

The Life and Time of Abdul Wahid Radhu
A case of fusion of cultures

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Transcending Conflicts
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Abdul Wahid Radhu with the Author in Srinagar

by Claude Arpi

Introduction

Many years ago, we once asked the Dalai Lama how he would define the essence of Tibetan culture. His reply was straightforward. He said: "*Tibetan culture has developed due to many factors - environmental, climatic and others - and Buddhism is the major factor in the development of Tibet's unique culture. Even non-Buddhist Tibetans have adopted the mental attitudes and way of life of Buddhist culture. That culture is based on the practice of compassion and tolerance.*"¹

As an example, he mentioned the Muslim population living in Lhasa. Several years later, this prompted me to have a closer look at the Tibetan Muslims, also known as *Kache*. The Tibetan word *Kache* derives from 'Kashmir'.²

The Kaches

The *Kache* community forms a tiny minority in Tibet, but its members are accepted as Tibetans, unlike the Hui Muslims living in North-eastern Tibet, who are known as *Gya Kache* or Chinese Muslims.

One particularity of the Muslims in Central Tibet is the fact that they are mainly of Kashmiri or Turkic descent through patrilineal lineage. Thomas Arnold, in his book, *The Preaching of Islam*³, wrote: "*Islam has also been carried into Tibet proper by Kashmiri merchants. Settlements of such merchants are to be found in all the chief cities of Tibet: they marry Tibetan women, who often adopt the religion of their husbands...*"

¹ Claude Arpi (Ed), *The Dalai Lama in Auroville* (Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Auroville, 1974).

² The Indian State is known in Tibet as *Kache Yul* (Yul = Land in Tibetan).

³ Thomas Walker Arnold, *Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, (Stosius Inc/Advent Books Division, 1984).

It is said that during the reign of the Persian ruler Umar bin Abdul Aziz (717-720), a delegation from Tibet requested the Caliph to send some Islamic missionaries to the Land of Snows. Salah bin Abdullah Hanafi subsequently went to Tibet. Though proselytisation was not successful among the local population, many of the missionaries settled in Tibet and married Tibetan women.

Around the 12th century, migrants from Kashmir and Eastern Turkistan entered Tibet, but here again was no large-scale conversion to Islam. While heavy Islamic proselytisation took place in Baltistan⁴ and to a lesser extent in Ladakh between the 14th to the 16th centuries, it was minimal in Tibet probably due its strong Buddhist roots and the distance from the main source of the Islamic faith.

In the 17th century a small community of Muslims flourished in Lhasa working mainly as butchers and traders. During the same period in India, the influx of Kashmiri immigrants in Ladakh and the subsequent conversions of many Buddhists to Islam created isolated conflicts between the two faiths. An example of this was reported between followers of the Soma Gompa and Jama Masjid in Leh.

Masood Butt, a young Tibetan Muslim working for the Dalai Lama's Administration in Dharamsala was one of the first to study the Tibetan Muslims. In January 1994, he wrote in the *Tibetan Bulletin*⁵: *"The arrival of Muslims was followed by the construction of mosques in different parts of Tibet. There were four mosques in Lhasa, two in Shigatse and one in Tsethang. In recent years, one mosque in Lhasa has been renovated, with Tibetan Muslims from India sending religious inscriptions to it for use. Tibetan Muslims were mainly concentrated around the mosques that they constructed.*

⁴ Today in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir.

⁵ Masood Butt, *Muslims of Tibet*, (*Tibetan Bulletin*, January - February 1994, Dharamsala).

These mosques were maintained well and were the centres of Muslim social life in Tibet."

He further explained that the Tibetan Muslims had fairly well assimilated in the Buddhist environment. They fully participated in the social and cultural life of the Land of Snows. As early as the 17th century, during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, they received some special privileges from the Tibetan Government. Masood elaborates: *"They were permitted to settle their affairs independently, according to the Shariat Laws. The government permitted the Muslim community to elect a five-man committee, known as 'Ponj' (Urdu for 'five'). This system of governance⁶ allowed the community to look after their own interest. From among the Ponj, a leader (known as Mia to Muslims and Kache Gopa or Muslim headman among the Tibetans) was elected."*

Tibetan Kaches had other advantages: they were free to set up business and did not have to pay taxes. It probably explains why most of the Muslim population in Tibet was involved in trade and lived in the main urban centers such as Lhasa and Shigatse.

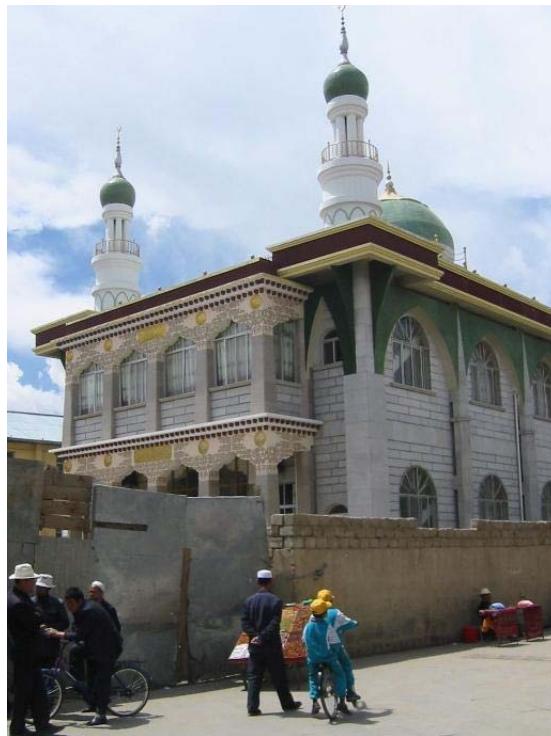


Mosque in Lhasa

⁶ *Probably similar to the Panchayat system in India.*

None of them did farming. One can easily understand that through their family connections in Ladakh, Turkistan, Baltistan or even Kalimpong, trade for them was the most suitable occupation.

The Tibetan Muslims were exempt from implementing the 'no meat rule' when such a restriction was imposed on the Roof of the World every year during the holy Buddhist month of Saka Dawa (Budh Poornima). They need not remove their headgears to salute the Buddhist Lamas during this period. Muslims were also invited along with other different communities to commemorate the assumption of spiritual and temporal authority by the Fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century⁷.



Lhasa Mosque

The Kaches had their own burial place. Masood added "*There were two cemeteries around Lhasa: one at Gyanda Linka about 12 km from Lhasa town and the other at Kygasha about 15 km away. A portion of Gyanda Linka was*

⁷ Known as *Ganden Podhang*, this system of government survived till 1959 when the Dalai Lama had to flee his occupied homeland.

turned into a garden and this became the place where the Muslim community organised their major functions.⁸ Most of these special privileges ended with the beginning of the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the fifties.



Kaches in Kalimpong in the 1950's

After the Tibetan uprising against the Chinese occupiers in March 1959, the Dalai Lama fled to exile in India. He was followed by some 85,000 countrymen. However, the majority of Tibetan Muslims could not leave Tibet

⁸ In Lhasa, there is a garden called *Kha-che Lingka* or 'Kashmiri Park' where the first mosque was built. The legend says that Pir Yakub, a Sufi who had come from India, used to pray on the Gyambo Utse, a ridge overlooking Lhasa. The Fifth Dalai Lama used to watch him each morning with his field glasses. One day he called Pir Yakub and asked him about his beliefs. They had long theological discussions and the Dalai Lama recognized Pir Yakub as a Saint. He asked him what would please him. The Sufi requested a piece of land to build a mosque and bury the dead according to the Islamic rituals. The Dalai Lama gave a large marshy land located to the west of the Potala where the Muslims could build their mosque and have a Park. Once the Dalai Lama had designated the place, arrows were thrown in the direction of the four directions to demarcate the site, thus the name of *Gyanda* was given to it. Pir Yakub died in Lhasa and his tomb is still to be seen in the Kha-che Ling-ka. [For more information, see Corneille Jest, *Khache and Gya-Kha-che, Muslim Communities in Lhasa (The Tibet Journal, Vol. XX, No 3, Fall 1995, Dharamsala)*.

immediately. During the following year, the Communist leadership treated them even more contemptuously than their Buddhist fellow countrymen. They suffered a great deal and it is even said that for some time, food was not allowed to be sold to them. However a few months later, the Tibetan Muslims in Lhasa organized themselves. They realized that the best way to escape the Chinese despotism was to approach the Indian mission in Tibet and claim Indian citizenship using their Kashmiri origin.

They approached Mr. P.N. Kaul, the head of the Indian mission in Lhasa. The problem was that most of the Muslim leaders such as Haji Habibullah Shamo, head of the Tibetan Muslims Ponj and many others like Bhai Addul Gani-la or Rapse Hamidullah had been arrested under diverse charges.

The Indian Government's initial response was rather lukewarm. They were ready to grant citizenship only to those who had a permanent residence in the State of Jammu & Kashmir and visited India from time to time, or whose parents or grandparents were born in undivided India. Only these categories were eligible.

However a few months later, the Indian Government agreed that all Tibetan Muslims could be considered as Indian nationals, and application forms for Indian nationality were distributed⁹. Muslims were granted Indian citizenship

⁹ See Ministry of External Affairs, *Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged and Agreements signed by the Governments of India and China*, known as White Papers (New Delhi: Publication Division, 1954-61), White Paper I, *A Letter from the Consul-General of India in Lhasa to the Foreign Bureau in Tibet, 13 May 1959*.

"On the 27th April 1958, I discussed with you the question of Ladakhi Lamas and Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir origin. You stated then that there were some Lamas from Ladakh but no one was in possession of any visaed documents. You enquired about the manner and the dates of arrival of certain other Indian Muslim nationals from Kashmir. I have looked into the position which appears to be as follows:-

Ladakhi Lamas and Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir origin have traditionally come to Tibet without any restriction or formality.

by the Indian Government, which considered the Tibetan Muslims as Kashmiris, and thus Indian citizens, unlike the other Tibetan refugees, who carry Refugee Status Certificates.



Inside Mosque in Lhasa

The former local Government of Tibet always treated the Muslims of Kashmir origin as foreigners and as distinct from their own nationals. These Kashmiri Muslims never declared themselves as Tibetan or deliberately renounced their Indian nationality. In fact these Kashmiris selected their own headmen who is called Khachi Ponpo, literally meaning Kashmiri Officer.

...To the knowledge of the Government of India no notification or declaration was made by the local authorities in the Tibet region of China requiring the persons of India origin residing in the Tibet region to obtain registration or traders certificates if they were not actually travelling across the border.

...The position therefore is that these Lamas and Muslims have their origin in Jammu and Kashmir State in India, and, notwithstanding their long residence in Tibet or even marriage with Tibetans, they do not cease to be Indian nationals. Since no law or regulation has been announced and enforced previously by the local authorities of Tibet region of China, we do not agree with the contention that absence of travel documents deprives them of their Indian nationality. Some of these persons, it is now understood, applied recently as Indian nationals and the seizure of their application forms would amount to interfering in their legitimate claims to be treated distinctly as Indian.

In view of the facts explained above, the Government of India urge that Ladakhi and Kashmiri Muslims and other Indians living in Lhasa and Shigatse should be treated as Indian nationals and their registration recorded accordingly."

Tibetan Muslims had their own architectural style. Mosques were built in a picturesque blend of Persian and Tibetan styles. Like in Tibetan architecture, they used colorful frescoes, sloping walls to withstand earthquakes, and put *Katha* (ceremonial scarves) at the doorway of the mosques.

Today, very little is known of the present condition of Tibetan Muslims inside Tibet. According to some reports there are still around 3000 Tibetan Muslims and 20,000 Chinese Muslims. In the recent years, a few Tibetan Muslims outside Tibet have been able to visit Lhasa while quite a few came to India.

According to Massod: *"The total population of Tibetan Muslims outside Tibet is around 2000. Of them, 20 to 25 families live in Nepal, 20 in the Gulf countries and Turkey. Fifty families reside in Darjeeling-Kalimpong areas bordering Tibet in eastern India."*¹⁰

It is fascinating to study how the Tibetan Muslim and Buddhist cultures have been able to interact and blend, how a minority and a majority were able to live together for centuries without any major clash or even hostility. This is particularly remarkable when one reads about the forthcoming (or already existing) 'clash of civilisations' in which one of the communities of our case-study is shown as the main protagonist.

In Europe, analysts and researchers have commented on the issue of 'integration' or 'assimilation' of the Muslims in the Western societies, particularly with immigrants of North African or Turkish origin in Western

¹⁰ The Official Website of the Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala says: *"His Holiness the Dalai Lama continued to keep in touch with the situation of Tibetan Muslims. Knowing their problems, His Holiness, during his visit to Srinagar in 1975, took up the matter with the Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir. He also encouraged the formation of the Tibetan Muslim Refugee Welfare Association. This Association began to chalk out projects for the economic and educational upliftment of Tibetan Muslims. With an initial financial assistance by His Holiness, coupled with assistance received later from Tibet Fund, New York, a handicraft centre, a co-operative shop and a school were established. A group of young Tibetan Muslims were given training in carpet making in Dharamsala."*

Europe or from South Asia in Great Britain. The opinions are diverse on how far these communities have been able to 'merge' their Muslim singularity into the indigenous culture and life. However, the mere fact that the issue has been so much debated tends to prove that there is a serious problem which has become particularly acute after the events of the 9/11 in the United States and the 'war against terrorism' undertaken by the US Administration.

In our case-study, we have the example of two communities who have lived together in harmony, respecting each other for centuries.

The question is therefore to try to understand how this has been possible. The first factor which comes to mind is what the Dalai Lama pointed out in his interview: *"Even non-Buddhist Tibetans have adopted the mental attitudes and way of life of Buddhist culture. That culture is based on the practice of compassion and tolerance."*

When the basis of compassion or at least tolerance is present on both sides, it creates an atmosphere in which impossibilities become possibilities. To try to understand this phenomenon, we traveled to the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir to meet a person who represents in our eyes the harmonious symbiosis of two cultures, Buddhist and Muslim, while remaining firmly anchored in his Islamic faith. This person is a Ladakhi by birth, Muslim by faith, he has lived years in Tibet where many of his relatives belong to the *Kache* community who has been trading for centuries on the dusty tracks of Tibet and Central Asia. The life of Abdul Wahid Radhu is a perfect example of successful fusion of two cultures.

The Life and Time of Abdul Wahid Radhu, the last Caravaneer

Some encounters are different. The one with Abdul Wahid Radhu will always remain very special for us. One of the reasons might be that for the past twenty years or so, we read a lot about him and hoped to meet him one day; however circumstances and 'life' (or karma) had not permitted it.

Despite (or because of) his advanced age, this human being -- very few such beings still exist today in our world of narrow-mindedness -- who has been one of the last caravaners of Central Asia and Tibet, can today look at his life and the historical events which changed the face of Asia with a certain detachment .



Abdul Wahid had the privilege to witness and even sometimes to be an actor in dramatic events that not only marked his native Ladakh for ever, but also the entire sub-continent, as well as Tibet and the whole Asia.

Born in Leh in the province of Ladakh of the Jammu and Kashmir State, Abdul Wahid Radhu received his higher education from the Aligargh Muslim University where he lived in the midst of intellectual and emotional ferment; he saw the first ripples of the movement which was to shake the entire sub-continent: the creation of Pakistan, or the Partition of India into two separate States, forever enemies since then. The young Abdul traveled with the one of

the last caravans paying tribute from the Kings of the Ladakh's tribute to the Dalai Lamas in Lhasa every three years. The educated Ladakhi was present in the Tibetan capital when the Chinese invaded the Roof of the World, supposedly "to liberate" the Himalayan nation from imperialist influence. He was then a friend with the Dalai Lama's family and most of the Tibetan aristocratic families. He was very much a part of the Tibetan Muslim community, very liberal and in many ways remarkably integrated with a Buddhist Roof of the World. Abdul Wahid also had the occasion to exchange ideas and share the aspirations of a group of young Tibetan rebels living in exile in Kalimpong in North India in the forties. They wanted the Roof of the World to participate to the new world stake as they had realized that the world was changing rapidly; they all dreamt of a modern and more democratic Tibet. He related to us his exceptional life.¹¹

It is during the 18th century, Sheikh Asad Abdul, the ancestor of Abdul Wahid migrated to Ladakh and established a trading house. It is said that a Persian inscription on the Sunni mosque in Leh mentions his name. Asad Abdul's father, Sheikh Muhammad Radhu was an important religious personality of the Kashmir Valley. The tradition reports that he would have been the one who deposited a hair of the Prophet in the famous Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar. Abdul Wahid says that the Radhu family can trace its ancestors to a family of Kashmiri Pandits. They were known as the Trakru before converting to Islam. Sheikh Asad's son, Faruq Radhu became the first caravaner of the family. Thanks to him, the name of Radhu acquired a great notoriety on the tracks and trails of Central Asia and Tibet. At the same time, others branches of the family began to open businesses beyond the Karakoram pass, in Kashgar or

¹¹ For the present paper, we have used long interviews with Abdul Wahid Radhu and some quotes from his book: Abdul Wahid Radhu, *Caravane tibétaine*, (Peuples du monde, Paris, 1991). There is also an English adaptation: Radhu, Abdul Wahid, *Islam in Tibet: Tibetan Caravans* (Fons Vitae, Louisville, 1979).

Yarkand in Eastern Turkistan¹². Most of them married in these distant regions and got integrated in the local society. The Radhu's blood began flowing in many towns and trading centers of Central Asia and Tibet. Apparently, a branch of the family still resides in Xinjiang today, a few remain in occupied Tibet, while another lives again in the Kashmir Valley where we met Abdul Wahid.

While Faruq Radhu's two elder sons, Haider Shah and Nasr Shah decided to settle in Ladakh, another brother left for Tibet where he married a Muslim Chinese girl. The relations, mainly business ones, between the cousins living in Tibet and the Ladakhi branch remained close; the family continued thus to spread and prosper.

Haider Shah's son, migrated to Tsetang, a small town situated south of Lhasa and married a Tibetan Buddhist. In Leh, the Radhus were an envied lot. They owned the most beautiful properties and their coveted merchandises from all corners of Asia filled up their warehouses.

It is in this cosmopolitan environment that the young Abdul Wahid grew. Several of his close relatives served the British Administration or the Maharaja of Kashmir, though there were always two divergent opinions in the family: while some thought that it was necessary to give to the children a 'modern' education, in other words a British education, others believed that a more traditional training as of caravaner and trader was enough to carry on with the family trade.

Haji Muhammad Siddiq, the grandfather of Abdul, whom the latter adulated, strongly believed that it was more important to preserve the family traditions. But the young Abdul wanted to see the world and even learn the language of the British. His grandfather tried for a time to oppose young Wahid's departure to Srinagar, but finally he had no choice but to abandon his grand son to 'his fate': *"My grandfather was a patriarch that reigned on a household of about*

¹² Today known as Xinjiang.

twenty persons. He was the one of most eminent and popular personalities in Leh. Till his death, he was rather happy to have been able to preserve the family traditions", recalls Abdul nearly eighty years later. When he arrived for the first time in the big city of Srinagar, the capital of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Abdul made an extraordinary discovery: his cousin Ataullah could ride *"a vehicle on wheels. He jumped on the machine. I never had seen such a thing"*. It was a bicycle...

Ataullah "mounted it, rushed, and fast as an arrow, he disappeared in a bend; suddenly he appeared in the opposite direction, driving at a staggering speed, until he came back to us. His demonstration stunned me." Abdul had begun his discovery the world; he would soon be initiated to a myriad of new things such as electricity, telephone, radio transmission, movie and even motor vehicles. Abdul remembers now that after a few days, he was already used to it. Today the wise man says, "It is only inner discoveries that one never tires of".

Ataullah, who for the past two years had attended a high school managed by the missionaries in Srinagar, quickly initiated the young Ladakhi to his new life. It should however be mentioned that very few youngsters from the high Himalayan mountains where timelessness ruled life, had the opportunity to attend western schools. The two cousins were a rare exception.

During their childhood years in Ladakh, their contact with 'outside' was extremely limited. Beyond the massive ranges there were usually only tracks and tracks again.

In Lhasa, the situation was slightly different. As the Muslim community was larger, *madrassas* (primary Koranic schools) were opened. The students were taught about the Koran and the pillars of Islam, particularly how to offer *namaz* (prayers). Apart from Tibetan language, Urdu was part of the main curriculum. Before the Chinese invasion, there were two *madrassas* in Lhasa and one in Shigatse.

Like their young colleagues in Srinagar, the Kache students were sent to India to join institutes of higher Islamic learning such as Darul-Uloom in Deoband, Nadwatul-Ulema in Lucknow or Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. Researchers have found the attendance of two foreign students: a Burmese and a Tibetan, in the 1875 Annual Report of Darul-Uloom Institute. Jamia Millia Islamia received its first batch of Tibetan students in 1945.

The difference between the Kache youth and our Ladakhi friends was that the latter had attended a Christian Missionary school in Kashmir and had received their primary education in English.

When Ataulah left Srinagar to enter Aligarh University, the blow was hard for Abdul Wahid. At first, he had no choice but to get use to his lonely schoolboy existence though he finally made some friends. It is symbolic of Kashmir before the venom of separateness entered the Valley, that the principal of the Christian school was a Brahmin octogenarian, the respected Pandit Shankar Kaul. The Himalayan children were taught not only Urdu language, but Persian literature as well. The school however insisted on the importance of the English language as a medium. Abdul remembers: *"The history courses were centered on England and the British empire. In a way, it was organized to make of us all good servants of the British."*

As often with the Ladakhis, the young Abdul did not have an easy rapport with his Kashmiri schoolmates, though they belonged to the same Muslim faith. Most of his friends were, like him, natives of the highlands such as Gilgit, Hunza, Astor or Punyal¹³. There was a deep solidarity and camaraderie between the 'Himalayans' who had come from regions so unlike the rest India or even the Kashmir Valley. Their way of thinking, of eating, of behaving, the way they perceived the world was simply different.

What his grandfather had dreaded was fast happening: *"At that time, all of us went through a very strong attraction for the West, the 'modern world'... We*

¹³ Today part of the Northern Areas of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir.

were anxious to dress like Europeans and for most of us, the highest ambition was to join one day the British administration. Waiting for that day, our uppermost dream, the greatest privilege of all, was to be on the list of those who every year were selected to go London with a scholarship granted by the Government of the Maharaja. For us, England was at the center of all our thoughts."

While he prepared his entry examination to Aligarh Muslim University, Abdul one day received the news that his grandfather was dying. Although the results were awaited any day, he had no choice but to leave immediately for Ladakh and thanks to his family contacts, he could use the 'express way' of the postal services. In seven days, he was in Leh. Being the only male descendant, his grandfather thought that Abdul Wahid would now take care of the family heritage and business. Decades later, Wahid wrote: *"When Haji Muhammad Siddiq was alive, we did not realize fully the inestimable values that he embodied; often we did not listen to his advices and sometimes we even deliberately opposed his ideas and his principles. Indeed, we were all in love with western modernity."*

Muhammad Siddiq died in May 1937, a few days after his grandson had reached Leh. The old man left his terrestrial sheath like the wise Sufi he was. With a perfect lucidity, he told his entourage: *"Now my sight is dissipating, my sense of smell slowly disappears. The last moment approaches."* He asked for his grandson who, too frightened by the proximity of death, did not immediately come to his bedside.

Decades later, Abdul wrote: *"I often wondered if Haji Muhammad Siddiq did not wanted to transmit me a tradition, maybe of initiatory character, for he was connected with the Tariqa Chishti, the Indian Sufi Brotherhood. Maybe also it was his intention to teach me to recite a special prayer"*. Later, Abdul Wahid while emptying the attic of their Leh residence found one of these Sufi

texts. Since that day, he daily recites it: *"to try to make amends for the mistake committed by not replying to the patriarch's ultimate call."*

The death of Muhammad Siddiq was for the family the beginning of the end of the epoch of the great caravans; it was only a question of some years before the century-old tradition completely disappeared. Soon disputes erupted between the different members of the clan; nothing would be like before. The world around had began to spin faster and faster and the remote Himalayan valleys were not spared. This was the time when the Valley of Kashmir saw its first 'democratic' movements led by a charismatic leader called Sheikh Mohamed Abdullah who was to play an important political role during the following years.

At the end of the thirties and early forties, the Muslim population of Ladakh was an integral part of the society; they still lived in harmony with the followers of the other religions, primarily the Buddhists. In many ways they embodied a symbiosis of Buddhist and Islamic cultures. When one meets Abdul Wahid, one realizes that his immense admiration for his grandfather was due to the fact that Muhammad Siddiq was the perfect example of a typically Ladakhi combination. The old caravaner was both a Tibetan by race and culture and a Muslim by religion: *"His face, his clothing, his behavior, the way in which he had furnished and decorated his house where everyone was welcome, were Tibetan. He always appeared dressed in a gown similar to the Tibetan one, but as a headgear he wore a white turban."*

Wahid adds: *"In addition, and this may have appeared unbelievable in an Indian society compartmented by classes, there were marriages between families of the two communities."¹⁴*

Having passed successfully his entrance examination and after some months spent in the enchanting surroundings of Leh, the young Wahid decided to join his cousin in Aligarh. A new life was beginning for him.

¹⁴ Though usually the wife had to convert to Islam.

In Aligarh, Abdul Wahid discovered the tremendous influence of Western thought in Indian Islam. Much later, the young Ladakhi realized that the religious beliefs of leaders of the Muslim University, wanting to project themselves as tolerant towards Christianity and modern ideas, *"remained in reality superficial and incapable of guaranteeing the preservation of our cultural identity in front of the intellectual enticements of the West."*

In the room that he shared with his cousin, he often participated in long discussions on the meaning of 'modernity' and what he conceived then to be "the summits of the human thought." These western influences reigned supreme amongst intellectual Muslims of that time; for them the British civilization represented the peak of societal evolution. Ironically, it was the same intellectuals who were at the origin of the concept of Pakistan, a 'separate and modern State' for the Muslims in the sub-continent. One of the characteristics of the teaching of Aligarh was a *"constant usage of Western thought as reference."* Wahid explains that for these intellectuals, Western thought offered the deepest criteria to judge the validity of any knowledge, even when it came to the understanding of philosophies flowing from typically Eastern reflection or similarly for Islam.

The main mentor or intellectual leader of the University was Muhammad Iqbal. Although considered by many as the most important Muslim reformist of the 20th century, he is viewed by others as the spiritual father of Pakistan. Abdul feels that Iqbal *"favoured of a form political activism among the Muslims, thereby contributing to popularize the idea that they constituted a nation separate from the other communities living on the sub-continent."* He adds *"his prestige was considerable among my generation's students. As early as 1947, many of them declared themselves Pakistan nationals. For their career, they left their native regions in India for the newly formed State of Pakistan."* He still believes that the main preoccupation of most of the history and philosophy professors was to reconstruct or rewrite the religious thought of

Islam. They considered it necessary to 'reinterpret traditional Islam in a modern way'. Abdul said that they commented "*with sympathy of the theories of a Nietzsche, qualified by them of 'modern prophet', of a Bergson and even of a Freud.*" Many years later, while the Ladakhi served the Dalai Lama, who had left Tibet to take refuge in India, Abdul Wahid learnt that the Tibetan leader had also studied western philosophers such as Kant, Nietzsche or Bergson. He sent him a note: "*These philosophers are henchmen of the devil. For God's sake, Your Holiness, please realize the level of lowness they are in comparison with the timeless wisdom Your Holiness represents.*"

It is in 1940 that the Ladakhi student discovered another world, with which he immediately felt a deeper affinity as compared with the rigid, superficial and 'modern' Islam of Aligarh University. He had been invited by his uncle to join him in Lhasa for the holidays. His visit to the Roof of the World provided the young Ladakhi a new and refreshing experience. For the first time, he perceived a new way to be; this was not only due to the physical magnificence of the landscape or the serenity of the life in the Tibetan capital, but also because of a certain quality in the culture of this country and its people. He would remain deeply attached to Tibet for the rest of his life. And here, we come back to the Dalai Lama's definition of Tibetan culture, "compassion and tolerance". The young Ladakhi felt in consonance with this *manière d'être*. Unfortunately after two months, he had to return to Aligarh to complete his studies (at least till he obtained his BA); but in the Muslim University he continued to dream of Lhasa. It was during the summer of 1942 that his life took another turn. His uncle Abdul Aziz who was the leader of the triennial caravan of Ladakh, known as the Lopchak, invited his nephew in order to initiate him to a caravaneer's life.

This new adventure marked the young Abdul Wahid for the rest of his life. The official caravan was something specifically Ladakhi: the official tribute of the Buddhist people from Ladakh to the Dalai Lamas had to be carried to the

Tibetan capital. The responsibility of the caravan was given to a Muslim family (the Radhus). Every third year, gifts were transported from Leh and presented to the religious leader of Tibet in Lhasa.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Lopchak Mission was institutionalized through the Peace Treaty signed at Tingmosgang in 1684 between Ladakh and Tibet. The Treaty says:

The Drukpa (red sect) Omniscient Lama, named Mipham Wangpo, who in his former incarnations had always been the patron Lama of the kings of Ladakh, from generation to generation, was sent from Lhasa to Tashi-gang, to arrange the conditions of a treaty of peace. The Ladakh [king] could never refuse to abide by the decision of the Omniscient One. It was signed as follows.

1. *The boundaries fixed, in the beginning, when king Skyed-lda-ngeems gon gave a kingdom to each of his three sons, shall still be maintained.*
2. *Only Ladakhis shall be permitted to enter into Ngari-khor-sum wool trade.*
3. *No person from Ladakh, except the royal trader of the Ladakh Court, shall be permitted to enter Rudok.*
4. *A royal trader shall be sent by the Deywa Zhung [i.e., the Dalai Lama in Lhasa], from Lhasa to Ladakh, once a year, with 200 horse. loads of tea, A 'Lopchak' shall be sent every third year from Leh to Lhasa with presents. As regards the quality and value of presents brought for all ordinary Lamas, the matter is of no consequence, but to the Labrang Chhakdzot shall be given the following articles:
(a) Gold dust-the weight of 1 zho - 10 times.
(b) Saffron-the weight of 1 srang (or thoorrang) - 10 times.
(c) Yarkand cotton cloths - 6 pieces.
(d) Thin cotton cloth-1 piece.*

The members of the Lopchak Mission shall be provided with provisions, free of cost, during their stay at Lhasa, and for the journey they shall be similarly provided with 200 baggage animals, 25 riding ponies, and 10 servants. For the uninhabited portion of the journey, tents will be supplied for the use of the Mission.

7. *The revenue of the Ngari Khor-sum shall be set aside for the purpose of defraying the cost of sacrificial lamps, and of religious ceremonies to be performed at Lhasa.*
8. *But the king of Ladakh reserves to himself the village of Minsar in Ngari-khor-sum, that he may be independent there; and he sets aside Its revenue for the purpose of meeting the expense involved in keeping up the sacrificial lights at Kang-ri [i.e., Mount Kailash), and the holy lakes of Manasarowar and Rakas Tal.*

Following a border conflict between Tibet and Ladakh during the 17th century, the two nations had come to an agreement. It was decided that to maintain friendly relations and promote regular trade between Ladakh and Tibet, a Tibetan caravan would travel once a year from Lhasa to Leh and that, another caravan, the *Lopchak* (triennial) would be sent by the King of Ladakh to Lhasa every two years. The latter was considered as a sort of a tribute from the Ladakhis to the Dalai Lama.

Both caravans were allowed to move freely and transport merchandises into the other's territory. Not only did these exchanges contribute to maintaining good relations between Ladakh and Tibet, but it was a rare opportunity for the caravaners to 'officially' do some good business. Just graduated from the university and speaking fluent English, the young Abdul kept a daily journal of his adventures. He remembers: *"Thanks to the slowness of the mules which in those years constituted our principal means of transportation, I fully had the leisure to record the details of our route. Often also, I could express the moods and thoughts of an idealistic young man, open to the modern world and who at the same time, had normally to maintain the trading tradition of his family."*

Several decades later wrote: *"With the experiences gained through the years, I can now notice that this departure was for me the first steps of a very long journey which has never ended; since then it helped me to begin an inner and almost continuous development."*

From that time onwards, he traveled on the large spaces of Central Asia, but also on the internal tracks of spirituality. He writes in his diary: *"Today, September 19 1942, twentieth day of my married life, I left my family residence, my wife, my aunt and my sister. I left for Lhasa to learn the trade of a merchant under the direction of my uncle, Abdul Aziz, the leader of the Lopchak."*

In the mind of the young man, there were many contradictory feelings. On one side, he was conscious of the commercial and political importance of the caravan. At the same time, he suffered to have had to abandon his young bride. It was not easy for him to adapt to a caravaner's life; the first night alone in the camp, the young man cried. Abdul Wahid recalls that in the forties, Ladakh was one of the most isolated regions of the planet. It took twelve days by pony to reach the closest large city, Srinagar, the capital of the Kashmir. The first airplane with Gen. K.S. Thimayya on board landed in Leh only in May 1948.

For centuries Ladakh had been an independent kingdom though geographically, ethnically and culturally the region was close to Tibet. The young caravaner remembers the stunningly beautiful landscapes: *"During these days of September 1942, the landscapes were still austere. Barley was being harvested and the fields had become yellow, almost all greenery had disappeared. Only the willows and the poplars which stood up near the streams, had kept their foliage, but also the apple and apricot trees planted around some isolated farms. The snow had started sprinkling the summits."*

It took three months for the caravan to arrive at Lhasa after many exciting and sometimes distressing adventures. It would be too long to narrate them all. In any case, were they not similar to those which punctuated the daily life of any caravaner for centuries? In Lhasa, they were received by the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan officials with the pomp due to their official position. Walking for months on the high tracks of Asia, made the young trader realize that thereafter his life would be centered on the Tibetan world and more interestingly for him, he would not need to abandon his faith in Islam.

However his family would slowly start to realize that the commerce which had flourished for centuries between Leh and the rest of Asia was doomed to disappear in a not too distant future. The new modern means of transport would make the direct road between India and Tibet via Kalimpong, Sikkim

and the Chumbi Valley the most economical way to move men and goods from the hot plains of India to the Roof of the World. The traders were often the first to realize changes occurring around and very often quicker than others to adapt to new situations. It was clear for the elders in the Radhu family that sooner or later, the tracks leading towards the Karakoram Pass and continuing to Yarkand, Kachgar and Central Asia could not survive the world changes. In 1943, Abdul Wahid decided therefore to settle in Kalimpong, one of Asia's new essential commercial (and political) nodes. He was soon to make interesting encounters with a few colorful personages dreaming like him of a new Asia. It would probably be necessary to write a book only on the life of Kalimpong, its intrigues, its secret agents, its plots and new political movements. Nehru once called the place a 'nest of spies'. It is necessary to first mention the great khampa trading families, the best known being the Sandutshangs, the Andutshangs, the Gyanaktshangs and the Pangdatshangs. The reputation of the latter spread to China, thanks to the monopoly they had on the trade of Tibetan wool which was exported in huge quantities up to America. *"To welcome the Tibetan notability which frequently visited them, they had constructed in Kalimpong beautiful and vast residential places. They all competed in hospitality,"* remembers Abdul Wahid.

The Pangdatshang were three brothers, Yaphel, Topgay and Rabgay. The first was the leader of the trading empire; he had an immense influence in political circles in Lhasa. Rabgay, the youngest was the revolutionary one, close to the nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-chek. Perhaps because he dreamed to see Tibet become a republic, he ended up being expelled from India. His ideas were too subversive for the British who wanted to keep the political present set-up on the Roof of the World. Empires do not survive on revolutions, but on *statu quo* only.

There was also Tsipon Shakabpa, a young Finance Secretary in the Tibetan Government who was a sort of official representative of the Dalai Lama in

India and who several times had the occasion to meet Jawaharlal Nehru to negotiate (in vain) an Indian military and political support for Tibet. Shakabpa himself told Abdul Wahid how he made his fortune. He had noticed that in the minting workshop producing copper coins in Lhasa, the left-over metal pieces was thrown away after the strike. His idea was to collect these scraps and sell them in India where the price of the copper was very high. He made such huge profits that Yarpel Pangdatshang himself became jealous: *"Shakabpa was then rich enough to play the first roles on Tibet's political scene"* comments Wahid.

It is at Rabgay Pangdatshang's place that Abdul Wahid had the most interesting encounters. For example Kunphela, a former confidant of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who after being unfairly accused of the death of his master, had to take refuge in India; or Changlochan, who is said to have participated in a 'republican' plot in Tibet. Wahid remembers that these two personages had not totally renounced participating in political activities on the Roof of the World, especially as they were aware that the Asian world was beginning to go through a great turmoil.

Perhaps more interesting was the young Ladakhi's proximity of two personages who deeply marked the history of the modern Tibet. The first one was a young and brilliant Tibetan intellectual, Bapa Phuntsok Wangyal, known by the Tibetans as Phunwang. He was fiercely Communist, though at the same time deeply committed to Tibet: *"An authentic Tibetan nationalist, he elaborated some 'pan-Tibetan' theories aiming to regroup together in a federation all the regions and cultures where ethnic Tibetan groups lived, it included Ladakh. Our discussions, friendly but differing, continued later in Lhasa where fate provided the opportunity to meet under unexpected circumstances."* Less than ten years later, Phunwang would be responsible for the entry of the Chinese forces in Lhasa. Unfortunately for him, though he was for a long time very close to Mao Zedong, he ended up spending 17 years of

his life in Communist jails, most of the time under solitary confinement. During our interviews with Abdul Wahid, he constantly asked us if we had any news of Phunwang who has been partially rehabilitated and lives today in Beijing without much contact with the outside world¹⁶.

A familiar individual in Pangdatshang House was Gedun Choepell, the Tibetan rebellious monk who undoubtedly was one the greatest scholars of his generation. Native from Amdo province in Northeastern Tibet, he had studied at the Drepung monastery near Lhasa. He had already been noticed for his nonconformist ideas. After obtaining his diploma of *geshe* (doctor in theology), he began to criss-cross the Indian sub-continent from the North-West Frontier Provinces to Sri Lanka, studying Sanskrit, Pali and English, interested by everything from history, religions or customs of people (he even wrote a manual in Tibetan on the *kamasutra*).

What probably helped creating a great proximity between Abdul Wahid and the Tibetan scholar was that both were deeply interested in the study of other faiths¹⁷. This was something rare at that time. When Gedun Choepell returned to Tibet in 1945, he was arrested and imprisoned for several years. The results of his linguistic and historical researches were confiscated (and probably destroyed)¹⁸. His research in the ancient history of Tibet was a masterly work

¹⁶ His name came recently in the news for having written three lengthy letters to President Hu Jintao. His missives dealt with the role and power of the minorities in the People's Republic of China. He is still considered by some in Beijing as the foremost Communist ideologue on the question of nationalities (and in particular of the rights on the Tibetan minority).

¹⁷ Though, Gedun Choepell once said: "When I speak to Christians or Muslims, their dogmatism is so heavy that I feel they could kill me." He probably liked Abdul Wahid for his open mind.

¹⁸ Abdul Wahid told Choepell's biographer (Heather Stoddard) that Gedun's research was extensively used by Hugh Richardson, the Head of the British Mission in Lhasa to write his *Tibet & Its History* (Boulder, Shambala, 1984).

which is still today considered as a reference. Who realized his genius then? He was probably too much in advance on his times.

He died a destitute just a few weeks after the arrival of the Chinese troops in Lhasa; he had been abandoned by all (except but some rare close spiritual friends such as Abdul Wahid). When he left this world, many considered him as a great yogi who had consciously chosen the time and place of his departure.

The life of Gedun Choepell symbolizes a Tibet that refused to open up to the changing world, a society which did not accept different ideas than the one propagated by the leading Buddhist monasteries. His life (and death) represents the struggle for a new Tibet against the conservative and entrenched forces of the aristocracy and the clergy who did not accept changes (some still believed that the earth was flat). Many in Kalimpong as well as later in Lhasa considered Abdul Wahid a disciple of Gedun Choepell.¹⁹ When we asked him, he just said that they were intellectually very close. Gedun wanted Buddhism to become a religion open to the future²⁰, accepting and respecting other faiths on an equal footing; this is probably what the young Ladakhi dreamed of realizing with Islam.

To come back to Kalimpong, Wahid was also in contact with Prince Peter of Greece; with the explorer orientalist Marco Palis with whom the Ladakhi discovered René Guénon and the great Russian scholar and artist George Roerich.

¹⁹ Abdul Wahid told: *"If you cross him in the market, you would have thought that he is an ordinary man, but after a talk with him, it was as if you had met a Bodhisattva. He was like nobody I had met before. His expression, his eyes were far beyond this world. His mistake was to have had no desire for fame... He attracted me because of his love for the human, whether a horseman, a trader, a servant, a monk or a peasant. I myself was a merchant without any intellectual pretension, but he was fascinating me"*. Even today, Wahid seems fascinated when he speaks of Gedun Choepell.

²⁰ In many ways, it is what the Dalai Lama succeeded to do during his years in exile.

Some months after India's independence, Abdul Wahid met with new adventures, this time not very pleasant. He had left for China on a business trip with a Tibetan trader, and before he could discover that the latter was a fishy character, Wahid found himself under house arrest in Nanjing, the capital of Nationalist China. He was to stay there for more than a year. The matter was simple; he had made the mistake traveling with a Tibetan passport while he was an Indian national; the Chinese wanted to use his Ladakhi identity for their own political ends. This period of his life was one of the most painful, he was cut from his family, his country; he could not even send a message back to Kalimpong. Thanks to his contacts with the Dalai Lama family as well as Rabgay Pangdatshang, he finally managed to leave Nanjing for Eastern Turkistan (Xinjiang), which had not yet been annexed by China.

A long series of eventful journeys eventually took the young Ladakhi to Gilgit, which had just been occupied by Pakistan and then to Karachi where he was promptly invited for tea by Mr. Ikramullah, the Pakistani Foreign Secretary. To Wahid's great surprise, the diplomat offered him a post in the Pakistani Foreign Service. Some French friends with whom he had traveled in Central Asia managed to convince him that it was not the right thing to do. He belonged to the Himalayas, not to the sub-continent. After some hesitation, Wahid decided to politely refuse the offer. He finally managed to catch a flight to Eastern Pakistan (today Bangladesh) and returned to India via Calcutta.

One interesting lesson of this long journey back home is that despite the conflict in China between the Communists and the Nationalists and in Kashmir between India and Pakistan, the young trader could rather freely cross borders, particularly in the Gilgit area as well as between East and West Bengal. A couple of years into Independence, the borders were not rigidified as they are today. The other point to be noted is Pakistan's great need of young educated Muslims to join its civil services, so much so that the Foreign

Secretary of this country could invite for tea an unknown young man and offer him a relatively senior post.

Let us return to Abdul Wahid: some weeks later he was able to return to Tibet and was reunited with his wife who had remained without news for all this time. Unfortunately his uncles were not as happy with his return, as they had taken opportunity of his absence to take over most of the business.

This undoubtedly helped Wahid to take the jump; he decided to return to Kalimpong where in no time, he ran a flourishing commerce again.

An event was to change the face of the Himalayas for ever, on October 7, 1950, the Chinese Liberation Army invaded Tibet. A few weeks earlier, Wahid had decided to return to Lhasa to start a joint venture with a rich Tibetan trader. The next two years were to be enriching years, although the situation became day by day more difficult due to the arrival of the Communists troops. His stay in the Tibetan capital was nevertheless an occasion to renew his contacts with the Dalai Lama's family and particularly with Gyalo Thondup, one of brothers of the Tibetan leader with whom he had shared difficult times in Nanjing.

We will not enter into the details of the first years of the Chinese occupation, but Abdul Wahid faced serious difficulties. After the triumphant entry of the Chinese troops in the Tibetan capital, his old friend from Kalimpong days, Phunwang was now the senior most Communist official in Tibet. Phunwang had been requested by Mao Zedong to make sure that the 'liberation of Tibet' was secured as harmoniously as possible. It is what happened ... but during the first few months only. The young Ladakhi could clearly see dark clouds looming on the horizon of the Land of Snows; he thought that it would not be long before the Tibetan population began resisting the forced Chinese 'liberation'. During his long conversations with Phunwang, which were not as free as they used to be owing to Phunwang's new official position, Abdul Wahid warned several times the young Communist cadre: *"You will be getting into*

serious troubles before long." When Phunwang would ask "Why", Wahid would reply: *"You are too much a Tibetan to be a true Communist"*. At that time Phunwang could not probably understand his friend, he still believed that Communism could solve all the problems of Tibet. But the situation began to slowly deteriorate until the day the Dalai Lama was forced to dismiss Lukhangwa, his very respected and straightforward Prime Minister; the old man was definitively too nationalist in the eyes of the Chinese.



Radhu family in Lhasa

Wahid was in a tricky position, on one hand he was on friendly terms with the Dalai Lama's brothers and on the other; he was still close to Phunwang who wanted to use him. Finally, the latter told him: *"Wahid, it is your duty to collaborate with us and, if you do not, you will regret it one day. I know your devotion to Tibet and you must seize the occasion to participate in the great task of emancipation of the Tibetan culture which has just now begun."*

A similar advice was given to him by Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, the principal minister of the Tibetan Government who had signed the famous (or infamous) 17-Point Agreement with China in May 1951. Being pressed to collaborate against his will and his personal beliefs, he decided to leave the Tibetan capital *"the best for me was to prepare my luggage and leave Lhasa, the dream city's atmosphere had become nightmarish."*

Paradoxically, thanks to his contacts with Phunwang and Ngabo, he could get a special pass which allowed him to return to Kalimpong under the pretext that he had to care for his wife's health.

He finally reached India and after a week stay in Calcutta, jumped into a train for Delhi: *"After Lhasa where we felt constantly spied upon, I was happy to find again in India an atmosphere of freedom "*.

In Delhi, he was welcomed by Ataullah who offered him a place to stay. They had already shared a room in Srinagar and then several years later in Aligarh University. The irony was that his cousin was now Second Secretary to the Pakistani High Commission in Delhi; he had taken up the offer that Abdul Wahid had refused; he was now a Pakistani diplomat.²¹

It is worth mentioning that after Wahid had returned to Kalimpong, Ataullah had also left Tibet. He had told Wahid about his intention to find a new occupation. When he had sounded out the Indian government, he only received negative responses. Wahid had mentioned to his cousin about the offer he had received from Pakistan. Ataullah tried his luck and he was immediately welcomed into the Pakistani Foreign Service. Thus a Ladakhi Muslim became a Pakistani diplomat. Ataullah first posting was in the Pakistani mission in Calcutta and later he rose to eventually become Pakistan's Ambassador in different countries, including Nepal.

What disturbed the young Ladakhi the most in Delhi was that nobody was interested by what had happened in the Land of the Snows. Intellectuals and well-connected people could only speak of the importance of the friendship

²¹ An interesting story about Ataullah can be found in www.tibet.net

A Pakistani diplomat in Tibet? *When I first saw Ataullah Khwaja in Washington, DC in 1996, I was slightly intrigued. Ataullah, who, along with his family, had come to attend the ceremony to celebrate the birthday of HH the Dalai Lama, was introduced as a Tibetan Muslim who is a retired Pakistani diplomat. Although I had known that there were, and still are, quite a few ethnic Tibetans in the Indian Foreign Service, it was news to me that the Pakistani diplomatic corps included one of our kind.*

with China and the birth of a new cooperation between Asia and Africa. He still remembers: *"At a time when everyone celebrated the new era of decolonization, it was not appreciated if one talked about Tibet, a typical case of recolonisation"*.

During the following years, Abdul Wahid took once again the family business, this time in Kashmir. In 1956, he was called by Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's brother, to start a 'Tibetan' business venture. Their association lasted till 1959. By then, the situation had become explosive in Tibet, and finally the Dalai Lama had no other choice but to take the road to India and request the Indian Prime Minister Nehru for asylum which was immediately granted.

During the following months the Ladakhi trader worked as an interpreter for the Dalai Lama who had begun to build an exile administration. He was the ideal person to 'officially' perform this job, being an Indian national and fluently speaking English, Tibetan and Hindi. Unfortunately after a few weeks, some Indian officials decided to remove Wahid from the Tibetan leader's service. The Indian Intelligence (probably B.N. Mullik, the boss of Nehru's Intelligence Bureau) thought that a Muslim was dangerous for India's interests; further he was probably suspected of informing the Pakistani authorities about the Dalai Lama's life in exile through his cousin. The Dalai Lama is said to have commented: *"I wonder what the poor Wahid has been doing to appear so fearsome to the Indian government."* The Ladakhi continued to take care of the Tibetan refugees in an unofficial capacity during the following years. Coming into contact with the suffering of the Tibetan people and hearing the stories of the thousands who lost everything during the so-called 'liberation' of Tibet, made him even more aware of the horrors of the new Marxist religion propagated by Mao and his colleagues. It only reinforced his beliefs in the virtues of tolerance and acceptance of other faiths. He collected thousands of testimonies on the abuses that the new Communist colonizers had committed (and continued to commit) and the unbelievable

ordeal of the people of the Roof of the World: *"They were reduced to a state of slavery in comparison of which their traditional and patriarchal bondage was a much softer, a more human system. I gathered thus a complete view of the Chinese actions who not only bear full responsibility for the unforgettable and stupid atrocities of this tragedy, as well as the destruction of the treasures of a civilization, but who also have slaughtered in the name of an imported Western ideology, itself powerless for the happiness in the West, the last traditional theocracy of the world. It was perhaps imperfect and often corrupt, but it was able to give a sense to the life of all."*

Wahid himself realized that Karl Marx's religion was the most intolerant faith of all; his natal Ladakh was not as "modern" as new China, but it had a culture so much deeper and certainly more compassionate.

It has been said that Abdul Wahid is a Sufi. Whenever we tried to bring up the question, he remained vague, his views on Islam are however fascinating, especially at a time when a certain type of radical Islam is questioned the world over.

The years of studies that the young Abdul spent in Aligarh University had not taken him away from the spiritual tradition that his grandfather had inculcated in the young boy. Crossing the large uninhabited spaces and encountering so many extraordinary personalities, he very quickly understood that there were two basic tendencies in Islam and that in the course of world history, each of these two currents had prevailed at a time or another.

Abdul explains the meaning of the *zahir* (the 'outer' Islam) and the *batin* (the 'inner' one)²². In a way, it corresponds to exotericism and esotericism. He feels that the history of the Muslim presence in India had demonstrated this duality.

²² In Arabic, *Zahir* can be translated by "apparent, visible, obvious, manifest, esoteric, exterior, literal, superficial" while Batin means 'concealed'. Al-Batin and Al-Zahir are two of the names of God. Al-Batin is the The Hidden, The All Encompassing while Al-Zahir is The Manifest, The All Victorious. (Ref. Wikipedia.com)

He adds: "*The conquerors and kings have established by force the reign of Islam and their temporal power, but it is holy personages, mystics and Sufis, who by their spiritual charisma and influence attracted the most converts and rooted Islam into masses thirsty of the divine and absolute.*"

What is remarkable today when one often speaks of the clash of civilizations is that Abdul Wahid considers that the *batin* possessed a spiritual quality that goes beyond forms and allows acceptance of other religious traditions. For example, Buddhists are not considered as *kafirs* (infidel) for Muslim followers of the *batin*.

The old Ladakhi points out that the contemporary world is unfortunately characterized by the predominance of all that is 'outer' and quantitative. The *batin* is therefore regrettably often foreign in today's life. The ideal for him would be if the *zahir* and the *batin* were balanced, that would allow Islam to answer at the same time the believers' worldly and social requirements while taking care of their highest spiritual aspirations.

When the adepts of the *zahir* (one could say this of other any organized creed) are only interested in converting to their faith the largest possible number of people, it can only result in confrontations and conflicts as we see today in the four corners of the planet. One proof of this is visible in Kashmir where the Hindu Pandits have been chased out of their ancestral villages by fundamentalist elements sponsored by Pakistan. The very identity of this nation, based uniquely on religious separateness, makes it intolerant. Most of the problems, called today terrorism or fundamentalism, are the direct outcome of the state of mind which presided over the creation of this State. Pakistan cannot be 'esoteric' since its birth is not a phenomenon based on a deep knowledge of Islam says Abdul Wahid. For him, this was only an emotional demonstration of certain political leaders, driven by their thirst for power. Abdul Wahid adds that there were periods in the history of India when *zahir* and *batin* were balanced. He takes the example of Akbar, the Moghol

Emperor. During close to a century, there was a sectarian harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims. He points out that *"tolerance shown by Islam [during Akbar's time] was not a sign of weakness or lukewarmness, on the contrary, this was for Islam a time of magnificence, of radiating spirituality and of brilliant civilization; many monuments remain admirable witnesses of this."*

According to Wahid, Shah Jahan who built the Taj Mahal in Agra²³ was the last Moghul sovereign to practice the *batin*. During the following decades and principally during the Aurangzeb's reign, the *zahir* with its intolerance and puritanism dominated. The Emperor was in opposition with his elder brother Dara Shukoh who should have acceded the throne in his place. The latter was a follower of the *batin*. He knew that there was a truth in other sacred traditions, particularly in Hinduism, and asserted that the non dualistic theories such as Vedanta and the Tawhid (Islamic doctrine of Unity)²⁴ as it is interpreted by the Sufis, were essentially the same. It is said that Dara Shukoh translated the Upanishads into Persian; Dara Shukoh believed that these basic texts of the Vedanta expressed certain truths also present in the Koran.

One can only regret that there are not enough Abdul Wahids in this world. Was it these long hikes in the vast spaces of the Asia which made men wiser? Immensity probably helps to widen the mind.

The Khache Phalu's Advice

It is necessary here to mention a remarkable work called *Khache Phalu's Advices* written supposedly by a Tibetan Muslim in the 18th or 19th century.

²³ The Taj Mahal has just been recognized as one of the Seven Marvels of the World.

²⁴ According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia, "*Tawhīd (also transliterated Tawheed and Tauheed;) is the Islamic concept of monotheism. In Islam, Tawhīd means to assert the unity of Allah. The opposite of Tawhīd is 'shirk', which means "making something a companion" (to God) in Arabic, referring to idolatry.*"

Tibet being generally associated with Buddhism, it seems strange that a Muslim could write a treatise about the *dharma* in the Land of Snows. It is probably for this reason that the authorship of this work is still disputed today. Acharya Tashi Tsering, a Tibetan scholar wrote in the *Tibetan Review*²⁵: "*There are a number of opinions regarding the authorship of the [work]. Some maintain that it was written by the Fifth Dalai Lama under a Muslim pseudonym... the most commonly held belief was that the [work] was written by one of the Panchen Lamas. But the actual authorship of the book languished in obscurity until recently.*"

Though some authors have cited the Seventh Panchen Lama, it is generally admitted amongst the Kache population in exile that it was written by one of their kin. "*The textual evidence, as we shall see, seems to support the latter claim*" says Prof. Dawa Norbu who translated the Advice into English²⁶.

The author would be a Muslim trader called Fazur-alla. Norbu says "*[the name Phalu] was probably a transcription difficulty or Tibetan corruption. A Muslim family who claimed Khache Phalu as coming from their ancestry showed me an old manuscript in Arabic and Tibetan. There his name was signed in Tibetan as Khache Phalug's Zui, and in another place simply Khache Phalu' Zui. Thus, the name Fazuralla is not too far off.*"

Abdul Wahid told Tashi Tsering in 1979 that Fazur-alla used for his Advice: "*the gist of the works of Sheikh Sa'di, the great 13th century Persian poet*". It is Sa'di who wrote the famous poems *Gulistan* (*The Rose Garden* translated into English by James Ross in 1900) and *Bostan*. These Persian classics are said to have taught in *madrassas* in Tibet.

²⁵ Tsering, Tashi, *The Advice of the Tibetan Muslim Phalu: A Preliminary Discussion of a Popular Buddhist/Islamic Literary Treatise* (*The Tibetan Review*, New Delhi, Vol. XXIII No 2, February 1988 p 10-15 and Vol. XXIII No 3, March 1988, p 18-21).

²⁶ Dr. Dawa Norbu (Trans.), *Kache Phalu's Advice on the Art of Living*, (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1987)

But Norbu adds: *"a close study indicates that Khache Phalu's Advices are not an imitation of Persian classics, neither in its style nor in its content. It is in a class by itself."*

For Tsering Tashi, it is written in *"straightforward colloquial Tibetan refreshingly, free of ecclesiastical pomposity and tiresome literary conventions, and can be easily understood and appreciated by the common man, both young and old."*

Dawa Norbu in the introduction of his translation explains what makes this work so special: *"It opens an enormous vista to the folk-mind; its strength and weakness; its wisdom and follies; its suffering and yearning; its ideals and illusions; its social ethos and trickiness; in short, its way of life and world view. Never before have we had so much common sense with so little allusion to the classical literature. Never before have we had such a good glimpse into the workings of the folk-mind in Tibet."*

The fascinating aspect is that Khache Phalu was a Muslim merchant, who could speak and write in a language understood by any Buddhist. As a trader, like all the Kaches, he was in a unique position, a Tibetan by culture, a Muslim by religion while at the same time a sharp observer of a society mainly centered on the Dharma of the Buddha.

The author of the treatise shows that he appreciates and understands the Buddhist faith as practiced in Tibet. While, like Abdul Wahid today, he remains a pious Muslim, at a same time he can be considered as a 'cultural synthesizer' who does not see any contradiction between his faith and the one of the majority around him. Norbu feels: *"The whole work is a testimony to the astonishing degree to which the Muslims in Tibet achieved a working spiritual consensus with the Tibetan Buddhist society. As a result, there was no case of Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Tibet."*

Tashi Tsering in his scholarly article lists 13 points showing *"the wealth of Muslim and allusions in the verses, which have no Tibetan and Buddhist*

flavour." To cite only a couple, Kache Phalu writes: "*These are the signs of the centre of the world, the path from this centre to the main centre*" or again: "*Trust and have face in Khuda (Allah)*" or "*when the craving for meat arises it is better to eat lice that eat ill omen butcher's share of meat*" (i.e. Muslims' practice to eat only *halal*²⁷ meat).

Then Tsering proceeds to give twenty-five examples showing that the work is typically Tibetan and not a remake of Sa'di's poems "*because of the tremendous wealth of Tibetan folk wisdom, proverbs and sayings scattered through the [work]*".

First there is the Buddhist concept of India being the Holy Land (*Arya Bhumi*) and not Mecca. India is considered as the Land of the Aryans (The Pure).²⁸ Norbu who describes the work as "*a mine of ethnographic data for social scientists interested in Tibetan religion and society*" like Tsering shows the dual aspects of the Advices. He quotes from other verses "*I prostrate before the Chief of all Chiefs. In Tibetan he is called Godhar [Allah]*." While advising children to be grateful to their parents, Kache Phalu says, "*Above is Godhar and below Him are the two parents.*" Allah is the ultimate relief.

The author insists on the importance of practicing to obtain a good Karma: "*There are many who utter [the word of] Karma but practitioners of Karma are as scarce as gold.*" From the first verses, the author mentions themes of Buddhist concerns: "*the law of karma, sense of shame, love and compassion, custom and tradition etc.*".

²⁷ *Halal* is an Arabic term meaning "permissible". In the English it refers to food that is permissible according to Islamic laws.

²⁸ If you want to go to the land of Aryans, India, you must eliminate ignorance from your mind; sink the black passions of desire and attachment to the bottom of the ocean; at which his readers are told to strive [translation Dr Dawa Norbu].

It is fascinating to see how sentiments which Tibetan Lamas and scholars could not put into simple, ordinary language were beautifully expressed by a Muslim merchant. Exempt of all the embellishments and the superfluities of highly codified classic Tibetan, he was able to go straight to the heart of common folks. Like Milarepa's songs seven centuries earlier, this made the success of the Kache Phalu Advice's.

Norbu put it nicely: *"Its directness is indicative of the Tibetan character. The author never minces his words; he says simply and directly what he wants to say. His folksy wisdom is shot through earthy Tibetan imagery borrowed from everyday life in rural Tibet."*

Dawa Norbu summarized the Advices: *"The ruler should rule his domain lawfully, that parents should bring up their children strictly, that everybody in society should know his limits and live according to the law of Karma."*²⁹

²⁹ Khache Phalu's written advice may be

a drop in the ocean of human culture

law of karma, sense of shame (and respect),

love and compassion, custom and tradition etc.

This pearl of advice, hung in a string of verses,

is like a small stream of realization.

The source of Dharma is the Vajra Throne;

behind is the Rocky Mountain of Dharma--high in its glory;

in front is the sea of compassion--full with glimmering light;

there summer or winter, day or night, is the same duration;

Summer is not hot, nor winter cold;

in such a place with perfect weather,

when the sun is right in the middle,

neither darkness nor shadows in the house.

These are the signs of the centre of the universe.

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"

And in our language "Godhar"

But let us return to our Ladakhi friend. In some ways it is unfortunate that there are no longer caravaneers criss-crossing the Asian continent; today, the old border posts have been closed and the caravaneers have been replaced by CEOs jet-setting from one country to another. The old Ladakhi still remembers: *"At the time when my journey began; when I left the highlands of my childhood for the first time, the Himalayan populations, to whom we belonged, led a natural and peaceful life, though it was also rough and austere, no doubt; but it was harmonious and beauty was manifest. Perched as we were on the Roof of the World, we constantly had to face the challenges of an overwhelming nature that forced us to work hard, just to continue to exist. It was necessary to be hard oneself and as we were not any better than others, having our own human weaknesses and our bad instincts, our life as Himalayans was far from being rosy. Those who evoke this gone time, speak always about it as an almost lost paradise."*

At the end of such a fully filled life, Abdul Wahid believes that with the disappearance of the caravans' era, some unique human values have vanished from Asia. He considers the last 'Himalayans' lived in harmony with their fate, progressing alongside the tracks, leisurely crossing the trans-Himalayan immensities. Nobody thought to rebel against his destiny: *"One accepted it,*

If you want to go to the land of Aryans, India,
you must eliminate ignorance from your mind;
sink the black passions of desire and attachment
to the bottom of the ocean;
(you must) burn out your greed and envy;
(you must) think, meditate and remember only one.

...As you journey, you will see.....

Whatever you do, will be religious;
whatever you send, will be in the right direction;
whatever you wish and desire, you will get in your hand;
whatever you say, will be well-said.

And whenever you bait, you will get the right number. [translation Dr Dawa Norbu].

one identified with it. This acceptance entailed a spiritual attitude of adoration and contemplation of the supreme Reality; Nature, which was still intact, Nature forebode the majesty and the perfection [of this Reality]."

He recalls that the caravaner's life unfolded itself away from the futilities of the so-called civilized world. He recalled: *"its simplicity, its purity, its slowness, the impression of sacred were totally opposite to the secular modernity of our age."*

Today the sense of the sacred has disappeared. The old man does not regret it, he just notes it. For him, one possibility only remains to continue to live this life, *"while symbolically accomplishing an inner journey and with the divine grace, one will be able to reach towards new altitudes."*

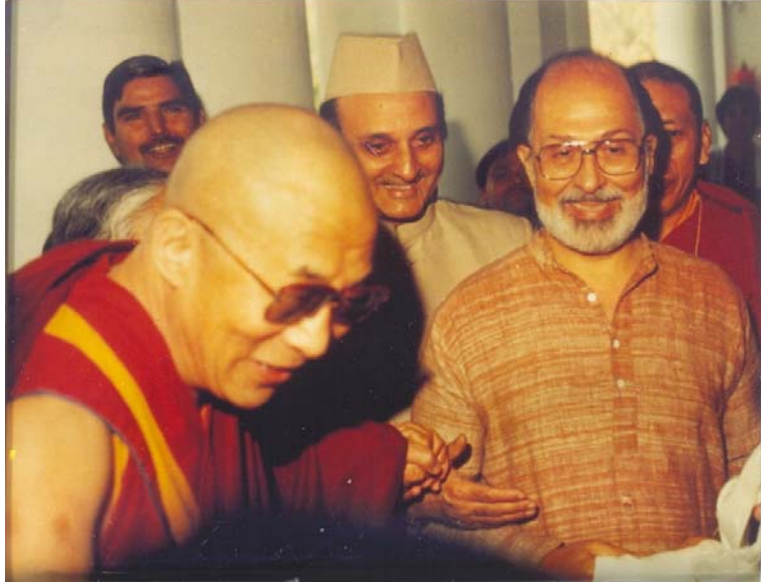
Abdul Wahid Radhu is the epitome of what Tibet (and Ladakh) was. Diverse races, with different faiths and beliefs lived in harmony together. One man could belong to two cultures without being ostracized by the either.

When we asked Abdul Wahid's son, Prof. Siddiq Wahid³⁰ *if it was possible to have several identities at the same time, he told us: "It is possible; in fact one has to accept to have several identities at the same time in order to live a healthy life. My point is that I feel we all have multiple identities.*

For example, I am born a Ladakhi, I belong to a Tibetan culture area, I was educated by Jesuits in Darjeeling, I live in a country which is overwhelmingly Hindu, I am married to a Lutheran Christian, for the sake of travel, I have an Indian passport, so it hard for me to reject any of these identities.

I have a photo on my table with the Dalai Lama, Karan Singh and one of the leading Muslim scholars called Sayeed Abdul Nasser. I keep this photo because [it represents] my three [main] identities. Intellectually, Nasser is my identity, culturally I am a Tibetan, politically, Karan Singh is my identity."

³⁰ Prof Siddiq Wahid is the Vice-Chancellor, Kashmir Islamic University, Avantipura and was the first Ladakhi to awarded a PhD from Harvard University.



One of the most pressing issues facing the planet today is that ninety nine per cent of the conflicts have their origin in the fact that one nation, one culture, one region, one caste or religion refuses to acknowledge the existence of others and to treat people as equal human beings. People like Abdul Wahid who could fully integrate in their psyche two or three different cultures are disappearing fast; tolerance has today been replaced by brutality and kalachnikovs. The *zahir* and the *batin* are not balanced anymore.

In many ways, the Valley of Kashmir faces a similar situation. The Maharaja's kingdom was socially and politically far from perfect, but populations from the Valley, from Ladakh, Gilgit, Hunza or Jammu lived together in harmony. Will we see one day this multi-cultural tolerance flourish again? The future of humanity depends undoubtedly on this.

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