

## CHAPTER 12

### The Agitation by the Muslims of Woba-ling

I WILL JUST say a little bit about the agitation by the Chinese Hui Muslims, which began around 1961 and was coming to an end by the time I got out of prison. In the old days, there were two separate groups within Lhasa's Muslim community. One was the Muslims of Indian Kashmiri origin, who were businesspeople with shops around the Parkor market street and were referred to by Lhasa people as "Parkor Kha-ché." The other group lived in an area on the east side of town called Woba-ling, working as butchers, millers, and sometimes market gardeners; their ancestors had come from the Xining region, and they were known to Lhasa people as the "Woba-ling Kha-ché" and in official Chinese usage as the "Hui nationality." Although both groups practiced the same religion, their places of daily worship and their graveyards were separate, since their forebears had come to Tibet at different times from different places, were of different ethnic origin, and had been granted different areas of settlement by the Tibetan government. Although Buddhists were the majority and Muslims a small minority, both groups were treated without religious discrimination or animosity as equal subjects of the Tibetan government with full access to Tibet's resources. They had permission to pursue the trades in which they were skilled, and they were economically successful members of the community.

After the devastating events of 1959, which affected everyone in the country, there was no longer any provision for the Parkor Kha-ché to remain in Tibet, and they appealed to the Chinese government to be allowed to return to their country of origin. Permission was granted, and by 1960 or so they had departed for India. The Woba-ling Kha-ché, with their origins in Xining and Gansu, had had very close links with the Guomindang representative office (*Don gcod*) in Lhasa prior to the Communist invasion due

to their racial affinity, and as soon as the Communists arrived in 1950, they welcomed and cooperated with them like a baby embracing its mother. At that time, it was the Chinese-speaking members of the Muslim community, as well as some of the Ba-pas from Kham, who became the most trusted associates and translators of the Chinese, leading to resentment between them and ordinary Tibetans.

When the uprising broke out in 1959, the Wobaling Kha-ché anticipated trouble and took refuge in the Chinese military camp rather than staying in their homes, and during the subsequent violent suppression, many Muslim youths took up arms and accompanied the Chinese soldiers as translators, oppressing and terrorizing the Tibetans. Because of that, some Tibetans burned down the Wobaling mosque in the course of the struggle. Once the uprising had been forcibly put down, not only the qualified ones among the Wobaling Kha-ché but even the old folks who usually stayed home and working members of trading and artisan families went to work as officials with the Chinese during the Democratic Reform campaign. They were rough and hostile with the Tibetans then, and behaved with unlimited arrogance. They had nothing but praise for the Chinese concepts of “Motherland” and “common good,” but perhaps they had not grasped exactly how the Communists operated, for apart from rewarding them for joining up as activists by granting state funds for the repair of their mosque, giving some of them exemplary appointments to purely ceremonial positions, and moderately commending their political stance, with regard to economic and all other aspects, the Communists made them put on the same “wet leather hat” as everyone else, and before long they had lost everything and bitterly regretted having sided with the Chinese. So when the Tibetan Muslims of Kashmiri origin got the chance to return to India, the Tibetan Muslims of Wobaling started an agitation to also be allowed to go abroad.

Getting no response from the Chinese [authorities], most of the Muslims who had served as Chinese officials resigned their positions, complaining that their loyalty to the government had gone unrewarded, and settled their families all together in a compound at the foot of the mountain below the Purbu-chok hermitage [in Do-dé] to the north of the city, which was used as a Muslim graveyard. They began a kind of passive struggle for the Chinese government to respond to their demands, and they had resolved to pursue it come what might, so when the edible oil ration was introduced and grain ration cards were distributed to all city residents, they refused to accept their ration cards. The Chinese didn’t make any forceful or aggressive response and did not brand the so-called Hui agitation (*Hud rigs*

*kyi rnyog dra*) with terms like “reactionary” and “counterrevolutionary,” but presented it as a “contradiction within the masses” rather than a confrontation “between the masses and the enemy.” They used the few Chinese Muslim officials still in service to lead reeducation meetings telling their people to take ration cards like everyone else and go back to their homes, but instead of agreeing, the agitators called those officials traitors and beat them up. After that, the Chinese authorities arrested and imprisoned some of the leaders of the movement and ringleaders involved in the attacks, but continued to hold the reeducation meetings.

This passive approach by the authorities proved just as fatal as physical repression. Since they refused their edible oil entitlement, the Hui had to buy oil on the black market at the rate of about 15 *yuan* per [*Khal* = 28 lbs.] of oil and 5 *yuan* per [*rGya ma* = 1 lb.] of butter, which meant steady expenditure while living without income. As their reserves ran out, one after another they were unable to see it through, and within a year or two most of those Muslims had to return to their homes and take ration cards. Even by the time of my release in 1963, a few families were still stubbornly refusing ration cards, and their children were among the beggars along the Lingkor path during the fourth month Purnima holiday (*Sa zla'i dus chen*) that year. Anyway, not only did the Muslim agitation achieve no results, it excited no sympathy whatsoever from any quarter. In the end, after the leaders had languished in prison for ten years, two of them were sentenced to death during the mass rallies of the “One Smash and Three Antis” campaign of 1970 and executed in the Shangtap ravine east of the city; a couple of others were sentenced to be executed after two years, and some were sentenced to life imprisonment.