

S H O R T R E V I E W S

RECIT D'UN VOYAGEUR MUSULMAN AU TIBET

Urdu text edited with French translation by M. Gaborieau.

166 pages, index. Published by the Librairie C. Klincksieck, Paris, 1973. Price : 24 F.

Although Chinese sources antedate them by some ten centuries, the Jesuit and the Capucin Missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries A.D. furnished the first Western accounts of Tibet. Interest in the study of Tibet grew steadily over the years, especially among westerners. It was greatly accelerated by the trade policy of the British East India Company Government in the 18th and the 19th Centuries. As a result, a great amount of literature is available on Tibetan studies concerning all sorts of subjects : travelogues, religion, grammar, philosophy and history. Tibet still continues to fascinate scholars all over the world despite the political change there in 1959 A.D.

The present book is an account of a journey from Nepal to Tibet made by a Kashmiri Muslim, Khwaja Ghulam Muhammed (1857-1928) in the late 19th Century. The narrative, which is in Urdu, is rendered with a clear translation in French, ample foot-notes to the text, and a thirty-page introduction on the subject of the Muslims of Tibet. References to relevant literature are given in the form of notes to the introduction. This introduction briefly traces the first contact of Tibet with the Arabs and Persia. Muslim influence in Tibet is seen in the field of medicine and also in the large vocabulary which is drawn from Muslim sources into Tibetan. The presence of Muslims in Tibet, mentioned by some foreign sources as early as the 12th century is quite certain from the 17th century, at the time of the Fifth Dalai-Lama. Relevant economic and sociological notes on the Tibetan Muslims are made by Gaborieau which show that the Tibetan Muslims can be divided into three groups. The majority consists of the Kashmiris who in Tibetan are called Kha-čhe. Then come the Ho-pa-lings, i.e., the Chinese Muslims, and lastly, the Gharibs, who are sociologically speaking a curious group of Muslims whose origin is obscure. The largest group among the Kashmiri Muslims is called the Za'idah, meaning those persons born in Tibet itself. They are naturalized Tibetans adopting the language and dress of Tibet completely and also marrying Tibetan women. Despite this they have jealously guarded their religious separateness and preserved their basic socio-economic characteristics all these years. Politically also they retained their separate identity and were placed in charge of a Muslim head-man, called the Kha-čhe 'go-pa. The latter was an officer formally recognised by the Tibetan government and was appointed by the Finance Ministry of Tibet. Trade and commerce were the main professions of the Kashmiri

Muslims. They took Tibetan products to India and imported Indian merchandise into Tibet (viz., wool, musk, medicinal herbs and gold from Tibet were exchanged with Indian merchandise such as beads, lace, textiles, dried raisins, fruits, knives, scissors and other hardwares). Besides carrying out their own trade, the Kashmiris acted as the intermediaries for the rich Tibetan families, lamas and monasteries in conducting their trade. When Tibet was overtaken by the political change of 1959, and Tibetans fled the country with the Dalai-Lama in large numbers, the Kashmiris fled with them too. But their ambivalent status in Tibet, described above, proved most frustrating to them in India, as India considered them only as repatriates and not as refugees. In these circumstances, they find themselves mal-adjusted in India now. Gaborieau says that there is not a single instance of their marrying either a Tibetan or an Indian woman after coming to India in 1959.

The original text by Khwaja-Muhammad is by no means a new and revealing account of Tibet rendered in careful detail or a scientifically recorded narrative of Tibet. It is just a short impressionistic account by a Muslim trader of Tibetan society, government, administration and religion, and of the Muslims living in Tibet; and it describes one specific incident which happened in the year of the author's visit: the pillage of Lhasa by the monks at the Tibetan New Year of 1883.

Gaborieau admits that the author describes virtually nothing about what he himself did during his ten month's stay in Lhasa nor about what personal incidents occurred to him in that period. Of course, the present text forms part of a larger dossier describing the history of the author's family, such as the life of his father, Ahsan Baba (?-1864) and an autobiography of himself which ends in the year 1890. The reason for editing the manuscript is stated by the editor in these words: "This is the only description of Tibet made in modern times by a Muslim". The editor has been studying the Muslims of Nepal for many years and the present text, which he found lying with a Muslim family of Kathmandu, naturally interested him. The usefulness of the book to Tibetologists is hard to see without the editor's hard work on the manuscript to make his choice a worth-while exercise. The contents of the entire manuscript—which the translator-editor has briefly outlined in the introduction—shows that perhaps the publication of the entire manuscript would have provided a better commentary on the history of the Kashmiri Muslims of Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley.

There is obviously a historical cause-effect relationship between these Muslims living in Tibet and Kathmandu. Trade may have been one of the primary reasons for the origin of a Muslim settlement in the Kathmandu valley as it lay on the direct route from the Gangetic plains to Tibet. Nepalese chronicles mention that the first Muslims to settle in Nepal were those who came in the reign of Ratna Malla in the 15th century A.D. Among the Muslims of Kathmandu valley, the majority is composed of Kashmiris as in Tibet. Although the Kashmiri nomenclature of these Muslims in

Tibet. has led many to think that they went there directly from Kashmir via Ladakh and western Tibet. Gaborieau is quite right in refuting this theory saying that the route of Western Tibet was less frequented and suggesting that the Kashmiris arrived in Tibet by passing through Nepal, and later Sikkim. He further says that the settlement of the Kashmiris was located along the route going from Kathmandu to Lhasa in such places as Kuti, Shigatse, Gyantse and Thi-Samber, thus vindicating his point. The family chronicle of Khawaja Ghulam Muhammad is probably typical of the manner in which most Kashmiri Muslims from the Gangetic plains must have travelled to Tibet. Their permanent quarters in Kathmandu were established to facilitate them in their entrepot trade. This is the reason for believing that editing the complete manuscripts would have served a better purpose as it would have preserved an illustrative case-study. However, Gaborieau's work as it stands is the best general treatment of Tibet's Muslims ever published; and the book is a fine job of offset printing.

P.R.S.

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NEPAL 2029, GESTERN NOCH VERBOTENES LAND.

By Heinrich Seemann. 196 pages including 3 plans, 63 b/w and 45 colour plates, maps. Published by Verlag Bendell A.B., Stuttgart, 1973.

Price : DM 98.50 (N. Rs. 380)/-

The author of this large and very lavishly illustrated book spent four years in Kathmandu as a diplomat, from 1967 to 1971. The book must be intended as a fairly thorough introduction to Nepal for Germans who have little prior knowledge of the country, and as such it is an appropriate book. The author does not seem to have travelled widely outside the Kathmandu valley, and most of the splendid illustrations by the photo-journalist Hilmar Phabel and the author are from the valley itself.

A considerable amount of information is neatly, perhaps rather pedantically, organized into nineteen chapters. Besides the usual introductory matters like geography, climate, etc., there are separate chapters dealing with the people, religion, history, art, German-Nepalese relations, mountaineering. The bibliography is rather thin. A common feature throughout the text is that the material dealt with in any detail concerns itself primarily with the Kathmandu valley, and information and references to people, places or happenings outside the valley are rather cursory. This is my main negative observation on the book as a whole. After all, 97 % of Nepal's population lives outside the valley in towns and villages—with cultures, histories, languages and life very different from Kathmandu, but not less fascinating, interesting or worthwhile to study.

As stated above, the book is beautifully illustrated with a number of large size illustrations in colour and black and white. Unfortunately, plates 51-54 have been reproduced two times in my copy of the book, once instead of plates 41-43.

The three maps of Kathmandu, Baktapur and Lalitpur are useful for identifying temples, stupas and other places of religious and historical interest.

H. K. K.