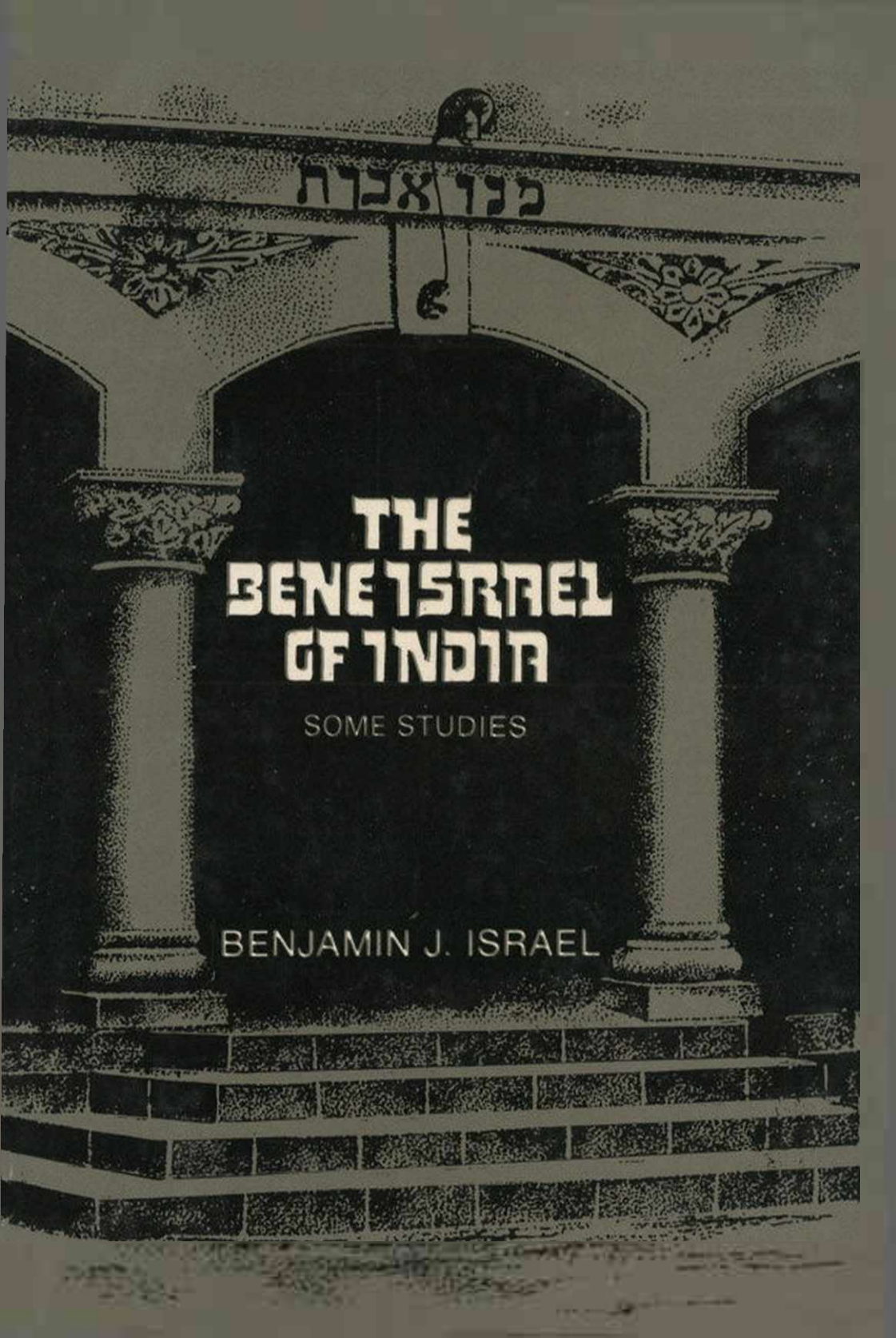

מנו אכרת
THE
BENE ISRAEL
OF INDIA
SOME STUDIES
BENJAMIN J. ISRAEL

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BENJAMIN J. ISRAEL

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THE BENE ISRAEL OF INDIA

SOME STUDIES

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Dedicated to

the unfading memory of

MY MOTHER

the greatest influence in my life

Preface

The writings here collected span a period of over twenty years since 1960. During my thirty years in Government service I hardly anticipated that, after I retired, I would devote so much of my enforced leisure to studies relating to the Bene Israel community of which I had always been a very marginal member.

Late in 1954, when I was still in service, Mr P. G. Shah, President of the Bombay Anthropological Society and Member of the Bombay Public Service Commission under which I was then serving, put me in touch with Miss Schifra Strizower who was in Bombay researching the Bene Israel community. I was able to draw her attention to reports of activities of the American Marathi Mission among the Bene Israel which I had come across in the Bombay University Library. Some years later I had occasion to write to her about a letter she had contributed to the *Jewish Chronicle* of London regarding the position of the Bene Israel in Israel, and a regular correspondence started between us on questions arising from the material she had collected in India on the Bene Israel. This required me to take a close look at the community and I began examining records and publications relating to the community on my own account. The correspondence culminated in my being invited in 1970 to contribute a Foreword to Dr Strizower's book *The Children of Israel: the Bene Israel of Bombay*, published in 1971.

In 1960 I was approached for information about my father by the editor of the Marathi periodical *Maccabi*, who was publishing a series of articles on Bene Israel personalities. I preferred to write about my father myself, and the personal sketch which, slightly revised, makes the last paper in this book is the result. It was originally published in 1960 for private distribution. For the periodical I furnished a short version. Though, owing to its personal character, the sketch differs from the other contents of the book, it provides a concrete portrait of a personality in many respects representative of the first generation of the Bene Israel which had the benefit of university education and which initiated

Bene Israel entry into the professions and the higher ranks of the public services.

When the controversy over the status of the Bene Israel for purposes of marriage broke out in Israel in 1961 I commented in letters to the English Press in Bombay as well as to the *Jewish Chronicle*. My friend and erstwhile colleague Isaiah Isaac Shapurkar, seeing I was concerned, sought my assistance in putting the Bene Israel case in the journal *Mebasser* published by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of India of which he was de facto editor until he incurred the displeasure of the American sponsors of the Union. I was invited by the Union to write a short account of the Bene Israel for an American journal. I agreed, provided I was given a free hand and provided the account first appeared in *Mebasser*. Though these conditions were accepted I was asked to make some changes in what I wrote. I refused and decided to publish a somewhat expanded version in pamphlet form. This is 'Religious Evolution among the Bene Israel of India since 1750', which appears here in an amplified and annotated form as the second paper. It is a measure of the dearth of authentic information outside India about the Bene Israel that the pamphlet, when published in 1963, attracted more attention than its slight character merited. In particular, it served me as an introduction to a few foreign scholars who have undertaken studies about the Jews of India. Contacts with these scholars and mutual exchange of information and comment intensified my involvement in Bene Israel studies until the infirmities of age overtook me.

It was again at the request of Isaiah Isaac Shapurkar that in August 1964 I furnished the Secretary of the Central Jewish Board of Bombay with a note on the Bene Israel marriage controversy in Israel. It was distributed at a protest meeting convened by the Board and is reproduced as the third paper in this book in its original form with a postscript which I have since added. The only reason for the inclusion of the note is that, to my knowledge, no account of the controversy putting the Bene Israel case has appeared elsewhere.

In October 1981 I was requested by Mr Ezra Kolet to write a short account of the Jews of India for the Centre for Jewish and Inter-faith Studies of the Jewish Welfare Association of New Delhi.

The account appeared in booklet form in June 1982. It is reproduced here, in a somewhat shortened form, as an introduction to the other contents. Though in some places it covers the same ground as the second paper I have not considered it necessary to make any changes in it. In a collection of assorted articles such overlap is difficult to avoid.

The remaining three papers relate essentially to the original Bene Israel habitat, the Kulaba (now Raigad) District of Maharashtra. I have chosen to use the old name rather than the new because it appears in all earlier literature about the community. They have been worked on and extensively revised over a period of almost ten years ranging from 1974 to 1982. I had intended at one time to make a comparative study of the Jewish population of Greater Bombay based on reports of the 1961 and 1971 censuses, but have not been able to do so. I must now leave this to younger hands, to whom the 1981 census data will be available.

The three Kulaba studies appear for the first time here. No serious effort was made to get them published when they were first written. Friends who have seen them suggested that I seek a publication grant from one or other Jewish foundation abroad, but I have been reluctant to do so. Early this year I had agreed to their inclusion along with 'Religious Evolution among the Bene Israel of India since 1750' in a collection of writings on Jews in India which Dr Thomas A. Timberg has arranged to bring out. On further consideration I decided, as opportunity offered, to get the whole corpus of my writings on the Bene Israel published in a self-contained volume, and Dr Timberg has kindly agreed to exclude my articles from his collection to avoid duplication.

Acknowledgments are due to the author and publisher for the quotation in the second paper from Professor Adrian C. Mayer's *Caste and Kinship in Central India* and to Dr Shalva Weil for the quotation in the fifth paper from her article 'Names and Identity among the Bene Israel'.

It only remains for me to place on record my gratitude to the late Isaiah Isaac Shapurkar for serving over the years as my eyes and ears in relation to the Bene Israel community, for stimulating me to write, and for allowing me free access to his carefully garnered and well preserved collection of old documents and

publications. I must thank my brother Samuel for consistent encouragement and expert professional help. My thanks are also due to my sister in-law Sarah for her strict scrutiny of my amateurish typescripts and for preparing the final copy. And I must not forget my sister Lily who has nursed me through two serious operations and for long relieved me of a number of responsibilities which were properly mine.

Bandra, Bombay B.J.I.

July 1983

1

Introduction

> Then said they unto him, 'Tell us, we pray thee . . . of what people art thou?' And he said unto them, 'I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.'
>
> —Jonah, ch. 1, vs. 8-9

I. Background

To many people in the outside world and even in India itself it is a matter of surprise to learn that for long centuries there have been Jews settled in India who, to a large degree, have entered fully into the variegated pattern of Indian life. Nevertheless, there have been small communities of Jews settled on the western coast of India since the tenth or eleventh centuries of the present era (i.e. 1000)—some believe they came much earlier; conjectures range from 1000 B.C.E to 70 C.E.[1] when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans and the Jews residing in Judea and Galilee were dispersed. Before entering into a brief account of these ancient communities of Indian Jews and the later accretions to them from time to time, it is necessary to say something about Jews and Judaism generally to put the picture in proper perspective. This is the more necessary because, on the one hand, some people think, especially after the establishment of the State of Israel, that a Jew must have extra-territorial loyalties and, therefore, cannot be wholly Indian, and because, on the other hand, it is sometimes thought that, because many Indian Jews so closely resemble other Indians, they cannot be wholly Jewish.

[1] Following Jewish usage, the letters B.C.E. stand for 'before the common era' and the letters C.E. stand for 'common era', taking the place of the more commonly used B.C. and A.D.

In a sense, ever since the Diaspora (lit. dispersion) the Jews *have* been an international people, dispersed throughout almost the whole world. But, wherever they have been allowed to do so, they have striven to become nationals of the countries of their residence to the fullest possible extent. They have earned the reputation of the Wandering Jew solely because they have seldom been allowed until comparatively recent times to settle permanently and send down roots, as from the start they were allowed to do in India. However, even in the periods of their greatest isolation from the peoples among whom they dwelt, they have never been a 'nation' in the modern sense of the word since they lost their national home in 70 C.E. It is only the Jews of Israel who can now be said to have a common nationality, and this nationality they share with non-Jewish inhabitants of Israel, whether Muslim or Christian, and not with, for example, the Jews of India, whose nationality is Indian. The fact that Indian Jews belong to an internationally dispersed people only means that they share with Jews in other countries a common religion which has emerged from the history of their ancestors during a particular period and in a particular location—a history embodied in their scriptures together with the basic doctrines of their faith. This tie of religion does not affect in any way their national loyalties, more particularly in a country like India which harbours adherents of so many different faiths.

As to the suspicion that Indian Jews may not be wholly Jewish, this arises, so far as physical characteristics are concerned, from the mistaken belief that there is such a thing as a typically Jewish physiognomy and that the Jews are a distinct race. Actually, from the start of their history, the Jews were a mixed people. They first emerged in history as a small tribe called the Habiru (Hebrews) which in about 2000 B.C.E. moved from Chaldea (in modern Iraq) to Canaan (later named Palestine by the Romans). They mixed freely with the local people and in Roman times freely admitted, and even eagerly sought, proselytes, so that in the first century B.C.E. there were more Jews in the Mediterranean lands than in Judea and Galilee. For many centuries the children of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father have been accepted as Jews by birth and this itself has promoted

some admixture. Today, Jews display almost every physical characteristic that may be found in the nations among which they have dwelt, and it should be no matter of surprise for an Indian Jew to resemble in many ways non-Jewish Indians rather than English or Russian Jews. The Jew of the anti-semitic caricaturist shares his hooked nose, thick lips and curly hair with numbers of people without a drop of Jewish blood in their veins, and millions of Jews have none of these features, still less all three in combination.

Some knowledge of what the Jews believe about their ancient history is also necessary in order to appreciate what Indian Jews believe about their origin and their migration to India. According to Jewish tradition, as recorded in the Jewish scriptures, the migration of the Habiru to Canaan took place under the leadership of Abraham, who had lost faith in the local gods and become a monotheist. Again, according to tradition, Jacob, a grandson of Abraham, had a strange encounter with a mysterious being who refused to reveal his name but who told Jacob that, in future, his name would be Israel. The renamed Israel had twelve sons who were the progenitors of twelve tribes named after them. These tribes bore the collective name of Bene Israel (Hebrew for Children of Israel). The Israelites grew in numbers and for two centuries or so dwelt in Egypt where they were enslaved. In about 1200 B.C.E., under the inspired leadership of Moses they escaped and, after wandering in the wastes of Sinai and there receiving the revelation of the Law or Torah, took possession of the greater part of Canaan which they claimed had been promised to them by God. They founded a kingdom of which they made Jerusalem the capital and built a Temple where alone certain sacred rites could be carried out. Later the kingdom split into two. The area occupied by ten of the tribes constituted the kingdom of Israel, with Samaria as the capital. The area occupied by the remaining two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, constituted the kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem as the capital. The Temple in Jerusalem was the common shrine for both the kingdoms.

In the eighth century B.C.E. the kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and the inhabitants were deported and

lost to history. The few who remained behind are, together with those who moved into the area from outside, believed to be the ancestors of the Samaritans who at present survive as a very small community on the west bank of the Jordan. Those lost to history became known in subsequent literature as the Lost Ten Tribes.

After another two centuries the kingdom of Judah in turn was conquered, in 586 B.C.E., by the Babylonians and most of the inhabitants were deported, only a small remnant being left in the kingdom. The deportees were allowed a certain amount of autonomy and eventually the Persian emperor Cyrus issued a proclamation under which a large number returned to Judea and started rebuilding the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. This work was completed after some delay under a later emperor. By this time the descendants of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin came to be known as Jews (derived from Judah) and their religion became known as Judaism.

As will be seen later, even if the ten tribes which constituted the kingdom of Israel disappeared from history, their common name of Israelites or Bene Israel was retained solely by the largest Jewish community in India. Curiously, the name was appropriated by Muslim tribes in Afghanistan and elsewhere and one occasionally comes across Indian Muslims with the surname Israeli. The name Jew is now generally established as the name of those who profess Judaism.

About Judaism it will suffice to say here that all the basic teachings are to be found in the collection of writings known as the Old Testament (to distinguish them from the later writings centred on Jesus of Nazareth known as the New Testament). The two together are generally known as the Bible (from *byblos* or book), though of course the Jews do not accept the New Testament as part of their Bible.

So far as the ceremonial side of Judaism is concerned, much of the ritual prescribed in the Bible centred as it was on the sacrificial form of worship, was greatly modified in the five centuries from 200 B.C.E. or so to about 300 C.E. on the basis of what is known as

the Oral Law (*Mishna*) and its codification and interpretation in the Talmud, the place of sacrifices being taken by readings from, and exposition of, the scriptures. The nature of the observance of Judaism by the Jews who came to, and settled in, India would, therefore, depend on when they came here and to what extent they were in touch with developments which took place after their arrival here. It will be seen that there is considerable uncertainty on both points, and it would perhaps be a fruitful subject for study to relate what is known about the nature of Jewish observances at particular times (and particular regions) to dates of possible migrations of Jews to India and also to dates of possible outside Jewish contacts.

As is to be expected, variations have grown in the external expression of their common faith among the different communities of Jews, influenced in part by their varied environments, so that often the observances of one group appear strange to another in their externals. Thus, the pronunciation of Hebrew varies from region to region, though some standardisation has taken place since the establishment of the State of Israel has brought Jews from far and near together again. So also, the tunes adopted by Indian Jews for their religious songs and the chants used by them for scripture readings appear strange to Jews from Europe and America, though the words are the same. It is however not difficult to find the common core underlying the variations, consisting of weekly readings from the Law and the Prophets, ancient formulations and rituals preserved unchanged from the original Biblical ordinances or their elaboration in the Oral Law. In fact, the framework of the Jewish order of service in the Synagogue goes back to the days of the Temple.

The important point to note is that a Jew is essentially the sharer of a common religion, even when he is not a strict observer of its ceremonial or ritual precepts. The non-religious Jew can retain his identity as a Jew only so long as he recognises his common bond with other Jews and his distinctness from non-Jews to whom he is otherwise bound by ties of a common nationality, language, friendship and secular culture.

II. Indian Jewish Communities

The first mention of Jews in connection with India occurs in the Bible itself. In the Book of Esther, which probably dates from the second century B.C.E., mention is made of decrees of the Persian monarch Xerxes (Ahasuerus in the Bible) relating to the Jews dispersed throughout the 127 provinces of his empire stretching 'from India even unto Ethiopa'. It is known that at its height the Persian Empire extended well into Baluchistan (then geographically regarded as part of India and now partly in Pakistan and partly in Iran) and even beyond. It is quite likely that there were Jews settled in the area named India in the Book of Esther. But none of those Jews are known to have survived. When we speak of Indian Jews, we mean Jews who were to be found settled in India much later.

The Jews of India, properly so called, fall into three distinct groups. The most numerous of these groups are the Marathi-speaking Jews who call themselves Bene Israel (the Children of Israel of the Bible) and who have settled for centuries on the west coast of India a little to the south of Bombay Island in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. At their maximum strength in 1951 they numbered about 20,000, but by 1961 their number had fallen to about 16,000 and by 1971 to about 5,500. This massive fall over a short period of twenty years is due to emigration, mainly to Israel but partly in small numbers to the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. After 1971 the rate of emigration has declined considerably. Though the 1981 census figures had not, at the time of writing, become available to the writer, judging by synagogue attendance at weddings and during the main festivals in September-October, the Bene Israel population has perhaps stabilised if not slightly increased. In Israel it is estimated that there are about 25,000 Bene Israel today. At present Bene Israel in Israel have to a large degree maintained their distinct ethnic identity and still worship in Bene Israel synagogues according to the ritual they followed in India, often speak Marathi among themselves, listen to Indian music and watch Indian films whenever possible. However, it is anybody's guess how long they will resist the strong forces operating in Israel to promote a common

culture and way of life. Indeed, those Bene Israel who in India had been to a large degree westernised, particularly those who on emigrating spent their first year in Israel in a non-religious kibbutz, have already assimilated the distinctively Israeli way of life.

A smaller group than the Bene Israel is that commonly known as the Cochin Jews or Cochinis. These Jews had originally settled in Cranganore and around in Malabar and lived there for centuries. In the fifteenth century C.E. they took shelter in Cochin, further south, after being attacked and despoiled first by Muslims (referred to sometimes as Moors), who had come to Malabar from South Arabia and settled there, and later by Portuguese invaders. These Jews never numbered more than 2,500 as far as is known (a bigger estimate made by a visitor from Amsterdam in 1687 when the Dutch were in occupation of a small area of Cochin Town has been discounted). By 1951 their number had fallen to 370, largely due to mass exodus to Israel. By 1971 their number had declined still further to 112. As of today it is estimated that there are not more than 50 to 70 Cochinis left in India, mainly elderly men and women belonging to the affluent subsection known as White Jews who have apparently stayed on for economic reasons even after the younger generation has emigrated.

The third group consists of Jews from West Asia, mainly from Baghdad, who came from time to time in the nineteenth century as traders or as seekers of fortunes under the patronage of individuals who had preceded them and had established large business houses or industrial establishments. These Jews were collectively known as Baghdadis, though several of them came, not from Baghdad itself, but from Basra, Syria, Aden, Iran and Afghanistan. They settled mainly in Bombay and Calcutta, though a few settled also in Pune where the celebrated Sassoons spent the monsoon season every year like the British Governor of Bombay and his Council. Actually the first arrivals of these Jews were in Surat before the nineteenth century, at a time when Surat and not Bombay was the major entrepot on the west coast of India. However, these early Baghdadi Jewish traders never made Surat their permanent home. In this respect they were like the

still earlier Jewish traders from South Arabia and Egypt who are known to have stayed for longer or shorter periods in seaport towns nearer Bombay and ultimately returned to their homelands, as British merchants and industrialists were to do during British rule. The Baghdadi Jews spoke Arabic or, in a few cases, Persian, but soon most of them switched over to English. None of them ever adopted an Indian language as their mother tongue as the Bene Israel and the Cochinis did. The Baghdadi Jews numbered about 5,000 in 1951, but as of today they could not number more than 250, mainly in Bombay and Calcutta. Unlike the Bene Israel and the Cochinis, comparatively few Baghdadis who emigrated after 1947 went to Israel. Most went to the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America and Canada.

It will be seen that at the present moment it is the Bene Israel who predominantly constitute the Jewish presence in India. Each of the three groups maintained its separate identity, with little admixture, except of the Baghdadis and the 'White Jews' from Cochin, though, as will be seen later, Jews from Cochin, as far as is known, first 'discovered' the Bene Israel, recognised them as Jews and improved their knowledge and observance of Judaism. The groups became Indianised in varying degrees, the Bene Israel being the most Indian in dress, language and mode of life, the Cochinis less so, and the Baghdadis least of all. It will, therefore, be convenient to treat of the three groups separately.

III. The Bene Israel

Whether the Bene Israel or the Cochinis are the older settlers in India is a moot point on which no definite answer can be given, as no authentic contemporary records exist of the first arrival in India of either group. All that can be said is that, while the Cochinis came to India from several places (including Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Spain and even Germany) at various times from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries and even earlier, in more than one migration, there is no evidence to show that the

Bene Israel settlement in India was due to a number of movements over a period of time. As to a Cochini presence in India before the thirteenth century, it may be said in the first place that they were encountered in Malabar by Marco Polo in 1293. Even earlier there are evidences of Cochini contacts with Jews in Egypt. And there are also the famous copper plates preserved in the main synagogue in Cochin, known as the Pardeshi (or 'foreign') Synagogue (so called because it was built by the latest immigrants in 1568), which record the grant of special dignities, powers and privileges to one Joseph Rabban and his descendants by a Malabar ruler. These copper plates have been variously dated but the latest date given is in the tenth century C.E., and there must have been Jews settled in Cranganore some time before the grant was made. Indeed, a well known Indian Christian historian[2] maintains that there were Jews settled both in Malabar and in the Konkan region of Maharashtra before 50 or 55 C.E. This was about the time that, according to tradition based on the writings of the early Church Fathers, two apostles of Jesus of Nazareth came to India to preach Christianity (whether it had this name at that early date is doubtful). One was Saint Thomas who came to Malabar and to whom is attributed the origin of the Syrian Christians. The other was Saint Bartholomew who is believed to have preached and converted not far from where the Bene Israel, according to their tradition, landed in India. The historian goes on to argue that, as the first missions of the apostles were directed to Jewish settlements in or out of Palestine, the two saints came to evangelise the Jews of India, the Bene Israel in Konkan and the Cochinis in Malabar, both of whom are presumed to have been settled before 50 C.E. in India. There is yet another presumption made by the historian: that it was known in Palestine that these two communities were in Konkan and Malabar respectively. The whole argument is somewhat circular. The apostles must have come to India *because* they knew that there were Jews there to evangelise, and there must have been two separate Jewish communities in 50 C.E. in India *because* it is known that two separate

[2] G. M. Moraes, *A History of Christianity in India*, pp. 25-45.

apostles journeyed to India to evangelise them. So far as the author can see, the historian has not succeeded in establishing either of his contentions. Be that as it may, in respect of the Bene Israel, though there is mention both in medieval Muslim chronicles and in Portuguese records of Jewish merchants and even synagogues in the area of early Bene Israel settlement (including the celebrated port of Chaul, for centuries the main centre of foreign trade in the Maratha country), these were visiting foreign merchants who, even when they were temporarily resident for long periods, eventually went back to their homes abroad.

So far as the writer is aware, the earliest written mention of Jews permanently settled in the Konkan region is in a letter of a Danish Christian missionary J. A. Sartorius written in 1738 in which, on hearsay evidence, he mentions a community of Jews in 'Surat and Rajapore' who call themselves Bene Israel, who do not have the Bible or know Hebrew and whose sole 'formula of prayer or of doctrine' is the word 'Shema' (Hebrew for 'Hear').[3] This is the first word of the most solemn declaration of faith, taken from the Bible, which a Jew repeatedly utters in every synagogue service and on every occasion calling for such affirmation, particularly at the moment of approaching death. The declaration runs thus: Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is one.

Much of what Sartorius related accords with what the Bene Israel told the Christian missionaries seventy years later in the early years of the nineteenth century as having been their condition in the past before they had received instruction from one David Rahabi of whom we shall hear more a little later. Much of it also accords with what the renowned philosopher, physician and theologian Moses Maimonides who long resided in Tunisia and Egypt wrote as far back as 1199 or 1200 in a letter to the rabbis of Lunel. He said: 'The Jews of India know nothing of the Torah and of the laws nothing save the Sabbath and circumcision.' How Maimonides got his information is not known. All that one can say is that there were very close trade relations between

[3] Sartorius is cited at greater length on page 54 of this book.

the west coast of India and West Asia in which Jewish merchants freely participated, and it was not difficult for information about India to get widely diffused by word of mouth and the circulation of the chronicles of travellers.

The only community of Jews in India that can answer to the description given by Maimonides is the Bene Israel of the remote past, because the Cochinis had never lost touch with Jewish communities in West Asia, including Egypt, from where, as mentioned above, they received accretions from time to time. Moreover, there had never been a time when the Cochinis had lapsed into such a minimal observance of Jewish rites and ritual as the Bene Israel were believed to have done. What we can safely infer from what Maimonides wrote is that there existed somewhere in India a community recognisable as Jews and identifiable with the community later known as Bene Israel. And from what Sartorius wrote we can safely infer that by 1700 if not earlier, the Cochinis had learnt of the existence of a Jewish community in the Konkan region near the Island of Bombay calling themselves Bene Israel.

Whether the Bene Israel had migrated to the Konkan coast after 1200 from some other region of India or whether they had been resident in the Konkan since their initial migration to India, there is no means of knowing. Bene Israel tradition does not refer to any migration from one region to another within India. As they told the Christian missionaries in the early years of the nineteenth century, the Bene Israel then believed that their ancestors came a long time ago by sea from somewhere in the 'north' and were ship-wrecked off Navagaon, very near Chaul on the mainland about 20 miles south of Bombay Island. According to the tradition, only seven men and seven women were saved from the shipwreck, and the later Bene Israel are the descendants of these seven couples. There is no tradition of any accretions later from across the seas. (The number seven is not, of course, to be taken literally. As is the nature of traditions a small number stands for a few.)

No written record appears to be extant with the Cochinis to establish when they first encountered the Bene Israel, nor is there anything on record to verify that it was a shipload of Cochinis

sailing up the west coast that were wrecked and were the ancestors of the Bene Israel, as some believe. Further, no record is available of what the Bene Israel told the Cochinis when they first met about their origin or time of arrival in India. The earliest Cochini document mentioning the Bene Israel known to the writer is a report of the celebrated Cochini merchant Ezekiel Rahabi to the Jews of Amsterdam in 1768 which mentions that Cochini teachers had gone to the Konkan to instruct the Bene Israel in the Jewish religion and its practices and that some members of the Bene Israel community had been taken to Cochin and trained as instructors in the Jewish religion.

Against these established facts has to be set the Bene Israel tradition related to the missionaries that a David Rahabi had, some nine hundred years before (i.e. about 1000), come to the Konkan (some believed from Egypt) and 'discovered' the Bene Israel (whether under this name or some other was not stated) by observing certain Jewish practices prevalent among them, such as the distinction between clean and unclean fish, the observance of Sabbath on Saturdays and circumcision on the eighth day (distinguishing them from Muslims who perform the rite at a much later date). The tradition went on to say that David Rahabi stayed among the Bene Israel and taught them a more faithful observance of their religion, including important Hebrew prayers, as against the single declaration 'Shema' of which alone till then they were aware. They went on to say that Rahabi selected three young men and trained them to be religious leaders and preceptors. It was believed that these three men were the ancestors of the hereditary Kazis who, until synagogues were established, performed religious rites, including marriages and funerals, and settled disputes (cp. what Ezekiel Rahabi wrote in 1768 about the Bene Israel men taken to Cochin for special training). In fact, according to an unpublished Hebrew history of the Rahabi family of Cochin, a son of Ezekiel Rahabi named David Rahabi did visit Western India on a mission on behalf of the Dutch East India Company, encounter the Bene Israel and work among them in the middle of the eighteenth century. It is inconceivable that there should have been *two* outside visitors to the Bene Israel with the same name who taught them at an interval of over

eight hundred years. What may have happened is that the community had retained from generation to generation memories of their first 'discovery' by an outsider some time before 1200 on the basis of which Maimonides made the observation mentioned above, and that over the years the memory became vague. Consequent on the visit of David Rahabi centuries later and the instruction arranged by him (as described in the letter of his father), the Bene Israel may have amalgamated the two events and, in the course of the subsequent half-century, transferred the name David Rahabi and some of his teaching to the 'discoverer' of eight hundred years before. This mixture of fact and legend is a striking example of how a naive group fashions actual happenings into something strange and romantic. But, shorn of all possible fanciful elements, the story of the re-entry of the 'long lost' Bene Israel into active communion with the rest of Jewry is romantic enough and perhaps unique in the history of the Jewish people.

It would here be appropriate for a member of the Bene Israel community to acknowledge the very great debt of gratitude which his community owes to the Jews of Cochin for laying the ground for the re-entry of the Bene Israel into the world fellowship of Israel. As the late Miss Rebecca Reuben, devoted and life-long benefactor of the community, was to write: 'The advent of David Rahabi is a memorable event in the history of the Bene Israel not, as generally supposed, for bringing back to them the religion of their forefathers, for that the Bene Israel had never lost, but for breaking that barrier of isolation which for long centuries had prevented all communication with Jews in other parts of the world.'[4]

In more recent times, there has been considerable speculation about the origin of the Bene Israel on the part of Jewish and non-Jewish scholars from abroad as well as members of the community themselves as they came to study the Bible and Jewish history. A few have suggested that at some remote time in the

[4] 'Religious Reorganisation' in *The Bene Israel Annual and Year Book*, 1919-20, p. xiv.

past a group of local inhabitants were converted to Judaism by visiting Jewish merchants (who had reason to come to India in course of trade) and that the Bene Israel are the descendants of these converts, as their imperfect observance of the religion before they were 'discovered' by the Cochinis would suggest. However, the production of a whole community from sporadic conversions by visiting merchants, even if they made prolonged stays in the host country, seems unlikely and does not seem to have happened anywhere else. In India, for one thing, the merchants would have little incentive to offer to a people to whom Judaism was so alien and strange. Nor did the same circumstances exist as with the Khazars of South Russia (between the Volga and Don rivers) whose rulers opted for Judaism for political reasons, to avoid the rival pressures of Christianity and Islam. Indigenous origin is presumably posited because the Bene Israel are so 'Indian' in appearance and manners but, while the Bene Israel can hardly at present be distinguished by foreigners from their Hindu or Muslim neighbours, it was not so difficult in the recent past for a discerning eye to see in the Bene Israel several indications of foreign origin which has left permanent traces in physiognomy and bearing. It is true that the Bene Israel are very different from the blue eyed and light haired Jews of Europe or America, but so are the Jews from Central Asia, and the Bene Israel are not so different from the coloured Jews from Yemen in South Arabia. In fact, Dr. John Wilson, who in the first half of the nineteenth century had worked among the Bene Israel, was so struck, when he visited Yemen, with the close resemblance of the Yemen Jews to the Bene Israel that he came to the conclusion that the Bene Israel had come to India from Yemen.

Taking for granted a foreign origin for the Bene Israel, conjecture has ranged over a wide field. Many have held that the Bene Israel belonged to the Lost Ten Tribes (some have gone so far as to identify particular tribes to which they belonged). For instance Dr Wolff, a Jew from Prague who had converted to Christianity and become a clergyman of the Church of England, visited Central Asia, Persia and Iraq in the thirties of the last century in search of the Lost Ten Tribes and was told in Meshed that the Yemen Jews believed that the Bene Israel of

India belonged to these tribes. A variant of the theory that the Bene Israel belonged to the Lost Ten Tribes is one which puts their arrival in India back to the reign of King Solomon in the tenth century B.C.E., before the ten tribes separated themselves from the other two and formed a separate kingdom.[5] This variant assumes that the sailors in King Solomon's merchant fleet belonged to the tribes of Asher and Zebulun (two of the tribes that were later 'lost'), that a ship from this fleet coming to India in search of 'apes, peacocks and ivory' and making for the ancient port of Sopara (which Indian scholars identify with the Bibilical Ophir and which is situated some 20 miles north of Bombay Island) was blown off course and got wrecked at Navagaon further down the coast. The survivors were the ancestors of the Bene Israel who are thus from the Lost Ten Tribes. Another variant of the theory of descent from the Lost Tribes was propounded by the Bene Israel historian par excellence Mr H. S. Kehimkar[6] and is generally now believed by most Bene Israel. This theory puts the arrival of the Bene Israel in India in or about 175 B.C.E. when he assumes they fled from Samaria where some remnants of the Ten Tribes were still surviving, to escape the oppression of the Greek overlord Antiochus Epiphanes.

The main reason behind the attempts to identify the Bene Israel with the Lost Ten Tribes seems to be *(a)* the Bene Israel never called themselves Jews as they would have, following the Bible, if they had been descendants of citizens of the Kingdom of Judah, and (*b*) they had no knowledge of the fasts which were prescribed after the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians or of the festival of Hannukah instituted even later, until they were introduced among them by the legendary David Rahabi. Ignoring these niceties, some believe that the movement of the Bene Israel to India was part of the dispersal which took place after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. Much more modest and, in the opinion of the writer, much more plausible is the theory that the Bene Israel came to India in the fifth

[5] The theory is set out by Shellim Samuel in his *Treatise on the Origin and Early History of the Beni Israel of Maharashtra State.*

[6] He did this in his *History of the Bene Israel of India.*

or sixth century C.E. from either South Arabia or Persia, in both of which there was trouble for the Jews at the time.

There is no hard evidence in favour of any of the theories mentioned above, and it is, therefore, futile to make any conjectures. Nor is it of any consequence at this late date to know when and whence the Bene Israel came to India or, for that matter, to what extent, after their arrival, they intermarried or had irregular unions with local women. What is more important to know is that, through long centuries of isolation, the Bene Israel kept faith with what they remembered of Judaism, including such a strict observance of the Sabbath that their local name become 'Shanwar Teli' or 'Saturday Oilpressers', indicating both their religious distinctiveness and their characteristic occupation, and that, as soon as the opportunity came with their 'discovery' by the Cochinis, they eagerly absorbed within a few decades all the Cochinis had to teach, including the liturgy and order of services, even if they still had to acquire a sound knowledge of Hebrew and the minutiae of rabbinic elaboration of the Law. The same eagerness they also displayed when the Christian missionaries began after 1813 to work among them. It was the missionaries who taught them not only to read but also to understand Hebrew and within a few years gave them the Old Testament in Marathi, watching with surprise with what eagerness they snapped up copies of the Bible as soon as they came out. Indeed, next to the miracle of Bene Israel survival in isolation, is the miracle of their recovery of the Bible from non-Jewish hands. And the early missionaries, though not neglecting their primary purpose of bringing the Bene Israel to Christianity, thought it necessary to concentrate first on teaching them Hebrew and the Old Testament. This was particularly the attitude of the American and the Scottish missionaries. The Church of England missionaries who entered the field later were more aggressive and went out of their way to attack what they called the errors of Rabbinic Judaism. But by that time the Bene Israel had adequate access to Jewish writings in English from England and America, including arguments to meet Christian attacks, and they stood firm. The English missionaries complained that the Bene Israel

just closed their minds when presented with arguments in favour of the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. Considering how grateful the Bene Israel were to the earlier missionaries for helping them to understand the primary source of their religion, for educating them and introducing them to English, it speaks volumes for their devotion to Judaism to find that so few of them were bowled over by the enticements which were dangled before them.

At the opening of the eighteenth century the Bene Israel were almost wholly concentrated in a small coastal strip of about 1,000 square miles slightly to the south of Bombay. This area was in part under the rule of the hereditary Maratha Admirals called the Angrias, in part under another Maratha feudatory chieftain, the Pant Sachiv of Bhor, and partly under the Muslim Nawab of Janjira. The British East India Company then held only the Island of Bombay and there is reason to believe that the Bene Israel had already begun enlisting in the Company's forces, first in their marine and then also in their infantry. As early as 1755 the Company acquired on the mainland a depot called Fort Victoria which also operated as a recruiting ground for the Bombay Army. This Army was soon to be organised into a regular force large enough to be able not only to defend Bombay, but also to take the offensive on the mainland. Indeed by the middle of the century the Bombay Army was almost continuously engaged against the Marathas, Mysore and various princelings in coastal Karnataka. The Bene Israel began enlisting in substantial numbers, often under the 'caste' name of Israel, and it is at this time that evidence appears of residence by Bene Israel in Bombay.

It appears that, before they started enlisting in the Company's army, the Bene Israel had served in the army and navy of the Marathas. Whether they also served under the Nawab of Janjira is not known. Several Bene Israel families have traditions of their forebears holding command of hill forts or serving as officers in the navy, so the possibility is that the Bene Israel took so freely to army service in the Company's employ because they already had a tradition of such service. Until the middle of the nineteenth century the Bene Israel were to be found in a large number of regiments of the Bombay Army but, for reasons to be presently

stated, the numbers began to decline thereafter. Owing to their superior education and merit the Bene Israel stood out and earned promotion to officer ranks out of all proportion to their numbers on the strengths of the regiments. At one time, it is estimated, about half the Indian officer strength of the Bombay Army consisted of Bene Israel. In course of time two successive changes in army policy had an adverse effect on Bene Israel enlistment. In the first place, promotion on strict seniority as followed in the much larger Bengal Army replaced promotion by merit which had prevailed in the Bombay Army, and, as a consequence, the rate of promotion of Bene Israel personnel fell sharply, owing to their small numbers. A larger proportion of Bene Israel soldiers had to stagnate in the ranks. In the second place, growing caste consciousness within the regiments led the authorities to make the Bombay regiments predominantly Maratha or Rajput in character, virtually excluding smaller communities like the Bene Israel which were not numerous enough to man a whole regiment. Not only were the Bene Israel crowded out but they were not interested in staying in the lower ranks indefinitely. By the third quarter of the century Bene Israel enlistment had practically ceased, and by the end of the century only a handful of senior officers were left in active service.

After service in the regular forces lost its attraction, Bene Israel interest shifted to the ancillary services, like supply, works, accounts, educational corps, medical (assistant surgeons), etc. These required a higher level of education, had a higher status than service in the ranks, and encouraged the shift to equivalent civilian positions. In particular, service in the ancillary services and in civilian employment necessitated a fair knowledge of English and the Bene Israel were encouraged to educate their sons in English.

The Bene Israel greatly distinguished themselves in the Bombay Army and served in several campaigns with credit. The honour roll of such wars and campaigns as the Maratha Wars, the Mysore Wars, the Sind War, the Punjab Wars, the Persian Campaign, the Afghan Wars, the Burma Wars and the Abyssinian War bears numerous Bene Israel names. A few Bene Israel had even survived in the Indian Army to serve in the Great War of 1914-18. A Bene Israel medical officer accompanied Allenby's Army in the Pale-

stine Campaign, and marched into Jerusalem with that Army in 1917.

It must be explained that, until 1918, no Indian could hold the Royal Commission. The highest rank an Indian could reach was Subedar Major (in the earliest days styled Native Commandant) which, though it carried considerable status, corresponded in substance to Regimental Sergeant Major in a British regiment. After 1918 Royal Commissions were very sparingly granted to Indians and several extraneous considerations governed selections. It was only on the outbreak in 1939 of World War II that the Bene Israel could, to a small degree, renew their connection with the armed forces in the higher ranks, a connection which continues to this day and which has provided India with a Vice-Admiral and a Major-General (there has also been a Baghdadi Jewish Lt-General). The Bene Israel were perhaps unique among the Jews of the world in having for over a century so large a proportion of their man-power in the armed forces of their country, albeit under the command of its foreign rulers.

At the time the Bene Israel started their connection with the Bombay Army, they were the oil pressers par excellence of the Kulaba District (the portion of the Konkan in which they were to be found) and were, therefore, commonly called *teli*, the Marathi caste name for oil pressers, rather than Bene Israel. Indeed, as recently as 1935 to 1944 a Bene Israel doctor serving in Janjira State was commonly known as the teli doctor. This does not, of course, mean that the Bene Israel were not also simultaneously known to themselves and to their neighbours by this name. It seems that the Konkan did not originally have indigenous Hindu telis and that it was only comparatively recently that Hindu telis migrated to the Konkan from the interior, so that it is likely that for a time the only telis in the Konkan were Bene Israel and the name teli came to be synonymous with Bene Israel. On the appearance of Hindu telis Bene Israel probably came to be distinguished from Hindu telis by the designation Shanwar Teli. By the end of the eighteenth century oil pressing had ceased to be the characteristic occupation of the Bene Israel, though even in recent times the only oil press in a village would, as often

as not, be owned by a Bene Israel; apart from army service the Bene Israel had begun to spread into a variety of occupations.

As already stated, in the middle of the eighteenth century the Bene Israel began to move into Bombay City and within decades there were as many of them resident in Bombay City as on the mainland (movement being regulated by passes issued by a Bene Israel Kazi recognised by the authorities as the *muccadam* or leader of the community). In Bombay City the Bene Israel became building contractors (*maistries*) and skilled carpenters and, as they took education in English, clerks, mechanics, draughtsmen etc. Their women earned a reputation as primary school teachers. They did not share the inhibitions which prevented high caste Hindu women from taking up outside employment, while lower caste Hindu women were illiterate. The Bene Israel entered Government service in subordinate positions in all branches. As higher education spread they entered the professions in small numbers and the higher branches of the public services in somewhat better numbers. They, however, never entered business or manufacture except as employees. It must also be confessed that they did not build on their experience as maistries and master carpenters to take to building construction and furniture making in a big way. They never had the skill to accumulate the necessary capital or marshal the necessary resources of men and materials. Nor had they the capacity to sustain their enterprises from generation to generation as some other Indian communities in Bombay could. As a community, therefore, the Bene Israel were never affluent, though they could boast that they always looked after their destitutes and never allowed them to beg.

In Kulaba District the Bene Israel lived scattered in a large number of villages from which they derived their surnames just like their non-Jewish neighbours. These consisted of the name of the village, with the suffix *kar*. As many as 142 such surnames are known to have existed (some may have died out before they were recorded). These surnames became fixed some three hundred years ago, so that it is not often that a person with a particular surname can hope to trace his immediate forebears to the village from which the surname is derived. Some of the more common

surnames are Penkar, Divekar, Rajpurkar, Ashtamkar, Talkar and Nagavkar.

The first names of the Bene Israel in the past were often purely Indian names such as Bapuji, Rowji, Abaji, Tanaji, Dhondba for men and Sonabai, Aka, Saku, Byna, Ambai, Shanabai for women. Already by 1750 one finds Biblical names in the Hebrew form in use, sometimes in an Indianised form, such as Samaji for Samuel and Hasaji for Ezekiel. Later still Biblical names were given their English form. There is now a trend towards a return to the Hebrew form of Biblical names and even towards the adoption of non-Biblical Hebrew names on the pattern of Israeli practice.

What the mother tongue of the Bene Israel was when they came to India is unknown. But for centuries it has been Marathi. Living in close relation with their Muslim neighbours, Urdu words derived from Arabic or Persian were adopted by the Bene Israel, sometimes creating the illusion, in the case of Arabic words similar to Hebrew, that the Bene Israel had retained the memory of the language they knew in their original home. As it happens, the Urdu words imported by the Bene Israel into their Marathi are kinship terms and terms relating to religion, such as *abba* for father, *masjid* for synagogue, *roza* for fast, *namaz* for prayer, *kazi* for communal leader (at present the word is used to designate a synagogue official who attends to outside ritual), *kabar* for grave, *kabrastan* for cemetery, *dolara* for bier and *kaffan* for shroud. Incidentally, this shows that the Bene Israel were in many ways closer socially to the Muslims than to the Hindus, though their relations with the latter too were cordial. A simple form of Urdu, Hindustani, which was the language of the camp in Muslim India and continued to be so in British times, often became the colloquial language of choice among the men of Bene Israel families with a record of army service, and, even before regular education in English came to be adopted early in the nineteenth century particularly in Bombay City, knowledge of English grew among army personnel. Indeed in several cases British officers serving in Indian regiments actively encouraged personnel serving under them to learn English or get their sons educated in English. In one particular case, the British officers of a Bombay regiment

posted on the North-West Frontier helped a Bene Israel regimental clerk to proceed to Oxford University where he secured a B.C.L. degree (he unfortunately died shortly after setting out on a career of communal service in Bombay).

In Kulaba District the Bene Israel were fully integrated with their neighbours, dressed and lived like them (except that the men for many years wore side-locks like Yemenite Jews) and even shared some of the local superstitions. Where they did not have their own cemeteries they buried their dead in Muslim cemeteries. Indeed, the scattered nature of their residence necessitated the closest inter-dependence, irrespective of religious differences. Except for the taboo on interdining, caste prejudices imposed little or no disability on the Bene Israel. On the other hand, the rigidity of caste rules made it easier for the Bene Israel to preserve their identity, as to some extent did the Indian custom of each caste living in its own neighbourhood in any town or village of any size. In Bombay City the Bene Israel were first concentrated in a neighbourhood in Mandvi called Israel Moholla (or quarter) near similar Muslim neighbourhoods. This explains why the first Bene Israel synagogue which opened in 1796 was so close to the area inhabited by Konkan Muslims and is now so distant from where most of its members are to be found. Within a century of the establishment of the synagogue, the Bene Israel first shifted a little to the north and then spread further afield until, ultimately, they came to live in mixed neighbourhoods throughout Greater Bombay, divided on economic rather than communal lines.

Early in the nineteenth century Bene Israel military pensioners settled in Thane, a district town near Bombay, and in Pune, the monsoon capital of Bombay Presidency. Many of the Bene Israel from Thane were employed in Bombay, while Pune, as the headquarters of the Southern Command of the Indian Army, provided many opportunities for employment to Bene Israel men. It was also a reputed educational centre and Bene Israel women made a name for themselves as secondary school teachers. Employment in the public services took the Bene Israel all over the Presidency. The Central Government services, as also the railways, took them

all over India and as far afield as Aden and Burma, but Bombay, where quite three-quarters of the Bene Israel population and all their important institutions were to be found, always remained the centre of all communal activity.

What form worship took before Cochini instructors acquainted the Bene Israel with the orthodox Jewish ritual is not definitely known. According to Bene Israel tradition at one time, as already mentioned, the sole prayer the Bene Israel knew and recited on every occasion was the 'Shema'. Tradition also has it that the Bene Israel observed the major Biblical festivals at approximately the right times in a crude fashion, and that, after the arrival of the legendary David Rahabi, they added the festivals instituted later and learnt the correct form of observance of the festivals. A further reform and elaboration took place early in the nineteenth century when Cochini instructors came and stayed with them.

The fall in the Bene Israel population has affected attendance in synagogues. Even on a Sabbath it is often difficult to secure a *minyan* (the attendance of at least ten men needed for Torah readings and certain other prayers). At the major festivals and at weddings, synagogues still have a good attendance.

The first Hebrew inscriptions on Bene Israel tombstones began to appear in the early years of the nineteenth century coinciding with the arrival of the Cochinis. About then, knowledge of the Hebrew script became general, even if few could understand what they had learned to read. A proper study of the Hebrew language had already been initiated by the Cochinis when the Christian missionaries appeared on the scene and made a systematic drive in this regard. Dr. John Wilson, the most celebrated of these missionaries and the most revered by the Bene Israel, actually compiled and published a Hebrew grammar in Marathi. The missionaries began teaching Hebrew as a second language in their secondary schools, of which there were at least three, and Hebrew was included as an optional subject in the syllabi of the Bombay University for the matriculation and higher courses. It must be admitted, however, that comparatively few Bene Israel attained a real mastery of the language, even after it was taught

in their own school, opened in 1875. Gradually school after school stopped teaching Hebrew. Recently even the communal school stopped teaching it. For many years, the St Xavier's College provided classes in Hebrew up to the degree stage, taught by part-time lecturers, who were always Bene Israel, but this facility no longer exists and, perhaps, no demand exists either. It is very doubtful whether Hebrew is taught anywhere in India today at university level, unless it is taught in Christian seminaries for training their clergy.

While the present orthodox Bene Israel ritual conforms to the Sephardi prayer books, there is one peculiarity which is unique to the Bene Israel, and that is the *malida* ceremony. On every occasion for thanksgiving a special home service is held, the central feature of which is the singing of a hymn from the Sephardi home service at the close of the Sabbath commemorating the prophet Elijah as the harbinger of the Messiah (hence the alternative name of *Eliyahu Hanabi* for the ceremony). This is followed by the recital of blessings over a concoction of parched rice, shredded coconut, raisins and spices (called in Marathi *malida*) which is then partaken of by all present, with fruit of at least two kinds. Such a ceremony is not known among the Cochinis or the Yemen Jews, the two communities most likely to have been imitated by the Bene Israel, and it is not unlikely that the Bene Israel have Judaised a practice of their Muslim neighbours with whom partaking of consecrated food after invoking the blessings of a favourite saint is common. And malida is made both by Hindus and Muslims for offerings at holy shrines. The Bene Israel evidently fastened on the particular Sabbath hymn because of their cult of Elijah, developed at some unknown date in imitation of the Muslim cult of saints. The Bene Israel in fact believe that the prophet had actually appeared to them on a hillock near the village of Navagaon, and, as he ascended to heaven in a chariot, had left a hoof print and a chariot-wheel track on the hillock, which they believe can be seen to this day. Some believe that it is specially meritorious to perform the malida ceremony on the site of the apparition. It seems that in Israel the Bene Israel often perform the ceremony in Elijah's cave at Haifa.

The establishment of the first Bene Israel synagogue in 1796 has an interesting history. It was constructed and endowed by Samuel Ezekiel Divekar (Samaji Hasaji Divekar) after his retirement from the Bombay Army with the rank of Native Commandant (Subedar Major). He was one of five brothers, all of whom became officers in the Bombay Army and his family seems to have been one of the leading families that had moved to Bombay from the mainland. The Bene Israel believe that he was taken prisoner with a number of other Bene Israel officers and men when the whole Bombay contingent capitulated to Tipu Sultan of Mysore at Bednur in 1783 during the Second Mysore War. The prisoners were to be put to death, but Divekar and other Bene Israel prisoners were reprieved when they said they were Bene Israel, on the intervention of Tipu Sultan's mother who pleaded for their lives because the Bene Israel were mentioned with favour in the Koran. Divekar is believed to have made a vow that he would, on release, build a synagogue in Bombay as a thanksoffering. The prisoners were released in 1784 on the termination of the war and Divekar did build a synagogue as soon as he retired from army service. In 1797 he went to Cochin to procure a *Sefer Torah*[7], but died there without doing so. His tomb was to be seen in the Jewish cemetery there.[8] The street on which the synagogue stands was named Samaji Street in his honour and is at present known as Samuel Street. Another street in the vicinity has been named Issaji Street after a brother of Samaji.

From the forties of the nineteenth century Jewish literature in Marathi began appearing, first on the initiative of, or in collaboration with, Cochini instructors and later independently by the Bene

[7] The parchment scroll inscribed by hand with the text of the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Old Testament, from which readings are chanted during synagogue services (pl *Sifre Torah*).

[8] A different version exists in an unpublished Hebrew document purporting to be a history of the Rahabi family of Cochin, but it is open to doubt in many respects. Prima facie, the Bene Israel tradition is more plausible, even if the intervention of Tipu Sultan's mother is discounted, so far as dates of Samaji's capture and release are concerned. That it was he who built and endowed the synagogue is beyond doubt.

Israel themselves. Noteworthy was a Hebrew-Marathi Haggada (a special service for the home to inaugurate the Passover festival) published in 1846. It was the joint product of Haham Hyam Joseph Hallegua from Cochin and Hyam Isaac Galsulkar who prepared the Marathi translation and who naively confessed that he made the translation without knowing Hebrew with the aid of the Haham and with reference to the Marathi translation of Exodus by the missionaries. Translation into Marathi from Hebrew and, later, from Jewish writings in English proceeded apace throughout the century, together with considerable original writing in Marathi. As knowledge of English spread and works in English became more freely available, writing in, and translation into, Marathi unfortunately declined very considerably. Outstanding among translators from Hebrew into Marathi was Joseph Ezekiel Rajpurkar, whose magnum opus was the translation of the whole Daily Prayer Book.

With growing dispersion and westernisation and as, with the weakening of caste taboos, freer social intercourse between different communities grew, there was a slackening of demands for strict conformity with communal mores and less regard for communal sanctions which had previously been unquestioned. In consequence, it has been difficult to generalise about Bene Israel mores and patterns of behaviour for the last three-quarters of a century or more. The utmost sophistication and westernisation, if largely in externals, will be found alongside strict conformity with modes of behaviour described by Kehimkar over eighty years ago. For instance, very many Bene Israel at present have only a colloquial knowledge of Marathi, their children have to be taught Marathi as a second language, if at all, and even Marathi-speaking Bene Israel prefer to send their children to English medium schools, like many of their non-Jewish neighbours. Only a handful of Bene Israel children are now to be found in the communal school where the medium of instruction is Marathi. It is significant that in the last eighty years the community has not produced a creative writer in Marathi of any note, while it has produced one of the foremost Indo-Anglian poets. Very considerable progress has been made in the last hundred years in most branches of higher study in English and in technological training, and several academic distinctions

have been earned. Today one will find members of the community in almost every field of skilled endeavour, whether as scientists, college teachers, including even a University Professor of Sanskrit, medical specialists, including heads of medical colleges and large hospitals, administrators, business executives, journalists, engineers, architects, ships officers or air pilots. If they are not conspicuous it is only because of their small numerical strength in a country of about 700 million.

Whether in the Kulaba District or in Bombay City, until recent times the Bene Israel, like the Parsees, were reputed to look after their own destitutes, even where the extended joint family could not look after them. This was done with the minimum of institutional provision, and a Home for Orphans and Destitutes opened in the early twenties of this century never had more than a handful of inmates. Again, though the Bene Israel have never been a rich community, and, indeed, a foreign journalist once described them as the world's poorest Jews, the community has always, by Indian standards, been ranked as moderately well off. Except for generous aid received from Great Britain since the eighties of the last century for their communal school, until fairly recently they depended solely on their own resources for the establishment and maintenance of their communal enterprises. Since World War II, however, financial aid has been provided by the American Joint Distribution Committee and ORT (which runs institutes of technical training at artisan level in Bombay). Until recently the Jewish Agency office in Bombay actively promoted subsidised emigration to Israel.

The Bene Israel have never succeeded in building up systematic machinery for coordinated and sustained activity for promoting the welfare of the community. Mushroom institutions and societies have come up from time to time, had their little day and vanished.

The Bene Israel have always identified themselves with India and have always been accepted by their Hindu and Muslim neighbours as wholly Indian. But they saw, with the establishment of British rule, opportunities to break out of the narrow round to which they had for centuries been confined and they did not sense in British rule the affront to their self-respect that many of their Hindu and even Muslim neighbours did. The Hindus, in particular,

still remembered that they were a conquered nation. Moreover, following on their involvement with army service, so many Bene Israel families had become dependent on the public services for their livelihood that loyalty to the powers that be became almost second nature. At the time of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign in 1887, the Bene Israel of Bombay, like other communities, presented an address, in which they said that the community owed solely to British rule their advancement from the lowly condition in which they had remained before that rule was established. This caused offence to the Pune Brahmins who sharply criticised the address as showing ingratitude to the Hindus who had given them shelter for so many centuries. It was probably never intended by the Bene Israel to cast any reflection on their former rulers in what they said. An appreciation of the 'blessings' of British rule was in any case at that time not restricted to the Bene Israel.

As the Bene Israel began to come into closer association with other Indians in higher institutions of education, they began to share their interest in public affairs. Many approved the moderate school of politics which advocated hastening by gradual steps towards self rule. In 1918 when Mr E. S. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet, toured India with the Viceroy to ascertain at first hand public opinion regarding political reform, eight Bene Israel leaders of the All India Israelite League presented an address to him in Bombay in their personal capacity, but 'in the interests of the Bene Israel'. In the address they gave support to the scheme of reform jointly advocated by the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League (then in rare alliance). They also expressed full confidence in the two major communities and opposed special safeguards or separate electorates for minorities other than the Muslims.

While the bulk of the community maintained a neutral position during the national struggle, a few individuals fully identified themselves with the national cause, even though they did not actively participate in the civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements. As early as 1916 or so Mr David S. Erulkar, who had as a student in England fallen under the spell of Lokmanya

B. G. Tilak, represented him in an appeal before the Bombay High Court as junior counsel with Mr M. A. Jinnah and Mr Joseph Baptista. His brother Dr A. S. Erulkar, who was for some years President of the Indian Medical Council and, as such, head of the medical profession of India, was more than once one of the physicians in attendance on Mahatma Gandhi during his fasts. Mr M. R. Masani has recently revealed that Dr Erulkar for some time gave him a regular monthly allowance to enable him to devote his time to active political work. Along with Mr I. J. Samson, Dr Erulkar was also responsible for starting a Jewish Nationalist Party, an organisation of fellow travellers of the Indian National Congress, like the Muslim Nationalist Party and the Christian Nationalist Party. Mr Samson had to pay the penalty by being passed over for permanent appointment as a judge of the Bombay Small Causes Court. On the eve of independence there was at least one active member in the left-wing Students Federation who later graduated to active trade union and publishing work for the Communist Party of India. A few Bene Israel, particularly in the Kulaba District, served as councillors and office bearers of municipalities or members of local boards and Dr E. Moses was Mayor of Bombay in 1937-38.

It will be seen that the circumstances in which the Bene Israel have lived in India are very unlike those which have had to be endured by Jews in many other lands, making it possible for the Bene Israel to enter into free and intimate intercourse with their non-Jewish neighbours. May one, therefore, before concluding this brief, description, quote what one wrote more than ten years ago:

> Is it not possible that the Bene Israel have been a puzzle to other Jews partly for this very reason? The image of the Jew to the Christian and the Islamic world was that of a creature living precariously at the capricious mercy of those who, where they did not hate, despised him and yet, paradoxically in Christian lands, feared him. His Jewish heritage had to be carefully guarded from external assault and the Jew became withdrawn, self-centred and constantly on the defensive. The Bene Israel never had cause to fear and they, therefore, saw no danger in free intercourse with their neighbours and full participation in the

life of the general community. The minutiae of Jewish observance which elsewhere served to preserve the distinct identity of the Jewish people in an alien and hostile environment could, therefore, not interest the Bene Israel. None of the traditionally Jewish occupations elsewhere, such as high finance and international trade, were entered by the Bene Israel. In fact, after they had given up their traditional occupation of oil-pressing, the Bene Israel could no longer be identified with any particular calling. It was their very 'normality' which made them such strange Jews, strange to Jews of other lands and strange to the educated Indian who derived his image of the Jew from English books. This 'normality' may be similar to that now seen in the Israeli Sabra which has the appearance of an abandonment of Judaism.

The small Bene Israel community left in India should, by all accounts, be in danger of disintegration. Though in total numbers it is no worse off than it was two hundred years ago, it is far less closely knit today and more intensely subjected to alien pressures. It no longer has the environment of a static society enduring in rigidly separated compartments without material change from century to century. On the other hand, the community today has advantages which were absent two hundred years ago. Communications within the country are far easier, contacts with world centres of Jewry are closer in many ways and ties with Bene Israel settled in Israel are still intimate. With persevering effort it should not be impossible to keep the Jewish spirit alive and active in the Indian community and one hopes that there will always be a sufficient number of dedicated workers devoted to this purpose.

IV. The Cochin Jews

As mentioned earlier in Section II there are now only a handful of Jews left in Cochin and, since most of them are elderly, there is a distinct possibility that, within a measurable time, they will

remain only a historical memory so long as Jew Town in Cochin retains its name. But an account of the Jews of Cochin cannot be excluded from even a short description of Indian Jewry in view of their stay for over a thousand years in India and the mark they left on the history of Malabar.

Even before Marco Polo encountered Jews resident on the Malabar coast in 1293, they were visited by the famous Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela in 1167. According to him there were several thousand Israelites 'dark like the other inhabitants'. A copper plate dating from the middle of the tenth century (i.e. c. 950) recording a grant by a local ruler to Syrian Christians mentions a guild of Jews as custodians of a church and its lands along with a guild of Christians and bears three signatures of witnesses in Hebrew script. This shows that there were Jews resident in Malabar well before 900 and that they had become part of the local community sufficiently to be entrusted with a share in the care of a Christian church. It also shows that Hindu rulers did not hesitate to assist non-Hindus in religious matters and that there was no antagonism between the local Jews and Christians, unlike conditions in Europe.

That the Cochin Jews were on the world Jewish map as early as the Middle Ages is shown by the visits that some famous rabbis are reputed to have paid to them in Malabar. One of the rabbis wrote in the fourteenth century as follows:

> I travelled from Spain
> I had heard of the city of Shingly [i.e. Cranganore]
> I had longed to see an Israel King
> Him I saw with my own eyes.

There does not seem to be any contemporary documentary record of how long before 900 there were Jews permanently resident in Malabar or whence they came, but Moses Pereira De Paiva, a member of a commission of four deputed by the Jews of Amsterdam to Cochin in 1685 to enquire and report on the Cochin Jews, has recorded what he was told about their origin.

According to his informants, seventy to eighty thousand Jews migrated to Malabar in the year 370 C.E. from Majorca (one of

the Balearic Islands off the coast of Spain in the Mediterranean) to which their forefathers had been carried away captive earlier. Why they left Majorca was not mentioned, nor how so large a number managed the long voyage in one lot. They were said to have 'found favour in the eyes of King Cheran Perumal' and 'with paternal and lasting affection he gave to Joseph Rabban the city of Cranganore in perpetual possession with an area of three leagues'. (Cranganore was situated some 30 kilometres north of Cochin.) The traditional date of the grant is 379 C.E., i.e. very soon after the arrival from Majorca. It will be seen later that this date has been disputed as almost 600 years too early.

De Paiva's informants further told him that in 499 C.E. another 'great batch of people' arrived, from where they could not say because all their records had been lost in the sack of their synagogue and houses in the sixteenth century. These arrivals of 370 and 499 were presumably the ancestors of that section of the Cochinis that subsequently came to be known as the White Jews, to distinguish them from the much more numerous section of the Cochinis that came to be called the Black Jews or, as De Paiva himself names them, the Malabarees. These Malabarees, De Paiva's informants told him, were descended from twenty-five slaves of a learned and rich White Jew who freed them after teaching them Judaism and from the slaves of other White masters, who joined the freed slaves on the deaths of their masters. It was not explained when the liberation took place, when the freed slaves were joined by the others, and how the Black Jews or Malabarees came by 1685 to number, according to De Paiva, 465 families against only 25 families of non-Black Jews reported by De Paiva as belonging to the Pardeshi Synagogue, although the progenitors of the White Jews had numbered eighty to ninety thousand in 370 and had been reinforced by another 'great batch' in 499.

So far, De Paiva reported oral tradition as conveyed to him. But he also recorded the names of the heads of some 20 families whose grandfathers or earlier forebears had come to Malabar at much later dates than 370 and 499 from such varied places as Jerusalem, Safed, Aleppo, Damascus, Spain, Germany, Persia and Iraq. In notes to De Paiva's report (recently published in English

translation) Mr S. S. Koder has specified the actual dates of arrival in Malabar and they range from 1566 to 1778. These late comers, with another five families coming from the original settlers of Cranganore that had moved to Cochin, formed the congregants of the Pardeshi Synagogue. Of these five Cranganore families two were descended from the famous Joseph Rabban, and their presence is held by Mr Koder to establish that the famous copper plates granted to Joseph Rabban were legitimately deposited in the Pardeshi Synagogue and not, as alleged by the Black Jews, deceitfully taken away from them. Again, De Paiva has marked some 14 families from among the Pardeshi Synagogue congregants as 'blancos' or white, the remaining being brown, not because of admixture with what he called Malabarees, but owing to long stay in the country. Incidentally, among the 'brown' families are some known to have come quite late from overseas. Mr Koder presumes that these may have come from an Arab country.

Against the tradition recorded by De Paiva, Mr Koder in his notes points out that the tradition of the Cochin Jews is that they came to Cranganore soon after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., which is not inconsistent with the belief that they came via Majorca after a halt of some three centuries there. Yet there are some serious objections to the Majorca theory. Though there was a dispersion after 70 C.E., or rather after Bar Kochba's revolt some seventy years later, it is very doubtful that such a large number of Jews were carried away captive to the small island of Majorca, and, even if they were, that after a stay of almost three centuries they should move in a body to so distant a haven as Cranganore. The Jews of Spain had no reason to flee so early as 370 C.E. when Christianity was still struggling to establish itself in Europe. The likelihood is that De Paiva's informants were eager to establish a Spanish origin for themselves in the fourth century, when actually Jews moved out from Spain much later. Mr Koder mentions that some scholars hold that the first immigrants to Malabar came from Persia in the fifth century, others that they are descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes and others still that they are descendants of Jews taken in captivity to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Mr Koder himself presumes that some of the Cochin Jews are descendants of Yemen Jews or Jews from

some other Arab countries. This is supported by the close resemblance in certain respects of Cochini religious chants to those of Yemen Jews.

What can be asserted with some certainty is that the Cochin Jews came to a part of India with which from ancient times the Jews of Western Asia and the Mediterranean region were familiar as traders, that the original settlers were joined from time to time by co-religionists from various lands up to the early eighteenth century, that they were throughout in communication with their fellow Jews and were fully aware of the developments that took place in Jewish religious practice and ceremonial, such as the codification of the Oral Law in the early centuries of the present era, and the standardisation of the prayer book according to the Sephardi rite. Unlike the Bene Israel settled further north on the west coast of India, the Cochin Jews, ever since the thirteenth century or even earlier, consisted of varied strands showing differences of skin colour, physiognomy and place of origin. Unlike the Bene Israel again, the Cochin Jews always conformed strictly to the complex requirements of ceremonial Judaism. The number of original settlers could not have been anywhere as large as 80,000 as mentioned by De Paiva, even assuming that many of them lost their lives in the troubles of the sixteenth century which compelled the Cochinis to abandon Cranganore and move to Cochin town in stages. Even after a settled and prosperous period of almost four centuries the population amounted to not more than 2,500. It was only because of its intense concentration that it could be so conspicuous.

As already mentioned the so-called White Jews at one time claimed to be the original settlers, and maintained that the so-called Black Jews or the Malabarees, as De Paiva called them, were the 'slaves of slaves' and of mixed parentage, though religiously Jews in every respect. On the other hand the so-called Black Jews claimed that *they* were the original settlers and the so-called White Jews came to Cochin only in the sixteenth century or so and, taking advantage of their greater wealth and influence with the powers that be, assumed ascendancy and relegated the Black Jews to an inferior position, refusing them entrance to their synagogues, refusing to marry with them, or even recognise the

validity of their ritual slaughter. The Black Jews also accused the White Jews, as mentioned above, of appropriating the precious copper plates granted to Joseph Rabban, who, the Black Jews maintained, was one of them.

It is possible that, as claimed by the Black Jews, the original settlers were coloured Jews who were joined from time to time by Jews of lighter complexion centuries later. Probably these fairer Jews at first identified themselves wholly with the earlier arrivals (separate synagogues for the Whites seem to have been established only after the move to Cochin from Cranganore in the sixteenth century), but with the appearance of the Portuguese, Dutch and British on the Malabar coast in the fifteenth century onwards and the association of skin colour with concepts of innate superiority of the white races over the dark, the fairer Cochinis were tempted to separate themselves from the darker Cochinis. In any case well before the arrival on the scene of De Paiva there were two distinct Jewish groups in Cochin, each maintaining its own religious institutions and observing between themselves much the same relations as the higher caste Hindus had with lower caste Hindus. Each group in turn had their slaves (until the institution was abolished in the middle of the nineteenth century) called the *Meshuarim*, who, though allowed to worship in their respective synagogues, were otherwise treated much like outcastes. All these distinctions have disappeared in the course of this century.

The caste overtones which the Indian environment added to the distinctions observed between the White and the Black Jews resembled in some ways those observed by the Bene Israel who too for a considerable time divided themselves into two sections, one calling themselves *Gora* (Marathi for white) and calling the other *Kala* (Marathi for black). It is possible that the Bene Israel began observing this distinction only after they came into contact with the Cochinis, without realising that there was an essential difference between the two cases. Indeed, at one time, some Bene Israel entertained doubts whether they should employ Black Jews from Cochin to serve as hazans in their synagogues, as they had begun to do after it became difficult to get White Jews as hazans. The Black Jews of Cochin were repeatedly pronounced by reputed

religious authorities in Egypt and Palestine to be Jews in every way, whereas 'Kala' Bene Israel were the progeny of unions between Bene Israel men and non-Jewish women. There is no evidence of any formal conversion of the women and of any religious marriage ceremonies being performed. The children were, however, brought up as Jews—they would not, in any case, have been accepted as Hindus—but were debarred from marrying 'Gora' Bene Israel and were subjected to certain other disabilities. In the case of the Black Cochinis, however, they were the progeny of purely Jewish parents whose only difference from the White Cochinis was a darker complexion. (This does not, however, apply to the Meshuarim attached to the Black as well as the White Cochinis.) Among the Bene Israel, conversions were performed only in the last century and a half after learning the procedure from Cochinis and Baghdadis. Another difference is that in Cochin White and Black did actually differ in most cases in skin colour, whereas among the Bene Israel, Gora were as often as not as dark as the darkest Kala, and many Kala were as light-skinned as many Gora. (The Bene Israel to this day show as extensive a variation of skin-colour as higher caste Hindus or Muslims of the Konkan.) In reality, the terms 'Gora' and 'Kala' as used by the Bene Israel were labels indicating status and not skin colour. Another difference between the two cases is that, whereas in Cochin the Black Jews always greatly outnumbered the Whites— in De Paiva's time there were as many as nine synagogues serving the Black Jews against only four serving the Whites—Kala Bene Israel were a mere handful compared to Gora Bene Israel. Lastly, the Black Jews of Cochin, as will be seen, worshipped separately from the Whites whereas Kala Bene Israel worshipped and performed ceremonies like circumcisions and marriages in the synagogues of the Gora Bene Israel. In the case of the Bene Israel, as in the case of the Cochinis, most of the disabilities of the Kala Bene Israel have disappeared. For several years now, Kala Bene Israel have served on the management of synagogues and have even held the office of president.

From ancient times, the Jews of Cochin had an honourable place in the counsels of the Hindu rulers of the different States constituting Malabar. Owing to their international contacts, they played a valuable part in the pepper trade, and they even served in the

armies of their rulers, refraining, it is reported, from fighting on the Sabbath. Their original settlement was in Cranganore which came in the fourteenth century under the rule of the Zamorin of Calicut.

In Cranganore, some time between the fourth and tenth centuries C.E. (there is no agreement among scholars on the correct date, the Cochini tradition putting it, as already mentioned, as 379 C.E.) a Jewish leader Joseph Rabban was given a hereditary grant of a number of privileges and honours in a small area in or near Cranganore. This grant was recorded on two copper plates in an archaic form of Tamil, the exact translation of which has caused difficulty. These plates are still preserved in the Pardeshi Synagogue in Cochin. It is believed that the privileges and honours granted to Joseph Rabban continued to be enjoyed by his descendants up to the 72nd generation. In or about 1344 the Zamorin of Calicut, taking advantage of dissensions in the Rabban family and cross appeals for intervention by the Rajah of Cochin and himself, withdrew the privileges and honours.

Some believe that the grant made to Joseph Rabban amounted to the conferment of sovereignty over a territory, tiny though it be. The legend grew that in India there existed a Jewish kingdom (Rabban and his descendants were referred to by De Paiva as Kings and the family as Royal), vide the verse of the Spanish poet quoted above. Actually, if the terms of the grant are studied, it does not amount to more than the conferment of the kind of feudatory privileges which Indian rulers were wont to bestow on their nobles, falling far short of sovereignty, somewhat resembling the rights belonging to feudal barons in medieval Europe. With all its limitations, however, the grant was probably unique in Jewish history and it indicates the degree of esteem and acceptance the Cochin Jews had earned in Malabar. It also provides eloquent testimony to the Indianness of the Cochin Jews from remote times.

The Cochinis in Cranganore evidently secured predominance in the pepper export trade, and perhaps also in the timber trade, breaking the monopoly of the Arab (also termed Moorish) traders operating on the Malabar coast, many of whom had settled permanently there. With the connivance of the Zamorin of Calicut,

who was not unwilling to see the hold of the Jews on the pepper trade relaxed, the Moors attacked them in Cranganore in 1524. Virtually defenceless, many of them fled to the protection of the neighbouring Rajah of Cochin, who in turn was not unwilling to gain a foothold in the pepper trade with the aid of the Jews. In 1565 the remaining Jews in Cranganore were again attacked, this time by the Portuguese, with the same object of driving them out of the pepper trade. The Jews fled en masse to Cochin. Even before these two movements a few Jews had migrated to Cochin in 1344, following on the dissensions in the Rabban family mentioned above. It will be seen that the close involvement of the Cochin Jews in the power structure in Malabar had its penalties as well as its rewards. Both the rewards and the penalties passed the Bene Israel by, owing to the low profile they maintained.

After 1566 all the Jews of Malabar were concentrated in Cochin town and its vicinity. However, though they had the protection and friendship of the Rajah of Cochin, who gave them a site for the Pardeshi Synagogue next to his Palace, they were still exposed to the enmity of the Portuguese, who were allowed to establish a trading post just outside the town of Cochin, to this day known as Fort Cochin. Ultimately the Portuguese made another attack on the Jews and partly destroyed the Pardeshi Synagogue, the Rajah being powerless to help. The Jews gained security only on the advent of the Dutch who in 1665 ousted the Portuguese and occupied Fort Cochin.

The period of Dutch predominance from 1665 to 1795 proved to be the Golden Age for the White Jews of Cochin. They flourished exceedingly, not only as the Chief Merchants of the Dutch for the purpose of procuring Indian products for them and distributing the goods the Dutch had to sell, but also as their agents in delicate negotiations with local rulers and as interpreters. Often in the negotiations, the Cochini intermediaries were given carte blanche to settle terms. The Jews owned and chartered out ships, provided finance on occasion to both Dutch and British factors and to local rulers as well. The Black Jews, however, shared little of this prominence and prosperity, being mainly petty traders and artisans.

With the departure of the Dutch the White Jews lost considerably in prominence and local influence. The British used them very seldom in their dealings with the local rulers, preferring to keep their negotiations in their own hands. The British also took most of the export and import trade into their hands, building up a much more elaborate machinery for conducting this than the Dutch had done. And soon, the British grew into rulers exercising sovereignty over rapidly expanding territory, and left trade and commerce to private British traders who had little use for the White Jews. Unlike the Baghdadis of Calcutta and Bombay, the White Jews did not have the advantage of being located in rapidly growing cities through which the trade of a whole continent passed and which were on the threshold of rapid industrialisation. Here, anyone with the necessary capital, foresight and initiative had the opportunity to make a fortune. On the other hand Cochin had become a backwater, until years later a major port was opened there. By this time, however, the White Jews had mostly become rentiers and they could never regain the prominence they had attained under the Dutch. A few joined the professions and some migrated to Bombay and Calcutta, merging with the Baghdadis.

In local affairs of Cochin State, the Jews always participated fully. Right until the State lost its separate identity in 1948 the Jews had a reserved seat in the Legislative Council established by the Rajah.

Something has been said in Section III of the immense service rendered to the Bene Israel by the Jews of Cochin. Of the many benefactors who went from Cochin to serve them was a Cochini converted to Christianity, Michael Sargon, who was sent by the Madras Jews' Society to bring Christianity to the Bene Israel, but instead ran schools for them from 1826 to 1859 without telling them a word about that religion. Like him, the first Cochini instructors and guides were White Jews. They encouraged the establishment of synagogues and served for a pittance as hazans in these synagogues. Gradually they were replaced by Black Jews, several of whom were still serving as hazans in the middle of this century.

Both Black and White Jews adopted the local language Malayalam as their mother tongue, but they never lost their hold on

Hebrew. They frequently wrote in that language and used it to communicate with Jews in other lands. Like Jews elsewhere they signed their names on legal documents in Hebrew. For centuries they dressed like their Malayali neighbours and adopted several of their local customs. Later, while the White Jews took to western dress and many of them adopted English as the mother tongue, the Black Jews adhered to Malayalam and it was seldom one found a Cochini hazan in Bombay who could speak English. The Black Jews also mostly retained the Malayali mode of dress.

Unlike the Bene Israel, the Cochin Jews did not increase materially in numbers over the centuries. On the other hand, their numbers tended to fall or, at best, to stagnate. Why this should have been so is difficult to understand.

The Cochin Jews have made a contribution to the land of their adoption far beyond what their infinitesimal numerical strength would suggest. A fitting climax to their millenium of Indian involvement was the presence of the Prime Minister of India at the celebration in 1968 of the four-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Pardeshi Synagogue in Cochin, the only synagogue still open out of a number, some much older and a few more recent. May one dare hope that the Pardeshi Synagogue will continue to stand for many a day even after the last Jew has departed from Cochin as a reminder of one of the most colourful threads that once was worked into the rich pattern of the Indian tapestry? And may one further dare hope that its presence will one day tempt back to Cochin a small but active community of Jews to keep alive India's reputation for hospitality and friendship for all? Kindness to strangers has been for long centuries the characteristic of India, as indeed it is one of the supreme duties enjoined on Jews by their religion.

V. The Baghdadis

As mentioned in Section II, the Baghdadis were the latest arrivals among the Jews who made their homes in India. The first settler

(as distinguished from the numerous traders who resided for longer or shorter periods in Surat for purposes of trade) was Shalom ben Aaron ben Obadiah Ha-Kohen. He was actually a native of Aleppo in Syria and not Baghdad. He arrived in Bombay in September 1790 but moved to Surat where he joined partnership with a Baghdadi. In 1797 Ha-Kohen moved to Calcutta where he built up a very prosperous business. He was joined early in the nineteenth century by other settlers who came from Baghdad, Basra, Aleppo and Yemen. It was, however, Ha-Kohen's son-in-law Moses Duek Cohen who is regarded as the real founder of the Calcutta Jewish community. It was he who put the community on an organised basis and catered to its religious needs. For three generations he and his descendants served as ministers and religious preceptors. A stream of immigrants continued to come to Calcutta throughout the nineteenth century and many from there moved on to Rangoon in Burma (then part of British India), Singapore, Hongkong and Shanghai, as they began to participate in the highly profitable import and export trade with the Far East centred on Calcutta.

The Baghdadi community of Bombay also had its origin in the City of Surat from where, early in the nineteenth century, some Baghdadis moved to Bombay and made their homes there. Their first leader was a rich merchant named Soliman ben Jacob Soliman, but it was only after the arrival of the celebrated David Sassoon from Baghdad via Bushire in Persia in the year 1832 that the Baghdadi community established itself in Bombay on firm foundations. As in the case of the Baghdadi Jews of Calcutta, the initial activities of the Baghdadis of Bombay were in the import and export trade with the Persian Gulf. This was followed by participation in the opium trade with China, in which they made enormous fortunes as did the Parsees.

There was an essential difference between the Calcutta and the Bombay Baghdadis. In Calcutta the Baghdadis found themselves the only settled Jews and they had to establish their own synagogue (in 1823) and cemetery (some time before 1836). Further, they did not have any problems of adjustment with long settled indigenous Jews incorporated into Indian society. In Bombay, on

the other hand, the Baghdadis found the Bene Israel already settled with a functioning synagogue and a cemetery. Though in many ways the Bene Israel must have appeared strange to them, as indeed they were to appear to many others in later years, the Baghdadis worshipped for a while in the Bene Israel synagogue and buried their dead in the Bene Israel cemetery. Soon, however, they began worshipping in their own prayer halls until the Sassoons built spacious and handsome synagogues for them, first in Byculla. the section of Bombay where the Baghdadis mostly lived, and later in the Fort in the southern section of Bombay to which the richer Baghdadis moved later in the century. In 1840 several Baghdadis petitioned the Bombay Government for permission to build a dividing wall within the common cemetery on the ground that they were Arabian Jews whose usages differed from those of the Bene Israel, but their request was refused. Later, the Baghdadis were given ground by the Bombay Municipality for a separate cemetery which they still use. In Pune too, which had a small resident Baghdadi community by the sixties of the last century, the Baghdadis used a separate section at one end of the common cemetery though there is no dividing wall. Incidentally, David Sassoon died in Pune in 1864 and is buried in the compound of the magnificent synagogue he built there with its tall red spire rising high above the surrounding buildings.

Both in Calcutta and Bombay, a certain number of Baghdadis became extremely wealthy as already mentioned. They had an uncanny appreciation of the directions in which the cities of Calcutta and Bombay would grow; the Sassoons in Bombay and the Ezras in Calcutta bought up at rock-bottom prices extensive real estate which, within a short time, became ripe for development and provided enormous capital gains at a time when the State did not take away in tax the bulk of the unearned income. Again, in Bombay, it was the Sassoons who foresaw the growth of shipping and constructed the first dock in Bombay, still known as the Sassoon Dock, as a pointer to future development of port facilities. The Sassoon Dock still serves a useful role for the growing mechanised fishing fleet.

While a large number of entrepreneurs made modest fortunes, and a large number made a modest competence as employees in Baghdadi or non-Jewish British establishments, quite a number of poor Baghdadis were tempted to migrate to India to subsist on the charity of the wealthy Sassoons, Ezras, Davids and Eliases both in Bombay and in Calcutta. In Bombay, particularly, the Sassoons made such generous provision for doles, that Baghdadi destitutes were materially better off than unskilled Indian labourers.

In Bombay, from the start, the Sassoons made adequate arrangements for the free education of Baghdadi children in the David Sassoon School, of which the first three or four headmasters happened to be Bene Israel. The school took the children only to the middle school level; but later, Sir Jacob Sassoon endowed a High School in which Baghdadi children got an excellent education in English up to the Senior Cambridge level. Those who were better off went to schools for European and Anglo-Indian children where they paid double the fees charged to those children. Many completed their education in Great Britain. At one time the Jacob Sassoon School admitted very few Bene Israel children but gradually, as numbers fell, Bene Israel began to be freely admitted. Today the majority of the pupils in the school are non-Jewish, but yet not as large a proportion as in the Bene Israel school with its Marathi medium of instruction. The Jacob Sassoon School is now the only school in Bombay where Hebrew is taught as a second language.

In Calcutta the Baghdadi community was not as alert in the matter of education as the Bombay Baghdadis. For a long time it was left to Christian missionaries to run schools for Jewish boys as well as girls, and members of the Jewish community even contributed scholarships to help Jewish children to go to these schools in the absence of any other provision. Of course the richer Baghdadis, like those in Bombay, took full advantage of schools for Europeans and Anglo-Indians. When it was discovered, almost by accident, that a Jewish girl was about to be converted to Christianity, the Jewish Girls and Infants School was started in 1881. Shortly afterwards, some provision was made for Jewish boys as well, but up to a very elementary level until 1907 when

a proper high school for boys was developed. Today there are hardly any Jewish students in the two schools.

The Baghdadi Jews spoke in Arabic and in the early days dressed in Arab style. They even published periodicals in Arabic but in Hebrew script. Gradually the younger generation became more familiar with English than with Arabic and, in time, most Baghdadis adopted English as their mother tongue, though many Arabic sayings and turns of phrase were remembered. Similarly, on social occasions, like circumcisions and weddings, Arabic songs were sung along with Hebrew songs and Arabic customs observed. Hardly any attempt was made to master any Indian language, though most Baghdadis became acquainted with colloquial Hindustani of a simple sort.

The more well-to-do Baghdadis, men as well as women, changed over entirely to European costume and became more or less westernised, though they always adhered strictly to their traditional rites and customs in religious matters, particularly funeral ceremonies. The poorer Baghdadis retained their Arab costumes until fairly recent times, the women longer than the men, and in the Byculla district of Bombay Baghdadi women in their white ankle-length gowns and shawls were a familiar sight. Rich or poor, the Baghdadis were never really Indianised, as the Bene Israel were.

The arrival of the Baghdadis in India after the British had firmly established themselves in Western India as rulers had consequences which affected relations between them and the Bene Israel, quite apart from differences arising from their diverse views on Jewish observance. On arrival, the Baghdadis saw, as newcomers unfamiliar with the Indian way of life, the racial divide, mainly marked by difference in skin colour, which kept ruler and ruled apart; saw also the stamp of inferiority which was put on the ruled and the contempt in which they were held, exemplified by the overtones which the term 'native' had acquired —a contempt which almost turned into hatred after the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The Bene Israel were wholly Indian and shared the inferior status of their countrymen. In the circumstances then prevailing, it was highly disadvantageous for the Baghdadis to

align themselves with the natives of India, including the Bene Israel, and assume an Indian character, when as Jews from another, albeit Asian, country they could remain distinct and escape the worst aspects of British-Indian relationships. It was only natural, therefore, that the Baghdadis, with a few exceptions, identified themselves, as far as possible, with the British rulers of India, not only in affirming undivided political allegiance, but also in sharing their business interests and their outlook. They joined clubs from which Indians were rigidly excluded and affiliated their commercial and industrial establishments to British Chambers of Commerce. The eldest son of David Sassoon, Sir Albert Sassoon, converted the family firm, David Sassoon and Sons, into a British company and shifted its headquarters to England. And the Sassoons by the third generation had all become Englishmen, giving up, before Indian independence, all connection with India.

The existence of the Bene Israel, with their ineradicable Indian character, in fact, proved a handicap when the Baghdadis of Calcutta, with the support of the local European community, sought to have an amendment included in the Government of India Bill of 1934, which was then before the British Parliament, entitling them to be included in the separate electoral rolls for Europeans for elections to Indian legislatures.[9] Had there been no Jews in India except the Baghdadis (and the White Jews of Cochin) such an amendment could have been adopted without embarrassment or accusation of discrimination between Jews on racial grounds. As matters stood, particularly when all Jews settled in India including the Baghdadis were of Asian origin, such an accusation could not be avoided and the British Government eventually refused to accept the amendment. Ironically, the separate European electoral rolls were only a passing episode in India's history.

Reference has been made to the religious differences which the Baghdadis in Bombay discovered between themselves and the Bene Israel. By the time the Baghdadis arrived in Bombay the Bene Israel had already been under fairly intensive instruction in Jewish

[9] An account of the episode is given by Rabbi E. N. Musleah in his *On the Banks of the Ganga: The Sojourn of Jews in Calcutta.*

observances from the Cochinis and had had almost twenty years of schooling with the Christian missionaries. Their synagogue had been functioning for almost thirty years, though it was still without a Sefer Torah. The Bene Israel, it would appear, were themselves conscious of their somewhat deficient compliance with the strict requirements of their religion. As the Pune Bene Israel naively told Dr J. Wolff when he visited them in 1833, they considered they were not sufficiently pious to deserve the privilege of possessing Sifre Torah. Attaching the greatest importance to the strictest observance of the least detail of Jewish ceremonial, many Baghdadis came to doubt the correctness of Bene Israel practice in what to them were matters of fundamental importance, namely divorce and the re-marriage of childless widows. Deficient observance in these respects rendered the re-marriages of the divorcee or the childless widow invalid. The progeny of such invalid marriages were regarded as tainted and unfit to 'enter into the Assembly of the Lord' for seven generations. On account of their doubts and the difficulty of distinguishing which Bene Israel came under the ban and which not, for a considerable time Bene Israel were not counted in the *minyan* or called up for the reading of the Law. In Calcutta and Rangoon, where the Bene Israel had no religious organisations of their own, these disabilities did handicap individual Bene Israel anxious to participate on an equal basis in congregational worship. In Rangoon the matter was agitated in the Rangoon High Court and was decided in favour of the Bene Israel. In Calcutta, the Bene Israel did not seem to challenge their exclusion, but the Baghdadis themselves seem to have sought rulings from religious authorities in Iraq and Palestine. In Pune and Bombay, where the Bene Israel had their own houses of worship and could muster their own minyans, the discrimination could be, and was, overlooked. In course of time the exclusion lost its rigour and almost came to be forgotten. The same doubts were, however, raised in Israel by individual rabbis whose licences were sought for marriages between Bene Israel immigrants and non-Bene Israel residents. After a heated controversy which aroused world interest, the Israel Rabbinate ruled that there was no bar on marriages where one party was of Bene Israel origin. In India itself absolutely no religious distinctions survive. Indeed, in Bombay Bene

Israel are often called upon to complete a minyan in the Baghdadi synagogue and in Pune it is a member of the Bene Israel community who leads the services in the Baghdadi synagogue.

Both in Bombay and in Calcutta, the Baghdadis made a striking contribution, out of all proportion to their numbers, to public life. They served on the municipal corporations of both cities, and in both cities held the highest civic office with distinction. They also served as members of the Legislative Councils of Bengal and of the Bombay Presidency. In Bombay particularly they were generous philanthropists almost, if not quite, equalling the Parsees in this respect. Many institutions in Bombay and in Pune still bear the name of Sassoon. The Baghdadis earned two baronetcies and several knighthoods for their public services, not to speak of lesser British honours. For many years Sir Victor Sassoon, as the representative of the Bombay Millowners Association, fought in the Indian Legislative Assembly the battle of the Indian textile industry against crippling disabilities imposed in the interests of Manchester. Indian banking had a powerful supporter in Sir Sassoon J. David. Sir Jacob Sassoon, the uncle of Sir Victor, was one of the principal donors who made possible the establishment of the Royal Institute of Science in Bombay, and it is said his widow was very disappointed when the Institute was not named after him.

Mention should be made here of the valuable contribution made, in the early days of the Indian cinema, by the Baghdadis to the enhancement of the status of women artistes. For centuries, it was not respectable for women to appear on the stage or to become professional musicians, dancers or singers. Among the first to break the taboo were a few educated Baghdadi and Anglo-Indian women who took up film acting, braving all the risks involved to reputation and otherwise. Their entry encouraged educated women from other communities to follow. Such women also began to appear on the stage and become dancers and singers. The fact that films were silent at first helped the Baghdadis and Anglo-Indians to overcome the handicap of language. With the introduction of talkies, there was less scope for actresses who did not know Hindi.

Today, though a few hundred Baghdadis have chosen to stay on in Bombay and Calcutta as Indian citizens, making a useful

contribution to the commercial lives of these cities, they are finding it extremely difficult to maintain organised communal activity, or, in view of the rigidly restrictive conditions written into their charitable trust deeds, to put the income of the trusts to the maximum beneficial use. It is significant that the most lively book to appear in recent years about the Jews of Calcutta has come, not from Calcutta itself, but from England where two Baghdadi ladies have collected and set down in fascinating detail, the nostalgic memories of fellow migrants.[10] After more than twenty years in exile, the spell of India still holds them! Will that spell help to keep a small Baghdadi community alive in India in the future?

VI. Concluding Remarks

The story of the Jews of India has on the whole been a happy one unlike that of their co-religionists in many other lands. It is true that now and then in the Diaspora Jews have, in one land or other, enjoyed periods of peace and prosperity and even outbursts of creativity which have brought advancement to the whole of mankind, but these periods have been succeeded by persecution, contumely and even expulsion. The most horrendous example is that of the Jews of Germany who for more than a century made a brilliant contribution to industry, science, literature, music and art only to be repaid with expropriation, expulsion, confinement and torture in concentration camps and, to crown all, extermination. India is perhaps the only country in the world in which, through long centuries Jews have dwelt in complete security and have been accorded an honourable place in the social structure of the land.

The Jews of India cannot claim to have any extraordinary achievements to their credit but they did maintain their identity over centuries in the midst of an alien civilisation and, in their

[10] Flower Elias and Judith Elias Cooper, *The Jews of Calcutta.*

small way, prosper. And, unlike some other small Jewish communities, they have not allowed themselves to be killed by kindness and get assimilated in the host society. Part of the explanation may lie in the Hindu concept of *dharma*, which has permeated the Indian outlook beyond the bounds of religion proper, and which requires one to remain in, and fulfil the duties of, the station in which Providence has been pleased to place one. But this by itself would not have sufficed to prevent the Jews from becoming by gradual degrees but another Hindu caste. The saving factor was a stubborn pride in the Jewish heritage which enabled the Bene Israel, for instance, to resist the blandishments of the Christian missionaries, much as they admired them and appreciated what they were able to learn from them. After all, stiff-neckedness, of which the Israelites were once accused, can also be a virtue. And survival as such is very highly rated in the Jewish scale of values.

India has proved to be a generous mother, not only to the Jews who came to live here permanently. She opened her doors freely to those who sought refuge with her temporarily when they were driven out of, or could no longer endure the dissabilities imposed on them in, the countries in which they had dwelt. For instance, in the thirties of this century, hundreds of highly qualified German and East European Jews were given refuge in India and provided facilities for the exercise of their professions here. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru played a notable part in getting the Government of India to do this, even though he was at the time engaged in a vigorous struggle against the British. More particularly, he persuaded a reluctant Indian Medical Council to recognise continental medical qualifications to enable refugee doctors, many most highly skilled, to practise in India. Most of these refugees had very successful careers and some introduced new industries into the country. India also provided a temporary home during World War II to Polish and other East European Jews who managed to elude Hitler's net and escape through Soviet Russia, Iran and Afghanistan. After the end of the War most moved away to Europe, America or Australia.

It will be asked why, if Indian Jews were so happy in India, they left in such large numbers after 1947. So far as the Baghdadis are concerned, the explanation is not hard to find. They were

comparatively newcomers to India, and had had no experience of living under Indian rule. They were highly westernised, with strong business ties with Britain and the Far East. Their leaders had developed international business interests which would suffer if they retained their headquarters in India. Lastly, they were more closely involved in Political Zionism than the Bene Israel, or even the Cochinis. were. The establishment of the State of Israel proved an attraction too strong to resist for those who were unable or unwilling to move to one of the Commonwealth countries or the United States of America.

The White Jews of Cochin, though resident in India for a much longer period had, ever since their prominence in Cochin trade declined on the departure of the Dutch, been getting more closely allied to the Baghdadis and largely shared their outlook. Again, their local importance in Cochin declined after the State was merged in the larger Kerala State. They too were prompted to move to one or other of the Commonwealth countries or to the United States of America.

The Black Jews of Cochin were very strongly influenced by Religious Zionism, if not to the same extent by Political Zionism, and the establishment of the State of Israel impelled them to move en masse to Israel. With their small number it was possible for them to settle in two or three *moshavs* (cooperative rural settlements) so that they have had fewer problems of integration into Israeli life than Bene Israel immigrants who have mainly moved to new development towns in the south of Israel.

As to the Bene Israel, Political Zionism had little appeal to the majority, though they shared the belief of most oriental Jews that, in God's good time, the Jews would return to Jerusalem under the guidance of the Messiah. A few sophisticated Bene Israel did understand and share the aspirations of Political Zionism and they watched with admiration the achievements of the Zionists under the Mandate. They did not, however, contemplate themselves moving to Palestine. They regarded the movement as largely dominated by Western Jewry and they wondered what place there was in Palestine for coloured people like the Bene Israel. Zionist emissaries came from time to time and were warmly received, but

they were also questioned whether the doubts which the Baghdadis had once raised about their religious status would be revived in Palestine if the Bene Israel went there (as indeed they were raised later in Israel). After the outbreak of World War II the attitude of the Bene Israel underwent a radical change. The stories that trickled through of the destruction wrought by Hitler among the Jews of Europe, the heroic attempts made after the war ended to transport to Palestine, against British opposition, the Jews, languishing in the concentration camps to which they had been consigned by Hitler, and the dramatic circumstances in which the State of Israel was established in 1948, just a year after India got her independence, created a wave of sympathy which drove away the doubts that the Bene Israel had entertained. When the opportunity came to join the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' as it was termed, many Bene Israel began moving to Israel with aid from the Jewish Agency or at their own cost. What was first a trickle quickly became a flood. Young people went first, parents even sending little children in what was called Youth Aliyah (lit. going up). Parents and even grandparents followed and many gave up quite good jobs to make their future in Israel. A strong attraction was the prospect of generous aid for rehabilitation in their new home, and in fact most of the poorer emigres greatly improved their economic position and standard of living. They also forgot the inhibitions which the caste system had grafted in India and took up work which in India they would have considered degrading.

Quite apart from the pull of Israel, the Bene Israel shared the general restlessness that had seized large numbers of Indians after 1947 and prompted them to seek opportunities for material benefit overseas. For the Bene Israel who caught this infection, Israel was only one, and not always the first, of the targets. Being the easiest, Israel was where most of the least qualified or least well-off went. And, it may be added, like the Anglo-Indians and the Indian Christians who during British rule were taught to regard themselves as under the special protection of their rulers, many Bene Israel too entertained the fear that in free India they would suffer discrimination, a fear that has proved groundless.

As already mentioned, it looks as if the wave of emigration has largely spent its force, and the fear that was once felt by some that the Indian Jewish community would soon virtually disappear may not be realised. But it is still not outside the range of possibility that the Jews may cease to exist as a coherent community in India. In that case, as the writer wrote some ten years ago with reference to the Bene Israel,

> This will be a loss to India, if not to world Jewry. However insignificant a part the Bene Israel played in the general life of India, by their very existence in sizable numbers on the West Coast, they have constituted a Jewish presence in India which in its small way has enriched its multi-faceted culture. More important, they have provided living evidence that, in at least one country in the world, Jews can exist with pride and honour and without any need for self-consciousness or protective withdrawal into a self-created ghetto.

2

Religious Evolution among the Bene Israel of India since 1750[1]

The Bene Israel of India have after a millenium and a half of obscurity in the history of World Jewry, been brought prominently to the notice of their fellow Jews by the unfortunate difficulties raised in Israel about their acceptability as 'full Jews' for purposes of marriage. The community was taken by surprise by the irruption of the controversy, and it is a measure of its isolation even in the recent past from the main centres of Jewish orthodoxy in Asia and Europe that it was caught unprepared. It is not my purpose, nor have I the equipment, to deal with the merits of the doubts raised about the validity of the marriage and divorce practices of the community by the custodians of orthodoxy in Israel. But the raising of the doubts indicates that the time has come for the community to take stock of its religious evolution since, in the middle of the eighteenth century, it began its continuous contacts with Jewish communities elsewhere. This is an attempt to invite attention to some salient features of this evolution. If it provokes closer and more exact study of the religious history of the community, my purpose will have been served.[2]

[1] This date was selected by me in 1963 in the belief that it was about this time that the first known contacts were made by the Bene Israel with Jewish communities elsewhere. As will be seen from this article as it now appears, such contact must have taken place much earlier.

[2] Though considerable study has been devoted to the Bene Israel since 1963, it has been undertaken mainly by foreign scholars, and little attention has been given to *developments* in the religious sphere. Much valuable documentary material has disappeared since World War II. Knowledgeable persons have died without recording what they knew and the memories of even the oldest of their survivors do not reach back far enough.

First of all, it must be remarked that the first authentic record of Bene Israel beliefs and practices as they were before the middle of the eighteenth century is what the Christian missionaries who worked among them in the first two or three decades of the nineteenth century put down as told to them by the Bene Israel. It is true that, by then, they were receiving instruction and guidance from their co-religionists from Cochin in South India, that their first synagogue had already been established (in 1796, in Bombay) and that, for at least half a century, they had been officially recognised in Bombay City as a community of Jews and enrolled in the East India Company's army as such. How long before that they were conscious of themselves as Jews and were recognised by others as such is uncertain. As early as 1732, a Danish missionary, J. A. Sartorius, was told by 'German and Indian [i.e. Cochin] Jews resident at Madras who gained their information from other Jews who came from Cochin' that there were people in Surat and Rajapore (i.e. the Konkan region of Maharashtra in which the Bene Israel lived)

> who do not call themselves Jews nor understand the name, but 'Bene Israel', children or descendants of Israel. They have not the books of the Old Testament nor do they understand Hebrew .... What they know of religion is not yet ascertained except that they make use of the word 'Shema' as a formula of prayer or of doctrine....They practise circumcision as a part of their religion.... They do not intermarry with other Indians, but keep to their own people.

Sartorius went on to say that an English Jew had seen and conversed with several of the Bene Israel.[3] This establishes that the Jews of Cochin knew of the Bene Israel much earlier than 1750 and that the Bene Israel were conscious of their Jewishness and kept themselves apart from their Hindu neighbours when first 'discovered', even if they did not then use or recognise the

[3] Cited by Dr Walter J. Fischel in his article, 'David d'Beth Hillel: a hitherto unknown Jewish traveler to India in the nineteenth century'.

name Jew. In 1768 the famous Cochini merchant Ezekiel Rahabi in a letter to the Jews of Amsterdam reported that Cochini Jews had gone to instruct the Bene Israel in the Jewish religion and that some Bene Israel had even been taken to Cochin for training as instructors. All this must have been considerably before 1750.

Dr Schifra Strizower, who made a close study on the spot of the community in 1955-56, claims to have seen a tombstone in a Jewish cemetery in the Kulaba (now Raigad) District with a Hebrew inscription dated 1715 C.E. If it can be established that the tombstone was actually erected in or about 1715, the discovery will establish that Hebrew was known to some Bene Israel at least half a century earlier than we have on other evidence any right to presume and that, therefore, the Bene Israel must have had more than a vestigial knowledge of Judaism earlier than we previously had grounds to believe. But a single tombstone is to my mind suspicious. If there is a Hebrew inscription on one tomb, why are there none on any others built at the same time and later? Are not the older tombs without any inscriptions at all, like those of the Muslims, and are not the earliest inscriptions in Marathi only, even at a time when considerable knowledge of Hebrew was known to have been present? The possibility that this particular tomb was erected much later than 1715 cannot be excluded out of hand.[4]

Another reason I had in 1963 for fixing the middle of the eighteenth century as the earliest known date for the Bene Israel being recognisably Jewish in more than a vestigial sense was that, according to the family records of the Rahabi family in Cochin, David Ezekiel Rahabi (who was born in 1720) 'went to Western India in the middle of the eighteenth century in the course of his work for the Dutch East India Company, there encountered the Bene Israel and reformed the Judaism he found existent among them.'[5] This was about the time the Bene Israel began migrating to Bombay City as mentioned above.

[4] This is dealt with further in Appendix 2.I.

[5] Schifra Strizower, *Exotic Jewish Communities*, London, 1962, p. 63.

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I have not seen the record of the Rahabi family referred to by Dr Strizower, but I gather from other sources that it is a comparatively recent document in Hebrew with no references to original contemporary sources. The published 1768 letter of David Rahabi's father Ezekiel, however, makes no mention of the son having 'reformed the Judaism' he found existing among the Bene Israel. In fact, Ezekiel Rahabi complained that the teachers sent from Cochin, as also the Bene Israel taken to Cochin for training as instructors, had proved ineffectual.

Now, the Bene Israel tradition, as related to the Christian missionaries, had been that a David Rahabi came to the Konkan about nine hundred years ago (i.e. in about 1000 C.E.) and discovered that they were Jews by observing certain Jewish practices followed by them such as the distinction between clean and unclean fish, the observance of the Sabbath and circumcision on the eighth day. He taught them to recite important Hebrew prayers and appointed three young men to attend to Jewish ritual. These are believed to have passed down Rahabi's teaching to their descendants, who were known as kazis. If the David Rahabi of Bene Israel tradition is the David Ezekiel Rahabi who visited them in the middle of the eighteenth century, it is inconceivable that in the early years of the nineteenth century when several persons who had met him must have been still alive, his coming had been put back in the communal memory more than eight hundred years. The possibility is that the name was transferred to the legendary teacher who, if he ever existed, was an entirely different person.

Some people believe that the legendary teacher was a brother of Moses Maimonides named David who, according to a letter of Moses Maimonides written in 1176 C.E., was drowned while travelling in the Indian Ocean. Now this brother, who was a trader, is not known to have visited that part of India in which the Bene Israel were to be found. Nor is there any ground to presume that he ever encountered the Bene Israel, still less that he stayed among them and taught them as the legend relates. This belief is not based on any old Bene Israel tradition. It appears to have stemmed from a reference to the Jews of India in another letter of Moses Maimonides written to the Rabbis of Lunel in 1199 or 1200 C.E.,

which became known to the Bene Israel only after 1900. In this letter it is stated that 'the Jews of India know nothing of the Torah and of the laws nothing save the Sabbath and circumcision'. It has been presumed that the informant of Moses Maimonides was his brother David, and that this brother was known to the Bene Israel as David Rahabi (the Egyptian). Even assuming that, by the Jews of India, Moses Maimonides meant the Bene Israel specifically,[6] there is no ground for believing that his brother was the legendary David Rahabi. And, it would be stretching coincidence too far to believe, without further proof, that *two* David Rahabis visited the Bene Israel and taught them at an interval of some eight hundred years.[7]

We have, then, in the middle of the eighteenth century, an Indian community undoubtedly Jewish in its religious observances, though without Hebrew prayer books and without the Bible or the Talmud, living scattered in towns and villages near the coast in the Kulaba District in the vicinity of the Island of Bombay, under the rule of the Marathas and the Muslim Sidi of Janjira State. The community had, as already pointed out, begun to move to Bombay City in sizable numbers by that time and to enlist in the army of the East India Company until, by the early part of the nineteenth century, they provided as many as half the Indian officer strength of the regiments of the Bombay Army, both infantry and cavalry. These people called themselves Bene Israel[8] and for a long time they were known as 'Shanwar Telis' (Saturday Oilmen) indicating their traditional profession of oil pressing and their practice of abstaining from work on Saturdays. By the middle of the eighteenth century, few families were engaged in this profession, so the name must have been given much earlier when it was their characteristic occupation. And their abstention from work on Saturdays must also have been traditional.

[6] Maimonides may have referred to some other isolated Jewish group in Afghanistan, Baluchistan or Eastern Persia, which were at the time under the rule of the Delhi Sultanate and which may in the Muslim Middle East have been included in the geographical region of India.

[7] This is dealt with at some length in Appendix 2. II.

[8] When and in what circumstances this name came into use is not known, but at one time the community objected to being called *Yehudi*.

As would be seen from the discussion of Sartorius's account above, the Bene Israel called themselves by this name even before 1732, and long before they could have learnt (or re-learnt) about the difference between Israel and Judah. There was an Afghan tribe with this name, though it professed Islam, and there were even some Muslims in North India until fairly recent times who called themselves Bene Israel and married only amongst themselves. It appears that in Persia and Central Asia there were Jews in the early nineteenth century who claimed descent from the Lost Ten Tribes. Dr J. Wolff, the missionary traveller, had this to say of the Jews of Meshed in Persia: 'The Jews of Meshed protest against the name of Jew: they want to be called *Bene Israel*, i.e. Children of Israel.'[9] This makes one wonder whether the Bene Israel brought the name with them to India from this area or at any rate from a country which had been dominated by Islam. There is no evidence that the name was given to them by their Cochini preceptors. The suggestion sometimes made that they adopted the name after contact with the British made them conscious for the first time of their ethnic distinctness from their Hindu neighbours has no basis.

To my mind it is futile to speculate from where and when the Bene Israel came to India. The legend that their ancestors were the survivors of a shipwreck at the village of Navagaon near the port of Chaul may be based on truth. On the other hand, it may have been adopted when our people came to learn that, according to one of the Hindu Puranas, fourteen corpses of foreigners from a shipwreck on the Konkan coast were miraculously brought back to life by Parashuram, an *avatar* of the Hindu God Vishnu, and given the status of Brahmins.[10] The Puranic legend may have been appropriated by the Bene Israel with suitable modifications to account for their presence on the coast. Nor is any useful purpose served by speculating whether our people belong to the Lost

[9] J. Wolff, *Researches and Missionary Labours among the Jews, Mohammedans and Other Sects*, London, 1835, p. 132.

[10] The Chitpavan Brahmins of Maharashtra are supposed to be descended from these miraculously created Hindus.

Ten Tribes[11] or to the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin, or whether they came from one or other of the numerous Jewish communities which were spread throughout West Asia, Persia and North East Africa for more than a century before the destruction of the Second Temple and for centuries thereafter. The bulk of Jewry has for its ancestors, not the Jews who were living in Judea in, say, 175 B.C.E., but the far more numerous Jews who were living dispersed in the areas mentioned above.

Till recently the Bene Israel harboured a pathetic compulsion to establish that they stemmed from the veritable stock of Jacob. Now that we know that, in fact, for the last two thousand years and more, there has been no such thing as a Jewish race; that what makes a Jew is not his ancestry but his commitment to Judaism (in the wider sense of way of life as well as religion), it is sufficient that the Bene Israel have for centuries been identifiable as Jews in all essential respects and distinguishable from their Hindu and Muslim neighbours. And, *pace* those who, like Gerald Abrahams in his book *The Jewish Mind,* would segregate the Bene Israel as 'quasi Jews' or who, like the former Senior Chaplain to the Israeli Armed Forces (later Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel), would wonder whether the Bene Israel are only 'half Jews', there has never been a time since their arrival in India when they have been anything but Jews. Alas, the doubt still exists in many quarters in Israel whether the Bene Israel are fully Jewish, because in many ways they behave like Hindus. Curiously enough, the Jewishness of those who behave like Americans, Poles or Germans or like North African Muslims is never called in question. This, of course, is entirely separate from the stigma of *mamzerism* (i.e. the progeny of prohibited marriages condemned to marry only amongst themselves) that still haunts the Bene Israel in Israel.

Admittedly, there was much in Jewish ritual that the Bene Israel did not observe for long centuries, and admittedly in many

[11] The Bene Israel, until they became acquainted with the Bible, probably did not know the distinction between Israel and Judah.

of their social practices they adopted the customs of their Hindu or more frequently, Muslim neighbours. But it is significant that, even when their observance of Jewish law was minimal, it included the essentials, viz., circumcision on the eighth day, the abstention from labour on the Sabbath, avoidance of forbidden foods, observance in a crude way of the major Biblical festivals at approximately the right times. Much is made of their alleged non-observance of the forms of levirate marriage or release therefrom and of divorce. But the Bene Israel did not practice divorce until they overcame their aversion to the institution and learned the forms from the Cochin and Iraqi Jews. In the few divorces which they had, they used to employ Iraqi Jews to guide them until they had familiarised themselves with the requirements. Again, few widows married again (probably in imitation of the practice of the higher Hindu castes). And it is claimed that an acceptable substitute for release from the requirement of levirate marriage was observed when a childless widow was married outside the family of her late husband. Further, the Bene Israel segregated the progeny of irregular unions with non-Jewish women for purposes of marriage in the absence of any practice of conversion. This progeny bore the opprobrious name of *Kala Israel* (Black Jew). Whether this practice always existed among the Bene Israel or was introduced at some later stage in their religious evolution will never be definitely known. Possibly, they first accepted the progeny of a Bene Israel father as a member of the community by birth, irrespective of the religion or marital status of the mother, and later, when they were acquainted with the Jewish law as to segregation of the progeny of adulterous unions, they adopted, as a rough and ready compliance with the Jewish law, the institution of Kala Israel, on the analogy of the practice of the Cochin Jews in relation to the progeny of their slaves. Fortunately, the rigour of the stigma which was attached in the past to the Kala Israel has been largely relaxed over the last seventy years; and one hopes that, in another generation, no one will distinguish between Gora (white) and Kala Israel. But in this institution we have an illustration of the Bene Israel concern for maintaining their Jewish identity, even

if it represents an assimilation of the Hindu practice of caste distinctions rather than an attempt to apply imperfectly understood Jewish law.[12]

Still more significant is the fact that, except perhaps for the cult of the Prophet Elijah as harbinger of the Messiah which the Bene Israel developed in apparent imitation of the cult of Hindu and Muslim saints in India, they never adopted a single practice from either Hindu or Muslim customs which transgressed Jewish ritual. In other words, their assimilation of Hindu or Muslim practices was restricted to social matters and did not extend to religion proper. For example, they may have followed Muslim laws of inheritance, they may have used in their rituals foodstuffs which were similar to those used by their neighbours in theirs; or they may have in marriages or funerals followed their customs. But in these respects they hardly differ from Jews elsewhere living like them in conditions of close, free and friendly association with their non-Jewish neighbours, if regard is given to the fact that they did not have, as Jews elsewhere did, the Talmud and the Codes derived therefrom to provide a frame of reference as a guide to specifically Jewish social mores.

The religious life of the Bene Israel before a sizable settlement was achieved in Bombay City was largely affected by the scattered nature of their population distribution. The first figures of population for the Kulaba District (including Janjira State) available to me are those of 1891, and the Bene Israel population then was 3,320. Working back a hundred and fifty years and taking into account the fact that in this period there was a steady stream of migration to Bombay City (where in 1891 there was a Jewish population of 5,021 of which at least 4,000 must have been Bene Israel), it would be safe to assume that, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Bene Israel population of the Kulaba District could not have exceeded 5,000. And this number was distributed over scores of villages and small towns. It is not likely that in any one place the population exceeded one hundred souls, or

[12] For further comment see Appendix 2. III.

twelve to fifteen families. In many places there may have been just two or three families. Religious observance was, therefore, largely centred on home ritual. Congregational worship was usually arranged at the house of the most prominent family, temporary booths being built for marriages. Burials were made in Muslim cemeteries at places where Bene Israel cemeteries did not exist. Every male was taught the technique of ritual slaughter (this continued to be done by Bene Israel living outside the large centres of Jewish concentration until fairly recent times); almost every male could conduct the services; and after the visit of David Ezekiel Rahabi, hazans were employed. The kazis probably toured whenever required to settle disputes and attend important ceremonies like circumcisions and marriages. In every cantonment where an appreciable Bene Israel population existed, religious services were organised by the head of the community, called the Muccadam, and there were special Jewish cemeteries. The conditions of a static society with rigid caste divisions which made it almost impossible for the non-conformist to break away from his own group and its established customs[13] helped immensely in the preservation of the Bene Israel way of life in spite of the fragmentation of the community into such minute groups in the midst of an overwhelmingly non-Jewish population. There was no way in which the Bene Israel youth could escape conditioning from early childhood; and though army employment in one sense took him away from the centres of Bene Israel culture, in another it made absolutely no change, because within the regiment the stratification and social exclusiveness of the civilian environment reappeared. And this state of affairs facilitated the transmission of the Bene Israel tradition from generation to generation by word of mouth and by example.

Another important factor which helped the preservation of the Bene Israel way of life was the absence of any secular civil law. Each community was left to rule its own affairs; to settle civil disputes among its own members; to discipline offenders against

[13] The stability of social life in India despite frequent and convulsive political changes and wars was remarkable.

its own codes. The usual penalties were the levy of a fine, the imposition of an obligation to provide a communal feast and, in the last resort, ostracism, and these penalties were effective. The rebel could not opt out of his community, because there was nothing outside it to which he would be allowed to adhere. Even after the establishment of British rule, the State for a considerable period left the regulation of the social life of each community to its own customary organs. One of the earliest regulations made for the Bombay Presidency after British rule replaced that of the Peshwas, debarred civil courts from entertaining suits regarding community or caste disputes. Only as social conditions changed and the admixture of diverse social groups in a complex civil community grew were secular laws enacted which allowed individuals to assert their personal freedom from caste and customary regulations and the power of community leaders to impose social sanctions withered. But social sanctions were still powerful in such matters as marriage and burial until very recent times.

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century there was a steady development of Jewish observance under the guidance of a succession of teachers from Cochin who followed those referred to by Ezekiel Rahabi in his letter of 1768. Religious organisation began to take a form which would be familiar to Jews elsewhere. The kazis began to lose their importance—already at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century they had to struggle for their established privileges, and by the middle of the nineteenth century they had ceased to exist except in name. The muccadam of the local community and the *jamat* (or general assembly of the community—a term borrowed from their Muslim neighbours) took over the judicial functions of the kazis. Other functionaries like the *gubbay*, the *hazan*, the *kazi* (who assisted the hazan in conducting congregational worship; not to be confused with the hereditary kazi), and the *sammash* appeared. Conditions were ripe for the establishment of synagogues, and the first synagogue (the Shaar-Ha-Rahamim) was established in Bombay City, which then had a fairly large Bene Israel population (probably 2,000 or so) concentrated in a small neighbourhood. As time went on, it became possible for the Bene Israel to employ hazans from Cochin or even Iraq.

Though the centre of Bene Israel religious life shifted to Bombay City with the establishment of the synagogue in 1796, effective control remained with the lay leaders of the community in the absence of a rabbinate. It is true that deference was paid to visiting *hahams*—often the deference was excessive and undiscriminating and sometimes the hahams were bogus—but the lay leaders had the final say. Influenced by Indian practice, it was sometimes attempted to make the leadership hereditary, but such attempts usually resulted in the creation of opposing factions and break-aways, one of which resulted in the establishment of a second synagogue in Bombay in 1840 (Shaare Rason). But, in matters of ritual, the Bene Israel were almost wholly in the hands of teachers from Cochin, and the possibility is that, had it not been for an intervention from the West, of which more will be said presently, the Bene Israel would have completely assimilated the ritual and ceremonial of the Cochin Jews and that, when Jews from Iraq (the Baghdadis) began to make their presence felt in Bombay, the Bene Israel would have accepted their guidance as well without question. In fact, it is often asserted that the Baghdadis for the first time provided the Bene Israel with a model of Jewish observance. Actually, it was the Cochinis who did this, and continued to do this long after the Baghdadis had established themselves in Bombay. For instance, the Haggada issued in 1843 in Hebrew and Marathi had detailed instructions regarding the *seder* ritual and the Marathi Almanac issued in 1845 had an appendix in which the ritual for the various Jewish festivals was briefly explained. The Haggada was prepared by Haham Hyam Joseph Hallegua and the Almanac by Haham David Judah Ashkenazi, both from Cochin. It was also under Cochini inspiration that synagogues were established on the mainland at Alibag, Panvel and Revdanda in the forties of the last century. Indeed, as early as the thirties of the last century the Baghdadis were praying in their own prayer halls; in 1843 they asked for a separate section to be walled off for them in the common cemetery.

Had the Bene Israel whole-heartedly accepted Iraqi leadership, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility to conjecture that the whole pattern of Bene Israel secular life might have taken a dif-

ferent shape. They might have hesitated to enter the public services in such large numbers, or take up private employment in non-Jewish factories and workshops because such employment made the observance of the minutiae of Jewish religious law impossible. Like the Cochin Jews they might have gone in for petty trading. As it happened, the Bene Israel hardly ever had scruples about accepting employment which would take them far from centres of Jewish population or would require them to work on Saturdays. Nor, by and large, have they been over-concerned about living in a Jewish neighbourhood. The subordination of the requirements of the ceremonial law to secular compulsions which marked Bene Israel living from the time they moved to Bombay City and which marks important sections of modern Jewish life in Western Europe and America might have been stopped.

The intervention from the West which changed the course of Bene Israel religious history was the lifting in 1813 of the ban imposed on missionary activity in India, and the establishment by the American Congregational Mission of schools in Bombay and in the Kulaba District. Before entering upon a brief description of the work of the Christian missionaries among the Bene Israel, it may be of interest to remark that, though the Portuguese for a long time had a stronghold at Revdanda, which occupies the site of the ancient port of Chaul, and though the Bene Israel lived in considerable numbers in the area, there is no record of any conversion activity by Roman Catholic missionaries among the Bene Israel. It is not as if the Portuguese did not interest themselves in conversions. In Bombay City and the Island of Salsette thousands of conversions were made. Even in the Kulaba District the Portuguese forced the Christian religion on numbers of Hindus. But they seem to have left the Bene Israel alone. Again, though Nestorian Christianity was at one time active a little to the north of the Kulaba District, the first Bene Israel encounter with Christianity was in its Congregational and Presbyterian forms early in the nineteenth century. It may be said at once that, from the Christian point of view, it was remarkably fruitless. There was hardly any conversion to Christianity in spite of a most intense

effort. Much that the missionaries had to offer was eagerly accepted and absorbed—literacy in Marathi, instruction in Hebrew, the Bible in Marathi, introduction to English—but, when it came to the New Testament and the acceptance of the messiahship of Jesus, the Bene Israel closed their minds. To the arguments of the missionaries they had one simple but decisive answer: 'We do not know the replies to your questions; our learned men elsewhere do; ask them.' [14] Not that they were afraid to face the missionaries; they were just sure that the missionaries were wrong when it came to the New Testament, even if they could not verbalise their conviction at the sophisticated level of the missionaries. In this connection the following quotation from a letter of Dr John Wilson of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission, dated 18 July 1841, will be of interest:

> I called a meeting of the principal Arabian Jews, which was held at the house of David Sassoon, the most opulent merchant of their body. . . . Towards the close of our interview we entered on the infinitely important question of the Messiahship of Christ, and had an opportunity of stating the usual arguments for its establishment. They ordered all their children to leave the room when we first mentioned the name of the Saviour; and we could not help observing how much more reserved they appeared in this matter than the Bene Israel.[15]

The extent of the missionary influence will be apparent from the fact that in 1829 there were 130 Jews in 17 schools run by the American Mission, seven on Bombay Island and ten in the Kulaba District. In 1827 the Mission had established a Hebrew school at Alibag (in the Kulaba District) with an average attendance of 30, including 8 girls. It was also reported that in the schools in the villages of the Kulaba District the instructors were

[14] The Reverend J. Henry Lord made this complaint in a small book he wrote in 1894 on *The Jewish Mission Field in the Bombay Diocese.*

[15] This and later references to Dr Wilson's missionary work have been taken from George Smith's *Life of John Wilson.*

Jews.[16] More significant of the extent of missionary influence was the fact that in 1830 Dr John Wilson was having meetings with the Bene Israel in Bombay City every Saturday evening. One of his first actions in Bombay was the publication of a Hebrew grammar in Marathi for the Bene Israel. In 1836 some 250 Bene Israel children, one-third of whom were girls, attended Dr Wilson's schools and, as the Bene Israel population in Bombay City at that time was only 2,000 or so, it meant that at least one-fourth of the children of school-going age were in his schools. These are remarkable figures for a time when illiteracy, particularly among women, was appallingly high, and when the Bene Israel were new to book-learning. In 1842, as many as 38 Bene Israel were attending the College established by Dr Wilson. It must be emphasised that these figures do not include the Bene Israel attending the schools of the American Mission or those of the Church of England missions. Nor was missionary activity confined to schools. To Dr Wilson particularly the Bene Israel owe an immense debt. Apart from his other services, the community owes to him the Hebrew scholarship of Joseph Ezekiel Rajpurkar, the indefatigable translator into Marathi of the Jewish Prayer Book and other religious literature. To him also is due the inclusion of Hebrew in the syllabus of the matriculation and higher examinations of the Bombay University.

Mention must also be made here of the work of the Madras Jews Society (a Church of England body) which made use of the services of a converted Cochin Jew, Michael Sargon, to run a number of schools for the Bene Israel. He enlisted the aid of other Cochinis, including his brother Abraham Sargon, all of whom had apparently retained their Jewish faith, in schools which he opened at Bombay and at Revdanda, Alibag, Ashtami and Pali (all in Kulaba District). These schools ran from 1826 to 1832, when the Madras Jews Society discontinued their aid, but the Bombay school was continued by Michael Sargon until 1859

[16] This information was taken from printed reports of the American Mission which I read some fifty years ago in the Bombay University Library.

under the auspices of the Anglican Church Missionary Society of Bombay. H. S. Kehimkar pays a warm tribute to Michael Sargon in his *History of the Bene Israel of India.* Every Saturday Sargon held meetings at which he explained the Bible and 'only spoke on Christianity when he was forced to do so.' [17]

Of the effects of missionary influence on Bene Israel secular life it is not necessary to say anything here. But there is no doubt that the missionaries gave them a knowledge of the Bible which they did not get from their earlier Cochini preceptors by making available free or at trifling cost copies of the Bible in Marathi translation and, more particularly, the Book of Psalms in metrical form.[18] They also profoundly influenced the Bene Israel attitude to the Bible, which, for better or worse, differed materially from that of the orthodox Oriental Jew. They taught them to regard the plain text of the Bible as a self-sufficient guide in matters of religion and to rely on their own individual reading of the Bible to learn God's law. And, ever since, though the Bene Israel have professed to accept rabbinical teaching and law like their fellow Jews elsewhere, they have never given rabbinical teaching the attention it receives elsewhere. When Dr Wilson, in his travels in Arabia and Palestine met the Samaritans and told them about the Bene Israel, the Samaritans were particularly interested and they sent a letter of greeting to the Bene Israel through him. Is it possible that in what he told them the Samaritans found a special link between themselves and the Bene Israel which did not exist with other sections of Jewry? The Samaritans, of course, accept only the Pentateuch, unlike the Bene Israel, and the Bene Israel by no means adopt the Karaite position of rejecting rabbinical

[17] H. S. Kehimkar, *History of the Bene Israel of India,* Tel Aviv, 1937 (written in 1897), pp. 66-7.

[18] The first Marathi translations of the Old Testament appeared between 1812 and 1821, but they were issued from Serampore in Bengal by William Carey, and were in a Marathi dialect not used in the Bombay region. Better translations were issued from Bombay from 1830 onwards. The missionaries were gratified to find the Bene Israel snapping up copies as they came out.

developments, but their instinctive preference for the plain Bible text does invite comparison with the Samaritans.[19]

By the middle of the nineteenth century missionary influence began perceptibly to decline. This was perhaps to a considerable extent connected with the entry into the field of Anglican missionaries when American and Scottish activity had declined. The main interest of the Anglicans lay in the gathering in of souls and they attached greater importance to proving the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, than to the teaching of Hebrew and to making available to the Bene Israel the Bible in Marathi. For instance, in the nineties of the last century, the Reverend J. Henry Lord published a series of articles in English in a missionary journal, in which he expatiated on the errors he claimed to have found in the Talmud and in which he warned the Bene Israel against the 'false allure' of Reform Judaism. By then, the Bene Israel had begun to answer back with the aid of Jewish polemical literature in English, some of which they republished in Marathi translation. Paradoxically, the few successes the missionaries had with individual Bene Israel were in this later period, when resistance should have been easier.

With the decline of missionary influence, the Bene Israel began relying more on secular schools, and in 1875 started a school of their own in Bombay. Further, the missionaries gradually withdrew from the field of primary education, and Bene Israel youth ceased to come under their influence in the most formative years. In secondary schools, also, the missionaries learned to confine themselves to strictly secular subjects, subjected as they were to a rigid grant-in-aid code prescribed by a Government conscious, particularly after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, of the political dangers of a Christian bias in education. In addition, the Bene

[19] I understand that Dr Cecil Roth, the historian and editor of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, believed that the Bene Israel were descended from Samaritans who migrated to India. If, as H. S. Kehimkar argued, the Bene Israel came to India from the Northern Kingdom, though only in about 175 B.C.E., they could have been Samaritans, but would they then have developed their cult of Prophet Elijah, when Samaritans recognised only Moses and Joshua?

Israel fervour for education seems to have suffered a set-back in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is significant that, though the Bombay University was opened in 1857, the first Bene Israel graduates in Arts did not appear until 1884, though in Dr Wilson's College there had been as many as 38 Bene Israel students in 1842. Economic pressures, which required Bene Israel young men to take up employment as soon as they completed school, may be the reason. Lack of a tradition of learning, such as Jews elsewhere had, may also have been a factor. Whatever the reason, the Bene Israel, who had made as early a start as the Parsees and the Brahmins with western education, rapidly fell back, and they remained substantially a community of mechanics, artisans, petty building contractors and clerks. Their women, who took a leading part in providing teachers for primary schools and nurses, did comparatively better, but the Bene Israel had the advantage that, unlike other Indian communities, they had no strong prejudice against women earning their own living, particularly after early widowhood.

Religiously, the period of missionary influence was one of rapid progress, so far as knowledge of Hebrew and appreciation of the requirements of Jewish law went. Ability to read the prayers was almost universal. In this period also there came into fairly frequent use the *kirtan* as a means of mass religious edification through song and connected oral exposition in prose. Usually a story would be chosen from the Bible and put into simple Marathi verse. The composer, who was called the *kirtankar*, would sing the verses alone, or with an accompanying chorus, aided by musical instruments, and would intersperse the singing with discourses which drew simple morals from the story treated, or which expounded religious doctrines. The form of the kirtan was, of course, borrowed from the Hindus, as were the musical modes in which it was sung, and probably the Bene Israel imitated the missionaries in this respect. A popular kirtankar would attract large audiences and work them up to a pitch of emotional exaltation comparable to that worked up by a revivalist preacher. The text of the songs would often be printed and eagerly sought after, and it is possible that sometimes considerable talent went into the composition of the verses and the improvisation of the

music. The institution has much declined, probably because it no longer attracts the services of kirtankars of the old calibre and the old unsophisticated sincerity; but even today an occasional kirtan is held and draws a large audience, particularly of women. In the heyday of the kirtan, the most popular kirtankar was probably Benjamin Samson Ashtamkar.

Growing acquaintance with English also threw open to the Bene Israel the rich treasure-house of Jewish literature in that language. The Bene Israel found that it was no longer necessary to take on trust what they were taught by the Cochinis and the Baghdadis. They could consult the sources in English translations. This was also the period of considerable Marathi writing on religious subjects. The rapid spread of knowledge of English initially encouraged translation into Marathi of sermons and expository literature and the publication in Marathi periodicals of news items of Jewish interest. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, this activity declined and soon virtually ceased, inhibited by the very spread of English that had initially promoted it. As a result, while those who knew English resorted more and more to books published in England and America, those who knew no English were worse off than before. Sad to relate, no attempt was made in this period to improve religious organisation.

The growing Bene Israel self-sufficiency which was a consequence of the encounter with the missionaries was perhaps one of the causes of the alienation of the Baghdadi Jews. These Jews had at first freely used the Bene Israel synagogues and cemeteries. But, as their numbers increased and as some of them attained fabulous wealth in trade and commerce, they began to isolate themselves as noted earlier. The Bene Israel appear to have felt that these newcomers wanted to patronise them. Again, while the Bene Israel were always regarded as wholly Indian, the Baghdadi Jews, particularly after their leaders took to a European mode of life and after the Sassoons were accepted in British society as the friends of princes, tended to regard themselves as different from the Bene Israel. To these factors, mainly relating to status and colour ('native' and 'black man' were terms

of contempt on British lips) were added doubts about the religious status of the Bene Israel. How far these doubts were genuine will, perhaps, never be known. But, though no definitely unfavourable ruling was ever given by the authorities to whom references were made without the knowledge of the Bene Israel, the Baghdadi Jews for a considerable period excluded the Bene Israel from their minyans, did not allow them to marry in their synagogues and excluded them from their communal charities, though individual Baghdadis, including the Sassoons, did extend help to Bene Israel charities, and provide employment to Bene Israel clerks or workmen in their offices and factories. The Bene Israel, assuming that the Baghdadis were in the wrong, ignored their ban, which in fact did not materially affect them. They persuaded themselves that their own practice was more enlightened than that of the Baghdadis. By concentrating on the issue of racial purity (which, in fact, had no religious significance) the Bene Israel failed to see the dangerous implications of the attack on their marriage and divorce procedures, and it is significant that, when the marriage troubles broke out in Israel, Bene Israel indignation was concentrated on the imputation of racial impurity rather than on the merits of the doubts raised about the validity of the remarriage of divorced and widowed women.

As already mentioned, the Bene Israel were not materially affected by their ostracism by the Baghdadi Jews. Their growing ties with British Jewry were not affected and generous help was given by the Anglo-Jewish Association to the Bene Israel school. Religious guidance was also given by the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom or the Haham of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Congregations whenever it was sought. In course of time the Baghdadi Jews themselves abated the rigour of their separation. The change in the social and political climate in India, even before the formal independence of the country was recognised, had much to do with the greater readiness of the Baghdadi Jews to accept the Bene Israel as their religious equals. But, when people in India had almost come to forget that the title of the Bene Israel to the full status of Jews had once been questioned, the Sephardi Chief Rabbinate in Israel was reminded of the contempt in which the Bene Israel were once held by Baghdadi

Jews, with the unhappy consequences which we have witnessed for the hapless Bene Israel who, by migrating to Israel, have put themselves under the jurisdiction of an ecclesiastical authority whose decrees are backed by the sanctions of the State.[20] As I have said at the start, I do not intend to discuss the merits of the religious issues involved. I would content myself by pointing out that, even if, as now appears, the Bene Israel were wrong in ignoring the significance of the purely religious issues involved in the segregation imposed by the Baghdadi Jews in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they were right in stressing the ugly implications of the action in the context of Indian social and political conditions so far as racial status and purity were concerned. In this connection it must be recalled that, as recently as fifty years ago, the 'half-caste' was held in contempt almost as low as the outcaste.

To resume our account of religious developments. The second half of the nineteenth century saw what the Reverend J. Henry Lord described in 1894 or so as a renaissance. Higher secular education revived; the Bene Israel began entering the independent professions, albeit in a trickle; and some of them secured responsible positions in government service. Synagogues or prayer halls were established at centres outside Bombay where sizable Bene Israel communities existed. Pressure was brought on synagogue managements to reform their administration. Elected managing committees and boards of trustees came into being, after the intervention of the courts in some cases, and membership of synagogues was put on a regular basis, with formal enrolment and payment of subscriptions. It is true that there was no change in the manner in which synagogue services were conducted and no attempt was made to secure properly trained religious preceptors and guides. The hazan continued to be a poorly paid reader, generally imported from Cochin, but in several homes there was a better appreciation of the essentials of Jewish observance. Superstitious practices, the making of vows and the use of religious

[20] See 'The Bene Israel Struggle for Religious Equality in Israel' which follows this article.

charms declined. Strangely enough, it is this period that has been characterised by the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel as one of decline in spiritual and religious life among the Bene Israel in the introduction he wrote to the book of documents regarding the Bene Israel published by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in 1962.

But with the decline of superstition the first seeds of religious dissent were sown. With higher education came acquaintance with the results of Biblical Higher Criticism, with the teachings of Reform and with the doubts of Agnosticism. Also, with the growth of inter-caste and inter-community intercourse in schools and colleges, the professions, business and public services, and with closer social contacts with members of other religious persuasions, came a loosening of the grip of the jamat on the individual. Individuals felt more free to live their lives according to their own lights. At first the more educated sections of the community took over the management of most of the communal institutions, but they failed to earn the trust of the rank and file and, unfortunately, they succumbed to internal rivalries for office, each office-seeker making bids for the support of the rank and file. In the struggle between factions the general interest suffered, and no appreciable progress was made in the conduct of synagogue services, or the provision of adequate religious instruction on an organised basis. Had it not been that a considerable number of children attended the communal school, where they got a modicum of religious instruction and learned Hebrew as a third language (English being the second language) there would have been a marked deterioration in standards of public worship. A serious result of the unseemly struggles for control over the synagogues has been a gradual withdrawal of several educated Bene Israel from all participation in communal affairs. It is not only the community that has lost thereby; the individuals who have withdrawn have lost as well, since withdrawal has led to an impoverishment of their spiritual lives, and the cutting off of their children from the life of the community. It has also led to a certain unspoken but unmistakable antagonism between the university-educated Bene Israel in the professions or in the higher

ranks of the public services, commercial corporations or industry and the Bene Israel artisan, mechanic or petty clerk.

Perhaps indifference in matters of religion would have grown in any case, particularly when indifference ceased to have painful social consequences. Even in regard to marriage and burial, which remained for several years effective weapons for exacting conformity after other sanctions had lost their force, there is no longer any compulsion to accept the requirements of Orthodox Judaism. Civil marriage is available, without any disabilities for the children who belong nowhere, and secular burial or cremation is easy to obtain. But, if the experience of the Roman Catholic Church in India is any guide, it should have been possible for the Bene Israel synagogues to retain the loyalty and devotion of the most highly educated and the most sophisticated Bene Israel.

The fact remains that there has been a continuous drift away from active participation in communal religious life of the more highly educated and sophisticated sections of the community, with the inevitable consequence that, in the absence of a trained clergy, religious and intellectual leadership is entirely absent. It is not surprising that, throughout their history the Bene Israel, have produced not a single Jewish religious scholar of any distinction. They have had Joseph Ezekiel Rajpurkar, whose work did not extend beyond translation; they have had Professor E. M. Ezekiel, Professor H. S. Reubens and Professor J. D. Aaron who taught Hebrew to college classes; but, without meaning any disrespect to their memories, it would be presumptuous to claim for any of them any substantial achievement in the way of enlargement of Bene Israel understanding of Judaism. They shone only in comparison to the darkness which permeated most other Bene Israel minds. Secular preoccupations engaged the best intellect of the community, and religious life inevitably suffered.

Between the years 1917 and 1923 it appeared that there was a real prospect of a reinvigoration of religious life in Bombay. The political and social ferment in the country infected the communal leadership, and efforts were made to come together and devise schemes for better communal organisation. The Shaar-Ha-Rahamim Synagogue, which had the greatest resources, drew up a pro-

gramme of improvement which included a larger synagogue, better services and religious training. Dissension and inability to sink personal antagonisms brought disillusion. The only material gain from the ferment was a decision by all synagogues to disallow bigamous marriages.

Meanwhile in Bombay City, many Bene Israel had moved away from the main centres of Jewish concentration. Many families lived beyond easy reach of synagogues and prayer-halls. Instruction in the reading of the prayers declined among these families, and there was also a gradual fall in attendance at synagogue services, except for the High Holy Days when synagogue attendance is, if anything as large as before. Observance of Jewish ritual in the home also declined, as secular preoccupations increased. A factor contributing to a decline of Jewish ritual in the home was the gradual shift from jamat participation in such domestic matters as circumcisions, marriages and funerals (including mourning ritual) and the restriction of attendance at these to close relatives and friends. Once the jamat was not present, individuals made variations in ritual according to personal wishes. Even in synagogues and at the cemeteries departures from standard practice drew progressively fewer protests. Individuals even dispensed with certain rituals or social practices which earlier were regarded as essential. This made for individual freedom and, sometimes, for genuine improvement. But, in so far as it encouraged indifference, it also resulted in greater spiritual impoverishment than might appear, because the decline of Jewish values did not involve acceptance of any alternative set of values such as conversion to another faith would have involved. True, a few found consolation in Theosophy (which had the advantage of not requiring a formal acceptance of a new religious allegiance); a few others took a very amateur interest in Vedanta. Most, however, just drifted and put on a veneer of Western secular culture which, however, did not extend beyond superficialities. The educated Bene Israel had lost their roots in their own culture and failed to grow any others.

Perhaps I am being a little unfair to the educated Bene Israel. The establishment of the Jewish Religious Union in 1925 does

represent a significant stage in the religious life of the community. A small and determined group which had failed to find satisfaction in the kind of Judaism which our synagogues stood for, set about providing services which, in their opinion, would make a better appeal. They sought inspiration in the teaching of Claude Montefiore and they linked themselves to the World Union for Progressive Judaism. But they adopted English as their language and this at once denied them the opportunity of influencing the bulk of the community. Though they aimed at ultimately switching over to Marathi, they have not been able to do so even after the lapse of almost sixty years. The movement has been carried on with perseverance in spite of great odds, but it has remained restricted to a very small section of the community. Still, from time to time, the Union was able to arrange for visiting rabbis from England and America to conduct services during the High Holy Days, and in 1957 was fortunate enough to secure the services of a rabbi to stay in Bombay throughout the year. He and his successor exerted an influence on local religious life which extended beyond their own congregation. However, for more than fifteen years now there has been no resident rabbi. The congregation has had to be content with the ministrations of visiting rabbis for short periods and to the guidance of a lay reader who has been rendering dedicated service though advanced in years. The group was able to send two of its younger members to America for training in the rabbinate. One of them did not stay the course; the other did not become available for service in Bombay.

The existence of the Jewish Religious Union has served as an irritant to the majority which likes to believe itself to be orthodox. Attempts were made in the late fifties to form a federation of synagogues, and aid was enlisted from America. In one sense it may be said that they have been more successful than one would expect, because, instead of one federation, two were established. One, the United Synagogue of India, has secured affiliation to the World Council of Synagogues, whose main support is the Conservative Jewish movement in America. The other, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of India, is linked to the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. The irony is that,

whatever ideological differences may underlie the separate existence of the two American supporting organisations, there is absolutely no difference in belief and practice between Bene Israel synagogues and prayer halls affiliated to one body and those affiliated to the other. Would it be too unkind to say that the only reason for two federations is inability of the leadership to unite? The separate existence of the Jewish Religious Union one can understand and respect, even if Liberal Judaism is condemned as an impermissible departure from Torah, or, more correctly, precisely for this reason. The separate existence of the two federations is, to say the least, difficult to justify.

The two federations were active for some years, with financial aid from the United States of America. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of India regularly issued a journal (*Mebasser*), mainly in English, with occasional articles in Marathi. The financial aid from abroad has apparently ceased, and the federations now seem to have only a shadowy existence.

Whether it is the United Synagogue or the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, the problems before the orthodox synagogues are the same. I will content myself with naming them.

First in order of urgency is the provision of Jewish literature in the language of the people, Marathi. As knowledge of English declines, this will attain even more crucial importance than in the past. Without such literature, religion will tend to be reduced to a matter of mere ritual and, being so reduced, it will cease to have any spiritual appeal or moral influence.

The second problem is the provision of religious instruction of an intensive kind which is not met by just running Hebrew classes. Perhaps, such instruction can only be given by specially trained teachers in communal primary schools, like the parish schools run by the Roman Catholics. It is true that this will have the great disadvantage of removing Bene Israel children from secular schools at the most impressionable age, and, to this extent, make integrated living with our neighbours more difficult. But, if primary importance is given to fulness of Jewish life, the problem has to be boldly faced and tackled.

The third problem is that of finance. It has to be realised that the running of communal religious institutions needs much more money than the synagogues can today command and also the services of highly skilled paid social workers. The time of the part-time honorary workers who have other preoccupations has passed, particularly for a community which has no wealthy leisured elite. Money must be raised and workers must be enlisted and trained. Such workers can be shared by several institutions. Here again it is a question of relative values. If those who profess loyalty to Orthodox Judaism value their religion sufficiently highly, they will consider no financial sacrifice which is called for too great. This applies also to the employment of religious preceptors and ministers. In this time and age, the community must be prepared to pay, and pay well, for religious guidance. The day of the shoemaker or the carpenter rabbi who gave his services free to the community has gone never to return. And the Bene Israel, in any case, never had the good fortune to produce such rabbis. If the community is serious about its attachment to Orthodox Judaism, it must create conditions which will encourage its best talent to enter the field of religious study and service. And it must be ready to give the religious leaders who emerge from its own ranks the deference and obedience which it so readily gives to foreigners.

There yet remains the most important problem of all, a problem which confronts Orthodoxy throughout the world. Judaism has to be presented to its adherents in a form which will not create an internal conflict of loyalties. It must be consistent with the living of a full secular life in a mixed society. It must be consistent with the whole complex of beliefs and values which our intellectual and cultural milieu presses on us. It must not involve a withdrawal into a self-created ghetto which walls the Orthodox Jew off from the main stream of Indian culture. Not being orthodox in my personal loyalties, I cannot presume to say how this should be done, or whether it can be done at all. But, if the Bene Israel are to be good Orthodox Jews as well as good citizens of India, they must find some way of harmonising the two calls on their loyalty. For the Liberal Jew, of course, there is not the same difficulty, as the idea of adaptation and change in religious res-

ponse to one's environment is not unfamiliar. But, as I said above, Liberal Judaism is not the religion of the vast majority of the Bene Israel, and it will need a very great effort to make its approach to Torah more generally acceptable, particularly to those who want religion to give ready-made answers to questions of ceremonial and ritual.

Whether it is the Orthodox or the Liberal form of Judaism that one prefers, one would be more sanguine about the future religious health of the Bene Israel community in India if one saw signs of some awareness of the needs and problems mentioned above and of some attempt to meet them.[21]

Note on Bene Israel Population

1. It will perhaps contribute to an appreciation of the religious situation of the Bene Israel if the size of the community at various stages is borne in mind. Such figures as are readily available without special search are, therefore, given below.

2. The earliest figures available are those for Bombay City alone. They relate to 1833 and show that the Jewish population was 2,246. Of these, about 2,000 may have been Bene Israel. It would be safe to presume that another 4,000 Bene Israel lived on the mainland, inclusive of those in the East India Company's armies. Later figures for the City of Bombay are 2,872 in 1864, 2,669 in 1872, and 3,321 in 1881. Perhaps, the number on the mainland ranged from 3000 to 4,500 in this period. The Baghdadi Jewish population may have grown by 1881 to 1,000 at the most. By 1881, there were Jewish residents in Pune, Thane, Ahmedabad and Karachi, but nowhere could the number have

[21] In the twenty years since this article was published in its original form nothing whatever has been done. Religious activity continues at a dangerously low level, to come to life during the High Holy Days. As in the eighteenth century the practice of Judaism now depends mainly on home ritual.

exceeded 1,000. The total Bene Israel population in 1881 may, therefore, be put at 7,000.

3. Later figures readily available are given in Table A.

TABLE A

Year	*Bombay City*	*Kulaba District* (including Janjira State)
1891	5,021	3,320
1901	5,357	3,313
1911	6,597	2,932
1951	16,085	1,852
1961	12,366	2,223

A reduction of 2,000 may be made from the Bombay City figures for 1951 and 1961 to represent Jews other than Bene Israel. And, to get at the total Bene Israel population of India, we may add about 4,000 for the cities of Thane, Pune, Ahmedabad and Karachi (before 1947) and also for the scattered population elsewhere. Thus the Bene Israel population must have risen from 10,000 in 1891 to 20,000 in 1951. In 1961 we may put the Bene Israel population at 16,000. The fall represents a migration of 7,000 to Israel counteracted by a natural increase of 3,000 or so, or an increase of 15 per cent over ten years. This is not inconsistent with the rate of increase between 1891 and 1951, when the population doubled, in spite of the severe plague epidemic of the late nineties of the last century and the influenza epidemic of 1918, which resulted in absolute declines in the population of Bombay City in 1901 and 1921.

4. The figures show that the community was in 1961 just viable in Bombay City, but was hardly viable elsewhere, except for the close links with the Bombay community. In Bombay City also, problems were created by its growing dispersion.

5. The 1971 census showed a fall in the Jewish population from 18,553 to 5,825, which may, perhaps, have been an underestimate. In the more important centres of concentration the comparative figures were as in Table B.

TABLE B

	1961	*1971*
Greater Bombay	12,366	3,607
Kulaba (Raigad) District	2,223	850
Thane	608	293
Pune	506	328
Ahmedabad (Gujarat)	515	431
Cochin (Kerala)	370	112
Calcutta (West Bengal)	1,191	48

The 1981 census figures have not become available to me at the time of writing. Emigration to Israel from 1971 to 1977, according to information kindly provided by the Director of the Jewish Agency office in Bombay some years ago, amounted to a little over 3,000. Emigration to Israel had been steadily declining since 1971 and seems now to be at an extremely low level. Emigration elsewhere, too, seems negligible. Judging from appearances, such as attendance at weddings in Bombay and at services during the High Holy Days, the Jewish population of India, mainly Bene Israel, should be between 4,000 and 5,000 today, roughly what it must have been two hundred years ago, with the difference that it was then concentrated in the Kulaba District and in Cochin, while it is now dispersed, except for some concentration in Greater Bombay and the neighbouring Thane town. Can communal institutions and, indeed, the community itself survive in these conditions?

6. The distribution of the Jewish population of Greater Bombay according to occupation in 1961 may be of interest. Of a total population of 12,366 (6,229 male, 6,137 female) the total workers were 3,765 (2,924 male, 841 female) showing that approximately 47 per cent of the males and 14 per cent of the females were working for gain. This indicates almost full employment of men below retiring age and comparatively small employment of women. Employment was distributed as shown in Table C.

TABLE C

	Male	*Female*
Cultivation, agricultural labour, mining, quarrying, fisheries, etc.	4	1
Household industry	12	15
Manufacture other than household industry	1,210	195
Construction	58	7
Trade and commerce	780	80
Transport storage and communications	474	67
Other services	386	476

It will be seen that most men were employed in factories and workshops (mainly as mechanics) followed by commercial employment (mainly clerical). Professional employment and the public services came lowest in the scale in the general category 'Other services' and in this category more women than men were employed. Presumably the category included teachers and nurses as well as lawyers and doctors. Outside Bombay City, the figures were probably more heavily weighted under 'Cultivation and agricultural labour' and 'Household industry' in the Kulaba District and under 'Other services' elsewhere.

APPENDIX 2. I

ANCIENT TOMBSTONES WITH HEBREW DATES

In *Exotic Jewish Communities* Dr S. Strizower said: '...in an old Bene Israel cemetery in the Konkan I noticed a gravestone with a Hebrew inscription dated 1715' (p. 65). On my raising doubts about a single gravestone with a Hebrew inscription of so early a date in my pamphlet, she wrote to me and said that the date had been confirmed by authorities in London (she had photographed the gravestone) and that this was not the only gravestone with Hebrew inscriptions of such an early date. Early in 1970 we checked the proofs of her book, *The Children*

of Israel: the Bene Israel of Bombay, together in Bombay and, to remove misunderstanding, she changed the singular to the plural in the relevant passage to read: 'I noticed gravestones with Hebrew inscriptions dated 1715' (p. 43). Soon after this, I happened to visit the cemetery at Navagaon (more strictly Navedar-Navagaon) the traditional site of the first landing of the Bene Israel, and found, as I had suspected, that the oldest built up tombs resembled those in Muslim cemeteries with layers of horizontal slabs progressively smaller in size and without any inscriptions. The oldest tombs with Hebrew inscriptions also had inscriptions in Marathi and I took down three of the earliest dates in Marathi. These were *Shake* 1740, 1764 and 1778 corresponding to 1818, 1842 and 1856 C.E. (The Hindu Shake era is 78 years behind the common era.) Later still Dr Strizower gave me a copy of the photograph she had taken and she insisted that the Hebrew date (which she read as 5475) was equivalent to 1715 and not 1818.

The Marathi inscription in the photograph reads in transliteration as follows: 'Moshe Ben Yosef Belkar hey mrythyu pavale Ashad Shud—[date not clear] Somwar Shake 1740 waye warsha 71'. Translated into English this reads: 'Moses Ben Joseph Belkar died on Monday in the bright [second] half of Ashad [June]—[date not clear] in the Shake year 1740 aged 71 years'.

I have been given to understand that the Hebrew inscription corresponds in material respects to the Marathi (i.e. the name, the day of the week, the month). An informant in Israel to whom I sent a copy of the photograph has advised that the Hebrew date is 5578, equivalent to 1818 C.E. Again, if there is any mistake, it is more likely to be in the Hebrew date (owing to unfamiliarity with Hebrew letters on the part of the engraver) than in the Marathi.

A report in the *Jewish Chronicle* of London dated 27 March 1970 mentioned an old cemetery at Pen in Kulaba District, going back more than 300 years to the times of Shivaji Maharaj, in which there were tombs with inscriptions in Hebrew, Marathi and English. The suggestion was that the tombs with Hebrew and English inscriptions were also more than 300 years old. I questioned the Bombay correspondent of the paper who had

sent the report, but he could not say what the dates on the tombstones were. Evidently, while the cemetery *was* old, it had been in use until very recent times, like the one at Navagaon, and the Hebrew inscriptions must have appeared only in the nineteenth century and after. The English inscriptions must be even later.

APPENDIX 2. II

MOSES MAIMONIDES AND THE BENE ISRAEL

In footnote 6 to the main article I have said that, in his mention of the Jews of India, Maimonides may have been referring to an isolated Jewish community in Afghanistan, Baluchistan or Eastern Persia. In his article 'Maimonides on India' published in the October 1948 issue of *India and Israel* which I came across only very recently, Dr H. G. Reissner stated that, in all probability, Maimonides was referring to Abyssinia when he mentioned India, as it was common in medieval times to confuse the two. But it is hardly likely that Maimonides who was resident in Egypt for many years made the same mistake as was made by Europeans of the Middle Ages and the conjecture in my note is more likely. However, on further consideration, I am inclined to believe that Maimonides was referring to the Bene Israel, as his description agrees so closely with that given by Sartorius almost seven centuries later. What still puzzles me is why Maimonides wrote in such general terms when he must have known that there were Jews in Malabar further south, who knew and observed all the minutiae of the Halacha.

Is it possible that some time before Maimonides wrote, the Bene Israel were 'discovered' by Cochinis or even by foreign traders and that the discovery became known to Maimonides? The foreign visitation must have been a memorable event for the Bene Israel. With the lapse of time the memory must have

grown more and more imprecise in transmission from generation to generation. When in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century teachers came from Cochin (perhaps brought by David Rahabi) as related by Ezekiel Rahabi, the later event must have got telescoped into the earlier memorable visitation, resulting in the tradition that a David Rahabi came some 900 years earlier and trained three kazis to carry on his work. In his *History* (p. 66), Kehimkar mentions a David Barukh Rahabi who came to Bombay in 1826 in the band of teachers taken there by Michael Sargon (see page 67 above), but he could not possibly be the hero of the Bene Israel legend.

APPENDIX 2. III

KALA AND GORA BENE ISRAEL

While I am inclined to believe that the distinction between Gora and Kala was introduced comparatively recently in imitation of misunderstood Cochini practice, the influence of Hindu custom cannot be ruled out.

So far as I am aware, the progeny of a Jewish *marriage* with a convert to Judaism were not treated as Kala. It was only irregular unions with unconverted women that produced Kala Bene Israel. And the practice of accepting the progeny of irregular mixed unions as inferior and segregated members of the Bene Israel community conformed to Hindu practice as described by Dr Adrian Mayer in his *Caste and Kinship in Central India*. He says:

> There is patrilineal affiliation when informal unions openly occur across caste lines. Although there is no recognised marriage between people of different castes, lovers sometimes live together and produce children who then belong to their progenitor's caste.

And again,

> The child of an informal union, though overtly affiliated to its progenitor's caste, is, in fact, thought of as a kind of 'second class member'. This is shown when its marriage is arranged. For it can often only with difficulty marry a poor 'full' member of the caste, and frequently ends by finding a spouse with similarly mixed ancestry.

3

The Bene Israel Struggle for Religious Equality in Israel

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, some eight thousand[1] members of the Bene Israel community of India have migrated to that country. Varying reports have been received over the years about their integration in the general community and about the hardships and difficulties they have to endure. While opinions may differ regarding the assessment of these reports and the apportionment of blame for failures of adjustment, even the most severe critic of the migrants cannot deny that, in the treatment they have been subjected to in the matter of marriage, they had genuine reason for the most grave discontent.

Members of the community need hardly be told of the unworthy attempts made many years ago by our Baghdadi co-religionists in India to have us branded as imperfect Jews on the grounds that we did not practise Chalitzah (i.e. ceremonies to be performed before the remarriage of childless widows) and that our divorce procedures were wrong. We treated these attempts of theirs with contempt and, in course of time, they were almost forgotten. Bene Israel migrants to Israel were, however, shocked to find that, particularly after the large influx of Iraqi Jews in 1951, hesitation began to be expressed in certain quarters about their acceptability as proper Jews for purposes of marriage. Despite a favourable ruling by Rabbi Herzog, who was the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, some individual rabbis refused to perform and register marriages when one of the parties was of Bene Israel origin. The matter burst into open controversy in May 1961, when the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Itzhak Nissim (who comes from Iraq), refused to make a declaration that the

[1] The number is estimated to exceed 20,000 in 1983.

Bene Israel as a community were acceptable as proper Jews for purposes of marriage. This refusal was doubly unfortunate because at the time the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbinate was vacant and Rabbi Nissim was all in all. It also had serious practical consequences. It gave authority to individual rabbis to refuse to perform what may be loosely termed mixed marriages on the mere ground that one of the parties was of Bene Israel origin; since marriages between Jews in Israel may be performed only by rabbis who are recognised as registrars and since marriages otherwise performed are invalid, in many cases mixed marriages could not take place at all. Again, the Bene Israel community in Israel was set apart from other Jews and the slur of presumptive bastardy was cast on the whole community, rendering its members barred in perpetuity from marrying outside their own tainted group. This slur naturally reflected itself in all social dealings. There is little wonder that, in the agitation that resulted, charges of racial and colour discrimination and practice of aparthied were bandied about.

In Israel itself the authorities took no notice of the agitation. But when the world press carried reports of the agitation (sometimes, it may be admitted, in an incorrect or even deliberately distorted form) and when angry letters and comment appeared in the Indian Press, the Government of Israel thought it politic, at first, to promise a review of the question as soon as the vacant Ashkenazi Chief Rabbinate was filled, and later to persuade the Chief Rabbinate Council to consider the matter without waiting for the elections.

It is pertinent to point out that there was a strange reluctance on the part of most Bene Israel leaders in Bombay to come out in the open with criticism of the unjust treatment their brethren were receiving in Israel. Some allowed their dissociation to go so far as to make them assure the Israeli authorities that the agitation in India was the work of irresponsible nobodies. The Executive Committee of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in India passed a resolution on the subject on 17 May 1961 and communicated it to the Indian press. The Central Jewish Board of Bombay, which purports to represent and protect Indian Jewish interests, maintained a politic silence for a while, but

eventually on 27 June 1961 sent a memorandum on the subject to the authorities in Israel.

In October 1961 it was announced that the Chief Rabbinate of Israel had, after exhaustive examination of the position, ruled that there was no basis for forbidding marriages with members of the Bene Israel community and that, therefore, such marriages were permitted. It was widely believed that a new chapter had opened with this ruling and all danger of discrimination had been removed. Unfortunately the ruling proved unacceptable in certain obscurantist circles in Israel and the United States of America, and the Chief Rabbinate yielding to pressure from these circles — a pressure which conveniently accorded with the old Iraqian prejudice — issued a Directive in February 1962 requiring rabbis functioning as marriage registrars to investigate the lineage of the Bene Israel party to a mixed marriage, so far as female progenitors were concerned, and also to investigate all divorces which may have taken place among the progenitors, as far back as the investigation could go. No marriage was to take place in any case of doubt without reference to the Chief Rabbinate. This directive, instead of implementing the ruling of 1961, made the position even worse than it had been before that ruling was given. It placed a duty on marriage registrars to carry out a most humiliating investigation which had not been required before. It gave fresh life and official recognition to the doubts about the legitimacy of every individual member of the Bene Israel community—doubts which had been treated as matters of individual opinion before and which the ruling of 1961 solemnly purported to have removed once for all. And it introduced a still further discriminatory feature. Whereas it was sought, by rigid questioning, to protect 'pure' Jews from contamination, 'pure' members of the Bene Israel community (and the possibility of some such being in existence was posited) were allowed to be contaminated without enquiry.

The issue of the directive roused a still greater storm of protest than that of the previous year. A resolution was passed by the World Council of Synagogues representing Conservative Judaism in May 1962. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in

India also voiced its protests through its journal *Mebasser*, and through an address to Rabbi Brodie, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of the British Commonwealth and Empire, when he passed through Bombay in March 1962. Its American sponsors, however, maintained an ominous silence and later used their influence to stop the use of *Mebasser* to publicise the just grievance of the community. The Central Jewish Board again dragged its feet, but eventually, through the persistence of the late Shri J. N. Reuben, passed a resolution on the subject on 14 May 1962. A new body now appeared on the scene, the Bene Israel Purity Justification Committee of Bombay, consisting mainly of young zealots, which undertook a campaign of militant agitation in support of the Bene Israel Action Committee which had been formed in Israel.

In Israel itself, the matter was raised in the Knesset, mainly through the efforts of Mrs Emma Talmi of the Mapam Party, but the Government of Israel successfully resisted every attempt to secure redress, whether by executive action or by legislation. Even intervention by the late President, Mr Ben Zvi, failed to secure a change of attitude from the Chief Rabbinate. The Government of Israel then resorted to the expedient of appointing a few appellate regional or national marriage registrars who would review cases of refusal to perform mixed marriages. It was claimed that this in practice removed all discrimination and that, under this arrangement, no mixed marriage was ultimately disallowed. The Action Committee in Israel, however, refused to accept this arrangement. They saw that, even if it enabled mixed marriages to take place, it did not stop the humiliating inquisitions which preceded them; nor did it remove the presumption of possible illegitimacy which hung over every individual member of the Bene Israel community by the mere fact of his origin. Only the withdrawal of the directive could remove their grievance, and this was resolutely refused. The authorities in Israel were hurt to find that the community was not prepared to swallow the insult involved in the refusal to cancel the directive in return for the dubious advantage of getting a few of its members passed as fit for marriage with outsiders after being questioned about their mothers, grand-mothers, etc.

In the latter half of 1962 an attempt was initiated to settle the issue by setting up machinery in India which would regulate marriages and divorces in a manner acceptable to the rabbinical authorities in Israel. In principle, rabbinical guidance in these matters is to be welcomed and help from Israel is unobjectionable. But the mistake was made of associating not only the Jewish Agency but also the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Government of Israel with the devising of, and control over, the machinery and guidance. Suspicion naturally arose that the aim was to bring Indian Jewry within the jurisdiction of religious authorities in Israel, especially as the arrangements were covered by considerable secrecy. A friendly hint was conveyed to the Consul for Israel in India that any such attempt would create difficulties and that, if it was persisted in, the intervention of the Government of India would be sought. It is understood that the hint was passed on to the Government of Israel, but it was not taken seriously. Through the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of India was persuaded to sponsor the visit of two Israeli rabbis to Bombay in May 1963. As soon as this became known, there was a vigorous protest from the Bene Israel Purity Justification Committee, and some individuals wrote to the Government of India asking its protection against interference by the Israeli Government in local religious affairs. The Bene Israel Action Committee in Israel was also not inactive. It made an independent approach to the Government of India. It is rumoured that the Government of India refused to grant visas to the rabbis and eventually only one of them arrived, and that too by a devious route via London on an American passport. Rabbi Z. Gotthold, who was at the time Director of Overseas Relations in the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, was the unfortunate rabbi who had to face strong and vigorous protests whenever he tried to make a public appearance in Bombay. He admitted frankly at a discussion held on his initiative at the residence of the Chairman of the Bene Israel Purity Justification Committee on 26 June 1963, that the directive of the Chief Rabbinate was discriminatory in effect and

inconsistent with the ruling of October 1961. He held out hopes of its withdrawal in the very near future, provided satisfactory arrangements were made in Bombay to regulate future marriages and divorces (how future conformity could cure past violations which rendered the descendants unfit for marriage with 'pure' Jews in perpetuity he did not wait to explain) and he recommended the submission of a humble petition to the Chief Rabbinate. His mission was completely infructuous, and it left matters exactly where they were before he came.

While agitation and protest in India slackened, the Action Committee in Israel continued to protest. There were hunger and sit-in strikes; and Mrs Talmi persisted in her attempts to keep the issue alive in the Knesset. The Chief Rabbinate defied the community to do its worst. The Government of Israel was content to make declarations from time to time that it had no jurisdiction in the matter and that, in practice, there was no discrimination. The untenability of these pleas is patent. It is precisely the backing of the State which gives legal force to the directive of the Chief Rabbinate and which gives the Chief Rabbinate exclusive jurisdiction in matters of marriage over all Jews, whether they accept its authority or not. By the simple expedient of refusing to recognise as marriage registrars rabbis who are not acceptable to the Chief Rabbinate, every form of Judaism except the orthodox is virtually denied free expression, giving rise to the jibe that in Israel there is religious freedom for all except Jews.

The agitation and demonstrations in Israel gathered momentum. During a visit to Israel in March-April 1964 the Chairman of the Bene Israel Purity Justification Committee worked out in personal discussions with the Bene Israel Action Committee plans for concerted action in Israel and India. On 22 June 1964 the Central Jewish Board of Bombay passed a resolution conveying a threat that, if the matter was not satisfactorily settled, an appeal would be made to world opinion, even if it involved injury to the good name of the State of Israel. The highly respected President of Israel *now* intervened. He convened a meeting at his office in Jerusalem on 31 July 1964 with spokesmen

of the Bene Israel Action Committee, at which the Minister for Religious Affairs and the Sephardi Chief Rabbi were present. The Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi who was in Tel Aviv asked to be excused because of his age. The President frankly admitted that the directive was inconsistent with the earlier ruling; the Minister for Religious Affairs stressed that in practice there was no discrimination and he explained at length how his Ministry was helping Bene Israel settlers in religious matters. The President then proposed that the Chief Rabbinate should issue a statement to the following effect:

1. The Chief Rabbinate reiterates its announcement that the Bene Israel from India are Jews in every sense.
2. The questions which are put at the time of marriage according to the Directive of 1962 apply to immigrants from every distant land, and do not in any way discriminate against the Bene Israel.

The Secretary of the Action Committee suggested the following formula:

> The Chief Rabbinate notes that, since the promulgation of the Directive in 1962, experience has proved that there is no necessity for a special directive against the Bene Israel, and therefore the existing procedure regarding other Jews will be applicable to the Bene Israel as well.

The representatives of the Bene Israel Action Committee undertook to put both the proposed formulae to representatives of the community, while Rabbi Nissim undertook to put the President's proposal before the Chief Rabbinate Council. At an emergency meeting of Bene Israel representatives held on 2 August 1964 attended by some one hundred persons, the proposal of the President was unanimously rejected. It is not difficult to see why, and it is hardly necessary to elaborate on its shortcomings. If the Bene Israel are Jews in every sense but yet have to be treated differently for purposes of marriage because they come from a 'distant land', in what does the difference con-

sist? Is it mere geographical distance and, if so, are they any further distant than Jews from California or Australia or South Africa or, for that matter, Baghdadi Jews from Bombay or Cochin Jews to whom similar questions are not asked? If the distance is not geographical is it distance in religious beliefs or practices, such as exists between different sects, or in degree of observance, or in deviation from orthodoxy, and who are the other 'distant' Jews? Most important of all does not the new distinction of 'distance' introduce another ground for discrimination and justify the charge that, whereas in Israel all Jews are equal, some Jews are less equal than others? And, if questions are to be asked to the Bene Israel at the time of marriage, why are they not to be asked if both the parties come from the same community, since the questions seek to find out if there is a bar to marriage and, prima facie, there may be such a bar when both the parties come from the Bene Israel community just as much as when *one* of them does?

At the same emergency meeting of Bene Israel representatives it was decided to stage a mass demonstration in Jerusalem on 5 August 1964 to indicate Bene Israel solidarity on the issue and their determination to struggle on for justice. From 2000 to 3000 members of the community converged on Jerusalem for the purpose from all parts of the country and went in procession to the headquarters of the Chief Rabbinate, Hechal Shlomo. The procession was accompanied by some fifty sympathisers, prominent among whom were Mrs Emma Talmi, Professor Yigal Yadin of Jerusalem University, official representatives of the Beersheba Municipality and the Chairman of the League for the Abolition of Religious Coercion. The procession is said to have been one of the most impressive demonstrations held in Jerusalem since the birth of the State and, for the first time, Mapai, the largest party in Israel and the backbone of the Government, came out in favour of the Bene Israel cause, as did the powerful labour organisation, Histadrut, isolating the National Religious Party as the only supporter of the Chief Rabbinate.

There was an overwhelming demand for the summoning of an emergency meeting of the Knesset, and the Cabinet decided

at last to take a positive stand on the issue, even if it meant a break with the National Religious Party.

At the meeting of the Knesset on 17 August 1964, the Prime Minister, Mr Levi Eshkol, moved a resolution: (a) affirming that the Knesset viewed the Bene Israel as Jews in all respects without qualification and with the same rights as all other Jews, including matters of personal status, (b) calling on the Chief Rabbinate to find a way of removing the causes of any feeling of discrimination among the Bene Israel, and (c) calling on the Bene Israel to take the Knesset decision into account and end their strike (some one hundred persons had been observing a sit-in strike outside the Jewish Agency office). Four opposition parties (Herut, Liberals, Mapam and Communist) submitted separate resolutions each asking specifically for the cancellation of the Chief Rabbinate's directive. The resolution of the Herut Party sought in addition to condemn attempts to besmirch the Rabbinate. The resolutions of the opposition parties were defeated. The Government-sponsored resolution was passed against the opposition of only two members belonging to the extremist Agudat Israel. Members of the National Religious Party, as supporters of the Coalition, voted for the resolution; members of the four opposition parties which had put forward their own resolutions abstained, obviously because they felt that the official resolution did not go far enough.

The same evening, Rabbi Unterman, the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, speaking over the radio (Kol Israel) expressed confidence that the Chief Rabbinate Council would at its meeting later in the week delete the words 'Bene Israel' from the directive and put in their place the words 'Community of Israel'. A spokesman of the Chief Rabbinate explained that this 'did not constitute a basic retreat from the Rabbinate's position' and that the *halacha* must be observed, 'but we are seeking a formula to assuage the feelings of the Bene Israel'. At the time of writing, it is not known whether the search for a formula has ended, and whether any change which may have been effected in the directive actually puts the Bene Israel in every respect on the same footing as other Jews in respect of marriage. Unless this is done without

equivocation (and the straightforward way to do it is to cancel the Directive) there will be no lasting and equitable solution.

Even if all ends well, one cannot refrain from an expression of regret that an issue which should have been recognised as a purely moral one, involving the self-respect of a weak and helpless minority, was left to be agitated through angry demonstrations and the exercise of political pressures, legitimate as well as illegitimate. It is tragic that the authorities in Israel should by their intransigence have reduced religion to a matter of political expediency and compromise.

In conclusion, one may be permitted to observe that, strictly, the infamous Directive of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel does not directly affect members of the Bene Israel community who have no intention of abandoning India as their home. But even they cannot afford to be indifferent to the false image of themselves which the existence of the Directive created among their co-religionists in other countries. Nor can they be indifferent to the continued humiliation of their brethren in Israel. For them to remain silent on this issue would have been shameful. Indeed, they have already incurred the guilt of not speaking out on the issue boldly and with one voice at a much earlier stage.

Postscript

On 31 August 1964 the Chief Rabbinate issued a statement deleting all reference to the Bene Israel in the Directive which was made applicable generally to all. But this was not the end of trouble in individual cases. In a letter of early 1970 I was informed: 'What a time these people have given us, and that the Bene Israel issue is all over is a lot of bunk. The number of people who have sworn that they know four generations of the — and — families will surprise you. People from all over the world testified that they had stayed with us in India etc. We went to Mayors and everyone ... My director (of the kibbutz) was actually marvellous. I have never seen anyone say such things to the Rabbinate and without his help I'm sure a lot more trouble would have been encountered.'

4

The Jewish Population of Kulaba District of Maharashtra

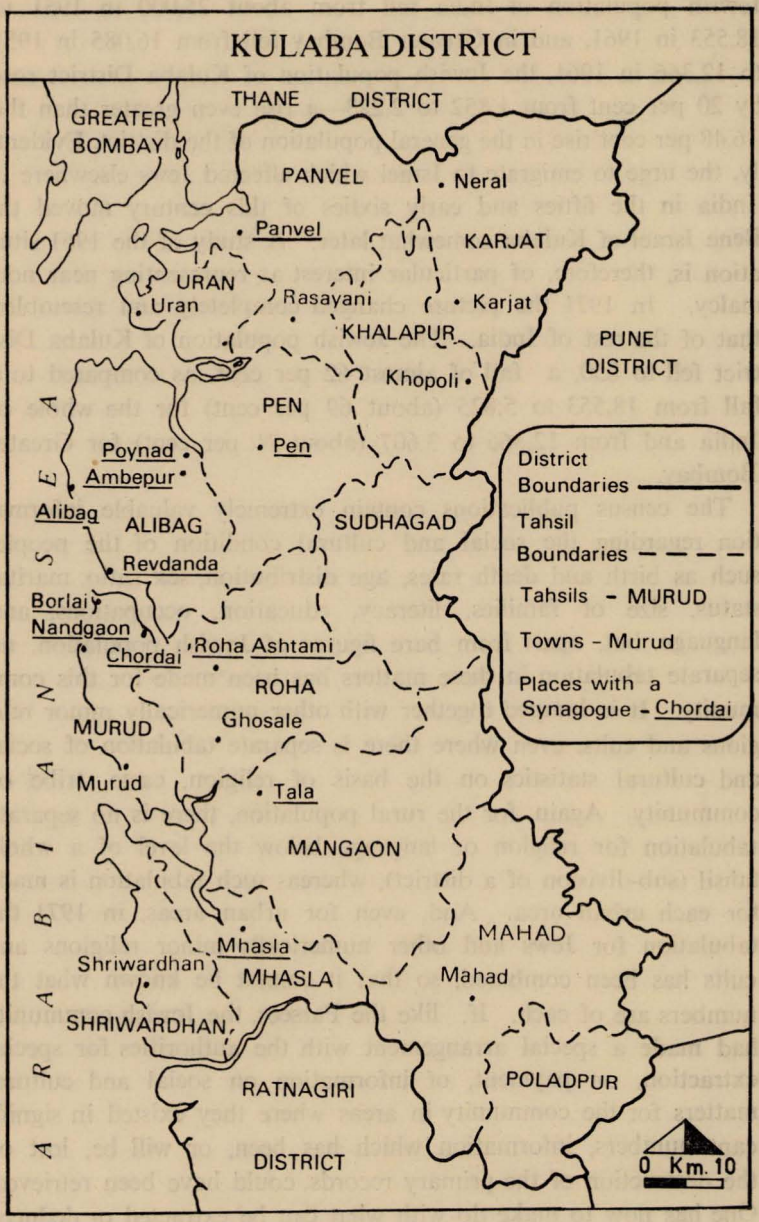
The main sources for this study of the Jewish population of the Kulaba District[1] of Maharashtra State in India are, for 1961, the *District Census Handbook, Kolaba* (the former official spelling of the name of the district) published in 1964 and Part II-C(i) of the Maharashtra volume of the 1961 Census Report, published by the Government of India. Unfortunately, the corresponding *District Handbook* for 1971 has been issued in parts and the first part published in 1973 does not contain the relevant information. The second part which might have contained population figures religion-wise has not, so far as I know, been published. Some information is, however, given in, or can be deduced from, the figures in Part II-C(i) of the Maharashtra volume of the 1971 Census Report. Information for 1971 has accordingly been drawn from this report.

There is good reason for choosing Kulaba District for this study out of the four-hundred-odd districts which make up the various states in the Union of India. This district saw the origin of the Bene Israel community in India in the remote past; the present Jewish population of the district is entirely Bene Israel; for centuries it sheltered the community in almost complete isolation from the main centres of Jewish life in other parts of the world. Though the district lost its primacy in the life of the Bene Israel to Bombay City in the nineteenth century, it still contained a much larger Jewish population than any other mainland district in India. Equally important, it was the only area in India where the Jewish population was predominantly rural in character (77.01 per cent rural in 1961). Again, while the

[1] The district was renamed Raigad District in 1982.

Jewish population of India fell from about 25,000 in 1951 to 18,553 in 1961, and in Greater Bombay fell from 16,085 in 1951 to 12,366 in 1961, the Jewish population of Kulaba District rose by 20 per cent from 1,852 to 2,223—a rise even greater than the 16.48 per cent rise in the general population of the district. Evidently, the urge to emigrate to Israel which affected Jews elsewhere in India in the fifties and early sixties of this century moved the Bene Israel of Kulaba somewhat later. A study of the 1961 situation is, therefore, of particular interest as representing near normalcy. In 1971 the picture changed completely and resembled that of the rest of India. The Jewish population of Kulaba District fell to 850, a fall of almost 62 per cent, as compared to a fall from 18,553 to 5,825 (about 69 per cent) for the whole of India and from 12,366 to 3,607 (about 71 per cent) for Greater Bombay.

The census publications contain extremely valuable information regarding the social and cultural condition of the people, such as birth and death rates, age distribution, sex ratio, marital status, size of families, literacy, education, occupations, and language, but, apart from bare figures of Jewish population, no separate tabulation in these matters has been made for this community. It is lumped together with other numerically minor religions and cults, even where there is separate tabulation of social and cultural statistics on the basis of religion, caste, tribe or community. Again, for the rural population, there is no separate tabulation for religion or language below the level of a whole tahsil (sub-division of a district), whereas such tabulation is made for each urban area. And, even for urban areas, in 1971 the tabulation for Jews and other numerically minor religions and cults has been combined, so that it cannot be known what the numbers are of each. If, like the Parsees, the Jewish community had made a special arrangement with the authorities for special extraction, on payment, of information on social and cultural matters for the community in areas where they existed in significant numbers, information which has been, or will be, lost on the destruction of the primary records, could have been retrieved. One has now to make do with what can be extracted or deduced from the published reports.


KULABA DISTRICT
THANE DISTRICT
GREATER BOMBAY
PANVEL
Neral
Panvel
KARJAT
URAN
Uran
Rasayani
Karjat
KHALAPUR
PUNE DISTRICT
Khopoli
PEN
Pen
Poynad
Ambepur
Alibag
ALIBAG
SUDHAGAD
Revdanda
Borlai
Nandgaon
Chordai
Roha Ashtami
ROHA
MURUD
Ghosale
Murud
Tala
MANGAON
MAHAD
Mhasla
Shriwardhan
MHASLA
Mahad
SHRIWARDHAN
RATNAGIRI
DISTRICT
POLADPUR
ARABIAN SEA
District Boundaries
Tahsil Boundaries
Tahsils - MURUD
Towns - Murud
Places with a Synagogue - Chordai
0 Km. 10

Map 4.1

Habitat

Kulaba District lies on the western coast of Maharashtra off Greater Bombay and forms part of the Konkan region. It has a coastline of about 150 miles (242 km) and is traversed by numerous inlets which carry the tang of the sea far inland, as do a number of tidal rivers; during the four monsoon months these rivers carry to the sea a large volume of the rain water so abundantly precipitated on the Sahyadri range situated along the eastern border of the district some 30 miles inland. The area of the district is 2,712.3 square miles (6,943 sq. km).

In 1961 the population of the district was 1,058,855 and in 1971 it was 1,263,003, an increase of 19.28 per cent. By religion, the population was made up as shown in Table A. In 1961, this

TABLE A

KULABA DSTRICT: POPULATION BY RELIGION

	1961 (%)	*1971* (%)
Hindus	88.96	88.25
Muslims	5.96	6.53
Buddhists (mostly recent converts from Hinduism)	4.36	4.41
Jains	0.35	0·49
Christians	0.14	0.19
Jews	0.21	0.07

was probably the only district in the whole of India where the Jewish population (2,223) exceeded the Christian (1,518); in 1971, the Christians (2,436) were almost thrice as many as the Jews (850).

The district is divided for administrative purposes into fourteen smaller areas called tahsils (formerly the larger or more populous areas were termed talukas and the smaller or less populous mahals). Map 4.1 shows the district with the tahsil boun-

daries and the towns with a Jewish population in 1961 and/or 1971 and also places which have or had synagogues (names underlined).

The district is predominantly rural in character, with 1,767 villages (some now uninhabited) and only 14 towns (2 of which have been officially recognised as such only after 1961). In 1961 the largest town was Panvel, with a population of only 18,130. This was still the largest town in 1971, with a population of 26,602. In 1961 the rural population constituted 89.92 per cent of the total population, compared to 71.98 per cent for the State of Maharashtra as a whole. With some industrialisation in the north and north-east in recent years, the rural population has fallen slightly in 1971 to 87.92 per cent compared to 69.95 per cent for the State of Maharashtra as a whole. Despite the industrial growth mentioned above, there still was in 1971 considerable migration of male workers to neighbouring Bombay, resulting in a higher female:male ratio (the number of females to every 1000 males) in the district (1056) than in Maharashtra as a whole (933).

The Jewish Population

While the 1961 census publications give separate figures of the Jewish population of Kulaba District for each tahsil and each town, and also the break-up of these figures by sex, the 1971 publications give merely the total Jewish population, rural and urban, with separate figures for each sex. To obtain the figures of Jewish population for each tahsil and town, recourse has to be had to the details given under the general head 'Other Religions and Persuasions', which includes all the numerically smaller religious sects as well as those sub-sects which the compilers have been unable to identify as belonging to a recognised religion. (For instance, persons describing themselves as Anglicans have been included among 'Other Religions and Persuasions' instead of being treated, as they should have been, as Christians.) Accordingly in Kulaba District the only definite information regarding the Jewish population in 1971 is as shown in Table B.

TABLE B

JEWISH POPULATION, KULABA DISTRICT, 1971

	Males	*Females*	*Total*
Rural	268	278	546
Urban	164	140	304
Total	432	418	850

Below the district level the Jewish population has been included in the figures under 'Other Religions and Persuasions'. Table 4.I at the end of this study shows the distribution of the persons tabulated under this head tahsil-wise, rural and urban. Besides Jews, this head includes, in the case of the Kulaba District, 4 persons calling themselves Baha'i — presumably Zoroastrians or Parsees by origin — (all urban), 6 persons calling themselves Lobhanchi—presumably tribals—(all rural) and 84 Zoroastrians or Parsees (25 rural and 59 urban). Therefore, out of a total of 944 persons (484 males and 460 females) tabulated under the head 'Other Religions and Persuasions' only 94 are not Jews. Excepting the 84 Parsees, the remaining 10 non-Jews may be ignored for our purposes.

As for the Parsees, the population distribution of 1961 may be taken as a guide in making a conjecture regarding the probable distribution in 1971. In 1961, out of a total Parsee population of 121 as many as 82 resided in four towns as follows: Matheran 31, Uran 46, Revdanda 4, and Roha-Ashtami 1. The remaining 39 were in rural areas of as many as 10 tahsils, in none of which they numbered more than 7. Since 1961 a new industrial township has grown at Khopoli which is likely to have some Parsees. A few may also have resided in or near Panvel. It may safely be presumed that, except for the few Parsees in Khopoli and Panvel, the urban Parsee population of Kulaba District was in 1971 to be found only in the towns of Matheran and Uran where most of them were to be found in 1961. It may also be presumed that the 53 persons in these two towns tabulated under the head 'Other Religions and Persuasions' were mainly Parsees

(in 1961 there were 77 Parsees in these towns as shown above). The remaining 6 urban Parsees may, as stated above, belong to Khopoli and Panvel. It is difficult to conjecture where the 25 rural Parsees resided. They may have been scattered in Uran, Karjat and Khalapur Tahsils and can perhaps, be ignored for our purposes.

Having made a conjecture of the probable distribution of the Parsee population, one can do so in regard to the Jewish population, urban as well as rural, with a fair degree of confidence that errors if any will be merely marginal. Tables 4.II A and B at the end of this study show the distribution in 1961 and 1971 respectively of the Jewish population in the 14 tahsils, with separate figures for urban and rural population and for each sex. Further analysis of these tables will be found in the next but one paragraph.

In 1961 the Jewish population of the district was 2,223 or 0.21 per cent of the total population. The rural Jewish population was 1,713 (0.18 per cent of the total rural population) and the urban 510 (0.47 per cent of the total urban population). In 1971 the Jewish population had fallen to 850 or only 0.07 per cent of the total population of the district, of which 546 was rural (0.05 per cent of the total rural population) and 304 urban (0.20 per cent of the total urban population). As already stated, unlike the position in other parts of India, the Jewish population of Kulaba District was in 1961 predominantly rural, 77.01 per cent being in the rural areas and only 22.99 per cent in the urban areas. In 1971 the Jewish population was still mainly rural in character, though less predominantly so, 64.23 per cent being in the rural areas and 35.77 per cent in the urban areas. The Jewish population was, however, more urbanised than the general population in 1961 as well as 1971, as will be seen from Table 4.III. This shows the percentage of rural population in the total population of tahsils with a Jewish population of more than 50, and the percentage of Jewish rural population in these tahsils. Sudhagad, Mhasla and Mangaon Tahsils had no towns, so that the population in these tahsils was wholly rural. In 1971 the Jewish population of Mhasla and Mangaon Tahsils fell below

50, as did that of Roha and Shriwardhan Tahsils which in 1961 had respectively 78.98 per cent and 68.57 per cent of their Jewish populations in rural areas. Panvel Tahsil had in 1961 the lowest percentage of rural population (39.63 per cent compared with 84.29 per cent for the general population); in 1971 the percentage had increased slightly to 40.80 per cent but was still markedly below that of the general population viz. 80.71 per cent. In Pen Tahsil the percentage of Jewish rural population fell from 53.21 per cent in 1961 to 12.22 per cent in 1971, the lowest in the district, against a percentage of 88.52 per cent in 1961 and 88.72 per cent in 1971 for the general population.

It will be seen from Tables 4.II A and B that in 1961 Mahad and Poladpur Tahsils in the south-east and Karjat Tahsil in the north-east had a negligible Jewish population. Of these Mahad and Poladpur Tahsils had no Jews at all in 1971, though Karjat Tahsil continued to have a few. Uran Tahsil, which in 1961 had 33 Jews, probably had none at all in 1971. Khalapur Tahsil was another area which in 1961 had very few Jews (33). These had dwindled to 10, probably all urban in the new Khopoli township, in 1971. Roha, Mhasla, Mangaon and Shriwardhan Tahsils suffered a very steep decline in their Jewish populations between 1961 and 1971, the biggest loss being suffered by Roha, followed by Mhasla, Shriwardhan and Mangaon. Sudhagad Tahsil, which had the largest Jewish population in 1961 (493), yielded first place to Alibag Tahsil with a Jewish population of 261 in 1971, compared to only 195 in Sudhagad. All the Jews of Sudhagad were, however, rural and it had the largest concentration of rural Jews in the district, the next largest being Alibag with 137 rural Jews. Owing to the absence of village-wise tabulation of population by religion it is not possible to say in which parts of Sudhagad and Alibag Tahsils the rural Jews were to be found, but in the case of Alibag Tahsil, it would perhaps be safe to conjecture that they were to be found within easy reach of the towns of Alibag and Revdanda. Sudhagad Tahsil is a mountainous tract to the east and comparatively remote from the coast, so it is surprising that so many Jews were to be found there in 1961 and so many still in 1971. From the fact that hardly any

Bene Israel surnames are derived from villages in that tahsil it may be surmised that there was a migration to the area after the Bene Israel had assumed their village-derived surnames and during the turmoil in the coastal areas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between the Marathas and the Sidis of Janjira State.

Table 4.IV shows the percentage of the Jewish population in each of the tahsils. It will be seen from the table that, in terms of percentages, the most 'Jewish' of the fourteen tahsils was Sudhagad both in 1961 and in 1971, followed in both years by Murud, though in absolute numbers Alibag overtook Sudhagad in 1971. Roha, which had third place in 1961, with 0.47 per cent Jews, fell to almost bottom place with only 0.02 per cent Jews in 1971. Whereas in 1961 there could well have been one Jew for every 200 persons in a compact area comprising Alibag, Pen, Roha, Murud, Shriwardhan, Mhasla and Pen Tahsils and parts of Panvel, Sudhagad and Mangaon Tahsils, explaining why such a small community was so conspicuous in the area, in 1971 only in the shrunken area of Alibag, Murud and Sudhagad Tahsils and in Panvel Town was this presence to be found.

Urban Jewish Population

For census purposes a place is treated as urban if (*a*) it has a municipality, or (*b*) it has a population of at least 5,000, has three-fourths of its male population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits and has a population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km, or (*c*) it otherwise possesses certain distinct characteristics to qualify it to be treated as urban. In 1961 there were only 12 recognised towns in Kulaba district only one of which (Matheran) did not have any Jews. In 1971 there were 14 recognised towns of which as many as 6 had no Jews (Matheran, Karjat, Uran, Murud, Shriwardhan and Mahad). Table 4.V gives the Jewish population of towns in Kulaba District in 1961 and/or 1971 and the percentage of that population. In the case of 6 old towns which still had a Jewish population in 1971, every town except Neral had fewer Jews in 1971 than in 1961. The worst case of all was Roha-Ashtami which by 1971 had lost all but 5 of its Jewish

population of 78. Shriwardhan had lost all its 22 Jewish inhabitants, Murud had lost its 8 Jews, Mahad its 6, Uran its 20 and Karjat its single Jew. Of the two new towns, Rasayani near Panvel probably had 2 Jews in 1971 and Khopoli probably had 10. The most Jewish town in 1961 as well as 1971 was Panvel, as far as the number of Jewish inhabitants was concerned, but in terms of percentage the most Jewish town in 1961 was Revdanda with a percentage of 2.02 (126 Jews), followed by Roha-Ashtami with a percentage of 1.03 (78 Jews). In Revdanda the percentage had fallen to 1.36 (92 Jews) in 1971 but it was still the most Jewish town. Pen came next with a percentage of 0.43 (51 Jews) slightly ahead of Panvel with a percentage of 0.41 (108 Jews). Alibag, the headquarters of the district, had a Jewish percentage of 0.27 (32 Jews) in 1971 against a percentage of 0.43 (43 Jews) in 1961. In Roha-Ashtami the percentage had plummeted to 0.06.

Location of Synagogues

Between the years 1840 and 1896 as many as 12 synagogues were established in Kulaba District. Of these one at Ambepur in Alibag Tahsil was closed as far back as 1916 for lack of a congregation; recently there was talk of reopening it, presumably to serve the north-eastern parts of the tahsil, but it remains closed. In recent years as many as seven more synagogues have been closed down, Talekar Synagogue at Post Chorde, Or-le Israel Synagogue at Nandgaon and Shaare Shalom Synagogue at Borli, also known as Borlai, all in Murud Tahsil, Knesseth Israel Synagogue at Tala in Mangaon Tahsil, Beth-El Synagogue at Ashtami and Shaar-Ha-Tephilla Synagogue at Mhasla, leaving only five still functioning, Magen Aboth at Alibag, Beth-El at Revdanda, Hesed-El at Poynad in Alibag Tahsil, Beth-El at Panvel and Beth-Ha-Elohim at Pen.

Sex Ratio

As observed above, the Kulaba District had a higher female: male ratio than Maharashtra as a whole. It is well known that,

unlike the position in Europe and America, in India the number of females is less than that of males at all ages after infancy. In rural areas the main causes are early marriage and high maternal mortality. In urban areas which are highly industrialised, there is the added reason of a number of migrant male workers who leave their womenfolk behind in the villages or small towns. Kulaba District is one of the areas which supplies migrant male workers to Greater Bombay and, therefore, has a surplus female population, particularly in the rural areas. Tables 4.VI A and B show the position in this respect for each tahsil with a Jewish population of over 50. It will be seen that in 1961 Sudhagad and Panvel Tahsils did not follow the general pattern in that they had no excess of females for either the general population or the Jewish population, indicating little migration of male labour from these areas. In 1971, while this was still the position in Panvel Tahsil, in Sudhagad Tahsil there was an excess of females both in the general and in the Jewish population, conforming to the general pattern for the district as a whole and indicating some migration of male labour (Jewish as well as non-Jewish) since 1961. In Pen Tahsil there was a marked deficiency of females in the Jewish population in both 1961 and 1971, though there was a surplus of females in the general population of that tahsil in both years. In Mangaon Tahsil too there was in 1961 a very marked deficiency of females in the Jewish population, contrary to the general pattern; in 1971 the Jewish population had fallen below 50. In 1961 the Jewish population of Shriwardhan and Mhasla Tahsils conformed to the pattern of the general population of these tahsils in having the greatest excess of females in the district. This shows that the tahsils were the most seriously affected by the migration of male workers, Jewish as well as non-Jewish. In fact, Shriwardhan Tahsil had as many as nine Jewish females for every two Jewish males.

In urban areas, in 1961 there was, with the exception of Shriwardhan town, a significantly lower female to male ratio for the Jewish population than for the general population. In Shriwardhan the small Jewish population was equally divided. In 1971, only four towns come within the tabulation, viz. Alibag, Rev-

danda, Panvel and Pen. Of these, Alibag and Revdanda both had an excess of females over males, unlike the general population, which had a deficiency in Alibag partly counterbalanced by a slight excess in Revdanda. As in 1961, Panvel and Pen had a deficiency of females, very markedly so in the case of Pen, where there were only 16 females as against 35 males.

Taking rural areas alone, there was in 1961 no marked difference between the Jewish and the general populations, except in the case of Mangaon Tahsil, where, as already mentioned, there was a very marked deficiency of Jewish females, whereas for the general population there was an excess. In Shriwardhan Tahsil the female ratio in the rural areas was as high as 2429. In 1971, the rural pattern in Sudhagad and Alibag Tahsils for the Jewish population resembled that of the general population. In Murud Tahsil there was an equal number of Jewish males and females, as against a moderate excess of females in the general population. In Panvel Tahsil there was a much larger deficiency of Jewish females than in the general population (the ratio being only 762 as against 962 for the general population) and in Pen Tahsil there was a very large excess of Jewish females (the ratio being 1333 as against only 1026 for the general population).

Taking the district as a whole the 1971 pattern was not significantly different from that of 1961. In the case of the Jewish population there was a very slight fall in the ratio, which could be purely accidental.

Language

Unfortunately there is no record of the language or languages spoken or known by the Jewish population, as language statistics are not tabulated according to religion. The practice is to record as the mother tongue the language first learnt in infancy or that commonly spoken in the home, the choice being left to the person enumerated or the head of the household giving the information to the enumerator. Information is also sought regarding any other language or languages spoken or known and it is left to the informant to arrange the subsidiary languages in any order he may choose. No attempt is made to assess claims for knowledge

of subsidiary languages or, indeed, of the language claimed as the mother tongue for that matter. The result, throughout the country, is that the most bizarre claims are solemnly recognised and recorded in the census returns, such as claims to speak non-existent languages like Canadian and Anglo-Indian. And when one sees that in 1961 as many as 40 males and 29 females in Kulaba District claimed to have Hebrew or Jewish (both these terms having been used in the returns) as the mother tongue, one does not know whether to take the claims seriously (there being no evidence whatever of any Jews other than Bene Israel in the district) or to treat them as merely symbolic gestures of Jewish solidarity on the part of simple minded Bene Israel. Another 10 to 14 persons apparently declared Hebrew/Jewish as their subsidiary language after their mother tongue, Marathi. These are more plausible claims, even if the knowledge of Hebrew extended merely to ability to read the language from the prayer book. It is probable that many other persons mentioned Hebrew/Jewish as a subsidiary language after English and/or Hindi or Urdu, but as there was no tabulation in the published returns of subsidiary languages after that named first, it cannot be known how many persons in the district mentioned Hebrew/Jewish among the subsidiary languages known after some other language. Information for 1971 has not become available at the time of writing (1978).

Conclusion

As migration to Israel has continued after 1971, the Jewish population of Kulaba District has continued to fall. Separate figures of emigration to Israel from the district since 1971 are not available. Figures for India as a whole, kindly provided by the Director of the Jewish Agency in Bombay, are as follows:

1971	1,211
1972	655
1973	530
1974	450 (estimate)
1975	400 (estimate)
1976	344
1977	327

It is safe to conjecture that the bulk of these emigrants came from Greater Bombay and Kulaba District. Though migration is slowing down and assisted emigration through the Jewish Agency has virtually ceased, it is taking place from a shrinking pool, and it is likely that some movement has since 1971 taken place to Greater Bombay. Census figures for 1981 are still not available, but it is clear that but a handful of Jews are left in the original Bene Israel homeland.

TABLE 4.I

PERSONS ENUMERATED IN 1971 UNDER THE HEAD 'OTHER RELIGIONS AND PERSUASIONS' IN KULABA DISTRICT

Tahsil	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
ALIBAG			
Rural	63	74	137
Urban:			
Alibag	14	18	32
Revdanda	45	47	92
Total	122	139	261
URAN			
Rural	7	1	8
Urban:			
Uran	18	18	36
Total	25	19	44
PANVEL			
Rural	21	16	37
Urban:			
Panvel	58	50	108
Rasayani	1	1	2
Total	80	67	147
KARJAT			
Rural	9	3	12
Urban:			
Neral	2	2	4
Matheran	9	8	17
Total	20	13	33

Tahsil	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
KHALAPUR			
Rural	10	9	19
Urban:			
Khopoli New Township	14	6	20
Total	24	15	39
PEN			
Rural	3	4	7
Urban:			
Pen	35	16	51
Total	38	20	58
SUDHAGAD			
Rural	94	101	195
ROHA			
Rural	6	6	12
Urban:			
Roha-Ashtami	2	3	5
Total	8	9	17
MHASLA			
Rural	9	8	17
MHASLA			
Rural	1	10	11
SHRIWARDHAN			
Rural	7	3	10
MURUD			
Rural	56	56	112
KULABA DISTRICT			
Rural	286	291	577
Urban	198	169	367
Total	484	460	944

TABLE 4.IIA

JEWISH POPULATION OF KULABA DISTRICT, TAHSILWISE, 1961

M : Males F : Females T : Total

Tahsil	*Rural*			*Urban*			*Total*		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Sudhagad	257	236	493	—	—	—	257	236	493
Alibag	98	137	235	93	76	169	191	213	404
Roha	143	150	293	40	38	78	183	188	371
Murud	116	130	246	2	6	8	118	136	254
Panvel	48	38	86	69	62	131	117	100	217
Pen	39	44	83	44	29	73	83	73	156
Mhasla	41	56	97	—	—	—	41	56	97
Mangaon	50	34	84	—	—	—	50	34	84
Shriwardhan	14	34	48	11	11	22	25	45	70
Uran	9	5	14	14	6	20	23	11	34
Khalapur	28	5	33	—	—	—	28	5	33
Mahad	—	—	—	4	2	6	4	2	6
Karjat	—	—	—	3	—	3	3	—	3
Poladpur	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1
Kulaba District	844	869	1713	280	230	510	1124	1099	2223

TABLE 4.IIB

JEWISH POPULATION OF KULABA DISTRICT, TAHSILWISE 1971

M : Male F : Female T : Total

Tahsil	*Rural*			*Urban*			*Total*		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Sudhagad	94	101	195	—	—	—	94	101	195
Alibag	63	74	137	59	65	124	122	139	261
Roha	6	6	12	2	3	5	8	9	17
Murud	56	56	112	—	—	—	56	56	112
Panvel	21	16	37	59	51	110	80	67	147
Pen	3	4	7	35	16	51	38	20	58
Mhasla	1	10	11	—	—	—	1	10	11
Mangaon	9	8	17	—	—	—	9	8	17
Shriwardhan	7	3	10	—	—	—	7	3	10
Uran	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Khalapur	—	—	—	7	3	10	7	3	10
Mahad	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Karjat	—	—	—	2	2	4	2	2	4
Poladpur	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kulaba District	260*	278	538*	164	140	304	424*	418	842*

*These figures do not account for 8 Jewish males in the rural areas. They may be residents of Khalapur and/or Karjat Tahsils.

TABLE 4.III

PERCENTAGE OF RURAL POPULATION IN KULABA DISTRICT TAHSILS WITH A JEWISH POPULATION OF MORE THAN 50 IN 1961 AND 1971

Tahsil	*1961*		*1971*	
	Jewish population (%)	*Whole population (%)*	*Jewish population (%)*	*Whole population (%)*
Sudhagad	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Alibag	58.19	98.89	52.11	86.96
Roha	78.98	90.55	— *	—
Murud	96.85	77.38	100.00	78 22
Panvel	39.63	84.29	40.82	80.71
Pen	53.21	88.52	12.22	88.72
Mhasla	100.00	100.00	— *	—
Mangaon	100.00	100.00	— *	—
Shriwardhan	68.57	81.11	— *	—
Kulaba District	77.01	89.92	64.23	87.92

* The Jewish population had fallen below 50 by 1971 in Roha, Mhasla, Mangaon and Shriwardhan Tahsils.

TABLE 4.IV

JEWISH POPULATION OF KULABA DISTRICT AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION, 1961 AND 1971

Tahsil	*1961*			*1971*		
	Jewish population	*Total population*	*Percentage*	*Jewish population*	*Total population*	*Percentage*
Sudhagad	493	41,794	1.18	195	44,915	0.43
Alibag	404	124,274	0.33	261	143,056	0.18
Roha	371	79,648	0.47	17	90,564	0.02
Murud	254	44,453	0.57	112	51,481	0.21
Panvel	217	115,378	0.19	147	148,348	0.10
Pen	156	83,201	0.19	58	100,169	0.06
Mhasla	97	38,898	0.25	11	45,182	0.02
Mangaon	84	124,370	0.07	17	144,064	0.01
Shriwardhan	70	54,821	0.13	10	63,237	0.02
Uran	34	56,462	0.06	—	71,342	—
Khalapur	33	53,376	0.06	22	182,325	0.01
Karjat	3	87,288	—			
Mahad	6	116,139	—	—	132,488	—
Poladpur	1	38,753	—	—	45,832	—
Kulaba District						
Rural	1,713	952,174	0.18	546	1,110,413	0.05
Urban	510	106,681	0.47	304	152,590	0.20
Total	2,223	1,058,855	0.21	850	1,263,003	0.07

TABLE 4.V

TOWNS IN KULABA DISTRICT WITH JEWISH POPULATION 1961 AND 1971

M : Male F : Female T : Total

Town	*1961*					*1971*				
	Jewish popn.			*Total popn.*	*%*	*Jewish popn.*			*Total popn.*	*%*
	M	*F*	*T*			*M*	*F*	*T*		
Karjat Tahsil										
Neral	2	—	2	5,604	0.04	2	2	4	8,078	0.05
Karjat	1	—	1	5,143	0.02	—	—	—	—	—
Panvel Tahsil										
Panvel	69	62	131	18,130	0.72	58	50	108	26,602	0.41
Rasayani (new township)	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	2,018	0.10
Uran Tahsil										
Uran	14	6	20	10,229	0.19	—	—	—	—	—
Alibag Tahsil										
Alibag	24	19	43	9,909	0.43	14	18	32	11,913	0.27
Revdanda	69	57	126	6,240	2.02	45	47	92	6,743	1.36
Pen Tahsil										
Pen	44	29	73	9,549	0.77	35	16	51	11,754	0.43
Roha Tahsil										
Roha-Ashtami	40	38	78	7,553	1.03	2	3	5	8,631	0.06
Murud Tahsil										
Murud	2	6	8	10,055	0.08	—	—	—	—	—
Shriwardhan Tahsil										
Shri-wardhan	11	11	22	10,344	0.21	—	—	—	—	—
Mahad Tahsil										
Mahad	4	2	6	11,083	0.05	—	—	—	—	—
Khalapur Tahsil										
Khopoli (New township)	—	—	—	—	—	7	3	10	18,152	0.06
Total	280	230	510	103,839	0.49	164	140	304	93,891	0.32

TABLE 4.VIA

SEX RATIO IN TAHSILS WITH A JEWISH POPULATION OF MORE THAN 50 IN 1961

(number of females to every 1000 males)

Tahsil	*Jewish population*			*General population*		
	Urban	*Rural*	*Total*	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Total*
Sudhagad	—	929	929	—	983	988
Alibag	817	1398	1115	961	1098	1079
Roha	950	1049	1027	955	1025	1018
Murud	— *	1121	1152	1040	1103	1088
Panvel	899	792	855	903	984	971
Pen	659	1129	879	919	1032	1019
Mhasla	—	1366	1366	—	1328	1328
Mangaon	—	680	680	—	1129	1129
Shriwardhan	1000	2429	1800	1068	1324	1271
Kulaba District	821	1030	997	943	1072	1058

* The Jewish population of Murud town in 1961 was too small to yield any significant ratio.

TABLE 4.VIB

SEX RATIO IN TAHSILS WITH A JEWISH POPULATION OF MORE THAN 50 IN 1971

(number of females to every 1000 males)

Tahsil	*Jewish population*			*General population*		
	Urban	*Rural*	*Total*	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Total*
Sudhagad	—	1065	1065	—	1026	1026
Alibag	1102	1175	1139	970	1101	1083
Roha	— *	— *	— *	—	—	—
Murud	— †	1000	1000	1053	1104	1090
Panvel	864	762	836	883	962	933
Pen	457	1333	526	941	1026	1016
Mhasla	— *	—*	— *	—	—	—
Mangaon	— *	—*	— *	—	—	—
Shriwardhan	— *	—*	— *	—	—	—
Kulaba District	854	1035	968	917	1077	1056

* The Jewish population in Roha, Mhasla, Mangaon and Shriwardhan Tahsils had fallen below 50 by 1971

† In 1971 there were no Jews in Murud town

5

Bene Israel Surnames and Their Village Links

It is well known that for centuries the Bene Israel of India, like their neighbours, used surnames derived from the names of villages in what was known as Kulaba District in Maharashtra State (renamed Raigad District in 1982), situated on the west coast of India off the island of Bombay. The surnames generally comprised the name of the village and the suffix *kar* signifying 'belonging to' or 'from'. There appears to be only one traditional surname 'Pingle' to which the suffix *kar* is not attached, but even that surname is believed to be derived from the village Pingalsai in Roha Tahsil of the district. There is one other name, Doodkar or Dootkar, which has the conventional ending *kar* but nevertheless is traditionally believed to be derived, not from a village, but from the commodity milk (*dood* in Marathi).

A few preliminary observations may be made on the origin of the practice of taking names from villages of origin or residence before proceeding to deal with the names themselves. In his *History of the Bene Israel of India* H. S. Kehimkar relates the practice of forming surnames from particular places to that of the ancient Israelites and cites the cognomen Tishbite given to Prophet Elijah. He goes on to say: 'Nor is the adoption of surnames by the Bene Israel peculiar to themselves even in modern times; for the Jews of Italy have mostly taken names of cities, e.g. Modena, Pisa, etc. The custom has also been adopted by Jews in Germany: Kalisch, Worms, Oppenheim, Berliner, Danziger, etc.' (p.40). Apart from the fact that it is doubtful whether the designation Tishbite as applied to Elijah can be regarded as a surname proper, there is nothing particularly Jewish in the practice of deriving surnames from places of origin or residence.

The practice of appending the suffix *kar* to the name of the village or town of origin has long been widely prevalent among the non-Jewish neighbours of the Bene Israel and, indeed, in almost the whole of Maharashtra, unless caste or clan names are adopted as surnames. In all probability, therefore, the Bene Israel merely imitated their neighbours. In fact, a large number of the surnames prevalent among the Bene Israel are also in use among Hindus and even Muslims from Kulaba District, such as Divekar, Dandekar, Deulkar, Mapgaonkar, Medhekar, Penkar and Shirgaonkar.

In this connection, the observations made by Mr Abraham Samuel Tarankhopkar, a member of the community who had a reputation as a Marathi scholar, on how the Bene Israel must have acquired their surnames may be cited. In a series of four articles in Marathi under the title 'Bene Israel' he had this to say:

> It must be specially mentioned that members of such [high] castes as Brahmins, Prabhus, Sonars [goldsmiths] and Kasars [glass bangle vendors] did not engage in cultivation; and even more, they regarded cultivators, Chamars [tanners], Mahars, Mangs and other such castes as untouchable and did not allow even their shadow to fall on them. Similarly they did not allow the shadows of the Bene Israel to fall on them. On this account Bene Israel houses were mostly situated on the outskirts of the village adjoining the Chamarwadi [the tanner sector] or the Maharwadi [the Mahar sector]. There are two divisions among the Konkan [which includes Kulaba District] Chamars, namely the Chawles and the Daboles. Of these, the Chawles have surnames similar to those of the Bene Israel. So it is very likely that the Bene Israel improved their status [lit. overcame their drawback] by adopting their custom in the matter of surnames. [*Friend of Israel*, Bombay, Vol. V, Nos. 7-8-9 (combined issue) July, August and September 1920, pp. 82-3. Translated by the present writer.]

These observations caused great offence to many readers and at a well-attended protest meeting it was resolved to boycott the journal in which they appeared. In consequence it had to close

down. The main cause of offence was that, not only were the Bene Israel equated with a Hindu caste of very low status, but it was even suggested that they sought to enhance their status by imitating the 'lowly' Chamars in the matter of surnames. And this at a time when the Bene Israel had acquired a status in secular society alongside the highest Hindu castes. In any case the observations were gratuitous because village-based surnames were used by all castes of Hindus, and not merely by low-caste or outcaste residents of villages. What really distinguished the Bene Israel from higher caste Hindus in fact was that, whereas every Bene Israel family had a village-derived surname (with the possible exception of the Doodkars), not all higher caste Hindus had them. Among Brahmins in Maharashtra we have surnames like Gokhale, Godbole, Modak, Ranade and Tilak and among Marathas such surnames as Bhonsle, Chavan, Kadam and Mohite, which are not derived from names of villages or towns. But very many Hindus from the higher castes do have village-derived surnames and, in fact, one constantly comes across high caste Hindus with the same surnames as those adopted by the Bene Israel. The most distinguished high caste Hindu sharing a surname with the Bene Israel that the writer can think of is the first Peshwa (or Chief Minister) of the great Maharaj Shivaji in the seventeenth century. His surname was Pingle, a very common Bene Israel surname. As most sizable villages had a fair admixture of Hindu castes, it is very unlikely that Bene Israel surnames mostly resembled the surnames borne by a particular caste of lowly status which were not also borne by higher-caste Hindus from the same villages.

Though not strictly germane to our subject, it may here be observed that it is not true that at any time in the past the Bene Israel had, in the eyes of higher caste Hindus, the same status as that of outcastes, who alone were untouchables proper. In Hindu society there was an elaborate gradation of castes and, therefore, different degrees of acceptance for a variety of purposes. Cultivators, such as Kunbis and Malis, were never untouchables. Though technically all non-Hindus were outside the caste hierarchy, in actual practice the only discrimination

against non-Hindus was the taboo on taking food from their hands. In Kulaba District the Bene Israel had exactly the same status as the Muslims, and this was certainly not low. It is very surprising that so knowledgeable a person as Mr Tarankhopkar had the reputation of being should have made so sweeping and unwarranted a statement. From some of the other observations in his articles it seems that he deliberately went out of his way to shock and even hurt his coreligionists.

What, in the matter of surnames, was peculiar to the Bene Israel, in the opinion of Miss Rebecca Reuben, who gave the best years of her life to the service of the community, was the use of the suffix *kara* (with a long terminal 'a') instead of *kar* for a married woman, a practice which was widely prevalent in the community up to about fifty years ago and which seems to be dying out. In her paper, *The Bene Israel of Bombay*, published in 1913 at Cambridge, England, Miss Reuben observed:

> The Bene Israel derived their surnames from the villages where their ancestors settled. Thus those who settled in Rajapur called themselves Rajpurkars, those in Tul Tulkar and so on. In connection with this may I mention a peculiar fact—not found in any other Indian community, but peculiar to the Bene Israel alone—and that is the form of the surname of married women. The wife of a Penkar would be Penkara, that of Kehimkar Kehimkara. Is it an unconscious survival of the Hebrew feminine termination *ah*? (p.9).

While it is true that the usage described by Miss Reuben was prevalent among the Bene Israel at a time when one did not commonly find it among their Hindu neighbours, it is open to doubt whether the usage was an unconscious survival of Hebrew usage; rather, it may have been just another assimilation of local usage. In Sanskrit, the use of the long 'a' in the feminine form of a name is the rule. Thus Ram or Rama, with a short 'a' at the end, is the male form of the name, while the female form is Rama, with a long 'a' ending. So also with Krishna with a short 'a' ending and with a long 'a' ending. And the writer has seen in a letter published in *The Times of India* the name of the celebrated

eighteenth century Maharani of Indore given as Ahilyabai Holkara, Holkar being the surname of the ruling family of Indore. The Holkars were Marathas, so the 'a' at the end of Holkara must have been in accordance with Maharashtrian usage, which perhaps was retained by the Bene Israel longer than by the general community.

Many members of the community have in the last century ceased using their traditional surnames. At first, as was the practice of Muslims and Parsees, no surname was used at all in secular matters (e.g. school enrolment, employment) and only the first name followed by that of the father was used. This is still the practice with a few. Later, and more commonly now, the first name of the grandfather or more remote forebear has been adopted as a surname, preceded by the first name and the father's name. A woman would use the father's name and surname after her first name until marriage and, after marriage, her husband's first name and surname after her own first name. Sometimes the letter 's' is added to the surname, e.g. Reubens or Hyams. In some cases the traditional surname has been anglicised, Killekar, becoming Kelly, Rajpurkar becoming Rogers, Charikar becoming Cherry and Ashtamkar becoming Ashton. In a few cases the suffix *kar* has been dropped, Jhiradkar becoming Jhirad and Koletkar becoming Kolet. Nevertheless, almost every member of the community knows his or her traditional village-derived surname and is identified by that name within the community (e.g. in synagogue membership lists) rather than by the more recently adopted Jewish or other surname. Thus the present writer belongs to a family, originally bearing the surname Wargharkar, which adopted the surname Israel three generations ago. Despite this, the traditional village-derived surname is still remembered and applied within the community to the family. Incidentally, it may be observed that the surname Israel was commonly applied to Bene Israel personnel in the Bombay Army of the East India Company on enlistment under their first names, the names of their fathers and their 'caste' name Israel as the surname. This explains why Chapter IX of Kehimkar's *History* dealing with the army service of the Bene Israel is so full of names of officers with this surname. It also explains how the

writer's family acquired the current surname. Hardly any other families with a history of army service have, however, retained the surname Israel. The practice of recording the traditional surname in synagogue listing has even travelled to Israel, though it has often been discarded for other purposes. Dr Shalva Weil observes in her paper 'Names and Identity among the Bene Israel' (*Ethnic Groups*, 1977, Vol. I, pp. 201-19):

> There is one situation in which *-kar* names are never rejected. This is in the sphere of ritual, the major aspect of Israeli life which is legitimately segregated according to 'edah [*Hebrew:* ethnic community]. In this area minority identity is acted out, and *-kar* names feature as the link between the ritual world of ethnic tradition and the secular world where personal names identify individuals as national citizens. The arena is the 'ethnic synagogue' .... Whenever a congregant is chosen to fulfil one of the synagogue 'Aliyot [*Hebrew:* calling up] or other ritual honours he is publicly called upon by name.... Amongst the Bene Israel, however, the addition of the *-kar* name differentiates Bene Israel synagogue ritual from that of all other 'edot [pl. of 'edah]. When a Bene Israel is 'called up' he is identified as Jacob ben David Dighorkar or Michael ben Josef Thalkar. The significance of this practice is far reaching in a discussion of ethnic group identity. For through ritual the Bene Israel *-kar* name is perpetuated and Bene Israel identity is publicly reaffirmed. The affirmation of *-kar* names is not confined only to public proclamations; it is reasserted in every matter pertaining to the synagogue such as membership registers, accounts, and so on which are classified according to *-kar* names. The practice is so embedded that even persons who reject their *-kar* name in nearly every other context, retain its use in the synagogue.

In several places in his *History* Kehimkar describes the users of a particular surname as a 'family', and names particular persons as the 'ancestors' of those bearing the particular surname. While it is likely that in some cases only a single family settled

in a village and adopted its name to provide a surname, so that the present bearers of that name can broadly be described as the descendants of the family or of its head, in the majority of cases a number of unrelated or only distantly related families must have adopted the same surname. This must be particularly so in the case of surnames with numerous bearers.

A list of 91 village-derived surnames used by the Bene Israel was given under the heading 'A list of the majority of surnames of the Bene Israel' in 1907 by the Reverend J. Henry Lord in his *Jews of India and the Far East*. A list of 103 such surnames was published in Marathi in the magazine *Israelite* in 1919 (Vol. III, nos. 9-10, September-October 1919). Towards the end of the series of articles by Mr Tarankhopkar in the *Friend of Israel* mentioned above there is a list of as many as 133 surnames which is particularly valuable in that, in all but three cases, he gives the names of villages from which he presumes that the surnames were derived and the sub-divisions (now called tahsils) of Kulaba District or the Bhor or Janjira States in which the villages were situated. (But for a part of Bhor State which was merged in Pune District, the two states have since been merged in Kulaba District.) In 1948 Mr Moses Ezekiel gave a list of 107 surnames in his *History and Culture of the Bene Israel in India*. A list of 91 surnames compiled by Mr Samuel S. Kasookar (a few of which are variants of a single surname) was published as recently as September 1982 in the Marathi magazine *Maccabi* which is published twice or thrice a year.

Though Mr Tarankhopkar's list is the longest, it still omits names which occur in one or more of the other lists. Thus it omits the surnames Galsulkar and Mangaonkar which appear in the earlier *Israelite* list. Galsulkar also appears in the lists of Mr Lord, Mr Ezekiel and Mr Kasookar, but only Mr Kasookar's list makes mention of the surname of Garsulkar which appears in Mr Tarankhopkar's list and which also occurs in several places in Kehimkar's *History*. The probability is that these are variants of a single name derived from the village Galsure. In fact, a third variant of the name exists, viz. Galsurkar. A known Bene Israel idiosyncrasy is the confusion of the *r* sound with others,

particularly the *l* and *d* sounds.[1] For our purposes they will be treated as a single surname. The other name in the *Israelite* list, Mangaonkar, does not appear in the lists of Mr Lord, Mr Ezekiel and Mr Kasookar and the writer has never come across it anywhere else. Though this is not decisive (there are several surnames in all five lists which the writer has never heard or seen), it is possible that it is not really a traditional surname. It may well be a name loosely used for persons who came to reside in Mangaon later than the time the traditional surnames were fixed. The anonymous compiler of the *Israelite* list himself warned readers not to mistake such names as Panvelkar, Revdandekar, Alibagkar or Mumbaikar for genuine surnames since they merely indicated present residence and not origin. Since, however, the compiler, in spite of his caution, did include Mangaonkar among genuine surnames, it has been treated as authentic for our listing.

Mr Lord's list contains 13 surnames which are not mentioned by Mr Tarankhopkar. One of these is Galsulkar discussed above. The other 12 are: Ashtekar, Borlekar, Dandgulkar, Deulkar, Dhatawadkar, Malegaonkar, Malinkar, Mankar, Ningadkar, Nowbaskar, Satarkar and Yulekar. Some of these may be variants of names in Mr Tarankhopkar's list, but several are distinctly different.

Mr Ezekiel's list contains 11 of the names in the paragraph above (omitting only Dhatawadkar and Malinkar) and, in addition, mentions one name not listed by the other four, viz. Kolabkar. This surname is also mentioned at p. 189 of Kehimkar's *History* and is the name of the author of a booklet published in 1943 entitled *Kolaba Travels*. Mr. Tarankhopkar has listed the surname Khulabkar and Mr Kasookar has listed the surname Khulapkar. There is little doubt that all three are variants of a single surname.

Mr Kasookar's list contains the surname Mhaisabkar which is evidently a variant of Mhaisapkar mentioned by Mr Tarankhopkar without indicating the village from which it may be

[1] This idiosyncrasy is referred to by Miss Reuben in the tract cited earlier and is there attributed to phonetic differences in Hebrew and Marathi.

derived. There is a village in Pen Tahsil named Mhaisbad from which the surname is probably derived though the more correct form of the surname would be Mhaisbadkar.

The writer has come across the surname Kharvilkar as that of the author of a Marathi book published in the seventies of the last century. The surname does not appear in any of the five lists mentioned above. In all probability it is a variant of the surname Kharilkar mentioned by Mr Tarankhopkar.

In Kehimkar's *History* there is mention in some places of the surname Mulekar (e.g. pp. 188 and 208) which does not appear in any of the lists mentioned above. In all probability it is an earlier variant of the surname Malekar which Mr Tarankhopkar has listed.

In an old report of a Bombay synagogue the surname Cochikar appears. This name is not to be found in any of the five lists mentioned above. It seems that, despite its appearance, it is not a Bene Israel village-derived surname, but one sometimes given to Jews from Cochin serving in Bene Israel synagogues. A friend once told the writer that in the Israelite School in Bombay he had fellow students named Cochikar who were the sons of a Cochin Jew serving as a hazan in a Bombay synagogue. In a Marathi preface to an almanac compiled for the Bene Israel by Haham Rabbi David Judah Ashkenazi and Hyam Isaac Galsurkar and published in 1854 the haham was described as coming from 'Cochi' and resident in Bombay.

The writer has been told that there are lists of Bene Israel surnames in English and Hebrew in institutions in Israel. The few names from these lists that have been communicated to him differ from those in the lists he has seen. In some cases the differences are slight and may be due to defective transliteration. Others are entirely new. Unless it is known from what source and when they have been compiled it is difficult to say how genuine the surnames are. All one can remark is that it is difficult to see how the new surnames could have escaped the notice of the five different sources which have been drawn upon by the writer.

This study covers 142 distinct surnames in all, of which some 20 have variants. In Appendix 5.I are listed all these surnames

in alphabetical order. For the purpose of identifying the villages with which these surnames could possibly be linked, use has been made of the *District Census Handbook for Kolaba District* compiled by the Maharashtra Census Office, Bombay, and published in 1964 as part of the studies based on the 1961 census. The *Handbook* gives lists of all villages in the District, recognised as such by law, arranged tahsil-wise. This was at hand when this study was first undertaken. Though a similar handbook has since been issued after the 1971 census, it has not been found necessary to make any revision, except for adopting the later population figures, since the only material change in the listing of villages is to give the 1971 population figures. Section A of the list contains surnames which can possibly be linked with villages named in the *Census Handbook,* however unlikely the link may prove to be. Against the name of each village is given the name of the tahsil in which it is situated. Section B of the list gives surnames which Tarankhopkar has identified with village names which do not occur in the *Census Handbook.* Here also all such villages and the tahsils in which Tarankhopkar places them have been mentioned against the respective surnames. Section C of the list contains surnames for which no identification has been made by Tarankhopkar and for which no identification has otherwise been possible, excepting the surname Dandgulkar (No. 32B in Appendix 5.I) which may be a variant of the surname Dandulkar (No. 32A), both derived from the village Dandguri.

Two surnames in Section A of the list, Talhekar (No. 111) and Talkar (No. 112), though listed separately, are possibly variants of the same name.

As regards the surnames in Section B of the list and the names of villages given against each, it may be observed that, though the village names do not appear in the *Census Handbook,* they may be the names of villages officially recognised as such in or before 1920 which have ceased to be officially recognized as separate villages since, or they may be the names of hamlets *(mazaras)* which are officially regarded as parts of adjoining villages or of what are known as *wadis* or *padas* (corresponding to wards of a town). All these, though they have distinct names,

do not appear in official lists of villages as they are for all official purposes included in the areas of statutorily recognised villages.

As is only to be expected, there is a very wide range of frequency with which the various surnames appear in any extensive listing, such as that of members of a synagogue in Bombay or subscribers to a popular charity. Some surnames are limited to only a few families, such as the surname Wargharkar (No. 121) which as early as 1830 or so belonged to only two brothers so far as is known (their two uncles had left no children) and which now belongs only to the descendants of these two brothers. Other names like Divekar (No. 37), Killekar (No. 60), Penkar (No. 88), Rohekar (No. 95) and Talkar (No. 112), are very common.

At this late date a definitive identification of a surname with a particular village is often a matter of considerable difficulty. In spite of the existence of official lists of villages, the position is complicated by the fact that the same name is often shared by two or more villages in the district, sometimes in the same sub-division of it. In such cases it is very difficult to identify the particular village from which the surname was derived. Even as far back as 1920 Tarankhopkar found the same difficulty. Where the same village name appears in the same sub-division, one is distinguished from the other by an indication of the location of each by the addition of the words *'tarf X'*, *X* standing for the name of some other village near which it is situated, *'tarf'* meaning 'towards'. If a pair of neighbouring villages with the same name is involved, one of them has the word *bhudruk* (or major) appended to its name and the other the word *khurd* (or minor). For the derivation of a surname, however, it is only the main name of the village that is used, making it difficult to assign the surname to any one of the villages.

There is reason to believe that the community adopted the practice of using village-derived surnames centuries ago. Since the names were adopted, several villages have over the years ceased to be inhabited and, after an interval in which they retained their identity in the official records, they have been dropped from them, their areas being merged in neighbouring villages. Sometimes two villages are merged into one with a single name. A case in point is that of the village Shirgaon in Murud Tahsil

(part of the former Janjira State) which some time before 1961 was merged in the village of Walke and officially ceased to exist, though the surname Shirgaonkar (No. 105 in Appendix 5.I) derived from the village continues to be used. There may be several other similar cases in which, though the surname survives, the village from which it was derived has disappeared or changed its name. It is also not conclusive evidence of derivation of a surname from a particular village to find that it has a name to which the surname can be related, because that particular village may not have been the one from which the surname was derived but quite another with the same name in some other part of the district, or another which has since changed its name or disappeared.

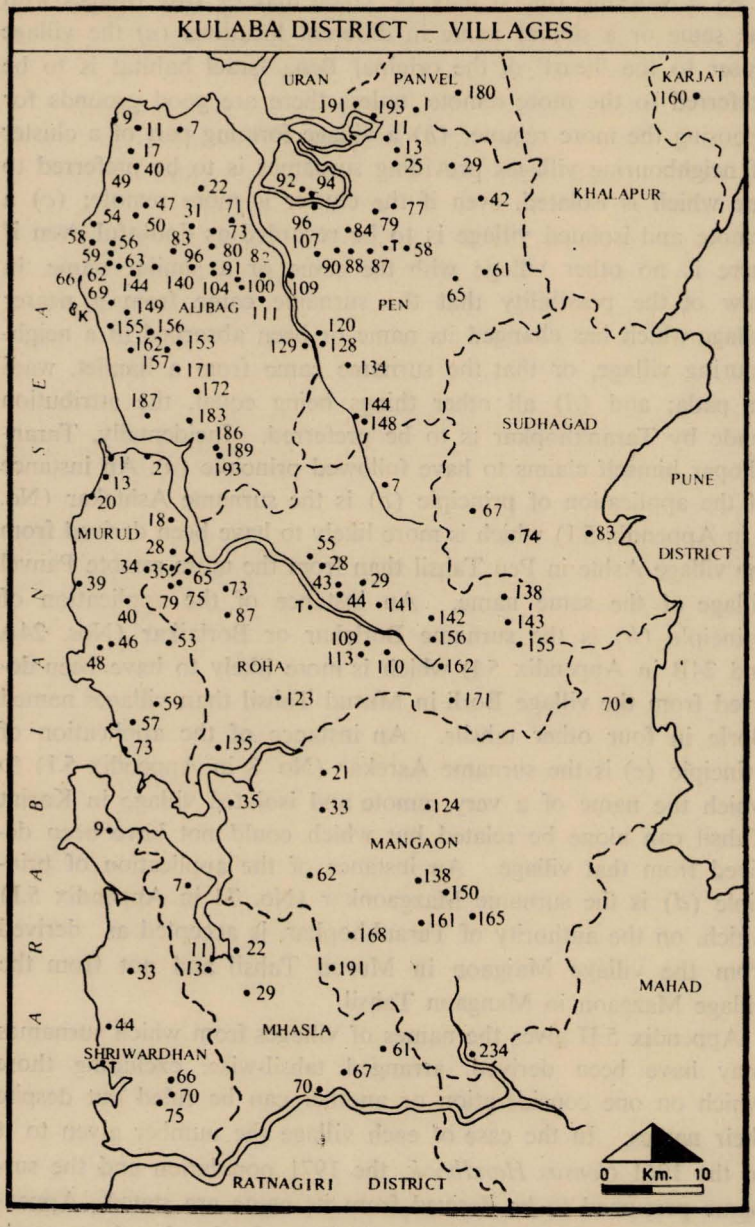
Again, it is possible that in particular cases surnames which can be related to particular officially recognised villages in particular parts of the district, were actually derived from what are now hamlets, wadis or padas in some other locations in the district. An instance is the surname Malekar (No. 68 in Appendix 5.I) which, according to an informant, was derived, not from the village Mule in Alibag Tahsil, but from the hamlet Mala, which, according to him, was included in the village Nagaon in the same tahsil. Such a possibility is even greater if, as in the case of the hamlet Mala, the hamlet, wadi or pada is much closer to the area of original settlement than the officially listed village.

One reason for believing that the existing Bene Israel surnames were adopted a long time ago is that no surnames have been derived from such places as Alibag, Revdanda or Panvel which have gained prominence or got their present names comparatively late, although the Bene Israel are known to have been resident in these places for a considerable time. Tarankhopkar presumes that the adoption of new surnames ceased by the end of the seventeenth century, since when there must have been shifts of Bene Israel population even apart from the move of growing numbers to Bombay. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the adoption of new surnames ceased even earlier. Sudhagad Tahsil, formerly part of the Bhor State, had in 1961 the largest Bene Israel population of any of the tahsils in the district, though it

is somewhat remote from the area of original settlement. It seems that many Bene Israel moved there in the seventeenth century, if not earlier, to escape the constant turmoil in the coastal areas of the district. Yet the tahsil provides only five villages from which Bene Israel surnames could have been derived, two of which are very improbable. Owing to these shifts of population it would be unsafe, in choosing between two or more villages, to go by the population of these villages in 1971, even if one knew how many Bene Israel were included in the population (which, in fact, there is no means of knowing). In all probability, in the case of many villages providing Bene Israel surnames, users of these surnames may have ceased to reside in the villages in question for generations. It is usually agricultural holdings that tie families to particular villages for centuries, from generation to generation. The Bene Israel seldom held much agricultural land. Nor were their ties to the lands they held as strong as those of the traditional cultivating classes. And ancestral villages had a further hold on Hindus which they did not have on the Bene Israel. That was devotion to the local deity which could be worshipped only in the village temple. Even now, many Hindus travel hundreds and even thousands of miles to offer worship at the village shrine on certain days and so maintain their ties to the original homes of their forebears. Most Bene Israel families that migrate have little motive to maintain their ties with their old homes. It would, therefore, be unrealistic to expect a person with a particular surname to be able to trace his connection with the village from which his surname was derived, except in rare cases in which for generations forebears had remained in the village or in which a remote ancestor could be traced who belonged to that village. The writer knows of none whose family records or oral tradition go back beyond the early years of the eighteenth century. Were it possible to examine records of land holdings dating back two and a half centuries or more (assuming such records exist for villages in the Kulaba District) it might have been possible to make more accurate attributions, assuming that Bene Israel holders of land then could be identified as such from their names or descriptions.

As a working rule it may be taken that of two villages with the same or a similar name in different locations (*a*) the village closer to the 'heart' of the original Bene Israel habitat is to be preferred to the more remote, unless there are good grounds for choosing the more remote; (*b*) a village forming part of a cluster of neighbouring villages providing surnames is to be preferred to one which is isolated, even if the cluster is more remote; (*c*) a remote and isolated village is to be regarded as doubtful even if there is no other village with the same or a similar name, in view of the possibility that the surname came from a nearer village which has changed its name or been absorbed in a neighbouring village, or that the surname came from a hamlet, wadi or pada; and (*d*) all other things being equal, the attribution made by Tarankhopkar is to be preferred. Incidentally, Tarankhopar himself claims to have followed principle (*a*). An instance of the application of principle (*a*) is the surname Ashtekar (No. 7 in Appendix 5.I) which is more likely to have been derived from the village Ashte in Pen Tahsil than from the more remote Panvel village of the same name. An instance of the application of principle (*b*) is the surname Borlekar or Borlaikar (Nos. 24A and 24B in Appendix 5.I) which is more likely to have been derived from the village Borli in Murud Tahsil than villages named Borle in four other tahsils. An instance of the application of principle (*c*) is the surname Asrekar (No. 8 in Appendix 5.I) to which the name of a very remote and isolated village in Karjat Tahsil can alone be related but which could not have been derived from that village. An instance of the application of principle (*d*) is the surname Mazgaonkar (No. 74 in Appendix 5.I) which, on the authority of Tarankhopkar, is accepted as derived from the village Majgaon in Murud Tahsil and not from the village Mazgaon in Mangaon Tahsil.

Appendix 5.II gives the names of villages from which surnames may have been derived, arranged tahsil-wise, excluding those which on one consideration or another can be ruled out despite their names. In the case of each village the number given to it in the 1961 *Census Handbook*, the 1971 population and the surname presumed to be derived from its name are stated. Appendix 5.III sets out the basis on which a selection has been made


KULABA DISTRICT — VILLAGES
URAN
PANVEL
KARJAT
KHALAPUR
ALIBAG
PEN
SUDHAGAD
PUNE
DISTRICT
MURUD
ROHA
MANGAON
MAHAD
MHASLA
SHRIWARDHAN
RATNAGIRI DISTRICT
ARABIAN SEA
0 Km. 10

Map 5.1

from villages of the same or similar names for inclusion in Appendix 5.II. It also contains comments on the derivation of certain surnames where some clarification or explanation seemed called for. Map 5.1 shows those tahsils or relevant portions of tahsils in which villages listed in Appendix 5.II are situated, with the location of each village indicated by the number given to it in the *Census Handbook* of 1961. The numbers rather than the names are marked on the map to avoid overcrowding. It should be noted that the villages are numbered separately for each tahsil, so that the same numbers may often be repeated in different tahsils. Towns are indicated by the letter T and Kolaba Fort by the letter K. In Appendix 5.I as well as Appendix 5.II an asterisk appears before each surname and each village name. as the case may be, on which comments have been made in Appendix 5.III.

The pattern which emerges from the location of the villages selected for inclusion in Appendix 5.II, as shown on the map, lends support to the tradition that the Bene Israel gradually spread out from the coast of Alibag Tahsil between Navedar-Navagaon and the ancient port of Chaul. As is to be expected, Alibag Tahsil provides by far the largest number of possible villages, viz. 46, though, as will be seen from Appendix 5.III, a few may not have actually provided surnames. Two of the villages are of special interest, apart from their contribution of surnames to the Bene Israel. One is Navedar-Navagaon (No. 54 in Alibag Tahsil on the map) which is the legendary landing place of the ship-wrecked ancestors of the Bene Israel and the burial place of those who were drowned. The second is Khandala close by (No. 144) which for many years has been a place of pilgrimage as the legendary scene of an apparition of the Prophet Elijah, a cult figure for the Bene Israel. Next after Alibag Tahsil come the adjoining two tahsils, Roha and Pen with 26 each, some doubtful in both cases. Surprisingly, after Pen comes the comparatively remote Mangaon Tahsil, with as many as 23 villages, though only 13 of these qualify for listing in Appendix 5.II. Following Mangaon comes Murud Tahsil with 17 villages one of which does not qualify for listing in Appendix 5.II. Then comes Mhasla Tahsil with 8 villages. Shriwardhan Tahsil also

has 8 villages, but one of these does not qualify for listing in Appendix 5.II. Next come three tahsils which largely fall outside the area of closest Bene Israel settlement. Panvel Tahsil to the north has 9 entries in Appendix 5.I, but only 3 of these qualify for listing in Appendix 5.II. Sudhagad Tahsil to the east, consisting of part of the former Indian State of Bhor, has 5 entries in Appendix 5.I but only 3 in Appendix 5.II. Karjat Tahsil to the north-east, though it has 4 doubtful entries in Appendix 5.I, has only a little less doubtful one in Appendix 5.II. Khalapur Tahsil has as many as 6 entries in Appendix 5.I but not a single one of these qualifies for entry in Appendix 5.II. Of the remaining three tahsils, Uran and Mahad have one entry each in Appendix I alone, while Poladpur does not feature in either of the Appendixes.

Against 125 surnames listed in Section A of Appendix 5.I as many as 180 villages are mentioned from which a choice has to be made. Of these some 148 villages have been selected for mention in Appendix 5.II, but even these are 23 more than the surnames which have to be matched. In addition, 10 surnames in Section B of Appendix 5.I have been identified by Tarankhopkar with places the names of which, as given by him, do not appear in the *Census Handbook*. Another 7 surnames listed in Section C of Appendix 5.I have not been identified with any place by Tarankhopkar nor can they be identified with any place listed in the *Census Handbook*. It will be seen, therefore, that there is a considerable area of uncertainty.

Despite this uncertainty it can safely be presumed that, during the period in which village-derived surnames were assumed by the Bene Israel — and the period must have extended over several years when there was considerable fluidity before the surnames were finally fixed—there was only a marginal spill-over of Bene Israel settlement into Panvel Tahsil to the north, Sudhagad Tahsil to the east and Mangaon Tahsil to the south-east. This leaves a compact block consisting of Alibag, Pen, Roha, Murud, Shriwardhan and Mhasla Tahsils which constituted the area of densest settlement. This area, which may be termed the Bene Israel heartland, could not have exceeded 1,000 square miles in extent,

roughly one-eighth the area of the State of Israel before the Six-Day War of 1957 and about 40 per cent of the present area of Kulaba District. In 1961, when there was still a sizable Bene Israel population in the district, this was still the area of greatest Bene Israel population, except for the large shift that had taken place to the remote Sudhagad Tahsil and to Panvel Town.

With the migration of the majority of the Bene Israel to Israel it remains to be seen how long the traditional village-derived surnames will remain in use. As mentioned before, these surnames do survive in Israel, if only for limited purposes within the ethnic group. Perhaps, as time passes, the Bene Israel in the land of Israel will eventually fall in with the practice of adopting purely Hebrew and non-biblical surnames for all purposes, even if they retain their ethnic distinctness. In India, most synagogues still require their members to register their traditional Indian surnames. But with growing laxity and lessening numbers several surnames will probably die out. It is also possible that the few Bene Israel who remain in India and retain their Jewish identity will want to stress their solidarity with their Maharashtrian neighbours by retaining, or returning to the use of, their traditional Indian surnames.

APPENDIX 5.I

BENE ISRAEL SURNAMES

A. Surnames with possibly connected villages as listed in Kolaba District 1961 Census Handbook

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
1	Adharnekar	Adharne	Pen
2	Agarwarkar	Agarwada	Mhasla

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
3	Akshikar	Akshi	Alibag
4	Ampurkar	Ambepur	Alibag
5	Aptekar	Apte	Panvel
*6A	Ashtamkar	Ashtami (town)	Roha
*6B	Ashtivkar		
*7	Ashtekar	Ashte	Panvel
		Ashte	Pen
*8	Asrekar	Ase	Karjat
9	Awaskar	Awas	Alibag
*10A	Bamnolkar	Bamanoli	Alibag
*10B	Bamanolkar	Bamnoli	Panvel
		Bamnoli	Mangaon
11	Barsulkar	Barshiv	Murud
12	Belgaonkar	Bedgaon	Mangaon
*13	Belkar	Belkade	Alibag
		Belkhar	
		Belkhar	Roha
14	Belulkar	Balawali	Pen
15A	Bhachekar	Bhatsai	Roha
15B	Bhastekar		
16	Bhalgaonkar	Bhalagaon	Roha
17	Bhalkar	Bhal	Alibag
18	Bharjekar	Bharje	Sudhagad
19	Bhinjekar	Bhilgikhar	Alibag
*20	Bhorupkar	Bhorup or Ghera-Sudhagad	Sudhagad
21	Birwadkar	Birwadi	Roha
*22	Borgawkar	Borgaon	Pen
		Borgaon Khurd	Khalapur
		Borgaon Bhudruk	
*23	Borgharkar	Borghar	Alibag
		Borghar	Mangaon
*24A	Borlekar	Borli	Murud
*24B	Borlaikar	Borle	Shriwardhan

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
		Borle	Mangaon
		Borle	Panvel
		Borle	Karjat
25	Chandgaonkar	Chandagaon	Roha
26	Chandrolkar	Chandore	Mangaon
27	Charikar	Chari	Alibag
28	Chewoolkar	Chaul	Alibag
		Chinchawali Chinchoti	Alibag
*29	Chincholkar	Chinchawali Tarf Atone	
		Chinchawali Tarf Diwali	Roha
30	Chordekar	Chordhe	Murud
31	Dandekar	Dande Tarf Nandgaon	Murud
*32A	Dandulkar	Dandguri	Shriwardhan
*32B	Dandgulkar		
33	Deulkar	Devali	Mangaon
34	Dhatavkar	Dhatav	Roha
35	Dhokarkar	Dhokawade	Alibag
36A	Dighodkar	Dighati	Panvel
36B	Dighorkar		
*37	Divekar	Div	Pen
		Div	Roha
38	Dusvikar	Dushmi Khar Pada	Pen
*39A	Erulkar	Yeral	Roha
*39B	Yeralkar		
40	Fansapurkar	Fanasapur	Alibag
41A	Galsulkar	Galsure	Shriwardhan
41B	Garsulkar		
41C	Galsurkar		

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
*42	Ghanekar	Gan Tarf Parhar Gan Tarf Shrigaon	Alibag
43	Ghosalkar	Ghosale	Roha
44	Indapurkar	Indapur	Mangaon
*45	Ivalekar	Sai	Mangaon
*46	Jawalikar	Jawali Javali	Pen Mangaon
47	Jhiradkar	Zirad	Alibag
*48	Jitekar	Jite Jite	Pen Mangaon
49	Kamarlekar	Kamarle	Alibag
*50	Kandlekar	Kandale Kandale	Pen Roha
51	Kanhekar	Devakanhe	Roha
52	Kasookar	Kasu	Pen
53	Kehimkar	Kihim	Alibag
54	Khamgaonkar	Khamgaon	Mhasla
55	Khamkar	Khamb	Roha
*56	Khanavkar	Khandala Khanav Khanaw	Alibag Panvel Khalapur
57	Khandalkar	Khandala	Alibag
*58A	Kharilkar	Khar Karavi	Pen
*58B	Kharvilkar	Kharavali Kharivali	Mangaon Khalapur
*59A	Khulabkar	Kolaba (Island Fort)	Alibag
*59B	Kolabkar		
*59C	Khulapkar		
60	Killekar	Kille	Roha
61	Kokbankar	Kokban	Roha
62A	Koladkar	Kolad	Roha
62B	Kolatkar		

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
63	Koletkar	Koleti Khar Koleti	Pen
64	Korlekar	Korlai	Murud
65	Kurekar	Kude	Mangaon
*66	Kurgaonkar	Kudgaon Kudgaon	Shriwardhan Mhasla
67	Kurulkar	Kurul	Alibag
*68	Malekar	Male Mule	Alibag Karjat
69	Malhegharkar	Maleghar	Pen
70	Malyankar	Malyan	Alibag
*71	Mangaonkar	Mangaon Mangaon Bhudruk Mangaon Khurd	Mangaon Sudhagad
72	Mankar	Man Tarf Zirad	Alibag
73A 73B	Mapgaonkar Mabgaonkar	Mapagaon	Alibag
*74	Mazgaonkar	Majgaon Mazgaon	Murud Mangaon
*75	Medhekar	Medhekhar Medhe Medhe	Alibag Roha Mangaon
76A 76B	Mhaisabkar Mhaisapkar	Mhaisbad	Pen
77	Mhasilkar	Mhasla	Mhasla
*78	Morbekar	Morbe Morba	Panvel Mangaon
*79	Nagavkar	Nagaon Nagaon Nagaon Nagaon Nagaon	Alibag Mangaon Sudhagad Uran Mahad

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
80	Nagothenekar	Nagothana	Roha
81	Naugharkar	Naukhar	Pen
*82	Nigadkar	Nigade	Alibag
		Nigade	Pen
		Nigadi	Shriwardhan
*83A	Nigrekar	Nigade	Alibag
*83B	Ningrekar	Nigade	Pen
		Nigadi	Shriwardhan
84	Nowgaonkar	Navedar-Navagaon	Alibag
85	Oomerdekar	Umbarde	Pen
86	Pabrekar	Pabhare	Mhasla
*87	Palkar	Pali	Sudhagad
		Pali Bhudruk	Khalapur
		Pali Khurd	
88	Penkar	Pen (town)	Pen
89	Pezarkar	Pesari	Alibag
90	Pingle	Pingalsai Bhudruk	Roha
		Pingalsai Khurd	
91	Poynadkar	Poynad	Alibag
92	Pugavkar	Pugaon	Roha
*93	Ramrajkar	Ramraj	Alibag
		Ramraj	Pen
94	Rajpurkar	Rajpuri	Murud
95	Rohekar	Roha (town)	Roha
96	Sabaskar	Shahabaj	Alibag
97	Sagaonkar	Sagaon	Alibag
*98	Saigaonkar	Saigaon	Murud
		Saigaon	Shriwardhan
99	Saikar	Sai	Panvel
100	Salavkar	Salav	Murud
101	Sankar	Sahan	Alibag

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
102	Saralkar	Saral	Alibag
103	Sassonkar	Sasvane	Alibag
104A	Shapurkar	Shahapur	Alibag
104B	Shahapurkar		
*105	Shirgaonkar	Walke (including Shirgaon)	Murud
106	Shirsekar	Sirse	Karjat
107	Shriwardhankar	Shriwardhan (town)	Shriwardhan
108	Sogavkar	Sogaon	Alibag
109	Songavkar	Sonagaon	Roha
*110	Talegaonkar	Talegaon	Mangaon
		Talegaon Tarf Goregaon	
*111	Talhekar	Talekhar	Pen
		Talekhar	Murud
		Tala	Mangaon
*112	Talkar	Tala	Mangaon
		Tale	Murud
		Talekhar	Murud
		Talekhar	Pen
		Tarne Tarf Tale	Mangaon
113	Tarankhopkar	Tarankhop	Pen
114	Thalkar	Thal	Alibag
115	Vadgaonkar	Vadgaon	Pen
*116A	Vadhavkar	Vadhav Bhudruk	Alibag
*116B	Wadhavkar	Vadhav Khurd	
		Wadhaw	Pen
117	Varsulkar	Varasoli	Alibag
118A	Wakrulkar	Wakrul	Pen
118B	Wakuralkar		

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
*119	Walwatkar	Walwati	Murud
		Walvati	Shriwardhan
120	Wandekar	Wande	Murud
*121	Wargharkar	Wadghar	Murud
		Wadghar	Mangaon
*122A	Warulkar	Waral	Mhasla
*122B	Wahralkar	Waral	Mangaon
*123	Warvatnekar	Waravatne	Mhasla
*124	Waskar	Washi	Roha
		Washi	Pen
*125	Wavekar	Wave (Nanegaon)	Pen
		Wave	Murud
		Wave	Mhasla

B. Surnames attributed by Mr. Tarankhopkar to villages not enumerated in Census Handbook

No.	*Surname*	*Village*	*Tahsil*
*126	Bandarkar	Bandar	Pen
*127	Bhonkar	Bhon	Mangaon
128A	Gadapkar	Gadap	Pen
128B	Garapkar		
*129	Gadkar	Gad	Roha
130	Mazronkar	Mazraona	Janjira State
131	Mendrekar	Mendhi	Janjira State
132	Sakshikar	Sakshi	Pen
*133	Satamkar	Satamba	Roha
134	Shirkolkar	Shirkol	Sudhagad
135	Telulkar	Talauli	Alibag

C. Surnames not attributable to specific villages

No.	*Surname*	*No.*	*Surname*
136	Bhanekar	139	Malinkar
*137	Doodkar or Dootkar	140	Nowbaskar
		141	Satarkar
138	Dhatawadkar	*142	Yulekar

Appendix 5.II

Tahsilwise List of Villages from which Surnames may have been derived with their populations in 1971

Village	*Number in official list*	*Population*	*Surname*
ALIBAG TAHSIL			
Akshi	155	1,884	Akshikar
Ambepur	104	1,966	Ampurkar
Awas	17	2,672	Awaskar
*Bamanoli	62	390	Bamnolkar Bamanolkar
*Belkade	149	564	Belkar
*Belkhar	73	uninhabited	Belkar
Bhal	56	368	Bhalkar
Bhiljikhar	189	647	Bhinjekar
*Borghar	186	516	Borgharkar
Chari	80	500	Charikar
Chaul	187	8,150	Chewoolkar
*Chinchawali	22	1,181	Chincholkar
*Chinchoti	183	1,309	Chincholkar

Village	*Number in official list*	*Population*	*Surname*
Dhokawade	11	1,997	Dhokarkar
Fanasapur	129	uninhabited	Fansapurkar
*Gan Tarf Parhar	83	30	Ghanekar
*Gan Tarf Shrigaon	96	33	Ghanekar
Kamarle	31	1,869	Kamarlekar
*Khanav	171	588	Khanavkar
Khandala	144	1,093	Khandalkar
Kihim	49	1,916	Kehimkar
*Kolaba (Island Fort)	K	uninhabited	Khulabkar Kolabkar Khulapkar
Kurul	69	944	Kurulkar
Malyan	172	490	Malyankar
Man Tarf Zirad	59	915	Mankar
Mapagaon	47	658	Mapgaonkar
*Medhekhar	111	509	Medhekar
*Mule	63	619	Malekar
*Nagaon	162	5,047	Nagavkar
Navedar-Navagaon	54	2,204	Nowgaonkar
Pesari	91	702	Pezarkar
Poynad	100	1,538	Poynadkar
*Ramraj	193	1,174	Ramrajkar
Sagaon	140	296	Sagaonkar
Sahan	156	682	Sankar
Saral	7	2,489	Saralkar
Sasvane	9	1,651	Sassonkar
Shahabaj	82	2,033	Sabaskar
Shahapur	71	3,298	Shapurkar Shahapurkar
Sogaon	50	754	Sogavkar
Thal	58	4,407	Thalkar
*Vadhav Bhudruk	153	317	Vadhavkar Wadhavkar

Village	*Number in official list*	*Population*	*Surname*
*Vadhav Khurd	157	150	Vadhavkar Wadhavkar
Varsoli	66	2,467	Varsulkar
Zirad	40	1,152	Jhiradkar
KARJAT TAHSIL			
Sirse	160	471	Shirsekar
PEN TAHSIL			
Adharne	65	322	Adharnekar
*Ashte	42	117	Ashtekar
Balawali	25	863	Belulkar
*Borgaon	58	526	Borgawkar
*Div	94	940	Divekar
Dushmi Khar Pada	1	1,746	Dusvikar
*Jawali	29	737	Jawalikar
*Jite	11	2,065	Jitekar
*Kandale	90	1,259	Kandlekar
Kasu	128	741	Kasookar
*Khar Karavi	109	458	Kharilkar Kharvilkar
Khar Koleti	144	uninhabited	Koletkar
Koleti	148	596	Koletkar
Maleghar	88	726	Malegharkar
Mhaisbad	120	429	Mhaisabkar Mhaisapkar
Naukhar	13	uninhabited	Naugharkar
*Nigade	134	427	Nigrekar Ningrekar

Village	*Number in official list*	*Population*	*Surname*
Pen (town)	T	11,754	Penkar
*Ramraj	77	80	Ramrajkar
Tarankhop	79	558	Tarankhopkar
Umbarde	84	1,817	Oomardekar
Vadgaon	87	135	Vadgaonkar
*Wadhaw	92	3,987	Vadhavkar Wadhavkar
Wakrul	61	1,284	Wakrulkar Wakuralkar
*Washi	96	2,537	Waskar
*Wave (Nanegaon)	107	1,054	Wavekar

ROHA TAHSIL

*Ashtami (town)	T	joint with Roha	Ashtamkar Ashtivkar
*Belkhar	75	657	Belkar
Bhalagaon	135	1,244	Bhalgaonkar
Bhatsai	55	1,270	Bhastekar Bhachekar
Birwadi	87	607	Birwadkar
Chandagaon	73	444	Chandgaonkar
*Chinchawali Tarf Atone	143	611	Chincholkar
*Chinchawali Tarf Diwali	171	532	Chincholkar
Devakanhe	141	856	Kanhekar
Dhatav	109	999	Dhatavkar
*Div	65	409	Divekar
Ghosale	123	1,900	Ghosalkar
*Kandale	138	792	Kandlekar
Khamb	142	810	Khamkar

Village	*Number in official list*	*Population*	*Surname*
Kille	110	1,238	Killekar
Kokban	79	505	Kokbankar
Kolad	162	1,613	Koladkar Kolatkar
*Medhe	28	1,032	Medhekar
Nagothana	7	3,861	Nagothenekar
Pingalsai Bhudruk	44	uninhabited	Pingle
Pingalsai Khurd	43	768	Pingle
Pugaon	156	905	Pugavkar
Roha (town)	T	8,631 (with Ashtami)	Rohekar
Sonagaon	29	415	Songavkar
*Washi	113	298	Waskar
*Yeral	155	597	Erulkar Yeralkar

MANGAON TAHSIL

*Bamnoli	150	635	Bamnolkar Bamanolkar
Bedgaon	70	140	Belgaonkar
Chandore	191	1,514	Chandrolkar
Devali	234	1,001	Deulkar
Indapur	124	321	Indapurkar
*Kharavali	138	1,424	Kharvilkar Kharilkar
Kude	35	777	Kurekar
*Mangaon	165	483	Mangaonkar
*Medhe	21	1,365	Medhekar
*Morba	161	3,130	Morbekar
*Sai	168	2,042	Ivalekar

Village	*Number in official list*	*Population*	*Surname*
*Tala	33	4,386	Talkar Talhekar
*Talegaon	62	1,323	Talegaonkar
SUDHAGAD TAHSIL			
Bharje	74	885	Bharjekar
*Bhorup or Ghera-Sudhagad	83	514	Bhorupkar
*Pali	67	4,523	Palkar
PANVEL TAHSIL			
Apte	180	1,794	Aptekar
Dighati	191	706	Dighorkar Dighodkar
Sai	193	1,884	Saikar
MURUD TAHSIL			
Barshiv	20	368	Barsulkar
*Borli	13	3,108	Borlaikar Borlekar
Chordhe	28	1,336	Chordekar
Dande Tarf Nandgaon	39	99	Dandekar
Korlai	1	1,876	Korlekar
*Majgaon	48	2,445	Mazgaonkar
Rajpuri	73	3,246	Rajpurkar
*Saigaon	59	132	Saigaonkar
Salav	2	944	Salavkar
*Tale	34	310	Talkar

Village	*Number in official list*	*Population*	*Surname*
*Talekhar	35	612	Talhekar Talkar
*Wadghar	40	10	Wargharkar
*Walke (including Shirgaon)	18	1,001	Shirgaonkar
*Walwati	46	850	Walwatkar
Wande	57	435	Wandekar
*Wave (including Ambaste)	53	315	Wavekar
SHRIWARDHAN TAHSIL			
*Dandguri	33	607	Dandulkar Dandgulkar
Galsure	66	1,012	Garsulkar Galsulkar Galsurkar
*Kudgaon	9	1,686	Kurgaonkar
*Nigadi	70	1,045	Nigadkar
*Saigaon	75	1,163	Saigaonkar
Shriwardhan (town)	T	12,342	Shriwardhankar
*Walvati	44	1,890	Walwatkar
MHASLA TAHSIL			
Agarwada	11	360	Agarwarkar
Khamgaon	61	1,317	Khamgaonkar
*Kudgaon	70	280	Kurgaonkar
Mhasla	29	4,560	Mhashilkar
Pabhare	22	2,121	Pabrekar

Village	*Number in official list*	*Population*	*Surname*
*Waral	7	1,576	Warulkar Wahralkar
*Waravatne	13	671	Warvatnekar
*Wave	67	551	Wavekar

APPENDIX 5.III

A. CASES OF TWO OR MORE VILLAGES WITH THE SAME OR SIMILAR NAMES

1. Villages named Ashte from which the surname Ashtekar (No. 7 in Appendix 5.I) is derived occur in Panvel and in Pen Tahsils. No guidance is available from Tarankhopar as he does not list the surname. In the absence of any other indication, the village in Pen Tahsil, being closer, is to be preferred and it alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

2. A village named Bamanoli occurs in Alibag Tahsil, an uninhabited village named Bamnoli occurs in Panvel Tahsil and a village also named Bamnoli occurs in Mangaon Tahsil. The surname Bamnolkar (No. 10A in Appendix 5.I) may have been derived from any one of these. Though at first sight the surname seems closer to Bamnoli than to Bamanoli, there are other and weightier considerations in favour of the Alibag village. An old Bombay synagogue report shows that at one time the form Bamanolkar (No. 10B) was in use as the surname. Secondly Tarankhopkar names the Alibag village, though as Bamnoli. Thirdly, the 'a' sound within a name is sometimes suppressed in such cases. The Panvel village can be safely ruled out but, perhaps, the Mangaon village cannot, as it is not so isolated.

The Alibag and the Mangaon villages have been included in Appendix 5.II.

3. There is a village called Belkade in Alibag Tahsil and two named Belkhar, one in Alibag and one in Roha Tahsil, from any one of which the surname Belkar (No. 13 in Appendix 5.I) may be derived. Tarankhopkar names Belkade in Alibag Tahsil. Though it has an edge over the Roha village, it may be the Alibag village Belkhar which was the source, since the more correct form of the surname would be Belkadekar if it came from Belkade. In view of this, all three villages have been included in Appendix 5.II.

4. There is a village called Borgaon in Pen Tahsil and two villages of the same name in Khalapur Tahsil, one distinguished by the word Bhudruk and the other by the word Khurd appended. The surname Borgawkar (No. 22 in Appendix 5.I) may have been derived from any one of them. The Pen village is the closer and had been named by Tarankhopkar. It alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

5. Villages with the name Borghar from which the surname Borgharkar (No. 23 in Appendix 5.I) may have been derived occur in Alibag and in Mangaon Tahsils. The closer Alibag village which is named by Tarankhopkar is to be preferred and it alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

6. A village named Borli occurs in Murud Tahsil—its name is given as Borlai by Kehimkar in his *History* and by some others—and villages named Borle occur in Panvel, Karjat, Shriwardhan and Mangaon Tahsils. The surname Borlekar (No. 24A in Appendix 5.I) or Borlaikar (No. 24B) could have been derived from any of these. The Panvel, Karjat and Mangaon villages are all remote and can be excluded from further consideration, leaving the Murud and Shriwardhan villages. Tarankhopkar does not list the surname and therefore provides no guidance. The Murud village is closely linked with the village Korlai which provides the surname Korlekar (No. 64) and both villages were served by a synagogue built in 1869. Borlai (Borli) was once a Portuguese Outpost on the Janjira State coast exactly opposite the Portuguese held port of Chaul across the creek. Until 1948 it

was administered from Alibag as it did not belong to Janjira State. The environs of Chaul contain several villages furnishing Bene Israel surnames. For these reasons the Murud village is to be preferred and it alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

7. The village Chinchawali and the village Chinchoti occur in Alibag Tahsil and the villages Chinchawali Tarf Atone and Chinchawali Tarf Diwali occur in Roha Tahsil. The surname Chincholkar (No. 29 in Appendix 5.I) could have been derived from any one of these. Tarankhopkar names a village Chinchawali in Roha Tahsil, but it still remains to be determined which of the two Chinchawalis in Roha was the one named by him. Again, the surname is closer in sound to Chinchoti than to Chinchawali, and Chinchoti has the additional advantage of being closer to the Navedar-Navagaon-Chaul area. If, however, Chinchawali is to be preferred, the Alibag village of that name also needs to be considered along with the two Roha villages. In the absence of more definite indications, the final selection must be left open, and all the villages have been included in Appendix 5.II.

8. Villages named Div from which the surname Divekar (No. 37 in Appendix 5.I) could have been derived occur in Pen and Roha Tahsils. Tarankhopkar names the Roha village. Kehimkar, however, mentions on p. 83 of his *History* a person named Bowaji residing at 'Diva in the Hubshi territory' (i.e. Janjira State) as reputed to be the 'founder' of the Divekar family. No village of the name Diva is to be found in the lists of the tahsils which before 1948 constituted the Janjira State. It is possible that, despite Kehimkar's tendency to describe the bearers of the same surname as a family, he was referring, not to the common ancestor of all Divekars, but to the ancestor of the particular family of Samuel Ezekiel Divekar who founded the first Bene Israel synagogue. It is also just possible that, as Div is situated on an islet in the Roha Creek which separates Roha and Murud Tahsils, Kehimkar wrongly assumed that Div was in Hubshi territory. Though, on the strength of Tarankhopkar's listing, the Roha village is to be preferred, the Pen village cannot be ruled out, and both have been included in Appendix 5.II.

9. The villages Gan Tarf Parhar and Gan Tarf Shrigaon occur in Alibag Tahsil and either of them could have been the source of the surname Ghanekar (No. 42 in Appendix 5.I). Tarankhopkar merely names Gan without further specification. The villages are very close and in 1971 they had populations of only 30 and 33 respectively. They may be combined as the joint source of the surname. They are both included in Appendix 5.II.

10. A village named Jawali occurs in Pen Tahsil and one with the name Javali in Mangaon Tahsil. The surname Jawalikar (No. 46 in Appendix 5.I) may have been derived from either. The Mangaon village is the more remote and Tarankhopkar names the Pen village which alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

11. Villages with the name Jite, from which the surname Jitekar (No. 48 in Appendix 5.I) could have been derived, occur in Pen and Mangaon Tahsils. As in item 10 above, the Pen village alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

12. Villages with the name Kandale from which the surname Kandlekar (No. 50 in Appendix 5.I) could have been derived, occur in Pen and Roha Tahsils. Though Tarankhopkar names the Pen village, the Roha village cannot be altogether ruled out and both have been included in Appendix 5.II.

13. Villages named Khanav occur in Alibag and Panvel Tahsils and a village named Khanaw in Khalapur Tahsil. The surname Khanavkar (No. 56 in Appendix 5.I) could have been derived from any one of them. The Khalapur village is very remote and may be ruled out. The Panvel village, though not so remote, may also be ruled out. Tarankhopkar places the village Khanav in Pen Tahsil but the official list contains no such village in that tahsil. The Alibag village is alone included in Appendix 5.II.

14. Three villages require to be considered as sources for the surname Kharilkar (No. 58A in Appendix 5.I) and the surname Kharvilkar (No. 58B) which may be variants of a single surname or may be separate surnames with different derivations. The villages are Khar Karavi in Pen Tahsil, Kharavali in Mangaon Tahsil and Kharivali in Khalapur Tahsil. As mentioned in the main article, the surname Kharvilkar has not been mentioned in any of the five sources from which our list of surnames has been drawn and

it may well be a variant of the surname Kharilkar mentioned in the sources. Tarankhopkar names a village Kharavli in Pen Tahsil, but the official list for that tahsil has no village with that name. It is possible that the Kharavli of Tarankhopkar is the same as Khar Karavi of the official list. It is also possible that the surname Kharilkar is derived from that village and the surname Kharvilkar from the village Kharavali in Mangaon Tahsil. Tarankhopkar may have wrongly assumed that the two surnames were variants of a single surname. The remote Khalapur village is, in any case, out of consideration. Both Khar Karavi in Pen Tahsil and Kharavali in Mangaon Tahsil are included in Appendix 5.II.

15. Villages named Kudgaon, from which the surname Kurgaonkar (No. 66 in Appendix 5.I) could have been derived occur in Shriwardhan and Mhasla Tahsils. Both tahsils being part of the former Janjira State, Tarankhopkar's list can provide no guidance, since he merely names the State. The Shriwardhan village, perhaps, has an edge over the Mhasla village, since it is the bigger of the two and, more important, is situated, with only a creek between, opposite villages in Murud Tahsil, from which surnames have been derived. Nothing more definite can, however, be said and both villages have been included in Appendix 5.II. Incidentally, this surname is a typical example of the Bene Israel idiosyncratic transformation of a 'd' into an 'r', Kurgaonkar instead of Kudgaonkar.

16. For the surname Malekar (No. 68 in Appendix 5.I) two possible villages have to be considered, Male in Karjat Tahsil and Mule in Alibag Tahsil. As mentioned in the main article, a third possibility is the hamlet Mala near Nagaon in Alibag Tahsil. Male in Karjat Tahsil may be ruled out as remote, so the choice is between the village Mule and the hamlet Mala in Alibag Tahsil. In favour of Mule is the mention in Kehimkar's *History* of the surname Mullekar in several places. On p. 188 for instance he says: 'It is, however, said that the ancestors of the Waskar and Mullekar families were successively appointed officers in charge of Avchitgad Fort situated near Roha, by the Peshwas.' The name Mulekar does not, however, appear in any

of the five sources on which we have drawn and the likelihood is that gradually Mulekar got transformed into Malekar. If this is so, the surname may be related to the village Mule rather than to the hamlet Mala. On the other hand, it is also possible that originally there were two surnames, one derived from the village and the other from the hamlet, and that in course of time the surname Mulekar got assimilated into the surname Malekar. As Mala is not mentioned in the official list of villages, Mule is alone included in Appendix 5.II.

17. The possible sources of the surname Mangaonkar (No. 71 in Appendix 5.I) mentioned in the *Israelite* list alone are the village Mangaon in Mangaon Tahsil and the villages named Mangaon Bhudruk and Mangaon Khurd in Sudhagad Tahsil. The Sudhagad villages are on the extreme eastern border of Kulaba District at a considerable distance from the area of settlement, so it is only the village in Mangaon Tahsil which need be considered. (The possibility that Mangaonkar is not a traditional surname proper has been considered in the main article.) The Mangaon village alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

18. The village Majgaon in Murud Tahsil and the village Mazgaon in Mangaon Tahsil are possible sources for the surname Mazgaonkar (No. 74 in Appendix 5.I). Tarankhopkar names the Murud village which alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

19. For the surname Medhekar (No. 75 in Appendix 5.I) the villages to be considered are Medhekhar in Alibag Tahsil, Medhe in Roha Tahsil and a village of the same name in Mangaon Tahsil. Tarankhopkar names the Mangaon village, but it is more distant than the Roha village of the same name. The Alibag village is somewhat doubtful as the surname to be derived from it should properly be Medhekharkar and not Medhekar, but this is not decisive since there are instances in which the terminal 'khar' in a village name has been suppressed in forming the surname. The matter must be left open and all three villages have been included in Appendix 5.II.

20. The village Morbe in Panvel Tahsil and the village Morba in Mangaon Tahsil are possible sources for the surname Mor-

bekar (No. 78 in Appendix 5.I). Tarankhopkar names the Mangaon village which alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

21. There are as many as five villages named Nagaon in Alibag, Mangaon, Sudhagad, Uran and Mahad Tahsils respectively from which the surname Nagavkar (No. 79 in Appendix 5.I) could have been derived. There can be little doubt that it is the Alibag village that provided the surname. All the others are remote and isolated. The Alibag village alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

22. For the surnames Nigadkar (No. 82 in Appendix 5.I) and Nigrekar (No. 83A) or Ningrekar (No. 83B) three villages require to be considered, viz. Nigade in Alibag Tahsil, Nigade in Pen Tahsil and Nigadi in Shriwardhan Tahsil. Tarankhopkar derives the surname Nigadkar from the Shriwardhan village of Nigadi and the surname Nigrekar or Ningrekar from the Pen village of Nigade. The Alibag village would ordinarily be the most likely source of all the surnames, being much nearer Navedar-Navagaon, but it is little more than a hamlet (1961 population 18 and 1971 population 60) whereas Nigadi in Pen Tahsil had a population of 534 in 1961 and 427 in 1971 and Nigadi in Shriwardhan Tahsil had a population of 942 in 1961 and 1,045 in 1971. Though recent population is not generally a decisive factor, Tarankhopkar must have had good reason for passing over the Alibag village in favour of the Pen and Shriwardhan villages. These alone have been included in Appendix 5.II.

23. The village Pali in Sudhagad Tahsil and the villages Pali Bhudruk and Pali Khurd in Khalapur Tahsil are possible sources for the surname Palkar (No. 87 in Appendix 5.I). Both Tarankhopkar and Ezekiel name the Sudhagad village which in all probability is to be preferred to the remote and isolated Khalapur villages. It alone is included in Appendix 5.II.

24. Two villages named Ramraj, one in Alibag Tahsil and the other in Pen Tahsil are possible sources for the surname Ramrajkar (No. 93 in Appendix 5.I). Though the Alibag village is named by Tarankhopkar, the Pen village cannot be altogether ruled out and both have been included in Appendix 5.II.

25. Two villages named Saigaon, one in Murud Tahsil and the other in Shriwardhan Tahsil, are possible sources for the surname Saigaonkar (No. 98 in Appendix 5.I). Tarankhopkar names Janjira State as the source and this could cover either of the villages since both tahsils are within the area of the former State. In 1971 the Shriwardhan village was the bigger but recent size is not the deciding factor and the matter must be left open. Both villages have been included in Appendix 5.II.

26. For the surname Talegaonkar (No. 110 in Appendix 5.I) there are two possible villages, both in Mangaon Tahsil, viz. Talegaon and Talegaon Tarf Goregaon. The former has been named by Tarankhopkar, is bigger and is closer to the area of original settlement. It has, therefore, been included in Appendix 5.II.

27. We now come to a set of five villages which are possible sources for the surnames Talhekar (No. 111 in Appendix 5.I) and Talkar (No. 112). Though they are listed by Tarankhopkar as separate names, they may be variants of the same surname, since Talhekar is not listed in the other four sources. The villages are Tala and Tarne Tarf Tale in Mangaon Tahsil, Tale and Talekhar in Murud Tahsil and Talekhar in Pen Tahsil. Tarankhopkar mentions Talhe in Mangaon Tahsil as the source of the surname Talhekar and Tal in Alibag Tahsil as the source of the surname Talkar. Neither of the villages named by him appear in the official lists of these tahsils. If the surname Talhekar is not merely a variant of Talkar, it may have been derived from the village Talekhar in Murud Tahsil which had a synagogue established in 1892. Talkar may have been derived from Tala in Mangaon Tahsil since there was a synagogue originally built as far back as 1849 in that tahsil at a place which Moses Ezekiel (himself a Talkar) names Taley-Ghosaley in his *History and Culture of the Bene Israel in India*. Actually, Ghosale is a village in Roha Tahsil and not in Mangaon Tahsil, though it is not far from Tala. The two villages have probably been linked together by the Bene Israel as the site of the synagogue because it served both. Tala may have become Tale in the joint name for the location of the synagogue. It is also significant that the village adjoining Tala is officially known as Tarne Tarf Tale, which means Tarne near Tale, suggesting that Tala and Tale are one and the same.

Of course, Tarne Tarf Tale cannot have been the source of the surname Talkar. Tala in Mangaon Tahsil and Tale and Talekhar in Murud Tahsil, have alone been included in Appendix 5.II.

28. There are three possible sources for the surname Vadhavkar (No. 116A in Appendix 5.I) or Wadhavkar (No. 116B), viz. Vadhav Bhudruk and Vadhav Khurd in Alibag Tahsil and Wadhaw in Pen Tahsil. Although the Alibag villages are much closer to Navedar-Navagaon the traditional landing-place, Tarankhopkar names the Pen village, which is much the largest. Perhaps he was influenced by the size, or he may have had some other special reason for departing from the principle of choosing the nearer village. As, however, recent size is not a determining factor, the matter must be left open. All three villages have, therefore, been listed in Appendix 5.II.

29. Villages named Walwati in Murud Tahsil and Walvati in Shriwardhan Tahsil, have to be considered to identify the source of the surname Walwatkar (No. 119 in Appendix 5.I). Tarankhopkar mentions Janjira State and thus provides no guidance for a choice between the two villages. Both have therefore been included in Appendix 5.II.

30. Two villages named Wadghar, one in Murud Tahsil and the other in Mangaon Tahsil, have to be considered as possible sources of the surname Wargharkar (No. 121 in Appendix 5.I). Tarankhopkar names the Murud village and family tradition also favours it. It alone has therefore been included in Appendix 5.II. This surname provides a further instance of the Bene Israel practice of substituting the 'r' sound for the 'd'.

31. Either of two villages named Waral, one in Mhasla Tahsil and the other in Mangaon Tahsil, may be the source of the surname Wahralkar (No. 122B in Appendix 5.I) or Warulkar (No. 122A). Tarankhopkar has listed each form of the surname as a separate surname, mentioning Wahral as the source of Wahralkar and Waral village as the source of Warulkar, both villages being in Janjira State. In none of the three tahsils which constituted the Janjira State is there a village with the name Wahral listed officially. The presumption is that the name given by

Tarankhopkar is a variant of Waral in Mhasla Tahsil. If so, the surname Wahralkar must be treated as a variant of the surname Warulkar. The Mangaon village need not be considered and the Mhasla village has alone been listed in Appendix 5.II.

32. Either of two villages named Washi, one in Pen Tahsil and the other in Roha Tahsil, may have been the source of the surname Waskar (No. 124 in Appendix 5.I). Though Tarankhopkar names the Pen village, the Roha village cannot be altogether ruled out and both have been included in Appendix 5.II.

33. For the surname Wavekar (No. 125 in Appendix 5.I) three possible villages have to be considered, viz. Wave (Nanegaon) in Pen Tahsil, Wave in Murud Tahsil and Wave in Mhasla Tahsil. Though Tarankhopkar names the Pen village, the Murud and Mhasla villages cannot be ruled out altogether, and all three villages have been included in Appendix 5.II.

B. DERIVATIONS OF SURNAMES REQUIRING EXAMINATION OR COMMENT

1. The surname Ashtivkar (No. 6B in Appendix 5.I) has been treated as a variant of the surname Ashtamkar (No. 6A in Appendix 5.I) since Tarankhopkar shows both as derived from the town Ashtami. There is, however, a village Ashta in Pen Tahsil which prima facie would have merited consideration as the source of the surname Ashtivkar were it not that it happens to be the source of another surname Ashtekar (No. 7 in Appendix 5.I).

2. The surname Asrekar (No. 8 in Appendix 5.I) is related by Tarankhopkar to a village in Karjat Tahsil which he names Asre. No village is officially listed with this name in this tahsil or, indeed, any other tahsil in Kulaba District. A village named Ase is, however, listed in Karjat Tahsil. Even if this is the village referred to by Tarankhopkar, it is situated in the extreme

north of the tahsil at a great distance from the area of Bene Israel settlement. Indeed, all attributions of Bene Israel surnames to villages in Karjat Tahsil must be viewed with great caution. Though the surname Asrekar is listed in Appendix 5.I as possibly identifiable with the village Ase in Karjat Tahsil, the village has not been listed in Appendix 5.II.

3. The surname Bhorupkar (No. 20 in Appendix 5.I) is derived by Tarankhopkar from a village named Bhorup in 'Pant Sachiv territory' (Bhor State). Kehimkar on p. 189 of his *History* mentions a fort in that territory named Bhorup of which the 'ancestors' of the Bhorupkars were said to be in charge. Part of Bhor State (the present Sudhagad Tahsil) was in 1948 incorporated in Kulaba District. No village named Bhorup is listed officially in Sudhagad. However, Sir Jadunath Sarkar in his *Shivaji and his times* mentions that in 1657 several fortresses in North Konkan, including 'Bhurup or Sudhagarh' fell to Shivaji (p. 55). And Ghera-Sudhagad is listed in the *Census Handbook* in Sudhagad Tahsil. (Ghera means surrounded by a wall). Though the name Bhorup seems to have disappeared, except in the surname, there can be little doubt that the surname came from what is now Ghera-Sudhagad.

4. The surname Dandulkar (No. 32A in Appendix 5.I) is shown as derived from the village Dandguri in Shriwardhan Tahsil on the authority of Tarankhopkar. Lord does not list this surname but instead lists the surname Dandgulkar (No. 32B) which is also mentioned by Kehimkar in his *History*. Ezekiel lists both surnames. Very likely, the original surname was Dandgulkar which some later curtailed to Dandulkar. In any case Dandgulkar is closer to Dandguri than Dandulkar, particularly if account is had of the tendency to replace the 'r' sound by the 'l' sound.

5. The surname Erulkar (No. 39A in Appendix 5.I) is attributed by Tarankhopkar to the village Yeral in Roha Tahsil. This attribution is confirmed by an earlier form of the surname, Yeralkar (No. 39B) which seems to have died out in recent years. The earlier form appears in old reports of a Bombay synagogue and in a list of subscribers for a book published in 1898. As in

the case of the surname Bamnolkar, which was formerly pronounced and written as Bamanolkar, Erulkar was formerly pronounced and written as Yeralkar.

6. The surname Ivalekar (No. 45 in Appendix 5.I), which is the same as Lord's Ewalekar, is shown by Tarankhopkar as derived from the village of Sai-Ivale in Mangaon Tahsil. The official list for this tahsil has the name of Sai alone, nor does the double name appear in the official list of any other tahsil. Presumably Ivale is a hamlet, wadi or pada forming part of the revenue village of Sai, which is listed in Appendix 5.II. The surname Yulekar (No. 142 in Appendix 5.I) listed by Lord and Ezekiel but not identifiable with any village in the official lists, could have been treated as a variant of the surname Ivalekar had not Lord listed separately the surname Ewalekar which is still closer to Ivalekar and is evidently identical with it. Yulekar has therefore been listed as a separate name.

7. The surnames Khulabkar, Kolabkar and Khulapkar (Nos. 59A, 59B and 59C in Appendix 5.I) have been treated as variants of a single name, as mentioned in the main article. Tarankhopkar derives the surname Khulabkar from Kulaba in Alibag Tahsil. While no village in this tahsil bears the name Kulaba, the island fort in the sea off Alibag does bear this name. The district derived its name from this fort, which was the headquarters of the Maratha admiral who was such a thorn in the side of the British operating from nearby Bombay. Kehimkar applies the name Kolaba at p. 182 of his *History* to Alibag town when he refers to the synagogue at Alibag 'otherwise called Angria's Kolaba'.

8. The surname Shirgaonkar (No. 105 in Appendix 5.I) is derived by Tarankhopkar from the village Shirgaon in Janjira State. The official lists of villages in Murud, Shriwardhan and Mhasla Tahsils contain no village with this name, but there is a village named Walke in Murud Tahsil which was stated in the 1961 *Census Handbook* to include Shirgaon. Presumably at one time Shirgaon existed as an independent village recognised as such, but was incorporated in Walke village some time before 1961. The incorporation must have been fairly recent in 1961, since it was considered necessary to mention that Walke included

Shirgaon. In 1971 this was no longer considered necessary. A village called Shirgaon exists in Alibag Tahsil, but in view of Tarankhopkar's identification of the surname with a village in Janjira State, Walke including Shirgaon has been included in Appendix 5.II. This case illustrates the difficulty which arises in trying to relate surnames which originated centuries ago with current names of villages officially recognised as such.

9. The surname Warwatnekar (No. 123 in Appendix 5.I) is attributed by Tarankhopkar to a village in Pen Tahsil named Warwatne. No village with this name is listed for that tahsil. but one called Warawatne is listed for Mhasla Tahsil. Though the Mhasla village is included in Appendixes 5.I and 5.II, the possibility exists that the source of the surname was indeed a place in Pen Tahsil which was once identifiable as Warwatne but which has since disappeared from official lists for some reason.

10. The surname Bandarkar (No. 126 in Appendix 5.I) is derived by Tarankhopkar from a village named Bandar in Pen Tahsil. Bandar means port in Marathi and, while the word appears in several places in maps of Kulaba District, no village with this name is listed for Pen or any other tahsil. A village Rave (No. 8 in the official list of villages in Pen Tahsil) is shown in a privately published map of about 1975 as Ravebandar. It is an inland port on the Apta Creek which separates Panvel Tahsil from Pen Tahsil. Possibly, Rave was known locally as Bandar and was the origin of the surname Bandarkar, but this is not sufficient reason for including it in Appendix 5.II.

11. The surname Bhonkar (No. 127 in Appendix 5.I) is derived by Tarankhopkar from a village named Bhon in Mangaon Tahsil. No village with this name is listed for that or any other tahsil. Mrs Brenda Joseph, who has inspected the records in the Alienation Office in Pune, has drawn the writer's attention to the villages of Bhonang and Bhond Kharosi which she came across in an 1881 list of Kulaba villages. In the 1961 *Census Handbook* these villages are listed in Alibag Tahsil, Bhonang with a population of 461 and Bhond Kharosi with a population of 13. Bhonang appears also in the 1971 *Census Handbook* with a population of 525, but Bhond Kharosi does not, evidently because it has since

1961 been incorporated in a neighbouring village. Apart from the fact that these two villages are nowhere near Mangaon Tahsil, in which Tarankhopkar located Bhon, neither of them is likely to be the source of the surname Bhonkar. Perhaps, like Bhond Kharosi in Alibag Tahsil, Bhon in Mangaon Tahsil ceased to exist some time between 1920 and 1961.

12. The surname Gadkar (No. 129 in Appendix 5.I) is derived by Tarankhopkar from Gad in Roha Tahsil. No village with this name is listed for that or any other tahsil. Gad means hill-fort in Marathi and there are several of these in Kulaba (the most famous being Raigad where the great Shivaji was crowned and from which the district gets its latest name). Tarankhopkar may, however, have been referring to Avchitgad Fort near Roha, vide item 16 in Section A of this Appendix. On the other hand, according to Kehimkar, a person with the surname Wadhavkar was appointed 'commandant at Sagadgud Fort in Alibag by the Angria' and his descendants acquired the name Gadkar (pp. 188-9 of his *History*). The *Census Handbook* lists a village named Sagargad in Alibag Tahsil. Kehimkar's attribution is much earlier than that of Tarankhopkar, but both may be mere conjectures. The matter must be left open.

13. The surname Satamkar (No. 133 in Appendix 5.I) is derived by Tarankhopkar from Satamba in Roha Tahsil. No village with this name is listed for that or any other tahsil. Mr Aaron D. Abraham (Satamkar) has told the writer that there is, in fact, a hamlet of that name on the outskirts of Roha town which he has visited. This is an instance of the disappearance of villages or the derivation of surnames from the names of hamlets officially treated as parts of villages with some other names.

14. As already pointed out, the surname Doodkar or Dootkar (No. 137 in Appendix 5.I) does not derive from the name of a village, and no village from which the surname could possibly be derived is to be found. In his *History* Kehimkar relates (p. 83) that a member of the Kamarlekar family (sic) who lived in Revdanda received the surname 'from the fact that his ancestors supplied the Government of Angria with dood or milk'. The surname is fairly common, and it is hardly likely that, if it was

acquired by a Kamarlekar family comparatively recently, the surname was inherited by so many families. Unless evidence is forthcoming of the alleged adoption of the surname by a Kamarlekar in the business of supplying milk, the possibility of its being, like all other surnames, derived from the name of a village which disappeared before regular surveys were introduced by the British cannot be ruled out.

6

Age of Marriage Among the Bene Israel: Some Statistics of 1881

In his *History of the Bene Israel of India*, written in 1897 but published only in 1937, H. S. Kehimkar wrote:

> The bitter experience of the evils that arise from the institution of early marriages, combined with the growing knowledge of their scriptures, have taught the Bene Israel to almost give up this pernicious institution. During the last 50 or 60 years we find few instances of this kind occurring and it is a gratifying circumstance to note that the institution of early marriage is fast disappearing from amongst us. No marriage as a rule now-a-days takes place unless the bridegroom is a youngman of twenty or twenty-two years old, and the bride be 14 or 15. The allegation made by the informant of the Bombay Gazetteer that amongst the Bene Israel 'a girl over whom 15 summers have scarcely passed is sometimes married to a man who has with difficulty survived the ravages of sixty winters, and an infant girl of eight years to a stout youngman of twenty', is a statement made without any basis of truth for the following reasons—
>
> Marriages among adults are common among the Bene Israel and hence grown up girls can very easily be found. Sometimes girls of twenty or twenty-one years old can also be found. Moreover as widow marriages have been habitually practised from the earliest times, many widows can also be found ... Notwithstanding all this, if one foolish person amongst the whole community acts otherwise, his action must not be taken as a test of the custom of the whole community. (pp 129-30)

The remarks to which Kehimkar took objection were not incorporated in any of the accounts of the Bene Israel which appeared in the three volumes of the *Bombay Gazetteer* published between the years 1883 and 1885, namely those for Pune District with the longest and most detailed account, Kulaba District (renamed Raigad District in 1982), the original Bene Israel homeland, and Thane District, with a considerable Bene Israel population in 1881. The remarks were actually contained in an article written by one Simeon Benjamin published in 1873.[1] Though no further information regarding the article and its place of publication is readily available, more particularly whether it was published officially as part of the source material for the *Gazetteers*, internal evidence shows that it was available to the compiler of the *Gazetteer* for Pune District, since several descriptions of Bene Israel customs in the *Gazetteer* closely follow those given in the article.

Evidence regarding the prevalence of child marriage and of unequal marriages at the time of the 1881 census which followed on the appearance of the remarks objected to by Kehimkar is to be found in the *Gazetteer* volumes for Kulaba and Pune Districts —Kulaba with an almost wholly rural Jewish population of 2,139 and Pune with an almost wholly urban Jewish population of 619. The Jewish population of Kulaba District in 1881 was wholly Bene Israel in character. In Pune there was a small number of Baghdadi Jews, but their presence can for practical purposes be ignored. In both cases, the *Gazetteer* volumes give statistics of the marital status of the Jewish population according to age groups based on the 1881 census. They give similar information regarding other communities. For our purposes, it would be relevant, in the case of Kulaba District, to compare the figures for the Bene Israel with those for the Hindus and the Muslims, so that it could be tested how far the practice of either or both of the major communities influenced that of the Bene Israel in an environment still comparatively untouched by the wave of modernisation which had affected urban areas. In the case of

[1] A typed copy of the article was lent to the writer by the late Mr I. I. Shapurkar.

Pune District, where the Bene Israel lived largely in a single big town, a comparison could usefully be made with the figures for the Parsee community numbering 1,577 which also was almost wholly urban in character.

Since 1881 the Kulaba District has been enlarged by the addition of areas taken from the neighbouring Thane and Pune Districts soon after the Gazetteers were published and by the absorption in 1948 of that portion of the Indian State of Bhor in which the Bene Israel were mainly to be found and the whole of the Indian State of Janjira. In 1881 the Bene Israel population of these areas could not have exceeded 1,400-500 in Janjira, 600 in Bhor, 300 in the transferred part of Thane District (Panvel Taluka and Uran Mahal) and a negligible number in the transferred part of Pune District (Karjat Taluka). It is also safe to presume that the population of these areas was largely rural, like that of the original Kulaba District, and that it shared the characteristics of that population.

Table 6.I at the end of this paper gives details of the marital status of the Bene Israel population of Kulaba District in 1881 according to six age-groups, separately for males and females. The percentages in each age-group falling in each category are given in brackets under the actual numbers. The table also gives in Section B for each age-group the sex ratio, i.e. the number of females for every 1,000 males. Table 6.II gives similar details in respect of the Jewish population of Pune in 1881, except that, while there is separate tabulation for the age-groups 20-24 and 25-29 for Kulaba District, there is only a single age-group 20-29 in Pune.

It will be seen from Table 6.I that in 1881 in Kulaba District 10 out of 366 girls below the age of 10 years were married. In the next age-group of 10-14, out of a total of 125 girls 40 were married, so that 50 girls in all out of a total of 491 (or 10.2 per cent) were married before the age of 15 years. In the case of the urban Bene Israel of Pune, only one girl out of a total of 125 under the age of 10 years and only 6 girls out of 43 in the age-group 10-14 were married, so that, out of a total of 168 girls, only 7 (or 4.2 per cent) were married before the age of 15 years.

This shows that, though a small number of girls were married unduly early by modern standards, the practice of child marriage had greatly declined as early as 1881 even in rural areas. And of the extremely few girls married by the age of 8 (some at least of the 11 girls married before the age of 10 must have been 9 plus) hardly any could have been married off to men of 20 years or above, as will be shown below. Therefore, the remark of the 'informant of the Bombay Gazetteer' about unequal marriages can only be taken as referring to something very unusual. What is really surprising is that in Kulaba District there were 5 boys below the age of 10 (out of a total of 305) and 11 boys below the age of 15 (out of a total of 115) who were married. Evidently, a number of fond mothers had made sure of the girls of their choice before they were grabbed by their rivals! These 16 boys must almost invariably have married girls younger than themselves (to marry an older girl would have been unthinkable), reducing the possibility of any girls of 8 being married off to grown men. It must also be remembered that child marriages were generally betrothals rather than marriages proper, since they did not involve cohabitation until after the wife attained puberty. In Pune, no boys below the age of 15 were married according to the 1881 census.

In Kulaba District the most popular age for marriage for women was apparently between 15 and 19, as 88.1 per cent of the 101 women in the age-group 15-19 were married, leaving only 9.9 per cent unmarried. In the case of Pune, 67.9 per cent of the 28 women in this age-group were married, showing that somewhat later marriage was coming into favour. In this age-group two widows appear in Kulaba District for the first time, but none in Pune. This again establishes that few of the young women were married off to elderly men, as there would have been more very young widows if such marriages had been common. But it may be conceded that the small number of young widows (2 out of a total of 592 females in Kulaba District below the age of 20 years and only 10 more between the ages of 20 and 29 years; in Pune none below the age of 20 and only 3 between the ages of 20 and 29) may be due to the re-marriage of young widows. It is well known that few Bene Israel widows re-married unless they were

widowed before the marriage was consummated or they were young and childless. As Kehimkar says in his *History:* 'Bene Israel women feel it to be very immodest to live with another husband after they have once been married. Re-marriage is generally brought about only after the greatest amount of persuasion on the part of the parents and relatives of the widow who is to be re-married.' (p. 109)

The break-down of the 458 unmarried females in Kulaba District and the 172 unmarried females in Pune; the break-down of the 527 married females in Kulaba District and the 119 married females in Pune according to age-groups; and the break-down of the 196 widows in Kulaba District and 38 widows in Pune according to age-groups are presented in Tables A, B and C.

TABLE A

UNMARRIED JEWISH FEMALES, KULABA DISTRICT AND PUNE CITY, 1881

Age-group	*Kulaba District*		*Pune*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Under 10 years	356	77.7	124	72.1
10 to 14 years	85	18.5	37	21.5
15 to 19 years	10	2.2	9	5.2
20 to 24 years	3	0.7	2	1.2
25 to 29 years	—	0.0		
30 years and over	4	0.9	—	0.0

TABLE B

MARRIED JEWISH FEMALES, KULABA DISTRICT AND PUNE CITY, 1881

Age-group	*Kulaba District*		*Pune*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Under 10 years	10	1.9	1	0.8
10 to 14 years	40	7.6	6	5.1
15 to 19 years	89	16.9	19	16.0
20 to 24 years	88	16.7	33	27.7
25 to 29 years	78	14.8		
30 years and over	222	42.1	60	50.4

TABLE C

JEWISH WIDOWS, KULABA DISTRICT AND PUNE CITY, 1881

Age-group	*Kulaba District*		*Pune*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Under 10 years	—	0.0	—	0.0
10 to 14 years	—	0.0	—	0.0
15 to 19 years	2	1.0	—	0.0
20 to 24 years	4	2.0	3	7.9
25 to 29 years	6	3.1		
30 years and over	184	93.9	35	92.1

In Kulaba District as many as 21 males out of a total of 67 in the age-group 15-19 were married, making a total of 37 married males below the age of 20 (out of 487). In Pune 6 males out of a total of 35 in the age group 15-19 were married. Probably the majority of these were above 17 years of age. In the next age-group of 20-24 in Kulaba District as many as 73.8 per cent were married, so that Kehimkar's statement that the most popular age for marriage of males was 20 to 22 years seems to be correct for that district at least. In Pune there was no separate tabulation for the age-group 20-24 but this statement may equally apply to the city, since for the combined age-group 20-29, 21 out of 30 men were married, or 70 per cent. Perhaps the most popular age for marriage in Pune was nearer 22 than 20, with a somewhat bigger spillover above 22. For both areas it may safely be asserted that marriage by the age of 20 for women and 25 for men was almost universal. The extremely small number of widowers below the age of 30 years (5 in the case of Kulaba District and 2 in the case of Pune) indicates that men who were widowed early usually re-married.

It would appear from the tables that generally men married about five years later than women, which accounts for the fact that, up to the age of 30 years, there were more married women than men in each age-group. After the age of 30 the position was reversed in Kulaba District and there were more married men than married women, showing that in many cases the wives

of the men in this age-group were enumerated in the lower age-groups. In Pune there was still a slight preponderance of married men, but the gap was considerably narrowed. That the men were generally substantially older than their wives is also seen from the fact that in the age-group of 30 years and over as many as 44.9 per cent of the women in Kulaba District and 36.8 per cent in Pune were widows. This also shows that, except for very young and childless widows, the re-marriage of widows was rare.

The tables give no indication of the extent of polygyny, though it is well known that a childless first marriage often in the past led to a bigamous second marriage rather than the divorce of the barren wife, which was fairly common among Jews in other parts of the world. Thus, Kehimkar in his *History* says: If a man obtains no issue by his first marriage, he commonly marries a second time, but some people re-marry without any cause. Provision for the maintenance and clothing etc. of the first wife is made whenever a Bene-Israel marries a second one ... if both wives do not live harmoniously with each other.' (p. 108).

The break-down of the 484 unmarried males in Kulaba District and the 186 unmarried males in Pune according to age-groups; the break-down of the 437 married males in Kulaba District and 93 married males in Pune according to age-groups; and the break-down of the 37 widowers in Kulaba District and the 11 widowers in Pune according to age-groups are presented in Tables D, E and F.

TABLE D

UNMARRIED MALES IN KULABA DISTRICT AND PUNE CITY, 1881

Age-group	*Kulaba District*		*Pune*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Under 10 years	300	62.0	105	56.4
10 to 14 years	103	21.3	41	22.0
15 to 19 years	45	9.3	29	15.6
20 to 24 years	14	2.9	7	3.8
25 to 29 years	9	1.8		
30 years and over	13	2.7	4	2.2

TABLE E

MARRIED MALES IN KULABA DISTRICT AND PUNE CITY, 1881

Age-group	*Kulaba District*		*Pune*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Under 10 years	5	1.1	—	0.0
10 to 14 years	11	2.5	—	0.0
15 to 19 years	21	4.8	6	6.4
20 to 24 years	45	10.3	21	22.6
25 to 29 years	72	16.5		
30 years and over	283	64.8	66	71.0

TABLE F

WIDOWERS IN KULABA DISTRICT AND PUNE CITY, 1881

Age-group	*Kulaba District*		*Pune*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Under 10 years	—	0.0	—	0.0
10 to 14 years	1	2.7	—	0.0
15 to 19 years	1	2.7	—	0.0
20 to 24 years	2	5.4	2	18.2
25 to 29 years	1	2.7		
30 years and over	32	86.5	9	81.8

Tables 6.III and 6.IV at the end of this paper give information as in Table 6.I in respect of the Hindu and Muslim population of the Kulaba District in 1881. Table 6.V gives similar information in respect of the Parsee population of Pune in the same year.

A comparison of Tables 6.I, 6.III and 6.IV will show that there was a closer approximation between the Bene Israel and the Muslims in Kulaba District than between the Bene Israel and the Hindus, establishing, as the present writer has always maintained, that the social mores of the Muslims had a greater influence over the Bene Israel than those of the Hindus, more particularly the lower castes among the Hindus.

Whereas by the age of 10 years only 2.7 per cent of Bene Israel girls were married, by that age 6.56 per cent of Muslim girls and 11.8 per cent of Hindu girls were married. In the next age-group of 10-14, 32 per cent of Bene Israel girls were married against 35.2 per cent of Muslim girls and as many as 73.6 per cent of Hindu girls. And among the Hindus another 2.7 per cent were already widowed, taking the percentage of married girls even higher. This shows that, up to the age of 15 years, marriage was somewhat later among the Bene Israel than among the Muslims, and much later than among the Hindus. In the age-group 15-19, whereas 88.1 per cent of Bene Israel women were married and 9.9 per cent still remained unmarried, 92.6 per cent of Hindu women were married and only 3.5 per cent remained unmarried. Among Muslims, the corresponding percentages were 80.7 per cent married and 15.9 per cent unmarried, showing that, while up to the age of 15 years Muslims had a higher percentage of married females, in the age-group of 15-19 the percentage fell below that of the Bene Israel. Perhaps the Muslims were not so concerned about early marriage as the Bene Israel once a girl was not married off by the critical age of 15.

As regards males, the tables show a much earlier age for marriage for Hindus than for the Bene Israel, and a close approximation between the Bene Israel and the Muslims up to the age of 19 years. From 20 years on, a greater percentage of Muslim males remained unmarried, due probably to the lower ratio of women to men among Muslims and perhaps greater prevalence of polygyny among the Muslims.

The greatest difference is in regard to the number of widows. Among the Hindus the percentage of widows was higher at every stage than among the Bene Israel and the Muslims, the effect both of earlier marriages and the absence of re-marriage of widows in the higher Hindu castes. Curiously the percentage of widows among the Muslims was slightly higher than that among the Bene Israel, whereas one would have expected, with freer re-marriage of widows, the position would have been the other way round.

So far as widowers are concerned, there was no significant difference in the percentages, except for the age-group 20-24, in

which as many as 3.3 per cent of the Bene Israel men were widowed, as against only 1.8 per cent of Hindu men and 1.5 per cent of Muslim men in the same age-group. The explanation probably lies in the fact that this was the age-group in which most Bene Israel men were first married and were most prone to lose their wives in the first child-birth, whereas Hindus tended to marry earlier and Muslims somewhat later.

Turning to Tables 6.II and 6.V relating respectively to the Jewish and Parsee populations of Pune, the figures show that Parsee males married somewhat earlier than Jewish males. Up to the age of 15 years not a single Jewish male was married, whereas 9 Parsee males were married up to that age. In the age-group of 15-19, 23.8 per cent of Parsee males were married, against only 17.1 per cent Jewish males. But in the case of females, Jewish females were married somewhat earlier than Parsee females. In the age-group of 10-14, 14.0 per cent of Jewish females were married against only 12.5 per cent of Parsee females and in the next age-group of 15-19, the difference is even more significant: 67.9 per cent of Jewish females against 53.7 per cent of Parsee females. Slightly more Parsee females than Jewish remained spinsters and significantly more Parsee males than Jewish remained bachelors beyond the age of 20. Thus, though Parsee males married earlier than Jewish males, proportionately more remained unmarried in the age-group 20-29. Why this was so is difficult to explain, since the position righted itself in the next age-group of 30 years and over. No significant difference is seen in the incidence of widowhood, and Parsee widows seemed as reluctant to re-marry after the age of 30 as Bene Israel widows.

Table G gives the percentages of unmarried, married and widowed males and females in each group. It will be seen that the Jews of Pune had the highest percentage of unmarried males, followed by the Parsees of Pune, the Muslims of Kulaba District, the Bene Israel of Kulaba District and the Hindus of Kulaba District in that order. In the case of females, the highest percentage of unmarried females was again among the Jews of Pune, followed, in that order, by the Parsees of Pune, the Bene

Israel of Kulaba District, the Muslims of Kulaba District and the Hindus of Kulaba District.

TABLE G

UNMARRIED, MARRIED AND WIDOWED MALES AND FEMALES IN KULABA DISTRICT AND PUNE CITY, 1881

Group	*Percentage*					
	Unmarried		*Married*		*Widowed*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Jews of Pune	64.1	52.3	32.1	36.2	3.8	11.5
Bene Israel of Kulaba District	50.5	38.8	45.6	44.6	3.9	16.6
Parsees of Pune	53.6	44.6	42.0	44.3	4.4	11.1
Muslims of Kulaba Dist.	50.6	34.0	44.9	47.2	4.5	18.8
Hindus of Kulaba Dist.	48.0	29.7	48.0	51.0	4.0	19.3

The data regarding the sex ratio in the tables is interesting in that it shows that in the case of the Bene Israel there was at all stages an excess of females over males, except, in the case of Pune, for the age-group 15-19. This was unlike the general situation in India where, on account of lesser care of girl babies, early marriages and high maternal mortality, particularly at the first child-birth, there has generally been an excess of males over females, except in some rural areas providing migrant male labour to industrial cities. And, in this respect, the Bene Israel population of Kulaba District in 1881 also differed from the Hindu and Muslim population of that district. In the case of the Hindus, the number of males exceeded that of females except between the ages of 20 and 25 and, to a slight extent above the age of 30. This may be explained by the temporary migration of adult males outside the district for employment—a phenomenon which in 1881 apparently did not affect the Bene Israel population to the same extent, since the Bene Israel tended to take their wives with them. In the case of the Muslims, the number of males exceeded that of females up to the age of 15 years, and in the total population. After the age of 15, there was a slight preponderance of females, probably due to migration of males with-

out their families. However Table 6.I does show that in Kulaba District the excess of females among the Bene Israel in the age-groups 15-19 and 20-24 was greater than that in the other age-groups or in the total. This was probably due to the temporary absence of Bene Israel youths in Bombay owing to the meagre facilities which then existed in the Kulaba District for secondary and higher education—a deficiency particularly noted in the *Gazetteer* of 1883, which states that many of the higher castes sent their boys outside the district for education. In the case of Pune, the excess of males over females in the age-group 15-19 maye be due to the influx of male students in Pune schools from Kulaba District. A comparison of the Pune figures for the Jews with those for the Parsees shows that the Parsees follow the normal Indian pattern of the preponderance of males over females in urban areas, showing that the Jewish population tended to be permanent residents, whereas many of the Parsees may have been traders or businessmen who had left their families in Bombay or other centres of permanent domicile.

The above analysis seems to establish that among the Bene Israel, even in rural areas, child marriages had in 1881 practically disappeared and that great disparities in age were uncommon. It is also established that marriage was almost universal among the Bene Israel, there being very few bachelors and hardly any spinsters. But after the age of 30, the number of widows rose sharply and was perhaps much higher than would be found in Jewish communities elsewhere, even in the Orient. This evidently reflected the influence of the custom of the higher Hindu castes, an influence which affected the Muslims and Parsees as well. Though the evidence is insufficient, there seems to have been no extensive polygyny among the Bene Israel, even as far back as 1881.

TABLE 6.I

BENE ISRAEL POPULATION OF KULABA DISTRICT, 1881

A. MARRIAGE DETAILS

(Figures in parentheses are percentages)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Under 10 years				
Male	300	5	—	305
	(98.4)	(1.6)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Female	356	10	—	366
	(97.3)	(2.7)	(0 0)	(100.0)
10 to 14 years				
Male	103	11	1	115
	(89.5)	(9.6)	(0.9)	(100.0)
Female	85	40	—	125
	(68.0)	(32.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
15 to 19 years				
Male	45	21	1	67
	(67.2)	(31.3)	(1.5)	(100.0)
Female	10	89	2	101
	(9.9)	(88 1)	(2 0)	(100.0)
20 to 24 years				
Male	14	45	2	61
	(22 9)	(73.8)	(3.3)	(100.0)
Female	3	88	4	95
	(3.2)	(92 6)	(4.2)	(100.0)
25 to 29 years				
Male	9	72	1	82
	(11.0)	(87.8)	(1.2)	(100.0)
Female	—	78	6	84
	(0 0)	(92.9)	(7.1)	(100.0)
30 years & over				
Male	13	283	32	328
	(4 0)	(86 3)	(9.7)	(100.0)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Female	4	222	184	410
	(1.0)	(54.1)	(44 9)	(100.0)
Total				
Male	484	437	37	958
	(50.5)	(45.6)	(3.9)	(100 0)
Female	458	527	196	1,181
	(38.8)	(44.6)	(16.6)	(100.0)

B. SEX RATIO

(Number of females to every 1,000 males)

Age group	*Sex ratio*
Under 10 years	1167
10 to 14 years	1087
15 to 19 years	1507
20 to 24 years	1557
25 to 29 years	1024
30 years and over	1249
Total	1233

TABLE 6.II

JEWISH POPULATION OF PUNE CITY, 1881

A. MARRIAGE DETAILS

(Figures in parentheses are percentages)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Under 10 years				
Male	105	—	—	105
	(100.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Female	124	1	—	125
	(99.2)	(0.8)	(0.0)	(100.0)
10 to 14 years				
Male	41	—	—	41
	(100.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Female	37	6	—	43
	(86.0)	(14.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
15 to 19 years				
Male	29	6	—	35
	(82.9)	(17.1)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Female	9	19	—	28
	(32.1)	(67.9)	(0.0)	(100.0)
20 to 29 years				
Male	7	21	2	30
	(23.3)	(70.0)	(6.7)	(100.0)
Female	2	33	3	38
	(5.3)	(86.8)	(7.9)	(100.0)
30 years & over				
Male	4	66	9	79
	(5.1)	(83.5)	(11.4)	(100.0)
Female	—	60	35	95
	(0.0)	(63.2)	(36.8)	(100.0)
Total				
Male	186	93	11	290
	(64.1)	(32.1)	(3.8)	(100.0)
Female	172	119	38	329
	(52.3)	(36.2)	(11.5)	(100.0)

B. SEX RATIO

(Number of females to every 1,000 males)

Age group	*Sex ratio*
Under 10 years	1190
10 to 14 years	1049
15 to 19 years	800
20 to 29 years	1267
30 years and over	1203
Total	1134

TABLE 6.III

HINDU POPULATION OF KULABA DISTRICT, 1881

A. MARRIAGE DETAILS

(Figures in parentheses are percentages)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Under 10 years				
Male	56,395	992	26	57,413
	(98.2)	(1.7)	(0.1)	(100.0)
Female	48,525	6,508	141	55,174
	(87.9)	(11.8)	(0.3)	(100.0)
10 to 14 years				
Male	16,567	3,385	102	20,054
	(82.6)	(16.9)	(0.5)	(100.0)
Female	3,686	11,425	424	15,535
	(23.7)	(73.6)	(2.7)	(100.0)
15 to 19 years				
Male	7,466	6,457	132	14,055
	(53.1)	(46.0)	(0.9)	(100.0)
Female	490	12,989	554	14,033
	(3.5)	(92.6)	(3.9)	(100.0)
20 to 24 years				
Male	3,355	9,236	228	12,819
	(26.2)	(72.0)	(1.8)	(100.0)
Female	158	14,294	969	15,421
	(1.0)	(92.7)	(6.3)	(100.0)
25 to 29 years				
Male	1,723	15,225	496	17,444
	(9.9)	(87.3)	(2.8)	(100.0)
Female	133	15,314	1,896	17,343
	(0.8)	(88.3)	(10.9)	(100.0)
30 years & over				
Male	1,880	51,964	6,229	60,073
	(3.1)	(86.5)	(10.4)	(100.0)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Female	222	31,058	30,634	61,914
	(0.4)	(50.1)	(49.5)	(100.0)
Total				
Male	87,386	87,259	7,213	1,81,858
	(48.0)	(48.0)	(4.0)	(100.0)
Female	53,214	91,588	34,618	1,79,420
	(29.7)	(51.0)	(19.3)	(100.0)

B. SEX RATIO

(Number of females to every 1,000 males)

Age group	*Sex ratio*
Under 10 years	961
10 to 14 years	775
15 to 19 years	998
20 to 24 years	1203
25 to 29 years	988
30 years & over	1031
Total	987

TABLE 6.IV

MUSLIM POPULATION OF KULABA DISTRICT, 1881

A. MARRIAGE DETAILS

(Figures in parentheses are percentages)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Under 10 years				
Male	2,445	45	1	2,491
	(98.16)	(1.8)	(0.04)	(100.0)
Female	2,308	162	1	2,471
	(93.4)	(6.56)	(0.04)	(100.0)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
10 to 14 years				
Male	994	116	5	1,115
	(89.1)	(10.4)	(0.5)	(100.0)
Female	551	304	9	864
	(63.8)	(35.2)	(1.0)	(100.0)
15 to 19 years				
Male	465	209	8	682
	(68.2)	(30.6)	(1.2)	(100.0)
Female	110	559	24	693
	(15.9)	(80.7)	(3.4)	(100.0)
20 to 24 years				
Male	263	344	9	616
	(42.7)	(55.8)	(1.5)	(100.0)
Female	19	711	44	774
	(2.4)	(91.9)	(5.7)	(100.0)
25 to 29 years				
Male	153	616	22	791
	(19.3)	(77.9)	(2.8)	(100.0)
Female	18	760	75	853
	(2.1)	(89.1)	(8.8)	(100.0)
30 years & over				
Male	213	2,687	357	3,257
	(6.5)	(82.5)	(11.0)	(100.0)
Female	36	1,724	1,524	3,284
	(1.1)	(52.5)	(46.4)	(100.0)
Total				
Male	4,533	4,017	402	8,952
	(50.6)	(44.9)	(4.5)	(100.0)
Female	3,042	4,220	1,677	8,939
	(34.0)	(47.2)	(18.8)	(100.0)

B. SEX RATIO

(Number of females to every 1,000 males)

Age group	*Sex ratio*
Under 10 years	991
10 to 14 years	775
15 to 19 years	1016
20 to 24 years	1094
25 to 29 years	1078
30 years & over	1008
Total	998

TABLE 6. V

PARSEE POPULATION OF PUNE CITY, 1881

A. MARRIAGE DETAILS

(Figures in parentheses are percentages)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Under 10 years				
Male	208	2	—	210
	(99.0)	(1.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Female	198	1	—	199
	(99.5)	(0.5)	(0.0)	(100.0)
10 to 14 years				
Male	108	7	—	115
	(93.9)	(6.1)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Female	77	11	—	88
	(87.5)	(12.5)	(0.0)	(100.0)
15 to 19 years				
Male	77	24	—	101
	(76.2)	(23.8)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Female	35	43	2	80
	(43.8)	(53.7)	(2.5)	(100.0)
20 to 29 years				
Male	57	79	1	137
	(41.6)	(57.7)	(0.7)	(100.0)

Age group & sex	*Unmarried*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Total*
Female	7	92	4	103
	(6.8)	(89.3)	(3.9)	(100.0)
30 years & over				
Male	13	251	37	301
	(4.3)	(83.4)	(12.3)	(100.0)
Female	1	169	73	243
	(0.4)	(69.5)	(30.1)	(100.0)
Total				
Male	463	363	38	864
	(53.6)	(42.0)	(4.4)	(100.0)
Female	318	316	79	713
	(44.6)	(44.3)	(11.1)	(100.0)

B. SEX RATIO

(Number of females to every 1,000 males)

Age group	*Sex ratio*
Under 10 years	948
10 to 14 years	765
15 to 19 years	792
20 to 29 years	753
30 years & over	807
Total	825

7

Khan Bahadur Jacob Bapuji Israel
A Personal Sketch[1]

I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants,
and my blessing on your offspring.
They shall spring up like grass amid waters,
like willows by flowing streams.
This one will say, 'I am the Lord's',
another will call himself by the name of Jacob,
And another will write on his hand, 'The Lord's'
and surname himself by the name of Israel.

—Isaiah, Ch. 44, vs. 3-5

My father's family appears to have belonged to the village of Wadghar which lies near the town of Murud in the former Indian State of Janjira, and, therefore, bore the surname of Wargharkar. The village was not inhabited when one of my sisters visited it in about 1940 and it could never have been anything but a poor hamlet. (In 1951 it was still uninhabited but by 1961 it had gained 76 inhabitants; by 1971 the number had fallen to 10.) When my father's family left Wadghar is not known. All that is known is that, late in the eighteenth century, three brothers bearing this surname were serving in the East India Company's army at Bombay. They all rose to the rank of Subedar, and after retirement are believed to have settled in Bombay. Two of them are mentioned in Haeem Samuel Kehimkar's *History of*

[1] To this sketch of my father, I have appended fairly extensive extracts from accounts of his father, mother and grandmother which he published in the *Israelite*. They have been translated from the original Marathi. Though I have used what my father wrote in preparing my own account and there will be found to be some overlapping, I have added the extracts as they throw considerable light on my father himself.

the Bene Israel of India among Bene Israel officers who fought in the Second Mysore War. Tradition has it that they had considerable landed property on Samuel Street in Bombay but that this property was sold in the next generation for a trifling sum. One of the three brothers died childless. Another had a daughter who seems to have died young. The eldest had two sons who both in their turn enlisted in the East India Company's army. The younger son named Satkelji retired as a Havaldar and died childless in Bombay in poverty. The elder son named Abraham rose to be Havaldar Major and went to China, apparently in connection with the troubles preceding the outbreak in 1839 of the First Opium War. He did not return to India. Whether he died or remained behind when the troops returned is not known. Abraham had two sons; the first named Isaac took medical training and became a hospital assistant; the second who was born in 1819 at Malwan in the Ratnagiri District (which had just come under the rule of the East India Company) was my grandfather. He was named Ezekiel, but from early youth he was known as Bapu, and he enlisted in 1837 in the 4th Rifles Regiment under the name of Bapuji Israel.

The surname 'Israel' was commonly used in official records for Bene Israel personnel in the armed forces. My grandfather used the surname even after leaving the army, but for a time his sons did not use it. My father's B.A. diploma gives his name as 'Jacob Babuji Vargharkar'. He and his brother were in the earlier years of their service known as 'Jacob Bapuji' and 'Shalom Bapuji'. My father used to say that they resumed the use of the surname 'Israel' in order to avoid being confused with Indian Christians. But the shorter names stuck and, even today, they are more easily recognised by these names than by the surname in several circles.

The two brothers, Isaac and Ezekiel, were on the death of their uncle, Satkelji, the only known Wargharkars in the Bene Israel community. The likelihood is that a single family originally bearing some other name had migrated to Wadghar village and come to be known by the name of that village, though a family tradition attributes the scarcity of Wargharkars to a curse put

upon them by a woman who had married into the family and had been illtreated.

Another tradition is that members of the family were in the service of Kanoji Angria, the famous admiral of the Maratha Empire who, late in the seventeenth and early in the eighteenth century, proved such a serious threat to the hold of the East India Company on Bombay City and its trade. It is not unlikely that, just as, at a later date, the Bene Israel who migrated to Bombay City enlisted in the armies of the East India Company, members of the community served earlier in the forces of the Angrias, since they, along with the Mughal naval commander, the Sidi of Janjira, for a considerable time ruled over the greater part of the Kulaba District. If, however, any Wargharkars did serve Angria, it must have been before they moved to Wadghar in the Sidi's territories and assumed this name. I mention the tradition only because it appealed to my father, who liked to believe that the Wargharkars had a head-strong wayward and adventurous streak in their composition.

My grandfather Bapuji (or Ezekiel) was barely 18 years of age when he enlisted. Even prior to that, he appears to have served in his regiment as a boy recruit. Within ten years he was commissioned as an officer and in another nine years he had become Subedar. He was unable to reach the highest rank open to Indians, that of Subedar Major, because he was compelled to retire prematurely from the army in 1859 on account of the loss of all his teeth. For several years after retirement he served with distinction in the Police in the Ahmednagar District.

My grandfather had seen active service in the Second Sikh War and the Persian campaign. There is no record of his regiment being affected by the Indian Mutiny in 1857. His early retirement from the army was to prove of indirect benefit to his sons, as he was able, on settlement at Ahmednagar, to give close personal attention to their education. When serving in the Police, he refused promotion because it would involve his transfer from Ahmednagar and interfere with the schooling of his sons.

My grandfather had a very poor education, but, though he could never read and write English, he had acquired considerable knowledge of men and affairs and had come to have a very great regard for higher education, which was remarkable, considering his environment.

Though my grandfather had fourteen children, only eight survived infancy (three sons and five daughters, of whom one son died at the age of twenty). My father was fifth among the surviving children and was born at Ahmednagar on 13 February 1863. My grandfather appears to have been a strict, even harsh, disciplinarian. One of his certificates speaks of him as 'one of the best native drills in the Army'. He had a quick temper, but with it went a strong sense of justice and fair play. He was, perhaps, too authoritarian and solemn to be altogether lovable to my father, who was high spirited and full of fun, but he had in full measure my father's respect and admiration. From him my father learned to love justice and, in his official career, to be scrupulously honest despite the most enticing temptations. Perhaps, it was from him also that my father derived his fundamentalist faith. According to my father, my grandfather, while careless of ritual, strictly observed the basic principles of Judaism. His observance of the Sabbath was particularly strict, and the hookah, of which he was very fond, was not touched on that day. This however, had its drawback. By the evening my grandfather's temper grew shorter and shorter, and the slightest cause for annoyance produced an exaggerated explosion. My father, too, lived by a simple faith in the loving mercy of God, in good deeds rather than ceremonial and ritual, in the literal truth of the Bible and, most of all, in the central truth of monotheism. Anything that savoured of idolatry enraged him, and that is why, while he admired the Christian missionaries, he regarded Islam, rather than Christianity, to be the closest approximation to Judaism. That is why also, although he had many Hindu friends, he was perhaps unable to appreciate the subtleties of philosophical Hinduism and Buddhism and saw in Hindu beliefs and practices a serious danger to the purity of monotheism.

To his mother, who had a tender sympathy for anyone in pain or difficulty, whether in her own family circle or outside, my father gave his entire heart. She was his protector from the anger of his father, and often drew upon herself the blame which would otherwise have fallen on my father, as indeed she did for others as well. The comparatively early death of his mother in 1887, when he was only 24 years of age, caused him deep distress. It was touching for those who watched by his deathbed more than forty-five years later to hear him in delirium return to the days of his childhood and address his mother as if she were present by his side.

From both parents my father inherited a love for gardening and for cattle and poultry. From his mother he inherited a capacity for entering into the thoughts and interests of the common man.

Like his brothers, my father had his schooling in the Government High School at Ahmednagar. His eldest brother, Shalom, was ten years his senior and studied up to the matriculation. His teachers, who were mostly Brahmin, used to resent his study of Sanskrit, and their constant discouragement affected his performance in the matriculation examination. He was, however, to show his true ability in his subsequent career. By sheer merit he rose rapidly to be a Deputy Collector in the Revenue Department. He had such a mastery over his work that young civilians used to be placed under him for training on arrival in India. Sir Janardan Madan, who was a distinguished civil servant, once told me that he learned all he knew about land revenue law and procedure from Shalom Bapuji. For more than five years he was Dewan of Janjira State and, though he left the State in 1896 or so, his name was still on the lips of the people forty years later as an innovator and reformer.

It was perhaps my uncle's sad experience in school that led my grandfather to agitate for the introduction in the school curriculum of Urdu and Persian as alternative subjects which non-Hindu students could offer in place of Marathi and Sanskrit. He was

successful and the two younger sons got the benefit. My second uncle, Hyam, passed the matriculation and joined the Elphinstone College in Bombay. He, however, contracted tuberculosis and died in 1880 before graduating.

My father seems to have had a better time in school than my eldest uncle, but he too seems to have encountered considerable prejudice on the part of Brahmin masters who still harboured the belief that book learning was the divine privilege of Brahmins and that to impart such learning to non-Brahmins almost amounted to sacrilege. This left a permanent impression on my father's mind, and he made it his business to counter Brahmin pretensions and to promote, in whatever way he could, the interests of the so-called lower classes.

While at school my father seems to have fared poorly in mathematics, which he feared, but brilliantly in languages. In particular, he mastered both Persian and Urdu. Persons competent to judge have testified to his deep and intimate knowledge of the two languages. In later years his mastery of Urdu was to prove of considerable benefit to the ruling family of Aundh State on whose behalf he conducted delicate negotiations in Hyderabad State with very highly placed officials. Persian was to be his special subject at the B.A. and he won a scholarship at the Elphinstone College for proficiency in that language. To the end of his life he retained his hold on the language. Quotation after quotation from the Persian classics would flow from his lips, and he took, and gave, delight in speaking Persian to Iranian restaurant keepers and Persian gypsies.

My father had a gift for, and a desire to learn, languages. In addition to English, Marathi, Persian and Urdu, he knew Gujarati fairly well and enough Kannada to make himself understood in that language. Hebrew, however, he did not learn, perhaps because he had taken a dislike in early childhood to the manner in which it was taught. After retirement he made desultory attempts now and then to learn Hebrew but his other preoccupations did not allow him to give sufficient attention to its study. But he more than once urged the importance of learning Hebrew as a living language and he was very pleased to see, when he visited the Sir

Elly Kadoorie School about eight years before his death, that Miss R. Reuben had introduced this method in the school. Curiously enough, none of his children inherited his interest in languages, nor, with possibly one exception, his facility in picking up new languages.

After matriculation my father joined the Wilson College in Bombay. While there, he was much troubled by repeated bouts of fever and he thought of migrating to the Deccan College in Pune. He was, however, dissuaded from doing so by the Principal of the Wilson College, Dr D. Mackichan, who took a personal and affectionate interest in him. Later, however, Dr Mackichan raised no objection to my father's transfer to the Elphinstone College when he wished to take advantage of the teaching of the celebrated Professor Mirza Hairat. At the Elphinstone College my father must have been the contemporary of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Chimanlal Setalvad, but apparently there was little in the way of extra-curricular activity in those days to bring together students of different subjects. Other contemporaries in the College of his own community were Mr Ezra Reuben (Nowgaonkar) who was to be a life-long and dear friend, and Mr E. M. Ezekiel (Talkar) the Hebrew scholar, whose wife's youngest sister my father was subsequently to marry. My father's College memories centred mainly round the inspiring teaching of Professor Mirza Hairat and the influence of the Principal, Dr Wordsworth, a grandson of the great poet. Of the other teachers he spoke little. Dr Mackichan of the Wilson College was another great influence in my father's life, and it was owing to his influence that, though my father graduated from the Elphinstone College, he always had a special affection for, and retained his connection with, the Wilson College. A few years before his death he attended the College Day and felt highly honoured at being asked to preside as the oldest ex-student present.

My father seems to have been a hardworking and methodical student. Copies of his English text books still survive—Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, Cowper's *Letters* and an annotated edition of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. All contain neat pencil marginal notes, and the Shakespeare play is carefully interleaved

with white paper covered with extensive notes in small but perfectly legible handwriting. This neatness and legibility my father's handwriting retained to the end.

It does not appear that English literature had any great appeal for my father. This was always a matter of surprise to me, considering his love of Persian and Marathi poetry. Fiction, again, did not appeal to him, and I very much doubt whether in his whole life he read more than half a dozen novels. The only books of a fictional character which I can remember him to have enjoyed are Washington Irving's *Bracebridge Hall* and *Old Christmas* from his *Sketch Book*. To these my father returned over and over again.

History my father loved, and though his busy official career left him little time for reading, what time he could spare he devoted to Indian history, of which his knowledge was both deep and exact, particularly in regard to the Muslim kingdoms in the Decan and the Maratha period.

In Bombay as a student my father stayed with one or other of his married sisters. It does not appear that he took a very active interest in communal matters. Apart from his college companions already mentioned he used to mention as his friends of student days Dr Benjamin Reuben (Kehimkar) and Mr Daniel Moses (Talkar). Communal affairs seem at the time to have been in the hands of a few domineering and somewhat obscurantist individuals and my father used to tell us that he and his friends often incurred the wrath of these leaders by refusing to take them seriously. Perhaps it was then that the strong distrust of the more highly educated and sophisticated sections of the community which certain elements still harbour was born.

My father and Mr Ezra Reuben were the first two Arts graduates from the community. My father was extremely keen on proceeding to take a degree in Law and becoming a lawyer. My grandfather, however, objected and compelled him to take up a clerkship in the Revenue Department. My father had all the makings of a good advocate, and I feel sure that, if he had been allowed to follow his bent, he would have had better scope for displaying those qualities of independence and resourcefulness

which were cramped in Government service and which, indeed, were to prove somewhat of a handicap at certain stages of his career. As it happened, he constantly chafed at the limitations of Government service, and did less well than several others who were his inferiors in ability and character. Had circumstances been kinder, it is very likely that he would have achieved eminence in public life.

His own experience of parental interference perhaps made my father particularly careful to leave his children more or less free to choose their own subjects of study and, so far as circumstances would permit, their own careers. It was only some time after his death that I came to learn that he had hoped that I would become a lawyer (perhaps as a means of vicariously achieving the ambition of his youth), but not once did he let drop even the slightest hint that I should study Law when he saw that my heart was engaged elsewhere. I am sure that, if his circumstances had been better, nothing would have pleased him more than to provide to each of his children the fullest scope to live his or her own life as he or she wished.

While my father was still a student he was pressed to marry. My eldest uncle had married when he was only fifteen, and my second uncle when he was barely eighteen. The pressure on my father ceased when my uncle Hyam died within two years of marriage leaving a widow who was still a child. My father graduated at the end of 1884 and at the end of 1885 he was married. As, in the meantime, girls more suited to his age of twenty-two were already married off, he had to marry a girl of nine. She was the youngest sister of the wife of his brother Shalom. My eldest sister was born in 1889 (when her mother was only thirteen or fourteen) and in March 1892 her mother died in child-birth at an age when today girls are just out of school. My father married for the second time in March 1893. My mother was then fifteen years of age—a rather advanced age for a girl to remain unmarried in those days. Perhaps it was because of her advanced age that she had to be content with a widower! My grandfather, it seems, had

arranged the match, but did not live to see the marriage performed. My father himself seems first to have made another choice of a girl maturer in age and far better educated. But she would not have him and my father accepted the bride chosen for him. We would often tease both our parents about this when, after many years, we came to know of my father's matrimonial preferences. We would speculate about the difference it would have made to us and about whether we would have been there at all. In our hearts we were sure that we were indeed fortunate that things had happened the way they had, but we always pretended to our mother that my father's first choice would have suited him better. My father himself took our teasing in good part and we could see that he quite agreed with us that he was lucky in the course events had taken.

At the time of their marriage my father's age was double that of my mother and, at the commencement, my father must have found it difficult to accord to so young a wife the position of equality and consequence which his education had taught him to believe was the wife's due. But he devoted the early years to the careful education of my mother. He kept masters for her, and encouraged her to associate with the wives of friends, particularly missionaries, and learn from them. My mother learned much. In all domestic matters she made rapid progress. In book learning perhaps she did not do so well, and her hold on English was always somewhat shaky. In any case, there was soon little time for study as her children arrived in rapid succession. What hampered my mother was her extreme shyness and diffidence. She had lost her own mother in infancy, and though her father was himself extremely kind, the household was dominated by her step-mother who was, perhaps, not as understanding as she might have been. My mother suffered particularly from invidious comparisons between herself and a cleverer half-sister. She fell back in school in consequence. It was not until after her marriage that she received the sympathetic understanding that she so badly needed.

As a result of the disparity in age, my father got into the habit of taking all the important decisions affecting the family and of expecting my mother to acquiesce. This, unsure as she was of her own capacity, my mother almost invariably did. And my father

was not altogether uninfluenced by his own father's belief that the crowning virtue of a wife is obedience to her husband. There was an amusing consequence to this little weakness of my father. Half in fun my father related in Marathi in the *Israelite* a Turkish story of the sorry consequences of a woman meddling in a matter outside her sphere. The rival paper, the *Friend of Israel*, published an attack on my father by an anonymous writer signing himself or herself as 'Grandmother', abusing him in almost vulgar terms and making unseemly remarks about my mother and sister. Then a still more vulgar leaflet was issued in the name of 'Grandfather' reviling 'Grandmother' and in turn 'Grandfather' was made the target of abuse. Who 'Grandmother' and 'Grandfather' were we never learnt.

In one respect alone my mother found it irksome to comply with my father's desires and that was in playing the role of a society lady. Shy as she was, she tended to be tongue-tied in company. She could not make a splash and gradually she managed to reduce occasions for such embarrassment to herself. She was certainly not cut out to be the sort of wife who, by her social graces, actively promotes her husband's career.

All things considered, however, my mother's married life was as free from avoidable unhappiness as any one has a right to expect. The unhappiness which came her way— and she had more than her fair share of it—was common to her and my father, and the fortitude of each was a support and encouragement to the other.

My father took his degree in January 1885 and immediately set about looking for a post in Government service. For a few months he served as a teacher in the American Mission High School at Ahmednagar. He appears to have done sufficiently well to make the Principal of the School, the Reverend J. Smith, who later was for several years in charge of the Book and Tract Society's bookshop in Bombay, anxious to retain his services permanently. Mr Smith became a personal friend of my father, and through Mr Smith my father came into very close contact with several members of the American Marathi Mission at Ahmed-

nagar. He came to admire their rectitude and unselfish devotion to the uplift of the lowly. Dr Hume was his particular hero. Above all, he shared with the missionaries, if he did not derive from them, a firm belief in the Bible as a self-sufficient source of religious guidance. To the end of his life, my father reposed unquestioning trust in what the Bible said as the veritable word of God. The difficulties which perplexed scholars, the doubts which their critical study of the text of the Bible created and theological subtleties meant little to him. Believing as he did that morality was the whole of religion, it was as a moral guide that he used the Bible in his daily life and he felt no need to go beyond it to later rabbinical teaching. I have the suspicion that, despite the primacy which he gave to morality, the Prophets meant less to him than the Pentateuch, the historical writings and the Psalms. In spite of the missionaries, the New Testament did not interest him much, probably because of his almost fanatical monotheism and revulsion from idolatry.

On 6 August 1885 my father joined Government service as a clerk in the office of the Mamlatdar of Sirur, Pune District, on a salary of Rs. 30 per mensem. In 1887 he got himself transferred to the Ahmednagar District, becoming a Head Clerk in February 1888. For a year he served in the office of the Commissioner, Central Division, at Pune and in January 1892 he was posted as Head Clerk to the Collector of Solapur, with the rank of Mamlatdar. For two years he worked as Inspector of Land Records and Agriculture in Solapur and Khandesh Districts and for a year he served as Survey Mamlatdar in the Deccan Revenue Survey. It is, perhaps, in this period that he acquired his almost expert knowledge of agriculture and his affection for the Deccan peasant.

In December 1895 he was appointed as Chitnis to the Collector of Satara. As Chitnis he was in charge of the vernacular section of the Collector's office and also, it appears, of the Political section, the Collector being also Political Agent for the Indian States of Phaltan and Aundh. In those days, the Chitnis to the Collector was a much more important personage than at present, but. even so, my father seems to have built up for himself in local

society a position much higher than his rank warranted. This, indeed, was to be characteristic of my father in every subsequent position he held. By the force of his personality he enhanced the consequence of every post to which he was appointed—it was almost as if, rather than deriving his status from the post, he brought to it a status he alone could confer on it. Be that as it may, as Chitnis he was trusted by his Collector and he was not afraid to use his position to forward all good causes that came to his notice. He particularly took under his care members of the less advanced communities like the Marathas and Muslims. Brahmin influence was still predominant, and the few Maratha clerks who managed to secure employment had to struggle against a wall of prejudice.

The kind of thing my father was wont to do came to my notice long after his death. An old and venerable gentleman walked into my office room one day. I asked him what I could do for him. He said he had no business with me. Reading my name on the sign-board, he had stepped in to see the son of his greatest benefactor. He told me that, almost sixty years before, my father had got him recruited as a clerk on the Satara District establishment and later had transferred him from the office of an unsympathetic Brahmin mamlatdar and got him posted in the Chitnis' Branch in the office of the Collector. There my father kept him under his own eye and gave him every encouragement and help. This enabled him to come to the notice of the Collector. He had after this risen steadily and, by the time of his retirement, had been promoted as Deputy Collector and given the title of Rao Bahadur. One of my brothers had a similar experience while on tour in the Ratnagiri District. A Maratha Deputy Collector came up to him and said that my father had, more than twenty years earlier, taken him to an Assistant Collector in the Satara District and got him employed, even though my father was no longer in service.

Though my father made no secret of his views about the need to break the virtual monopoly which the advanced communities, particularly the Brahmins, had established in the clerical grades in Government service, he was able to retain the respect, and

often to earn the close friendship, of his Brahmin colleagues. In Satara he took particular interest in the reform section of the Brahmins who established a branch of the Prarthana Samaj, and he often attended their services.

As Chitnis my father had occasion to deal with the affairs of the Aundh State to which he was later to go as Karbhari. In one particular case, he was able to get justice done to two women who had been rendered homeless and destitute through a most heinous murder committed before their very eyes at the instance of a very close relative. He was also instrumental in protecting the interests of the son and heir of the ruling Chief who was estranged from his father and living in virtual exile in Satara, and who was in danger of being excluded from the succession.

In January 1901 my father was transferred as Mamlatdar of Wai, where again he came into close touch with members of the American Marathi Mission. My father's stay at Wai was brief, for in September of the same year he received orders to proceed to Aundh where the Chief had died. My father was to take charge of the State until the Chief's successor was recognised by Government and installed. In spite of intrigue by other relatives, the claims of the eldest son who, as mentioned above, was staying in Satara were recognised and he was installed as Chief. He retained my father as Karbhari with the consent of Government. In 1905 the Chief died and his son who, in his turn, was estranged from the father, was recognised as Chief with the stipulation that he retained my father as Karbhari and referred to the Political Agent at Satara for decision any matter on which he was not prepared to follow my father's advice. The conditions were accepted, but deeply resented. It is hardly surprising that soon occasions for friction arose and multiplied; the Chief wanted a disproportionate part of the State's revenues to be assigned to himself; he wanted his favourites appointed to positions of influence and his father's confidants put down; he wanted the allowances of his uncles to be reduced and their private properties sequestered on flimsy grounds. Secondly, he suspected that my father was responsible (as he in fact was) for the irksome restrictions which Government had placed on the exercise of his sovereign powers, and hated my

father for this, not realising that he would have been passed over altogether but for the via media devised by my father. For his part, my father stood firm. While he showed the Chief all the respect and deference which his position warranted—the monarchical system had his profound respect—he considered that his first duty was to the people of the State, and he was not prepared to subordinate the interests of the people to the personal whims of the Chief. My father had the firm support of the Political Agent and, though he was willing to end the deadlock by reverting to British service, he was asked to stay on. Frustrated, the Chief tried to get rid of my father by arranging for a dacoity on our house in the course of which my father was to be maimed if not killed. By a fortunate chance information about the plot came to my father's ears and, almost simultaneously, to the ears of a British police officer in the Satara District. The man entrusted with the job of organising the dacoity was a prisoner in the Aundh jail who had been allowed to escape. He was apprehended in a border village in British territory, where he was getting together a gang to carry out the projected dacoity. As soon as a prima facie case was established the Chief was suspended, my father being left in sole charge of the State under the supervision of the Political Agent. Early in 1907 a Commission was instituted to try the Chief. Government tried to get a ruling prince to serve as a member of the Commission but could find none to do so. Indeed, the Princes regarded the suspension and projected trial of the Chief as an affront to their Order and a gross violation of their privileges. The Deccan Princes in particular were profoundly disturbed and tried their best to get Government to drop the proceedings, and, after they were over, to save the Chief from deposition. During this period my father once got information of a particular intrigue among several Princes assembled at Mahabaleshwar, including the Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shri Shahu Chhatrapati. The Maharaja was politely asked to leave the station within twenty-four hours. Years later, when the Maharaja met my father in Bombay in connection with the affairs of the Non-Brahmin Party, he laughingly reminded my father of their earlier encounter.

After an elaborate trial, the Commission reported that the charges made against the Chief were substantially established. Every attempt was made while the investigation and trial were proceeding to remove my father from Aundh, and his life was in constant danger. At the request of the Political Agent my father carried on as if everything was normal, without even removing his family from Aundh. The only precautions he took were to insure his life and to start subscribing to a fund to provide a moderate pension for my mother should anything happen to him.

Unfortunately Government hesitated about the next step. First the Chief was placed under suspension for three years. But Government soon found that witnesses who had deposed against the Chief started dying off in mysterious circumstances one by one. Government then decided to depose the Chief and the search for a successor started. There was an interregnum of almost three years during which, in the midst of intrigue, my father was left in charge of the State. The deposed Chief's younger brother was the natural heir, but he was a youth who was very much under the influence of his elder brother and his mother. Despite my father's advice he refused to detach himself from their influence and go to the Rajkumar College at Rajkot. Government, therefore, set him aside and selected an uncle of the deposed Chief, who was a University graduate with cultured tastes.

On the installation of the new Chief my father asked to be relieved, but the Chief pressed him to stay as Karbhari and my father yielded. This was an unfortunate decision, as it meant for my father absence from his regular line of duty for another three years. Indeed, he would have been much better off if he had left Aundh in 1905 or 1906, just before he was due promotion as Deputy Collector. Staying on at Aundh, no doubt, brought him for a time prominently, even sensationally, to public notice, and in 1911 enabled him to attend the Delhi Darbar, but it deprived him of the opportunity of showing his merit in the regular line and of earning the special promotion which his abilities merited. More serious, the long spell of virtually independent responsibility made it difficult for him to adjust himself psychologically to a situation

in which he was only a small cog in a huge machine; in which he had little scope for making important decisions; in which he had frequently to defer to men inferior in capacity to himself. The result was that, after he reverted to his regular line in January 1913 (he had been promoted meanwhile as Deputy Collector in July 1907), he found it difficult to take a real interest in the humdrum duties of the posts assigned to him, first that of Huzur (or Treasury) Deputy Collector and City Magistrate at Ahmednagar and, two years later, that of Personal Assistant to the Collector of Thane. He kept on looking for openings elsewhere. He tried for the appointment of Oriental Translator to Government (where his knowledge of languages and his experience in an Indian State would have been of particular advantage) but found that it was reserved as a prize post for Muslims. He also tried for an appointment in the Hyderabad State where in the course of negotiations conducted by him on behalf of a member of the family of the Chief of Aundh he had developed several contacts. Here also he was unsuccessful. Moreover, while at Aundh, my father, who previously had been most careful to live within his means, had gradually come to adopt a mode of living for which, with a fast growing family, he found his means insufficient. Optimistic as he was and fed with hopes of highly remunerative employment after retirement which made saving unnecessary, my father began to spend up to the limit of his income and even beyond it. He was generous with his help to relatives and friends and even to unknown people who often came to him with tales of hardship. He found that, when his income was substantially reduced on reversion to the regular line, he could not adjust his mode of living to his income. To gain freedom to look for more remunerative employment he asked for, and was granted, permission to retire on completion of thirty years' service. He was at the time under order of transfer from Thane to Surat, and retirement saved him from making the move. He retired on 12 July 1916 on a pension of Rs. 250 per mensem, a little less than two years before he would normally have done.

In January 1910, while at Aundh, my father was awarded the title of Khan Bahadur. The title was given evidently in recognition

of his steadiness and devotion to duty in a period of great personal danger and also of his concrete achievements in Aundh. A detailed account of his work there must await a study of the official records and cannot be given here. It will perhaps suffice to say that, in the ten years of his stay at Aundh, he initiated and brought to fruition revolutionary changes not only in the machinery of Government but in the day to day lives of the common people. Education, medical relief, communications and agriculture all made a leap forward. When he went to Aundh there was not a single telegraph office in the State; there were only a few primary schools for boys; the growing of even the most common vegetables was unknown. When he left, the State boasted a High School, a chain of schools for girls, a number of telegraph offices and a State printing press. Cottage industries, animal husbandry and improved methods of agriculture received special attention and, indeed, experts of the Agricultural Department of Government often found, owing to my father's enthusiasm, opportunities for putting to practical test ideas which they were unable to induce the Provincial Government to adopt. In fact, on a miniature scale, my father put into effect, half a century in advance of developments in British India, a coordinated programme of rural development of which the effects were visible before he left, in improved crops, better cattle and healthy cottage industries. It was also during my father's regime that the foundation was laid of industrial development in Kirloskar's iron works which were later to acquire all-India fame. Again, it was mainly owing to my father's concern for the backward classes that the first steps were taken, again half a century in advance of conditions in British India, to remove the evil of untouchability and to provide equal opportunities for education and employment to all classes of the population.

At the time of my father's transfer to Aundh in 1901, his family consisted of two daughters, both born at Pune and two sons, born at Satara. A third son, born at Satara, had died there of pneumonia within a year of birth. My mother used to tell us

that, when my eldest brother was born, the birth was celebrated, like that of a prince, by sending round sweets to friends on elephant back. We were duly impressed and jealous; but perhaps elephants were more easy to come by in 1896 than when we younger children were born, and the firstborn is the firstborn! The younger of the sons born at Satara died at Aundh in 1903 at the age of three. The illness was short and extremely painful, characterised by suffocation. The Civil Surgeon came from Satara and diagnosed the illness as diphtheria, but for years my parents firmly believed that the child had been poisoned, since he had taken ill immediately after a visit to the palace of the Chief where he had eaten some sweets. Some of the Chief's family were against my father and it was not unknown for children to die suddenly and mysteriously in the palace through family rivalries. Years later, when my mother saw the daughter of my eldest sister die of diphtheria, she realised that the symptoms were similar, and that the Civil Surgeon's diagnosis had in fact been correct.

Six children were born in Aundh, four boys and two girls. The youngest of these, a boy, died at Aundh in 1910 at the age of six months or so.

My two eldest sisters in due course were sent to the High School for Indian Girls at Pune (commonly known as Huzur Paga) as boarders, and my eldest brother too was sent to school as a boarder first at Pune and later at Panchgani. As we younger children started approaching school-going age, my father realised that he would be unable to afford to send us all to boarding schools. My eldest sister had reached the matriculation class and was in any case to go to Bombay to join College. My father, therefore, decided in 1910 to take a house in Bombay and keep his family there. We moved to the first floor of a bungalow at Grant Road, somewhere near the Charni Road tram junction. Used as we had been to living in an independent house set in a huge garden and to roaming wild through house and garden throughout the day, I am afraid we proved a nuisance to the occupants of the ground floor. Also, my father did not like to see us small children cooped up in a house without a garden. Through a Parsee friend he secured early in 1911 a big indepen-

dent bungalow in a large compound at Bandra. The bungalow had lain vacant for some time as it was said to be haunted by more than one ghost, and we got the place at a comparatively low rent. We saw no signs of the ghosts; our noise and bustle must have frightened them away if they in fact existed. To our delight, in the same compound, was the shell of a large burnt-out building which was pulled down only several years after we went to stay there.

After we moved to Bombay, there were four further additions to the family: a girl in 1911, boys in 1914 and 1916 and, last of all, a boy in 1920.

My eldest brother joined the St. Mary's School at Bombay, and my second sister stayed on at Pune. The rest of us were put in school in Bandra. Except for spending our holidays at Aundh, Karad, Satara or Ahmednagar, according to my father's posting, Bandra has been our home since 1911. For years we were the only Bene Israel residents of Bandra and today we are undoubtedly the oldest Bene Israel residents there.

One result of our move to Bombay was that our father became a somewhat remote figure for us. Even our mother would leave us from time to time to the care of our elder sisters and brother to go and stay with our father, or one of my elder sisters would go and keep house for him. More and more our father got somewhat detached from the day to day management of the household. Even after his retirement, when he spent more prolonged periods at home, he was content to leave my mother, assisted by us children, to run the house.

When the family was small, my father was able to give very close attention to the mental and moral development of his children, in the way of choosing their toys and books, supervising their studies and guiding them in whatever they did. Later, when we moved to Bombay, circumstances made this impossible and the elder children took over the function of guidance and supervision. Retirement from service in 1916, far from permitting my father to give more time to his children, rather added to his outside preoccupations, so that, while we saw him somewhat more often, we had even less of his time and attention. Only in the last few

years before his death, when repeated set-backs in business compelled him to curtail his activities, was he able once again to some extent to enter into the lives of his children. But by then most of us had become accustomed to take our own decisions.

As I look back over the years it appears to me that my father was greatly handicapped by the size of his family. Not only would he have been able to do much more for his children if there had been only three or four of them, but he would not, in later life, have been driven, as he was, to desperate expedients to earn enough money to maintain those standards of comfort and amenity which he thought his children deserved. But for my father himself the size of his family was a matter of pride. With the Psalmist he believed:

> Sons are a heritage from the Lord,
> the fruit of the womb a reward.
> Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
> are the sons of one's youth.
> Happy is the man who has
> his quiver full of them!
> He shall not be put to shame
> when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.
>
> Psalm 127, vs. 3-5

Not content with carrying the burden of his own large family, he was constantly undertaking responsibility for relatives in distress. Soon after his first marriage, he gave shelter to the young widow and son of a cousin of his, and looked after them for some time. To one of his sisters he made a regular monthly allowance for some years. Another who was estranged from her son was taken by him to Aundh and she stayed with him until there was a reconciliation. Another sister yet, who was widowed, stayed with us, along with her children, until she died. He also took in the eldest son of my mother's widowed sister, looked after him for some years and found him employment. In later years he could not afford generosity on this scale, but, as late as 1923, he brought home a nephew who was lying seriously ill in

St George's Hospital and kept him at our house until he recovered. All this he did from a strict sense of family duty.

My father had very high ambitions in respect of my eldest sister and eldest brother. In my sister's case, her engagement and eventual marriage to our cousin (the eldest son of Dr Joseph Benjamin) put an end to his plans. In the case of my brother, who was to be sent to America for engineering studies, so many financial and other complications arose before he could do anything that the departure for America was first postponed and then abandoned. My next two brothers were destined for business. My father had a theory that, to make a really good businessman, one must be caught young, withdrawn from academic studies and thrown into the midst of practical work, with a tutor to look to minimum cultural requirements. These two brothers were, therefore, withdrawn from school early in 1919. One was sent to Nandod in Rajpipla State where my father had started a tannery; the other was put in a printing press which my father had started in Bombay. The brother at Nandod begged to be allowed to rejoin school and after a year was allowed to do so. The brother at Bombay was left stranded when the press passed out of my father's hands late in 1920. He eventually went to sea as one of the first apprentices in navigation on a ship belonging to the Scindia Steam Navigation Company. The rest of us were allowed to carry on with a more orthodox education and to choose our own careers.

On the whole, I am afraid none of his children has quite measured up to my father in achievement or even in potentiality. What we lacked, I suspect, was his driving ambition and self-confidence and perseverance against odds. To a greater or lesser degree we have all inherited our mother's diffidence.

Beneath the seeming indifference in domestic matters of my father, ran a strong undercurrent of affection and concern. Times of illness gave us glimpses of these, and my father's calm courage and unhesitating reliance on Providence steadied us all. Again, now and then, a stray remark or question would reveal to us that he was aware of what was going on around him, or that he had noticed those small nuances of mannerism which differentiate one

child from another, even if we seldom went to him with our difficulties or doubts. Though he did not often make a display of his affections, and in fact sometimes gave the impression that he cared more for his friends outside than for his own family, we never doubted that, in reality, his wife and children were his first concern. As his financial difficulties increased, he gave up for our sakes without the least hesitation one after another all the small luxuries with which he was accustomed to indulge himself. In particular, he would sacrifice almost everything for the sake of education, treating his daughters in this respect exactly like his sons. Except for one moment of panic, when he seriously contemplated shifting us away from Bombay to Nandod for the sake of economy—a plan which fortunately his friends persuaded him to abandon—he was determined to provide us with a decent education and a comfortable home. All things considered, his success in this exceeded expectation.

Though as I said before, my father had a strong sense of family solidarity and though he was, by nature, fond of society, gradually owing to circumstances we tended to withdraw from all contacts outside the immediate family circle. This withdrawal came at a time when several of us were passing through adolescence and, I am afraid, it affected us to such an extent as to make us almost unsocial. I am sure that this would have distressed my father. The very size of the family, which to him was, as I have said, a matter of pride, facilitated this withdrawal by providing us with a self-sufficient and varied environment. An aspect of this withdrawal into our own shell was a certain remoteness from communal activities in Bombay. This remoteness my father too shared with us. Though, for a time, as will be seen later, my father took considerable part in communal 'politics', he never had his heart in it, and would not have been drawn in at all but for the influence of Mr David Erulkar. His withdrawal from communal affairs caused him no pain. After his expulsion from the Gate of Mercy Synagogue in 1918, he never enrolled himself as a member of any congregation. Nor did he attend many communal functions. Perhaps his long absence from centres of Bene Israel population contributed to his aloofness.

On my father's premature retirement from Government service in July 1916 he tried to get some employment in an Indian State or, failing suitable employment, to establish himself in business. He was asked whether he was willing to go to Mesopotamia as a civilian officer accompanying the British Indian forces operating there during the Great War of 1914-18. He refused the offer as he did not wish to leave his family. The reputation he had earned in Aundh State as king-breaker and king-maker stood in the way of employment under one of the Princes. A highly placed I.C.S. officer told him that certain Princes he had approached were frightened at the thought of employing my father.

Employment being unavailable, my father turned to business. It appears that he first tried to enter the grain business in partnership with a grain dealer but failed to secure the requisite permission. He then established a supply agency which never really got going. In 1918 or so, something took him to Rajpipla State where an acquaintance of his, an ex-Presidency Magistrate of Bombay, was working as Dewan. He secured from the State a monopoly for collecting and exporting hides and skins on the condition that he started a tannery and leather goods manufactory. With no knowledge of local conditions, of the peculiarities of the particular business and of the technology of tanning and leather goods manufacture, my father was entirely in the hands of plausible charlatans —and with all his shrewd knowledge of human character, my father had an open and confiding nature which simply invited the sharper to try his hand. In addition to what he could scrape together, my father put into the business all he could borrow. Needless to say, he was cheated by his 'expert' who decamped one day with a considerable sum of money. My eldest brother, who was in his last year at College, was sent to Nandod to take charge temporarily; as matters turned out, he had to stay on for some years, and his educational career was ruined.

Despite the setback received by the business the prospects seemed not unhopeful because of the boom which temporarily followed immediately on the Great War. A Parsee friend got interested and offered to provide the necessary finance. This friend bought out the Erulkar brothers who had meanwhile entered the concern

as sleeping partners. Soon the slump came and there was no market for the hides which, owing to his monopoly, my father was obliged to buy. The leather goods manufactory did somewhat better, but my father's Parsee partner got cold feet and hesitated to provide further funds. In the disputes that followed mutual confidence was lost and ultimately my father and brother had to face a charge of cheating in the Court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate in Bombay. This put an end to the business, and, for almost a year, my father's energies were concentrated on throwing off the charge made against him and my brother. The proceedings dragged on; it became evident that the trying magistrate had been got at by the other side and was using his position to induce my father to agree to pay his partner all the money invested in the business. In spite of strenuous efforts the prosecution was unable to put before the Court sufficient evidence to justify the defence being called upon to rebut it, and the magistrate had no alternative but to discharge my father and brother. He vented his spite on my father by making certain uncalled-for remarks in his order. My father resented these remarks deeply, but he was advised that there was no legal remedy, as no appeal lay to the High Court where an accused was not even called upon to put in his defence.

Soon after the case was over, early in 1923, my father was seriously ill for almost a month, and our doctor was afraid he would not survive. However, there was a lot of fight still left in my father, and he made a quick recovery. His first concern was to get Government to take notice of the magistrate's unjudicial conduct, but the magistrate was very highly connected, and Government refused to take any action. Punishment, nevertheless, overtook the magistrate in a short time. He over-reached himself by approaching a High Court judge in a matter before the judge. He was reported to Government by the judge, and was required to retire and refused a pension. But my father's confidence in Government was rudely shaken.

My father was not content with the hides and tannery business established at Nandod. Simultaneously, he started a printing press with machinery and equipment supplied by a nephew who had settled in Nagpur. This press was shifted from Bandra to Bombay

in 1919 and gradually started working at a profit, thanks to the interest taken by Mr David Erulkar, who was then in Bombay practising as a barrister, and to the management of one of my mother's brothers. A dispute, however, arose about the price to be paid to my cousin for the machinery. My father was advised that the price demanded was much too high, and late in 1920 the press was sent back to Nagpur.

After 1923 my father made several attempts to start some other business. He put through a forest deal in Jawhar State which proved profitable, but he was unable to consolidate his position for lack of ready capital, which indeed was to handicap him in pursuing several other promising schemes. He took up for management a large Inam estate in the Satara District and, here again, took the assistance of my eldest brother. Persons who had lost a fruitful source of easy money on the assumption of management of the estate by my father, incited the Inamdar who made it impossible for my father to carry on. Litigation ensued, as also in other transactions in the Satara District with persons of doubtful reputation to whom my father resorted in his extremity.

Every attempt made by my father to earn money only resulted in more and more debt, worry and distress, but my father hotly resented any suggestion made by friend or relation to give up. Every such suggestion he interpreted as an invitation to confess defeat, and the only result was that he let us know as little as possible of what he was doing. Often, when he left home, we did not know where he was going and how long he would be away. He began feeling that he had lost the sympathy of his own flesh and blood, and a shadow was cast on his relations with us all which was not entirely lifted until shortly before his death.

What we failed to understand at the time was that my father was driven by a deep-rooted need to achieve distinction in some unmistakable way and that to ask him just to stay quietly at home was to ask him to accept humiliating mutilation. He saw about him several persons whom he knew to be inferior to himself achieving material success, and he could not understand why such

success should elude him or why we should ask him to give up its pursuit. He, perhaps, failed to see that it is sometimes just as praiseworthy to recognise harsh realities as to resist them, and to accept humbly the accidents of circumstances.

My father's growing financial embarrassment led him to borrow from Marwaris who, as some of us started earning began putting pressure on him to make responsible for repayment jointly with him those of us who had reached majority. This my father steadily refused to do, and in 1927 one of his creditors finally drove him to the bankruptcy court. He got his discharge on undertaking to pay monthly a certain sum towards his debts. He did this regularly until he died. As more of us started working and as our incomes increased, we were able to give our father the satisfaction of seeing his personal debts steadily decline, quite apart from the court arrangement and beyond its requirements. At the time of his death he had the assurance that, within a short time, the personal debts would be completely liquidated.

I have mentioned that on retirement my father was for a time drawn into communal 'politics'. Prior to this, the only evidence available of any active interest in communal affairs consists of correspondence which he carried on in 1912 or so with the Reverend J. Henry Lord a Christian missionary of Bombay who had written a short account of the Bene Israel. My father objected to Mr Lord's remarks about the racial composition of the community in the context of Indian conditions, where any admixture was likely to be regarded as degrading. My father's particular concern was to establish that the Bene Israel were racially as 'pure' as Jews anywhere else in the world and that, in fact, they were likely to be much less mixed than Jews elsewhere, owing to the rigid caste system of India. About the same time a controversy had arisen over certain unfortunate remarks about the Bene Israel made by Sir Jacob Sassoon in an interview given by him to the *Jewish Chronicle* of London, suggesting that the Bene Israel could not be accepted as full Jews. My father wrote a long and angry letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* which was not published but which

later provided material for a small pamphlet which he published in 1919 on the subject of the purity of descent of the Bene Israel.

My father was proud of the Indian character of the community, and he pointed out that Jews everywhere resembled the people among whom they were settled, unless they were recent migrants. As to racial admixture, he pointed out that there was hardly any race in the world which was more mixed than the Jewish; that at various stages of Jewish history intermarriage and admission of proselytes had been free; that in India alone intermarriage was made difficult by rigid caste taboos which the Bene Israel themselves enforced for a very long time.

It might appear that exaggerated importance was given to the matter by my father, but, when he wrote, a serious attempt was being made by the Baghdadi Jews of Bombay to establish that there was a vital difference between themselves and the Bene Israel who, because of their Indian character, were inferior to other Jews. Indians were a subject people, and admixture with Indians put a stamp of inferiority on them; on the other hand the Baghdadi Jews were exactly like the European Jews and, therefore, fit to consort with the white rulers of India. Without denying our Indian character, my father was concerned to establish that we were as good (or as bad) Jews as the Baghdadis. In a small way we children had direct experience of the attitude of the Baghdadi Jews. Some children belonging to a Baghdadi family temporarily resident in Bandra joined our school and went about telling the other children that we were not real Jews. My father brought this to the notice of the school authorities who promptly put a stop to this propaganda by threatening expulsion.

My father saw that the status of the community in the eyes of our Indian neighbours depended on its genuinely Jewish character, considering the contempt in which the half-caste was held; any suggestion of inferiority in comparison with other Jewish groups would at once create the belief that the Bene Israel were a sort of Jewish outcastes. Fortunately, all nonsense about superior races and inferior races has been knocked on the head by the horrors of Hitlerism, and questions of racial purity are of little significance today.

My father's retirement coincided with the return to Bombay from England of Mr David Erulkar. A very close friendship was established between the two despite great disparity in age. The marriage of Mr Erulkar to a sister of my mother brought them still closer. Mr Erulkar plunged into communal politics and drew my father in also. For some years there had apparently been two groups controlling communal institutions, particularly the Gate of Mercy Synagogue and the Israelite (later Sir Elly Kadoorie) School. One group was headed by Dr Elijah Moses (later Mayor of Bombay) and Mr Solomon Moses (Vakrulkar) and the other by Mr D. J. Samson and Mr I. J. Samson. Mr Erulkar and my father were drawn to the Samson group and my father's first public appearance on a communal platform was in connection with meetings called to congratulate Mr D. J. Samson on his acquittal in criminal proceedings instituted against him by the Bombay Improvement Trust under which he was employed as an engineer. The opposite party had apparently tried to drive him out of communal affairs, and his friends made an organised move to retain him.

Mr Erulkar started a monthly paper called the *Israelite* in 1917 and my father was one of his most active helpers. Mr Erulkar was full of ideas for communal uplift, and he suggested in his paper the holding of an annual conference of Bene Israel representatives from all over India to deliberate upon questions affecting the community. The idea caught on and at first it appeared that the opposing groups would work together on the platform of the conference. At the very first general meeting held to prepare for the conference, presided over by my father, there was a head-on collision over the definition of the scope of the conference. My father, in particular, was accused of attempting to bring political questions into the scope of the conference at the instance of the Erulkar brothers who were well-known associates of Lokmanya Tilak in the Home Rule League. Colour was lent to the suspicion by the presentation by my father and several of his associates, including the Samson brothers and the Erulkar brothers, of an address to the Hon. Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, who was touring India in connection with the

preparation, in association with Lord Chelmsford, of proposals for constitutional changes in India. The address, which purported to be in the interests of the Bene Israel community, gave support to the joint scheme of reforms put forward by the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League, expressed the fullest confidence in the good intentions of the Congress and League towards the smaller minorities and opposed any special safeguards for these minorities. Copies of the address were widely distributed and it attracted considerable attention. Despite appearances, however, my father had absolutely no sympathy for the agitational approach to politics characteristic of Lokmanya Tilak, and he would have been the first to oppose this kind of politics being introduced into the projected conference. All he was concerned to point out was that the specific exclusion of politics from the conference would prevent it from considering questions affecting the community which impinged on public affairs, such as due representation in the public services.

An acute controversy arose, full of manoeuvres and counter-manoeuvres, hair-splitting arguments and accusations of bad faith. My father's particular contribution was a series of 'open letters' to the community, in which he made a vigorous defence of his position and an equally vigorous attack on his opponents. One of his letters was devoted to an attack on one of the pet schemes of the Conference, the taking of a communal census which would provide reliable information about the social and economic conditions of the community. The scheme was well-intentioned, but over-ambitious; it required disclosure of strictly personal matters without adequate safeguards against the information being misused; but, though these points were duly made, it was evident that the real objection of the critics was that their opponents had thought of it first. My father, while mentioning the other objections, strongly urged that the taking of a census was sinful, and would bring on the community God's grave displeasure and dire punishment. My father was undoubtedly sincere in this belief, since in his view the Bible clearly forbade the counting of heads. But, even so, if my father had considered the matter more dispassionately. he would perhaps have realised that what

was proposed was, in substance, not so much a counting of heads as a survey of social and economic conditions falling outside the scope of the biblical ban. *The Times of India* put the controversy in the proper perspective by giving the heading 'Census superstitions' to a letter from my father on the subject published in the correspondence columns. Owing to the opposition raised and also to the inherent difficulties of the task, the census was a dismal failure. As children we thoroughly enjoyed the excitement and fun so long as the controversy raged, though, even then, we had the suspicion that the quarrel resembled that between the Big-Endians and Small-Endians in Lilliput. Under the surface, of course, the fight was for control over communal institutions, but in this fight my father was not in the least interested.

The first Conference was held in December 1917. My father and his associates withdrew and formed an organisation called the All India Israelite League which, they claimed, was the only *constitutional* representative body of the community. The controversy cut across ties of family and friendship. My father's close friend, Mr Ezra Reuben, was offered the presidentship of the Conference when my father withdrew and, though he refused it, there was an unfortunate controversy about the offer in the communal papers, involving my father. It says much for the strength of their friendship that it was not affected in the least by the controversy. In fact, about the same time, my father shared his friend's anxiety and grief over the last illness and death of Mrs Reuben. At her funeral my father was privileged to say a special prayer in Marathi. It was much admired and I give an English translation which, however, can give only an imperfect idea of the original, since so much depends in such a case on the sound of the words and the tone of the voice:

> Almighty God, we have our being in an intermingling of death and life. The purpose of our earthly pilgrimage is hidden from us. Whence we come and whither we go, the secrets of Thy creation, we have no desire to learn, for we know that it is impossible for us to comprehend Thy ways. Still, at this grievous hour, when our hearts are so sorely wounded, it is

meet that we should call upon Thee for aid and healing. We, therefore, pray, O Lord, that Thou give unto Israel such mothers, such wives, such daughters and such sisters to promote our welfare and render us fit to enter the messianic kingdom.

Eventually the President of the first Conference was my uncle, Dr Joseph Benjamin (Bamnolkar) of Ahmedabad. Ironically he and his whole family stayed with us in Bandra during the Conference. We found it highly diverting to see my uncle and his family, including my elder sister, going off to attend the Conference, and almost simultaneously, my father and mother going off to grace the counter-demonstration of the embryo All India Israelite League.

The first meeting of the League was held at Karachi in December 1918, when my father presided. The meeting was a big success, thanks to the organisation of Mr Abraham Reuben (Kamarlekar) the leader of the Karachi community. The League set on foot several ambitious schemes, including the walling-in of the ancient Bene Israel cemetery at Navagaon (where, according to legend, are buried victims of the shipwreck from which the community dates its stay in India), a primary education fund and a hostel to be attached to the Israelite School. My father took an active part in the next two or three annual meetings of the League, at one of which his elder brother, Mr Shalom B. Israel of Pune, presided, but the departure of Mr David Erulkar from Bombay and my father's growing business preoccupations led to his gradual withdrawal.

One lasting achievement of my father in the communal sphere was the Jewish Cooperative Credit Society (later Bank). He was the first to suggest its establishment and he did most of the spadework for its organisation. He was its first President and was, along with my eldest sister, the largest shareholder. Later, owing to his financial difficulties, he lost all his shares.

My father was for a time on the Managing Committee of the Israelite School and he became a member of the Gate of Mercy Synagogue. He drew up for the synagogue an interesting scheme for promoting commercial education and the education of women

and girls in cottage industries. Within a short time the opposite party got control of the synagogue and, for some reason which I do not know, my father was expelled along with Mr I. J. Samson. He probably trod on some over-sensitive toes.

One unfortunate feature of my father's intrusion in communal affairs was the involvement of my mother in controversy. In 1913 or so she had been asked to preside over the annual gathering of the Bene Israel Stree Mandal, and her presidential address had been written for her by my father. Shortly after the *Israelite* started publication there was published in the paper over her name a letter criticising the Mandal for shifting its premises from the Israelite School to a private room in an allegedly unsuitable locality. Miss R. Reuben replied on behalf of the Mandal and another letter appeared in the *Israelite* over my mother's name repeating the criticism. This provided an opportunity to the rival paper, the *Friend of Israel,* to poke fun at my mother. What she felt about it all she kept strictly to herself. In fact, my father was frequently writing in Marathi over her name, both in the *Israelite* and in other journals, but fortunately all this writing was non-controversial, being mainly concerned with household remedies for simple ailments and other domestic matters.

My father wrote frequently for the *Israelite* in Marathi as well as English, and, in the later years of its existence almost whole issues were his work. In 1926 he took over the editorship of the paper when Mr I. J. Samson, who had succeeded Mr David Erulkar a few years earlier, was appointed judge of the Court of Small Causes. The paper was for some years published under the management of Mr Aaron Benjamin (Kandlekar). He withdrew late in 1926 and in a short time the paper ceased publication. My father's writings covered a wide variety of topics and took various forms. Metrical versions of the Psalms, ballads retelling episodes from the Bible, extracts, with his comments, from books and journals he had read, phantasies, and notes on current affairs as often as not of no particular communal interest, were all included.

Two matters of more than passing interest on which he wrote may be mentioned. In a Marathi article he earnestly warned

the community against the danger of alienation from our neighbours by neglecting Marathi and by indiscriminate westernisation of dress and manners, foreseeing, with considerable shrewdness, the consequences of independence. In an English article on Tisha b'Ab published in 1923 he pointed out the dangers of political Zionism which sought to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine under the protection of the military might of the Western Powers against the opposition of the Arabs. 'How long' he asked, 'shall we contend with a large population of a race teeming with a spirit of independence practically unknown in many other races in the world?' and he added, 'The great nations, now at our back, may have one day or other to withdraw and we are in danger of being placed, face to face, with the Arabs, with little sympathy between us.' He pointed out that a stable national home could be established only with the consent of the Arabs and in collaboration with them. He nevertheless believed that the restoration of the national home of the Jews would come in God's good time, but pointed out that 'God's sacred words deny this success to human efforts, independent of a mission appointed by Him' and that our duty was 'humbly to await His will and command.' In this view he came very close to the strictly orthodox Agudat Israel position, which regards political Zionism as impiety.

The most ambitious piece of work my father undertook in connection with the *Israelite* was a translation of Montefiore's *Bible for Home Reading*. Several instalments were published in the *Israelite* before it closed. Of the value of the translation I have no means of judging, but at the time I thought it unfortunate that my father was content to reproduce verbatim the biblical text from existing Marathi versions. I was his main assistant in locating and making cuttings of the relevant passages. To my plea that this method made ineffectual all the care Montefiore had lavished on the Biblical text, my father thought it sufficient answer that fresh translation of the biblical text as given by Montefiore would cause much delay. In fact, I suspect that much of my father's writing suffered from haste. He wrote very rapidly with-

out notes, and seldom revised what he wrote. Only a Dr Johnson can get away with this.

Though not strictly relevant in this section, it would be appropriate to mention here that my father wrote fairly extensively in Marathi in non-Jewish journals. On agricultural topics he wrote much for *Sheti ani Shetkari* (Farming and the Farmer) published by the Deccan Agricultural Association of which he was a life member. In English he wrote much less. During the civil disobedience movements of 1930-31, and 1932-33 he wrote several letters to the *Times of India* strongly critical of Mahatma Gandhi and his method of satyagraha. He fervently believed in the virtue of hastening slowly and of concentrating on the uplift of the backward classes and the reconstruction of the rural economy before making any further political changes. The basis of this belief lay, not in any love for foreign rule (though the British people and the achievements of British rule greatly impressed him), but in the conviction that, until the backward classes and the huge agricultural population were brought on a level with the advanced classes, democracy would be a mockery, and independence would, for the masses, bring no relief from exploitation; exploitation by foreigners would be replaced by exploitation of a more ruthless kind and on a much vaster scale by the indigenous upper classes. What he, and many other genuine lovers of the masses, failed to see was that the vast upsurge which Gandhiji's civil disobedience movements stimulated, itself firmly placed in the hands of the masses the reins of political power and made possible adult franchise as an effective check on exploitation. Had he lived to witness the revolutionary changes which succeeded one another after 1937, he would, I am sure, have understood more correctly the liberating role of Gandhiji.

Recurring themes in my father's writings were the crucial importance for India of agricultural development and the revival of cottage industries, the danger of concentrating on heavy industries, and the moral and social dangers of birth control. In fact, in these matters, his line of thought was very much the same as that of Gandhiji.

It is, I am afraid, beyond my powers to capture the personality of my father in cold print and to communicate to the reader even a tithe of its warmth, charm and unselfconscious earnestness. Most of those who knew him as a contemporary have passed away, and, though my father wrote much, his writings were not autobiographical in any real sense.

Though by no means handsome, my father impressed all who met him by his intellectual keenness, width of interests and catholicity of outlook. Intolerant of viciousness in any form, he had compassion for the weak and, though he was quick to resent affront or injury, he was equally quick to forget and forgive. And he was equally quick to make up after a quarrel. Indeed, he had so little malice in himself that he was often confounded when persons whom he had offended or even disagreed with harboured malice against him. Even for the Chief who went to the length of trying to get him murdered he had an understanding pity. Years later he had a friendly meeting with the Chief at Dharwar where he was interned. He even helped the man who had been hired to murder him, by getting him employment in Kirloskar's factory.

The permanent impress of his personality on the common man was illustrated for us when in about 1927, more than fifteen years after he had left the Satara District, a group of Mangs (an untouchable caste lower in status even than the Mahars) from that District came to him and earnestly begged to be made Jews because they were determined to remain Hindus no longer and considered that the religion of their beloved 'Saheb' must be the best religion. My father got in touch with Mr Claude Montefiore, who pointed out the practical difficulties in the way of sending out from England a Jewish mission to India. My father, believing as he did that Islam was, next to Judaism, the most satisfactory religion, put the Mangs in touch with a Muslim religious organisation in Bombay. Hundreds of them were converted to Islam. Unfortunately, in spite of my father's exhortations, little was done to look after the converts, and I am afraid their last condition was sorrier than their first.

I heard my father making a public speech only once. It was in Urdu at the gathering held to celebrate the conversion mentioned above, and it was made without preparation, because my father was taken to the gathering without previous notice. I could follow the speech only in snatches, but I could see from the reaction of the audience how impressive it was. I am told that he was equally effective in Marathi. What helped him as a speaker was complete self-confidence and ready resource.

My father had little sympathy for the philosophical waverer who cauld not make up his mind about anything because he saw all the difficulties. He had a practical cast of mind, and was content to leave the profound secrets of existence severely alone. Indeed, he felt that God had deliberately drawn a veil over the deepest mysteries which it was almost sacrilege to try and lift. When in 1925 I told him that I had chosen Philosophy as my special subject at the B.A., I could see that he thought me a queer creature. Of course, he was far too understanding to criticise my choice or to try and make me change my mind.

When necessary my father could be a model of tact, and he had the capacity of producing the soft answer that turneth away wrath. But he also had the capacity to carry the war into the camp of his enemies whenever this was found to be necessary, and he thoroughly enjoyed a clean fight.

With us children he was always considerate and generous, but he was quick-tempered and sometimes his anger got the better of him. The greatest fault in his eyes was disobedience and neglect in carrying out orders. It was, however, easy to get round him and draw out his tender affection. In 1916, when he was posted at Thane and came home to Bandra for the week-ends, we children once spent a whole Sunday morning clearing a shady site in the compound and erecting a spacious tent on it. Proud of our handiwork, we summoned our father to see and admire. Instead of congratulations, which we confidently expected, we saw our father's face cloud over with anger; we had ruined a whole bed of seedlings which he had planted and carefully reared! Something terrible was bound to happen to us. But luck was

on our side. One of my sisters, who must have been seven years of age at the time, turned the tables on my father by bursting into tears and accusing him of failing to appreciate our wonderful skill and industry. My father could only laugh and return to the house. I suspect that his official subordinates similarly played upon his feelings and sense of humour when in a tight corner.

I have already mentioned that my father's confiding nature made him easy prey to the confidence-trickster. Somehow, my father gave the impression that he rather enjoyed being tricked. I remember a pompous Indian Christian who had meet my father somewhere and in 1926 or so began calling at our house almost every other day. He spoke of dining and lunching at Government House, of being on intimate terms with the Commandant of the Indian Marine and so on. He undertook to get my eldest brother employment in a British bank. We were not entirely taken in by his talk. For one thing, he was far too fond of bread and home-made butter for a true habitue of Government House. But my father did not call the man's bluff on the off chance that, perhaps, he might be able to do something for my brother. The man borrowed some money which he promptly returned, evidently hoping to make a really big haul on the next occasion. In the end my father forced his hand, and it was arranged that he should take my father and brother to the manager of the bank in question. The man quickly disappeared in the bank premises leaving my father to explain to the manager why he had called. Needless to say there was no job in the bank for my brother, and we never saw the man again.

My father had an eye for curios of all kinds, and for old pictures, books, coins and brass and copper ware. He gave considerable help to well-known collectors of historical documents like Rao Bahadur D. B. Parasnis and Mr Purshottamdas Mavji in locating valuable documents and pictures in the Satara District. At Aundh he laid the foundation of the well-known museum and picture gallery there. Though he purchased several beautiful brass and copper images of Hindu deities, he always gave them away, because he thought it wrong to keep them in a Jewish household even as decoration.

My father appreciated Indian music, but, while he enjoyed watching a play, he was not quite sure whether he was right in doing so. I suspect that to a certain extent he shared Plato's misgivings about the moral dangers of a person pretending to be other than himself; like Plato, he perhaps felt that one tended to grow like what one imitated. In particular, he thought it very wrong for men to play women's parts and vice versa. The influence of the Bible is clearly evident here. On the whole, the Arts did not play any appreciable part in my father's life. He liked to adorn the walls of his house with pictures, but, by and large, they consisted of photographs and reproductions of no great artistic merit. Until about 1925 there was always a complete gallery of portraits of British royalty occupying places of honour.

In early childhood my father had a bad attack of measles which affected the sight of his left eye, greatly darkened the skin of his face and slightly impaired his digestion. In 1913 he was seriously ill with a carbuncle which was wrongly suspected to be diabetic. His health was otherwise generally good. He was slim as a young man, but his figure broadened as he approached middle age. For a time he kept a beard, which certainly did not improve his appearance, but ever since I can remember him he wore only a moustache.

My father was abstemious in his habits and, until 1910 or so, strictly moderate in his use of alcohol. After that he drank more, particularly in company. When his troubles increased after retirement, he tended to drink more than was good for him, particularly when he was feeling depressed, but he stood his liquor well and he had the capacity of rousing himself to sobriety in a sudden emergency. Towards the end of his life he strictly rationed himself, and in the last year abstained almost completely. He smoked very moderately, but only cigars.

After about 1923 my father steadily lost weight and his appetite became very poor. Yet he retained his physical vigour to a remarkable degree. My eldest sister lost her husband after a painful and long illness in 1924. In 1926 two of my brothers were dangerously ill with typhoid and in that year my mother's

health broke down and she became an almost chronic invalid. In 1927 my sister lost her only daughter from diphtheria. All this, added to business worries and setbacks, took its toll and my father began showing his age.

In May 1931 my father sustained a fall just outside the General Post Office in Bombay and felt excruciating pain in his left leg. My uncle Mr Abraham Samson (Killekar) was with him and urged him to go immediately to St George's Hospital near by. My father refused and insisted on accompanying my uncle to the office of an insurance company where my uncle had to draw some money, my father remaining in the car. He came home all the way to Bandra and the doctor was sent for. One look at the leg was sufficient to tell the doctor that my father had suffered an impacted fracture. The doctor insisted on immediate removal to the K.E.M. Hospital. There he asked for an X-ray examination. Though bathed in perspiration, my father was exchanging pleasantries with the hospital doctors. Discovering that one of them belonged to the Mulshi Peta of Pune District, my father recounted Shivaji's exploits in that area, and the hospital doctors refused to believe that there was a fracture. Our family doctor had considerable difficulty in persuading them to take the case seriously. An X-ray examination was eventually made and this revealed a fracture. My father was admitted as an inpatient and his leg was put in plaster of Paris from the hip to the toes. It turned out that at his age this was the wrong thing to do; and, in any case, the job was badly bungled. The flannel bandages beneath the plaster were too tightly wrapped and obstructed blood circulation. To crown all, the bandages were fastened with safety pins which began rusting.

My father stoically endured agonies in the hospital for five days or so, though the staff were as attentive and kind as the circumstances of a general hospital would permit. We were assured that all was going well, but my father insisted on being taken home. Reluctantly we complied with his wishes, and we had barely reached home when we realised the wisdom of our action. My father was in a high fever and was intermittently delirious. His back was a mass of bedsores. The doctor suspected

poisoning from the sores. When a surgeon was summoned and the plaster was cut open, it was found that the leg from the knee downwards was covered with extensive sores. For almost a fortnight my father's life hung by a thread. He seemed to make no appreciable improvement until one day in June he was asked to agree to the marriage of his fourth daughter to Mr David Reuben, son of his old friend Mr Ezra Reuben. At once his will to live asserted itself, and from that day he showed progressive, though slow, improvement. The delirium ceased and the sores on the leg started healing. Within six months he was taking a few steps with the help of a crutch and with an improvised support to correct the shortening of the leg. By the time of my sister's marriage in May 1932 my father was walking fairly freely with the aid of a stick, though he had difficulty in climbing stairs.

The fracture of his leg forced my father to do what nothing else had succeeded in effecting. It forced him to give up his attempts to establish some business. But he keenly felt his confinement. Though he had his garden and his books to occupy him, he was oppressed by a feeling of failure and defeat. He had spells of despair, and I suspect that for the first time he lost confidence in himself and began casting about for reasons for the frustration of all his ambitions. It was hard to watch his unhappiness without any means of reaching him with comfort and assurance. Indeed our very ability to carry on the day-to-day life of the family without his active help perhaps accentuated the feeling that he had outlived his usefulness. He read his Bible assiduously and one can only hope that he found comfort in doing so. His closest confidants in this period were his friend and neighbour Khan Saheb R. Samson (Bhonkar) and my uncle Mr Abraham Samson. The former, in particular, was frequently with him and carried out for him several commissions connected with his business complications in Satara.

In the early part of 1933 my father had repeated attacks of diarrhoea which as it turned out, were a forewarning of pernicious anaemia. The anaemia was not noticed until the middle of June and, I am afraid, there was some delay on the part of the doctor in starting effective treatment with injections of liver ex-

tract. In the first week of July it was evident that my father would not recover, though, barely twenty-four hours before his death, the doctor, seeing the apparently carefree way in which he was chatting and joking with Khan Bahadur Judah Hyam (Mhashilkar), Mr Ezra Reuben and Mr Abraham Samson, told us that there was still much ground for hope. What the doctor did not then know was that the jokes and laughter were actually at his expense. My father had, shortly before, asked me to fetch him his marked copy of the Bible and to leave him alone with his friends. We were afterwards told that my father had opened the Bible at I Kings 1 and read out the following:

> Now King David was old and advanced in years; and although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. Therefore his servants said to him, 'Let a young maiden be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait upon the king, and be his nurse; let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may be warm.' So they sought for a beautiful maiden throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The maiden was very beautiful; and she became the king's nurse and ministered to him; but the king knew her not.

My father compared the futility of the doctor's attempts to the ineffectiveness of the young and beautiful maiden when the time came for King David to die, and he added some pungent remarks on the pretensions of doctors. To us waiting outside and hearing only the laughter within, what in reality was a cheerful acceptance of the approach of death, came as a ray of hope.

Soon the visitors departed, and my father began to sink. His last care was to take a promise from my uncle that he would not allow any extravagance in funeral expenses and, in particular that we would not take the body to Ahmednagar; where my father had often in the past expressed his wish to be buried. At about six in the evening on Monday, 10 July 1933, my father quietly passed away — all passion spent.

On his tombstone we thought it appropriate to put these words from *Samson Agonistes:*

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise or blame; nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

APPENDIX 7.I

THE REVERED EZEKIEL alias BAPUJI ABRAHAMJI WARGHARKAR

(from the *Israelite* for July-August 1925)

My father's name was Ezekiel. But in his childhood his grandmother used to call him Bapu. When still very young he had to take employment as a boy recruit in the Fourth Rifles Regiment. He then gave his name as Bapuji Israel and this name clung to him for the rest of his life.

He was born at Malwan in the Konkan in 1819. Shortly after his birth his mother died. His father never returned from China where he went for the First China War.[1] Bapuji was brought up during his childhood by his paternal grandmother Hannahbai alias Yesubai. She died in Ahmednagar where the tombstone over her grave in the Jewish cemetery can still be seen.

Bapuji's father was named Abrahamji. He was Havaldar Major in the Fourth Rifles Regiment. His uncle Satkelji was Havaldar in the same regiment. He retired and settled in Bombay where he later died....

[1] The first China (or Opium) War commenced only in 1839, and if the father of Bapuji left India in the early childhood of the latter, as is believed, he must have gone to China in the military escort of one or other of the missions which were sent from India to China by the East India Company before the outbreak of hostilities. Or he may have gone East on some other expedition to a country other than China.

As Bapuji's father did not return from China, the commanding officer of the regiment enlisted Bapuji as a recruit boy....

His elder brother, Isaji, studied English and took up medicine. Bapuji joined the army as a sepoy, and soon started to rise. As he was proficient in drill, he was entrusted with teaching it, and to the end of his service his proficiency in the subject was much relied on. He gradually attained the rank of Subedar. He, however, lost all his teeth and had to retire from the army on a pension in 1859. On retirement he settled in Ahmednagar. The manner in which he acquitted himself in the army will be seen from the following certificate:

> Subedar Bapuji Israel served with the 4th Rifles for 22½ years, 5 years as a Company Havildar, 2 years as Havildar Major and 12½ years as Commissioned Officer, during eight of which he held the appointment of Native Adjutant under the present Brigadier Honner, C.B.
>
> Having lost nearly all his teeth, he was pensioned by the special Invaliding Committee held under the provisions of G.O.C. 5th June and 6th July 1859.
>
> Subedar Bapuji Israel is perhaps one of the best native drills in the Army and he is without exception one of the most educated, intelligent and excellent native officers I have ever known. He has always been one of the selected native officers of the regiment for the Order of British India.
>
> He wears two medals, Mooltan and Persia, and was for 18 months on recruiting service, enlisting 175 recruits.
>
> I very much regret that the state of health of the most rising native officer of the corps should have compelled him to quit it at the culminating period of his career. He was on the high road to the most important appointment in a native regiment, the Subedar Majorship.

He used often to describe his arduous experiences at the battle of Sobraon, in the Persian War and in the battle of Multan and the subsequent sack of the town.... During the sack of Multan he rescued the widow and two children of a Sikh Sirdar and

their property and took them to a place of safety with the support of Colonel Honner....

He was reemployed in the Police Department in 1863 as a Native Commandant in Ahmednagar District. When this post was retrenched, he was appointed as Police Inspector, but he twice or thrice reverted from that rank to the post of Fouzdar in Ahmednagar. In this post he spent the greater part of his police service and he retired on a second pension in Ahmednagar.

In remaining in his post at Ahmednagar he sacrificed his prospects of rising in the service. We brothers were studying in Ahmednagar, and he did not want our education to suffer by frequent movement from place to place. And in order to be able to give personal attention to our education he refused to go elsewhere himself on promotion but stayed on in Ahmednagar....

How he fared in the Police Department can be seen from the following extract from a testimonial:

> Subedar Bapuji Israel was appointed Native Commandant of the Ahmednagar Police on the 23rd March 1863 and held that appointment until the reorganisation of the Police on the 1st April 1869 when he was appointed Inspector of Police in Nasik. Having several sons at school in Nagar he resigned his Inspectorship and returned to Ahmednagar as Chief Constable on the 1st June 1869, was promoted to acting Inspector in October 1875 and reverted to the Chief Constableship on 1st February 1877.
>
> During the whole of Bapuji Israel's service in the Police he has proved himself a most excellent, trustworthy and intelligent officer.

When Bapuji Israel (Wargharkar) was serving in the Police Department he had occasion to attend on some big personages. Three of these come to my mind.

When King Edward VII toured India as Prince of Wales he visited Pune and stayed at the Government House at Ganeshkhind. Bapuji Israel was one of the three Police Inspectors on duty at the gates. It was an onerous duty and he was commended for performing it well. Once, noticing the war medals on his

uniform, the Prince came close and, after some questions, expressed his appreciation.

On the occasion of the visit of the late Maharaja Tukojirao Holkar of Indore to the Deccan on pilgrimage Bapuji Israel was appointed to make arrangements for the Ahmednagar Taluka. The Maharaja was pleased with the arrangements and gave him a letter of appreciation and a ceremonial shawl. . . .

When the senior Sir Salar Jang Saheb, who was regent of Hyderabad State, visited Ahmednagar to study the British system of government accounts Bapuji Israel was entrusted with the police arrangements. He was very pleased with Bapuji and pressed him to ask for a favour. Bapuji asked that, after his two younger sons completed their studies, they should be employed in the Hyderabad State service. Sir Salar Jang Saheb agreed, and advised Bapuji to bring the boys to him after they had learned some Urdu and Persian. We were of course studying these languages already. Unfortunately Sir Salar Jang died suddenly of cholera soon after at Aurangabad. Of us two brothers, one died in youth, but, if Sir Salar Jang had lived, I at least would perhaps have become some kind of Hyderabadi Nawab Jang Bahadur, small or big, and the misfortune that overcame me in my eagerness to become a businessman after my retirement would not have occurred. In any case, despite adverse circumstances, I am still persisting in my business attempts. Setbacks should not deter one and one must persist in one's efforts. Perhaps, God is sending me these trials as an object lesson for my children. . . .

Bapuji Israel detected many thefts, pursued and captured dacoits and rendered valuable service during the uprising of Kolis and Bhils from Jawhar and the Dangs. . . .

His great virtue as a Government servant which was highly appreciated was that he never accepted a bribe in any circumstances and treated all women with great respect. . . .

Bapuji Israel must have had only meagre schooling, but he must have done considerable private study and read much. Through practice he could understand English somewhat, but could neither read nor write it. He used to make us read to him English newspapers and books on history and question us to make sure that he had understood.

His memory was very sharp and he was a shrewd judge of men. He never put obstacles in the way of others and gave help even to scoundrels after making them realise that he had recognised them for what they were.

His Marathi handwriting, both Balbodh and Modi, was very fine, and he had an expert knowledge of book-keeping. He used to teach arithmetic to his grandchildren....

He kept a detailed daily account of his household expenses with scrupulous regularity and he was keen on seeing that money was spent only on useful purposes.

He was particular about the education of his sons and daughters and did not regard any expenditure on his children as extravagant, provided it was for education or health. But it was difficult to get a pie out of him for entertainments. Every delicacy was provided at home, but he would not give a pie for buying eatables from hawkers near school. Of course, sometimes our mother was more indulgent to us in this regard.

He took a personal interest in his children's education, and kept close touch with our teachers and often visited our school. He worked for the spread of education amongst Non-Brahmins in association with Mr Shivram Bapuji Paranjpe, Headmaster of the Ahmednagar High School, with whom he developed close friendship. Non-Brahmins often left school very early because they found the study of Sanskrit too difficult. He, therefore, secured facilities for learning Urdu and Persian in the school for such boys....

He rendered much and varied public service as a member of the Ahmednagar municipality and also served as Chairman of the municipality on some occasions. He was particular about the sanitation of the town and strictly supervised the Badshahi wells. He learned from an old maistry the way these wells were supplied with water and did not permit any changes. In consequence there was an ample supply of water, and all springs used to flow freely. Later an engineer introduced some innovations which resulted in the diversion of the underground flow. Ultimately the wells dried up and there was scarcity of water in Ahmednagar....

He could not tolerate delay in municipal work caused by unnecessary discussion. I remember one incident after he had retired

on pension but was still a member of the municipality. He returned home from a municipal meeting in a temper at one or two o'clock in the afternoon. Formerly all members of the municipality used to be nominated but, by the time of the incident, the practice of having some elected members had come into force. The famous scholar Shankar Pandurang Pandit was the President of the municipality. The elected element was given to quarrelling over words and on this occasion a heated argument arose over a trifling matter. All the B.A.s and M.A.s kept on arguing over words. Considerable time elapsed without any conclusion being in sight. Bapuji got up, saying he was accustomed to doing work and could not bear waste of time in bandying words to the detriment of action, and walked out. Pandit Saheb immediately got the matter under discussion disposed of and always remembered the incident. Later, when he was in Porbander, in one of his letters he made particular reference to the incident.

There was a severe famine in Ahmednagar in 1875-76. The famine extended as far south as Mysore and Madras. As this was the first famine during the British regime, the Government was not so well prepared as it is now. Thousands of people flocked to the city in search of food. Bapuji and his associates did great work and saved numerous lives. He had considerable influence with traders who respected him for his straightforwardness and he was able to secure their co-operation without any orders from Government....

When in service he disliked waste of time in idleness and the same quality continued after his retirement. He kept himself occupied throughout the day and was particularly fond of sewing. He would collect us all and make us sew our clothes. People did not have sewing machines in their homes in those days and it was considered a great qualification for both old and young to be able to sew one's own clothes as far as possible. It was customary in rich as well as poor families to attend to one's own needs and few domestic servants were employed. Labour was, therefore, available for agricultural and other manual work and there was abundant production....

He was fond of rearing good breeds of poultry, turkeys and guinea fowl. In his opinion poultry farming could provide a livelihood for many families. This is so. Rearing of poultry on a large scale for egg production and the table, to cater to the domestic as well as foreign market, is not as much developed as it should be. Instead, attention is concentrated on the production of goods which are abundant abroad and can be purchased more cheaply than they can be produced here, while agriculture, milk production, rearing of sheep and goats and poultry farming which are particularly suitable for India are falling into neglect, with the result that food is insufficient. . . .

He was fond of keeping horses and considered riding an essential element in children's education. We were therefore able to become expert riders. . . .

He was short-tempered, but was not actuated by malice, treachery or vengefulness. He did not pursue his enemies, believing that their misdeeds would bring their own punishment. . . .

Once he put his confidence in a person he refused to entertain any complaints against him. I think a few scoundrels managed to secure his confidence and escape punishment when complaints were made against them, as he firmly believed them to be incapable of doing wrong. He always forgave those who made a clean breast and admitted their wrong-doing, but had no mercy for those who resorted to falsehood.

Usually my mother used to draw on herself the rigour of his wrath to save the person who had incurred it. According to the custom of those days he kept his wife in strict submission to himself. All subedars practised their military discipline and strictness first on their wives. My mother often suffered as a result of this attitude, but she nevertheless maintained a happy frame of mind. Be that as it may, in those days all subedars treated their wives strictly. I think they believed that, when the subordinates saw the strict treatment they meted out to their wives, the subordinates would fear them and be careful to obey. Strangely enough, these very subedars allowed their children a certain amount of independence. Daughters were particularly indulged. We (boys) were not permitted to leave home without our mother's

permission, but this rule was not enforced in the case of our sisters....

Bapuji Israel was very firm in his faith in his own religion. He had only a limited knowledge of Hebrew but scrupulously observed the Sabbath, the fasts, Yom Kippur and other important holy days. He had an aversion for anything forbidden by religious laws, and considered soothsayers, talisman makers and magicians to be deceivers. In old age he became somewhat less rigid and came to give greater importance to mental poise than to external ritual....

For many years he was the muccadam of the Bene Israel congregation at Ahmednagar. He followed the wishes of the majority and made no distinction between rich and poor. He avoided arbitrary exercise of his authority as muccadam.

He believed that officers of the East India Company generally strove for the public good and was doubtful how far the public would benefit from officers who secured appointments solely on the results of examinations. He had great admiration for European military officers and there was no doubt that he learned his love of strictness and punctuality from them....

He had no liking for acquiring a landed estate, though during his service he had several opportunities of obtaining land from Government. His European officers often urged him to accept land but he passed off the matter jokingly by saying: 'Should the hand that once wielded a sword now handle a sickle?'....

He was fond of gardening and when the Police garden at Ahmednagar was under his charge it flourished. He himself planted fruit trees and prepared grafts. My love of gardening and poultry I derived from him.

He had a strong constitution and was hardly ever ill. He used to take long walks even in his old age. Our mother died suddenly of tetanus as a result of receiving an injury on her foot from a rusty nail. After that he was less careful of his health and developed diabetes. He received a further shock in his weakened state when my first wife died. He had great courage, however, and would have lived long. But one of his nephews who had become deranged bit his thumb in a fit of rage. The doctor, unaware that he was suffering from diabetes, made an incision on

the thumb. The wound festered and resulted in general poisoning which in a very short time had a fatal result. His last anxiety was about my remarriage. I used to avoid the subject but he apprehended moral danger for me. After his death my brother did not let me remain unmarried long....

Bapuji Israel died on 22 August 1892 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery near the Dagdi Masjid....

We brothers and sisters were spread far and wide on account of our occupations but all of us gathered at Ahmednagar before his death and were able to give him comfort. Many grandchildren were also present and he got considerable satisfaction in seeing and speaking to them before he died....

Bapuji Israel had friends also among the missionaries. Dr Bisell (?), Dr Fairbank and Dr Hume were fond of him and used to help him as far as they were able. Sometimes they would enter into discussion with him. He would say, 'Your teaching is correct, but give up your belief in the divinity of Christ and join us' and the discussion would end in laughter.

This life-story contains no exciting tales of heroic deeds or miracles. It is the story of the ordinary doings of a simple man. But, while accounts of brave and extraordinary deeds are plentiful, it is rare to find unalloyed honesty and devotion to duty. My father's life is of significance because it displays these qualities, and I trust that the community will appreciate this and that our young men will find in it an example worthy of emulation. For our salvation we need honest and dutiful persons rather than geniuses with extraordinary abilities....

APPENDIX 7.II

MY GRANDMOTHER AND MOTHER

(from the *Israelite* for September-October 1926)

We did not see my father's parents, but my mother's mother survived for many years to our benefit...

My grandmother was a Charikar by birth. We have no particulars about her father, but her brothers became well-known. Her eldest brother, named Shalomji, was a Subedar. Another brother of hers, named Abrahamji, was also a Subedar. Later he joined the Police and was promoted as Assistant Superintendent of Police. He was the first Indian to hold such a high post...

My grandmother according to the practice of the times had no formal education. All her education was in household matters. She was married at a very young age to a well-to-do but middle aged widower named Daniel who belonged to Mhasla in Janjira State. My grandmother's married life was very short. My mother was born two or three years after the marriage and shortly thereafter my grandfather died. The Mhashilkars had considerable landed and other property and my mother had grown-up stepbrothers. It is understood that their descendants are still at Mhasla. We have never met.

After the death of my grandfather a great calamity befell my grandmother. The breach which occurred then was never healed.

In those days the Janjira State was more or less independent. The Nawab believed in following antiquated laws. Persons guilty of adultery were put to death. I have myself seen the fearsome place at which the death sentence was carried out by hurling the culprit from the top of the Fort on to the rocks below. As a check to adultery, the State law required that no young widow in a community which permitted re-marriage should remain unmarried, and such a widow had to marry any person who came forward to do so and paid a fee of fifty rupees. My grandmother came within the scope of this law. A childless widower came forward with an offer of marriage. He made the requisite application and paid the prescribed fee. My grandmother refused to marry him. Her eldest brother was at the time in the Third Regiment which seems to have been stationed nearby, probably in Bombay City. She sent word to him of her predicament, and he proceeded to Janjira armed with a letter from his commanding officer. Fortunately at the time, owing to the inability of the Nawab to control serious rioting in the State, there was posted in the State as Political Officer an official named Colonel Salmon (?). The Colonel, on reading the letter from the commanding officer, intervened, and

the Nawab relented to the extent of permitting the young widow to leave his territories within twenty-four hours. If she was not out within that time, the order of remarriage would be enforced. Immediately brother and sister, with the young baby (my mother) fled, and within twenty-four hours were safe in British territory.

Thereafter my grandmother stayed for the rest of her life with her brothers....She used to manage all their household affairs and they brought up my mother and arranged for her marriage. The house of her uncles was the only home my mother knew.

My grandmother's name was Baiobai. I saw her only in old age, but even then she had a strong build and attractive appearance.... She appeared hot-tempered but was kind at heart....

My grandmother had great compassion for the poor and needy and, as soon as she had word of illness or death in the neighbourhood, she always left whatever she was doing and went to give aid.

She used to listen to religious tales of all faiths but was strict in the observance of the requirements of her own....

She could not bear to see a young married woman who did not have children in due time, and she would grow most anxious about such a woman. 'Why have you no child?' she would ask over and over again, and it was very amusing to watch the interrogation. Once the battery was turned on my first wife. Considerable time had passed after our marriage without a child, and the questioning started. In fun I once said: 'Granny, is the matter in her hands?' I became the target of her attack and had to flee. Soon thereafter my wife conceived, and my grandmother was happy. Seeing my first child before she died gave her pleasure.

It was not as if this anxiety about childlessness was confined to the family circle.... She never said as much, but I think that she apprehended that a young married woman who had no children was more liable to be led astray than one who had...

My grandmother's death occurred in Pune. Some months earlier my elder brother, Mr Shalom B. Israel, had been transferred to Pune as Mamlatdar, and my grandmother used to go and stay with him. But she used to get uneasy and would soon return to the house of her brother's son which she had made her home.

Once when she was at my brother's place he received an offer of the Dewanship of Janjira State from the Nawab. After our discussion of the offer was over, my grandmother asked what we were talking about. On my brother saying that he had received an offer of Dewanship from the Nawab of Janjira my grandmother flared up. 'Do not go to that rascally place. You will be killed outright' she said. We felt like laughing. The old lady would not be convinced that times had changed. Only after she had taken a promise from my brother that he would not go to Janjira did she return home.[1] Shortly thereafter one evening she suddenly lost consciousness and quietly passed away in extreme old age....

My grandmother's birth date is not known. She died at the end of 1890 when she must have been between 85 and 90 ....

My mother was a premature child and therefore was not as robust as my grandmother, but she was wiry and strong and had a sweet and attractive appearance.

My mother was illiterate, but she believed, like my father, that education was necessary both for boys and girls. She never indulged us in regard to staying away from school and she gave all my sisters as much book-learning as was possible in those days.

My mother's life was spent in looking after her home and children....

My mother was even more loving and charitable than my grandmother and she did not know what it was to turn away empty a person in need. To all the poor and needy of the neighbourhood she extended a helping hand.

As for children, she knew no distinction between her own children and others. Mr Joseph Benjamin Bamnolkar and his brothers possibly have even more memories of her kindness than I have. She used to love my school companions as much as she did myself.

On all occasions, sad or happy, my mother was even more helpful and sympathetic than my grandmother to all, without distinction. Mahars, Mangs, Bhangis and the lowest of the low were

[1] He did eventually go to Janjira as Dewan.

all one to her if they were in need, and there was no person in our Moholla who did not have recourse to her....

The most appealing and memorable achievement of my mother was the preservation of the harmony of our house by keeping tactful silence when my father, who was given to sudden and violent outbursts of temper, was in one of his rages. Through great self-control my mother would save the situation both for herself and for others. What we are we owe to this patience. When husband and wife fail to show understanding for each other and to make allowances for each other's shortcomings, they only bring misfortune on themselves. My mother was fully aware that my father's intentions were excellent. Only sometimes my father, in his impatience, instead of devising means of remedying a mistake which might have been committed, became angry with the offender. At such a time my mother would tide over the critical period by great patience, and would not allow any permanent harm to arise....

My mother's birthdate was not recorded. She died on 7 December 1887 at Ahmednagar. Her age must have been about 55 years at the time.

Her health was not very good and in middle age she suffered for a time from fever due to hysteria (?) After a while this fever left her, and her health considerably improved.... She would have lived long, but she received an injury to her foot with a nail, and she got tetanus of which she died....

On Saturday evenings, she made it a point to visit Bene Israel ladies. Daily in the afternoon neighbouring women would gather in our house and engage in preparing papads, pickles and masalas and in cleaning grain. Amusing gossip would be exchanged. At marriages and circumcisions Muslim and other women would come and there would be singing all night....

She was very firm in her simple beliefs, and she gave alms to religious mendicants of all faiths. All Jewish ceremonial was strictly carried out by her, and she invariably attended Rosh Hashanna and Kippur prayers....

From our father we learned punctiliousness. More valuable than this was the gift we received from our mother, which was the virtue of charity. If there is any trace of this virtue in us,

then it has come to us from our mother. My eldest sister, Simhabai Rajpurkar, was my mother's favourite and she was full of charity almost beyond belief...

As in the case of my father I readily admit that my mother had no great achievements to her credit. But the lives of housewives are of even greater significance than those of women who have ruled states. It is good mothers who give rise to nations which can be called fortunate....

Finally, I would point out that the same law applies to men as to women. A man who is not a father and has no experience of the management of the small but complicated kingdom of the family will find it difficult to carry out adequately the management of national affairs. Just so, women who have not experienced motherhood do not develop the qualities needed properly to carry out any kind of work. Our young women should, therefore, never forget that, whatever profession they may choose to follow, motherhood should be their primary aim.

Glossary

Ashkenazi: originally the term was applied to Jews who were settled in Northern France, Germany and the Slavonic countries. At present it is applied to Jews who follow the ritual developed in these regions, as distinguished from those who follow the Sephardi (q.v.) ritual.

Chambar: tanner, formerly treated as untouchable.

Chitnis: the head of the revenue branch in the office of the Collector (q.v.) in Maharashtra of the rank of Tahsildar (q.v.).

Collector: the officer in administrative charge of a revenue district who is also the district magistrate.

Commissioner: an official in supervisory charge of a group of revenue districts, called a division.

Deputy Collector: a revenue official ranking just below the collector of a district in supervisory charge of a group of tahsils (q.v.) or at headquarters as personal assistant to the collector.

Eliyahoo Hanabi: Elijah the Prophet whom the Bene Israel invoke in home thanksgiving services. According to Jewish tradition the prophet, who was taken up to heaven, will reappear before the Messiah (q.v.) arrives. The name is used by the Bene Israel for the thanksgiving service itself.

Gubbay: synagogue treasurer.

Haggada: a set form of blessings, prayers, etc. recited at the special home ceremony (called the *Seder*) on the eve of Passover or *Pesah,* a week-long festival which commemorates the escape of the enslaved Israelites from Egypt.

Haham, also *Hacham* or *Hakham:* the title (lit. 'wise' or 'sage') used among Sephardi (q.v.) and Oriental Jews for a rabbi.

Halacha: the whole corpus of the written and oral Jewish law.

Havaldar or *Havildar:* lowest non-commissioned officer in the Indian army.

Havaldar or *Havildar Major:* non-commissioned officer in the Indian army next above Havaldar.

Hazan: the main official who conducts and leads the services in a synagogue.

Inam and Inamdar: a gift or grant of land by the State on a special tenure involving the alienation wholly or partly to an individual or institution of the rights of the State to land revenue. The holder of an inam was known as inamdar. All inam tenures have now been abolished on payment of compensation.

Jamat: term borrowed by the Bene Israel from their Muslim neighbours to describe the general body of members of a synagogue or of a local community.

Kazi: originally a hereditary religious preceptor of the Bene Israel, descended from one of three members of the community who, according to tradition, were taught Jewish ritual and practices by David Rahabi and appointed as religious leaders and as arbitrators in disputes. At present the term is used to designate a synagogue official appointed to assist the hazan (q.v.) and to attend to funerals and home ritual of congregants.

Kibbutz: collective settlement in Israel in which property is held in common. The settlement is mainly agricultural but may also be engaged in industry.

Konkan: the coastal region of Maharashtra State comprising the districts of Thane, Raigad (formerly called Kolaba or Kulaba), Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg.

Levirate marriage: obligatory marriage of a childless widow with brother of deceased husband. Release from this requirement may be obtained by performing the ceremony of *halitza* in which the brother formally refuses to go through with the marriage and frees the widow to marry outside the deceased husband's immediate family.

Lost Ten Tribes: ten of the twelve tribes into which the Israelites were traditionally divided, constituting the kingdom of Israel, as distinguished from the kingdom of Judah. On the fall of the kingdom of Israel in the eighth century B.C.E. they were mostly dispersed and lost to history.

Mahal: formerly a group of villages in a taluka (q.v.) which constituted a special unit for land revenue administration. Now all mahals have been recognised as independent tahsils (q.v.).

Mahar: a Hindu caste formerly treated as untouchable.

Maistree or *maistry:* a craftsman. Among the Bene Israel the term was generally applied to a building contractor.

Mali: cultivator of a vegetable or flower garden or orchard.

Malida: a term applied to strengthening food of all kinds, or to a mixture of foods offered at a shrine. Among the Bene Israel the term is used for a concoction of parched rice, shredded coconut, raisins, sugar and spices over which blessings are recited in the

Eliyahoo Hanabi (q.v.) ceremony. The term is often applied to the ceremony itself.

Mamlatdar: the officer entrusted with the local revenue administration of a taluka (q.v.). The designation is no longer in use.

Mamzer: the offspring of a union which is forbidden by Jewish law and the descendant of such offspring. Marriage between a mamzer (pl. mamzerim) and a 'legitimate' Jew or Jewess is prohibited.

Mang: a Hindu caste formerly treated as untouchable, graded below the Mahar (q.v.) caste.

Maratha: a Hindu caste in Maharashtra to which Chattrapati Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha Empire, belonged.

Meshuarim: manumitted slaves of Cochin Jews, and their progeny.

Messiah: from the Hebrew *mashi'ah,* the Annointed. Believed by the Jews since Roman times to be a future descendant of King David who would be raised up by God to remove the yoke of oppression from the Jews and reign over a restored kingdom of Israel to which all Jews would return from exile. The concept of the Messiah is foreshadowed in several books of the Bible.

Minyan: the minimum of ten men required for the recital of certain congregational prayers.

Mishna: the Jewish Oral Law, traditionally believed to have been revealed along with the Torah (q.v.). This Oral Law was codified and recorded in the Talmud (q.v.).

Moshav: cooperative agricultural settlement in Israel.

Muccadam: in Bene Israel usage (now obsolete) the head of a local Bene Israel community. The name is derived from the Arabic *muqaddim,* leader or head of the community, and has been assimilated in Indian languages to designate a supervisor over a gang of workers.

ORT: acronym of the Russian name for Society for Manual Work; an organisation for providing vocational training in skilled trades and agriculture among Jews. At present ORT, with headquarters in Geneva, operates in more than 30 countries, including India. The ORT schools in Bombay, like similar institutions in several developing countries, gives training to non-Jews as well.

Parsees: the descendants of Zoroastrians who fled to India on the Arab conquest of Persia.

Sammash: the caretaker in a synagogue.

Sephardi (pl. *Sephardim):* originally the term was applied to Jews of Spain and Portugal to distinguish them from Ashkenazi (q.v.) Jews. Later the term has been applied to all Jews following the ritual developed in Spain and Palestine, including all Oriental Jews.

Shanwar: the Marathi name for Saturday.

Subedar: the first commissioned rank in the Indian army open to Indian personnel.

Subedar Major: the highest commissioned rank in the Indian army open to Indians until 1918. Earlier in the Bombay Army the designation was Native Commandant, which the Bene Israel Indianised as Commodan.

Tahsil and Tahsildar: the present names for Taluka (q.v.) and Mamlatdar (q.v.). Also spelt Tehsil and Tehsildar.

Talmud: record, in two compilations (Jerusalem and Babylonian), of the Mishna (q.v.) and discussions thereon by scholars and jurists over some centuries.

Taluka: a sub-division of a revenue district in Maharashtra, now termed Tahsil.

Teli: oilpresser.

Torah: the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses. The term is also applied to the whole body of Jewish tradition.

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