eat like Tibetans.

FLH - Culturally Tibetans!

ZN - Yes, culturally Tibetan Muslims have completely blended in. Just to give you an idea that on Eid (Festival of Muslims) we make noodles to celebrate the day (Just like a Tibetan Buddhist would do on Losar). We also make *Khapse* (Tibetan Cookie) on Eid just like

in Losar. However, Tibetans Muslims consider themselves to be Indian by nationality.

FLH - Tibetans Muslims consider themselves to be????

ZN - Indian by nationality. Because when they came to Tibet they did not come as Tibetans they came as Kashmir or Ladhakis traders, right?

FLH - When your family came in India they came as Kashmiri?

ZN - They came as Indians back to their land. This is important and most young Tibetan Muslim may not be aware of this. Although we have completely blended in Tibetan culture, we were not Tibetans by citizenship. Let's get back to history again. A bunch of people, and families, especially men, as traders, came over and moved to Tibet for economic benefits and got married to women from another country, normally the women take over the citizenship of the man and not the other way round. When they settled, they got merged into the culture. Of course, the people of the land knew that they were not the actual settlers of Tibet. However, the native Tibetans have never raised any objections and their relationship with Tibetan Muslims has always been very cordial, peaceful, and respectful of one another.

FLH - So, they did not have the Tibetan Nationality?

ZN - Yes, this is true! And it wasn't like they were seeking one. They still had their names registered in the Embassy. A lot of them.

FLH - Were they registered at the Indian Embassy? You mean back to history? Your ancestors?

ZN - Back in history people were not bothered to register in an embassy because migration was very smooth, borders in the strictest sense did not exist. People, who were well educated from India, were very aware of their roots. Not that you want to leave Tibet, but they were aware of their roots in India and the cultural connection of living as a Tibetan. So, when the Chinese took over Tibet, most of the Tibetan Muslims went to the Indian embassy asking for support and safety.

FLH - The Tibetan Muslims went to the Indian Embassy?

ZN - Yes. when my grandfathers had to leave Tibet, it was a smooth migration with all the documented paperwork. We also had an Indian minister waiting at the border to ensure safety of our people.

FLH - Nehru?

ZN - Yes, under Nehru's directions. He suggested two places for settlement. One was in Kashmir.

FLH - Nehru himself was at the border in Kashmir?

ZN - No, not himself. He suggested settlement areas. The other place chosen was either Bangalore or areas close to Bangalore. Bangalore, because he thought the weather conditions would be suitable for us.

FLH - But Bangalore is a very hot place for Tibetans!

ZN - Maybe he was thinking of the plateau: Bangalore is part of Deccan plateau. This is just my guess. This is an interesting aspect of the Tibetan Muslims that most people neglect to understand. We were Indians by nationality and that the Tibetan identity was a result of blending with the Tibetan culture (for many generations) of which we are very proud of.

FLH - So you are Indian first! Tibetan in second?

ZN - No, I don't think it would be right to prioritize our identity as Indian first and Tibetan second. By citizenship we are Indian deeply interwoven with Tibetan culture through trade and social lifestyles.

FLH - By passport you are Indian?

ZN - Yes!

FLH - Your father has an Indian passport?

ZN - Yes. My mother also had an Indian passport. Even in Nepal, you'll across a lot of Tibetan Muslims families are living with an

Indian passport but they are here for purely economic reasons. Therefore, the practice of migration for economic reasons continues.

FLH - It's a traditional migration, a seasonal migration!

ZN - It's not seasonal; the migration is really centered on trading opportunities or business opportunities.

FLH - Are they also Nepali citizens?

ZN - Not a Nepali Citizen? Trading or economic opportunities was an important reason why our people migrated. So, one will observe history repeating again as many of our young children is blending with Nepali culture, yet their nationality stands as Indian.

FLH - So it's an economical migration?

ZN - Most of the migration were driven by economic opportunities.

FLH - In most part of the world migration is economical!

ZN - Absolutely!

FLH - The Indian media never stressed that double identity for the Tibetan Muslims as Indian and Tibetan as well.

ZN - Well, there hasn't been any significant research in this. However, this is quite normal, an Italian family going to the US, their third generations will recognize themselves as American, but



then they still have retained a bit of Italian culture. You would observe the same in a lot of Asian countries, if you look at Nepalese again, there are Indian Nepalese in Sikkim and in Darjeeling (both in India) technically they are Indians by nationality but their food, clothing, language, and the culture is the same as Nepalese in Nepal.

FLH - This is community.

ZN - Yes!

FLH - Yes. It's a regional identity. If you compare it with the French situation French from the North are completely different from the French of the South. We cook in totally different manners. They use butter, we use oil. They drink beer we drink wine. Our accents are very different. Our climate also. But we all feel that we are French.

ZN - Yes, it's a regional identity, we may have a different history but that overlap of few hundred years together brings common sentiments that cannot be sidelined by mere segregation of nationalities. If you had a chance of meeting some Tibetans Muslim you may find them the same as Tibetan by physical features and yet, some of them look very much like Kashmir again.

FLH - So, you were globalized since the 17<sup>th</sup> century?

ZN - I wouldn't say globalized but I think migration was very normal around that time.

FLH - The Silk Road!

ZN - Yes! Mostly around that period. We also have a small mix of families with Chinese ancestry. But we also refer them as Lhasa Kache (Tibetan Muslims).

FLH - This is the historical dimension. I was in Darjeeling last year. In interviewed a Kashmir leader of the Muslim community of Darjeeling. He told me something very interesting. He told me that **Tibetan Muslims are religiously Muslims and Culturally Tibetans.**

ZN - Essentially that's what we are! You must realize that you can be Tibetan and belong to another country as well. Our culture is deeply interwoven with Tibetan culture, and yet we bear a different nationality. This is not an outcome of few years but almost few hundred years. Back in history, nobody was bothered about borders and migration especially in this region. As long as you could speak Tibetan and a subscribed to a common understanding everything was great. In fact, a lot of Muslim names then, were tweaked either because they could not pronounce the name or on purpose adjusted to the abilities of their mother tongue, for instance my dad's name is...Gulam Moinuddin which later became 'Mandila' and Faitama as 'Fatula'. Maryam as 'Mayamla' Tibetan Muslims have always

regarded education as a priority, by early 1900 they went to India to study, like my uncle Yussuf completed his education from India.

FLH - They were continuous movers. But not only Muslims, farmers, and a lot of Tibetans even the Buddhists were always on the move.

ZN - Yes.

FLH - As far as politics are concerned are you for a Free Tibet?

ZN - Tibetan Muslims as a community support the movement for a Free Tibet. Why not?

FLH - Yes, they are more Muslim Families in Kashmir than in Darjeeling.

ZN - Absolutely!

FLH - I think in Darjeeling according to my sources they are only 40 families.

ZN - Not much. In Kalimpong probably only 15 families.

FLH - It's a mixture.

ZN - It's a mixture!

FLH - How do you cope with that mixture? Are you Tibetan? Are you Indian?

ZN - Frankly, it has never been that difficult. People around us understand our background and are very welcoming of our identity. It's common in Asian families.

FLH - It's scalable. Progressive.

ZN - Yes, we can say that.

FLH - As far as religion is concerned, I read in Newspapers, In Indian Newspapers, that some Tibetan Muslims believe in Karma.

ZN - I am not sure of that!

FLH - I was quite surprised and interested because it meant that they have their own way to practice Islam.

ZN - This is not sure! Can you explain?

FLH - It also meant the impact of Buddhism and circulation of beliefs. So, I have interviewed that Kashmir trader in Darjeeling in 2017, he told me "*No, this is not true*"; The Tibetans Muslims are very strict on Islam and very strict in following the Quran. So, there is no Karma at all in their beliefs!

ZN - He is right!

FLH - Can you confirm that?

ZN - Well karma in the sense of both good and bad things occurring in this world is something everyone agrees to. But karma

to attain salvation, I am not certain if Tibetan Muslims subscribe to that belief.

FLH - Is there a little bit impact of Shia Islam?

ZN - Most influence is from Sunni theology, with a hint of Barailwey during the early days in Tibet (as I have been told by my elders).

FLH - Borelli? What you mean by BARAIELY?

ZN - Barailwey puts emphasis on the divinity of our prophet (PBUH) - His birthdays are celebrated: graveyards and tombs of pious people were worshipped.

FLH - Sufi impact?

ZN - Yeah maybe a little bit of Sufi and Baraiely...

FLH - What is Baraeily?

ZN - Their practice includes excessive honoring of the prophet beyond the justification of Quran.

FLH - Like the Sufis?

ZN - Yes, in some sense of practice but they are not the same.

FLH - How do you call them Baraiely?

ZN - Barailwey.

FLH - Tibetan Muslims are the only Muslims in the world who have a “sensibility” to Karma...

ZN - Let me correct this. When the Kashmir trader (you interviewed in 2017) *said Tibetan Muslims do not believe in Karma*. He was correct. In the early days, it is plausible, that some Tibetan Muslim families would accept some aspects of Tibetan Buddhist belief system. However, as more people started receiving their education from India and Muslim University, gradually they eradicated practices that were not coherent with the tenets of Islam.

FLH - Little by little the Tibetan Muslims became just like other Muslims!

ZN - Yes! Of course.

FLH - So your specificity as Tibetan Muslim has fade away, progressively, for a more formal way of being a universal Muslim.

ZN - Right!

ZN - I hope you are not considering this as a puritan. I didn't mean establishing a life of a puritan but unifying under a common belief with their own history and culture of its own.

FLH - Or Tara for example? Does *White Tara*, for example, *has an impact?*

ZN - What is *Tara*?

FLH - Important Buddhist deity.

ZN - No we don't have! At all! And I don't think that was there even those days. It was more a cultural thing. Even within Tibetan Muslims spectrum, you will find families who are quite liberal in some ways while some are highly conservative but unified under a foundation of common belief, as I said earlier it's difficult to paint with a single brush.

FLH - Yes. There is diversity!

ZN - I can't think of many now, however, we have always been inclined towards empowering women – education, rights etc. This clearly is a strong influence from Tibetan culture, Tibetans in general is very gender equal society from the very beginning. So, we have picked up good practices from Tibetan culture that are coherent to Islamic belief system.

FLH - Tibetan Muslim Women are educated.

ZN - Everyone is educated! Some women prefer to wear a head scarf while some don't; many are employed in different professions. In fact, for some Tibetan Muslims Families Women have done much better than men! So, in that sense, yes, we are a progressive community.

FLH - You mean are they more successful than men?

ZN - Successful from both economic and career wise. There are doctors and professionals of substantial numbers.

FLH - Doctors in medicine?

ZN - Yes.

FLH - In your family?

ZN - No not only my family but good chunk of Tibetan Muslims Families.

FLH - Across all the community?

ZN - Exactly!

FLH - In Nepal and Kashmir also?

ZN - Yes, Education has always been a priority for us.

ZN - Yussuf uncle's wife is catholic school educated. This is sixty/seventy years ago. I don't think you will come across any Tibetan Muslim family whose children are not educated. Of course, not all people of my uncle's generation were educated.

FLH - This is a major point because this is not the case with all the Buddhist Tibetan refugees...Even though the Dalai Lama highly stress on education and its importance, a lot of Tibetan refugees don't speak English and are poorly educated. All refugee camps possess their own schools, and the effort is there...



ZN - There is also a community school in Kashmir, setup by the Dalai Lama administration, they've got good teachers there.

FLH - My view is that there is a tradition to educate the kids and it's not by chance that the community is educated at 100 per cent. There is an historical cultural heritage that started 400 years ago. The singing heritage for example.

ZN - *The Nagma*. The context of Nagma came from Tibetan Muslims. The food habits, the language have been gently influenced too. Tibetan fellow brothers have often praised our style of speaking Tibetan language.

FLH - It's a different Tibetan?

ZN - It's not a different Tibetan language. It's different in the way we grace the language.

FLH - Influenced by poetry?

ZN - Maybe.

FLH - Historically the Tibetan Muslims were granted special rights by the different Dalai Lamas in Lhasa. Like the right to eat meat. All their privileges were connected to the Tibetan power and Dalai Lama institution. They used to live near the Potala palace and very tightly connected with the power.

ZN - Yes, they had privileges! The Dalai Lama had a very high regard for Tibetan Muslims (like everyone else). He is often heard of recalling Tibetan Muslim families who were good at making delicious Tibetan style bread.

FLH - Tsampa? Timommo?

ZN - No... Tsampa... is basic flour. We don't make it so much at home these days.

FLH - Timmomo?

ZN - It's called *soofali* and *Sangafalee*. Tibetan Muslims had sacred privileges such as managing their own cemeteries, access to mosque site, access to meat etc.

FLH - As far as politics are concerned, the Muslim Tibetans suffered as much as other Tibetans ...Just like the Buddhists.

ZN - Absolutely! They did! But I got to be honest here. As I said earlier, you cannot paint everyone with one brush. Some suffered greatly, some were put behind bars, some of the families were dislocated, and some never got to meet their families again, but most had an easy migration back to India.

FLH - So, you don't see yourself as a refugee?

ZN - I don't see myself as a refugee.

FLH - Most Tibetan don't have the Indian nationality?

ZN - No, they don't!

FLH - Since 2017 the law has changed, and it seems easier to get the Indian nationality for the Tibetan refugees now.

ZN - Much easier now!

FLH - They are still Tibetan Muslim families in Kalimpong.

ZN - About 70 % of Tibetan Muslim families are living in Srinagar. My family, I mean my grand-father, and my grand- father cousins, stayed back in Kalimpong. Kalimpong and Darjeeling were more favorable to us because it was situated in the trading route from most of the time.

FLH - So, why 70 % of the Tibetan Muslim families wanted to stay in Srinagar?

ZN - Purely again due to lineage and the historical connections.

FLH - Is it easier to be a Muslim in a land where Muslims are the majority?

ZN - Perhaps they thought this is going to be easier for them. However, many of them like my grandfather did not want to go to Srinagar.

FLH - Why?

ZN - They felt more comfortable in Kalimpong because for a very long time Kalimpong was a trading spot. I guess it was more about convenience.

FLH - In Srinagar they lived in camps?

ZN - Initially. Yes, of course! They were not given houses etc...

FLH - But they formed a small group of people. How many Muslims came to India to escape Chinese domination?

ZN - Can't state the number but most migrated back. The voyage was not a very dramatic one. It was planned.

## Appendix 2

### Alexandra David-Néel publications (French)

1898 : *Pour la vie - réflexions sur tous les faits de société* (Éditions « Les Nuits rouges »)

1909 : *Le Féminisme rationnel* (Éditions « Les Nuits rouges »)

1911 : *Le Modernisme bouddhiste et le bouddhisme du Bouddha* (Alcan)

1921 : *Le Bouddhisme du Bouddha* (Éditions du Rocher)

1927 : *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa, à pied et en mendiant de la Chine à l'Inde à travers le Tibet* (Plon)

1929 : *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Plon)

1930 : *Initiations lamaïques. Des théories, des pratiques, des hommes* (Pygmalion)

1931 : *La Vie surhumaine de Guésar de Ling : L'Iliade des Tibétains*, préface de Sylvain Levi (Éditions du Rocher) - avec la collaboration de Lama Yongden

1933 : *Au pays des brigands-gentilshommes* (Plon)

1939 : *Le Bouddhisme : ses doctrines et ses méthodes* (Éditions du Rocher)

1940 : *Sous des nuées d'orage* (Plon)

- 1947 : *À l'ouest barbare de la vaste Chine* (Plon)
- 1949 : *Au cœur des Himalayas : le Népal* (Pygmalion)
- 1951 : *Astavakra Gîtâ. Discours sur le Védânta advaita* - réédité (1974) en un volume unique « *Astavakra Gita - Avadhuta Gita, poèmes sanscrits védantins* » (Éditions du Rocher)
- 1951 : *Les Enseignements secrets des bouddhistes tibétains, la vue pénétrante* (Pygmalion)
- 1951 : *L'Inde. Hier, aujourd'hui, demain*, réédité et augmenté en 1969 sous le titre *L'Inde où j'ai vécu* (Plon)
- 1952 : *Textes tibétains inédits* (Pygmalion)
- 1953 : *Le Vieux Tibet face à la Chine nouvelle* (Plon)
- Grammaire de la langue tibétaine parlée*
- 1958 : *Avadhuta Gîtâ de Dattatraya. Poème mystique Védânta advaita* - réédité (date non connue) en un volume unique « *Astavakra Gita - Avadhuta Gita, poèmes sanscrits védantins* » (Éditions du Rocher)
- 1958 : *La Connaissance transcendante* (Pygmalion)
- 1961 : *Immortalité et réincarnation. Doctrines et pratiques. Chine - Tibet - Inde* (Plon)
- 1961 : *Les Enseignements secrets des bouddhistes tibétains, la vue pénétrante*, deuxième édition revue et augmentée (Adyar - Paris)
- 1964 : *Quarante siècles d'expansion chinoise* (Plon)

1970 : *En Chine - l'Amour universel et l'Individualisme intégral* (Plon) - édition posthume

1972 : *Le Sortilège du mystère. Faits étranges et gens bizarres rencontrés au long de mes routes d'Orient et d'Occident* (Plon) - édition posthume

1975 : *Vivre au Tibet : cuisine, traditions et images* (Robert Morel éditeur, Apt) - édition posthume

1986 : *La Lampe de sagesse* (Éditions du Rocher)

1998 : *Pour la vie, et autres textes libertaires inédits, 1895-1907*, présentés par Joëlle Désiré-Marchand (Éditions Les Nuits rouges)

2000 : *Correspondance avec son mari, édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Plon), édition posthume, reprenant les deux volumes publiés précédemment :

1975 : *Journal de voyage : Lettres à son mari, 11 août 1904 - 27 décembre 1917. Vol. 1* (Éd. Marie-Madeleine Peyronnet)

1976 : *Journal de voyage : Lettres à son mari, 14 janvier 1918 - 31 décembre 1940. Vol. 2* (Éd. Marie-Madeleine Peyronnet)

2000 : *Le Féminisme rationnel* (articles inédits du journal *La Fronde*), suivi par *Les Femmes, ces immigrées de l'intérieur*, de Catherine Lafont (Éditions Les Nuits rouges)

2003 : *Féministe et libertaire. Écrits de jeunesse* (compilation des deux parutions précédentes, 1998 et 2000) (Éditions Les Nuits rouges)

## **Novels**

1935 : *Le Lama aux cinq sages*, Alexandra David-Néel, Lama Yongden (Plon)

1938 : *Magie d'amour et magie noire. Scènes du Tibet Inconnu* (Plon)

1954 : *La Puissance du néant*, roman du lama Yongden, traduit et annoté par Alexandra David-Néel (Plon)

2018 : *Le Grand Art*, le Tripode, 11 octobre 2018, 400 p. (présentation en ligne [archive]) : premier roman d'Alexandra David-Néel achevé en 1902 et resté inédit jusqu'en 2018.



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