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THE BOHRAS A MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF GUJARAT

The Muslim trading communities of Gujarat trace their descent to Hindu origins. They are divided into the three well-known groups of Bohras, Khojas and Memons, the first two of which are Shi'a Ismā'īlīs and the last Sunnīs. All three communities claim to have embraced Islam about the same time, between the eleventh and the twelfth century A. D. (1).

It appears that at the beginning and for some time afterwards, these communities comprised both Sunnī and Shi'a elements. Today, however, the Bohras are divided into two distinct and exclusive communities of Sunnīs and Shi'as with no social relationship whatsoever existing between them (2). A sectarian controversy in the Khoja community was brought before the Bombay High Court in 1866, and the judge had to decide whether the Khojas were Sunnīs or Shi'as (3). The Memons who, as a whole, adhere to the Sunnī doctrine, seem to have their Shi'a counterpart in a modern branch of the

(1) The first missionaries of the Bohras arrived about 460/1067. The Khojas claim that their first missionary, Nūr Saṭgur, reached Patan in 1166. The Memons, who in the main descend from the same Hindu stock as the Khojas, were converted by a son of 'Abdu'l-Qādir al-Jīlānī.

(2) The Sunnī and Shi'a Bohras still have adjacent living quarters in many towns of Gujarat. The dress of their womenfolk in rural areas, too, shows remarkable similarities.

(3) Advocate General v. Muhammad Husen Huseini, (1866) 12 Bom. H. C. R. 523 ff.

Agha Khan's Ismā'īlīs who call themselves Momnas and who belonged originally to the Hindu caste of Leva Kumbis. The names of both communities are corrupted forms of the Arabic *Mu'min*. In Kutch and Kathiawar large numbers of Momnas live side by side with the Memons. The Momnas have now either attached themselves to the Khojas or have remained as a separate sect with few Muslim traditions and will probably, in the course of time, merge into the Hindu fold, as happened to some of these halfway communities in the last century⁽¹⁾. It is curious to note that the Momnas who joined the Khojas were given a lower status within the community⁽²⁾. It is probable that these Momnas, with their superficial Muslim colouring, discovered that in their essential beliefs they differed wholly from other Momna and Meman groups and succeeded to the Khojas, who admitted them as second-class members.

The initial spread of Islam among these trading and non-trading communities of Gujarat was little more than a personal attachment to the missionaries, mostly Ismā'īlīs, who tried to divert them from their original allegiance. For these first converts Sunnism or Shi'ism had no meaning whatsoever, in an age of Hindu dominance. Sectarian differentiation in such a time would have been inexpedient and fruitless. With the coming of Sunnī political power in northern India, the Šūfī orders engaged in a similar task among the Hindus of the North, and these activities later extended to Gujarat and to Central India in the wake of expanding political power⁽³⁾. A personal attachment to a teacher, Shi'a or Sunnī, which did not involve any drastic change in the daily life of a Hindu, could be welcome

(1) In Gujarat, the Matia Kumbis were one of them. (Matia probably from Arabic *muff*). Others were the Jats, the Surmas, and the Kers Mianas. The Matia Kumbis who have returned to the Hindu faith call themselves Vaishnava Kumbis.

(2) When the judge asked who the Momnas were, defence counsel replied, 'They are a humble community of shoemakers; not Khojas, but adherents of the Agha Khan.'

(3) All converted Sunnī communities still retain their saints (*pirs* and *pirzādas*). The main Šūfī orders in Gujarat are the Qādirīs, the Rīfī'īs, the Chishtī's and the Jelālī's.

under uncertain conditions, when political changes seemed imminent. Most conversions from Hinduism in those days were nominal, and are to be attributed to the efforts of these missionaries. About the same time, too, some of the North Indian Muslims migrated to the South, fleeing before the Ghaznavids and the Ghorids⁽¹⁾.

By this time other Muslim influences had already penetrated into Gujarat. The Bohra Ismā'īlī tradition has it that Sidhrāj Jaysingh, the Solankī king of Gujarat (1094-1133), his minister Bhārmal⁽²⁾ and the Jain teacher of Kumārpāl, Sidhrāj's successor, adopted Islam. How far this conversion to Islam was genuine or not is difficult to say, but there is a strong possibility that it might have been an act of political expediency. In any case, Islam in Gujarat continued in an uncertain and fluid state, which can be seen from the fact that Sunnī Bohras⁽³⁾, Khojas and Memons till the passing of the Shar'at Act of 1937 were governed in most respects by customary Hindu law⁽⁴⁾. The Hindu customs observed by all these indigenous communities in many spheres of life up to the present also indicate how superficial were the roots Islam had taken in them.

Leaving the Khojas and the Memons aside, we will now direct our attention to the Bohras, and begin with a few preliminary remarks. The popular account relates that Sultan Aḥmād, a Muslim king of Gujarat (1411-1441), divided the new converts into two groups and called the fighters Mawla'l-Islām⁽⁵⁾

(1) Both Memons and Khojas claim descent from the Lohanas. These people dwell round Lahore, which derives its name from their settlements. The existence of a politically independent Ismā'īlī community in Multan and Mansurah is mentioned in Ismā'īlī and other sources. A section of Khojas are still known as Multani Khojas. The last known attempt by the Ismā'īlīs to regain power in N. India was in 694/1236.

(2) A few Bohra families in Kathiawar claim descent from Bhārmal. Three much venerated Bohra saints come from that family.

(3) The Sunnī Bohras in many parts of Kheda and Broach have come under Wāḥabī influence, and Hindu customs have been largely given up except in some remote rural regions.

(4) The Kutchi Memon Act of 1920 was the first partial attempt to replace the Hindu customary law by Muslim law.

(5) These are today known as Moleesam Girasia.

and the non-fighting converts Bohras (1). This is merely a later invention, for Sunni Bohras are mostly warlike peasants preserving their Rajput origins in their physical features and popular traditions. Moreover, some of the Sunni Bohras of Surat, Broach and Baroda claim Brāhmanī, Mārwāṛī and other lower caste descent. Numerous Sunni Bohras in the Surat and Kheda districts of Gujarat bear, in common with many Hindus (2), the family surname of Vohra. The combination of these diverse elements must have been earlier than the coming of Muslim rule to Gujarat, and it is probable that there was a Hindu caste called Vohra (3) which accepted some form of Islam while continuing a Hindu mode of life, and became a refuge for other new converts. With the coming of Sunni rule, divisions appeared within this community which maintained the pattern of a Hindu caste under a thin Islamic veneer. Although the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a Bohras was not noticed in the early stages, it gained in importance with the growth of Sunni political power. Since the early Sunni Bohras had little more than a personal attachment to their Sūfī pīrs, an attachment which even today divides the Sunni Bohras amongst themselves, according to their allegiance to different pīrs and pīrādās, social, including marital relations existed between the Sunni and Shi'a branches until 1535, when Ja'far Shīrāzī asked the Sunni Bohras to cease all social relationship with their Shi'a counterparts (4).

The Ismā'īlī communities of Northern India seem to have been independent and to have had no relations with their

(1) The popular etymology derives the word from *uyawabdar*, i. e. trade. The Sunni Bohra tradition that they were called Bohras because they consisted of several sects or paths (Gujarati: *bahu rāh*) accords, however, better with the early composition of the community of several heterogeneous elements.

(2) These Hindus, too, are not traders.

(3) Elliot, *Races of the N. W. Provinces of India*, I, 43 and 150.

(4) The Bohra tradition asserts that this was one of the largest secessions from the community, and was led by a man called Ja'far who became a Sunni and carried with him about three fourths of the community. These people are known today as Ja'fari Bohras, and they call themselves 'Badi Jamā'at' or 'Chār Yārī', i. e. 'the bigger party' or 'the friends of the four callings'.

co-religionists in Gujarat (1). The Ismā'īlī Bohras, it is true, preserve the tradition that co-religionists of them existed until very recently in Multan. This seems to be merely based on the historical fact that Multan had been an Ismā'īlī principality. Some Bohras have also tried to show that the Bohra missionary, Mawlāya Nūru'd-dīn, and the Khoja Missionary, Nūr Satgur, were one and the same person. Nūru'd-dīn, according to the Bohras, arrived about 1067 A. D. and carried on his missionary activities in Deccan where he died and was buried in the city now known as Aurangabad. The tomb of a Khoja missionary at Navsari (2) gives the date of Nūr Satgur's death as 487/1094. The Fāṭimī caliph Mustansīr bi'llāh died in 1094, too, and it was only after his death that there occurred the split in the Ismā'īlī community, which is the basis of the distinction between Bohras and Khojas. There can have been little, if any, difference between their teachings at that time. The Khoja tradition, however, asserts that Nūr Satgur reached Gujarat only after 1179 (3) in the reign of Bhīm Solankī (1179-1243). In the face of these conflicting claims and the paucity of reliable information, it is difficult to venture any opinion about the time of their arrival or their doctrines. Indeed, the growth of the main bodies of both communities, Khojas and Bohras, has been almost wholly independent of each other.

The Ismā'īlī Bohras are divided into Dā'ūdīs, Sulaimānīs, 'Alīas, Nāgōshīas, Hiptās and two other recent factions. The differences between these branches concern the allegiance to the various persons who claimed the leadership of the community. The history of the earlier divisions is well known (4).

(1) For Ismā'īlīam in Northern India see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. Multan; H. Ray, *The Dynastic History of Northern India*, Calcutta 1931; Hashim Syed, in *Islamic Culture*, I, 1927; Sulaiman Nadvi, *ibid.* VIII-IX, 1934-1935; S. M. Stern, *ibid.* XXIII, 1949.

(2) W. Ivanow, in *JEBRAS*, XII, 1936, p. 60.

(3) T. W. Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, p. 275 mentions that the Khoja missionary arrived during the reign of Sīdhrāj. This seems to be a contamination of the Bohra and the Khoja traditions.

(4) Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. Bohras; J. N. Hollister, *The Shi'a of India*, p. 265-306.

These divisions have led to the formation of separate communities whose social existence is as exclusive as that of the Hindu castes. At times, there have been half-hearted attempts by well-meaning Sulaimānīs and Dā'ūdīs to patch up these differences, but as was to be expected, they all came to naught. The Sulaimānī and Dā'ūdī schism was almost inevitable, after the loss of the semblance of political power by the Sulaihidīs in the Yaman. It was almost entirely an Indian-Yamanī quarrel. The causes which led to the final break-away of the Indian element from their co-religionists in the Yaman still exist and a conciliation is unlikely.

The 'Alīas, the Nāgōshīas and the Hiptīas survive only in a few families in Baroda and Ujjain, and these will probably sooner or later merge into the larger communities with whom they are in close contact, either Hindu or Muslim.

The two recent break-aways among the Dā'ūdīs bear a certain resemblance to the Hiptīa schism, insofar as these three groups, in contrast with the other branches of the Ismā'īlī Bohras, accord to their leaders a higher position in the Ismā'īlī hierarchy than that of Dā'ī (or Dā'ī Mutlaq). After the extinction of Fatīmī rule in Egypt, the Yamanī centre of Ismā'īlism, demanding higher claims⁽¹⁾, reached a compromise, by which the head of the community was to retain the grade of Dā'ī Mutlaq. The founder of the Hiptīas, Hibatu'llāh ibn Luq-mānjī, claimed to have been in touch with the Imām through his Dā'ī-Balāgh; this schism occurred in 1780. The first of the two modern secessions occurred towards the beginning of the present century. Its leader, 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn, claimed to be the Hujja of the Imām, a rank next to that of Imām. His followers are few and are found in Nagpore, where they are known as Mahdībhāghwāllās. The second modern schism is still more recent. Its leader, about 1944, originally claimed the Imāmāte, but soon abandoned this claim for a claim to the lesser dignity of Hujja. The most interesting fact about this incident

(1) The claims ranged from Dā'ī Mutlaq to Hujja. Ismā'īlī sources, mainly the 'Uyūnu'l-Akbar of Dā'ī Idrīs, give in detail the differences that arose in the Yaman after the death of the caliph Amīr bi-Amrī'llāh.

is that though the seceders were few, they belonged to the class of religious dignitaries and were considered very learned.

These schisms had a lasting effect on the community: it became more compact than ever and the leader's control of the community became stronger.

The Dā'ūdīs, since the beginning of the present century, have nevertheless suffered many domestic feuds. The headship or Dā'īship of the community was for a long time reserved to the Yamanī families which had migrated to India when conditions in the Yaman became unbearable under Zaidī and Turkish pressure. Although a few Dā'īs were of Indian extraction, it still took a long time for the Indian element to oust the Yamanīs. The last four Dā'īs, and some earlier ones, have come from Indian families with anti-Yamanī leanings. The accession of the 47th Dā'ī, 'Abdu'l-Qādir Najmu'd-Dīn, the grandfather of the present Dā'ī, who succeeded a Yamanī Dā'ī, Muḥammad Badru'd-Dīn, led to a split between the two factions. The majority of the 'Ulamā' and Mashā'ikh claimed that Muḥammad Badru'd-Dīn died without nominating a successor. Since the nomination of the successor by the predecessor is one of the cardinal points of Shī'ite dogma, this created a delicate situation. The 'Ulamā' and Mashā'ikh, however, hushed the matter up by keeping the information from the community, and arrived at an agreement that 'Abdu'l-Qādir Najmu'd-Dīn should assume the headship of the community and abstain from claiming the spiritual position of Dā'ī. The agreement seems to have been faithfully carried out at first, but once securely established, and having overcome the Yamanī opposition by winning over or isolating the remaining hostile elements, Najmu'd-Dīn assumed the title of Dā'ī⁽¹⁾. Nothing much of importance happened under his successor, Ḥusāmu'd-Dīn, brother of Najmu'd-Dīn. The 49th, Dā'ī, Muḥammad Burhānu'd-Dīn, a son

(1) It was admitted by the opposition that Badru'd-Dīn intended to nominate Najmu'd-Dīn, but since it is essential that the appointment should be public, the succession of Najmu'd-Dīn was not recognized. The public nomination is called an-naṣṣu'l-jalī. For the stand of both parties see the Burhanpur Durgah case, (1947) 75 I. A. 1, and the Chāpds Bha'ī Gulla case, (1921) 24 Bom. L. R. 1060.

of Najmu'd-Din, succumbed to the resurgent Yamani element and admitted in a document (1) that his father and his uncles, the 47th and the 48th Dā'īs, were not Dā'īs but merely caretakers of the community. He was succeeded by his brother, Abdu'llāh Badru'd-Din. The Indian element, however, absolutely re-established itself with the accession of the present 51st Dā'ī, Abū Muḥammad Tāhir Sayfu'd-Din, a son of Burhānu'd-Din.

The first action he took was to disperse the opposition group by appointing their members to distant administrative posts in the community. Thereafter, by threats of excommunication, he extracted from many of them written admissions that they accepted him and his three predecessors as duly nominated Dā'īs, and thereby achieved the unquestionable leadership of the community. The few who refused to agree were expelled from the community on various grounds. The weapon of excommunication proved to be very potent, for the leader of the community controlled the means of livelihood of the 'Ulamā and Mashā'ikh, and could easily reduce them to poverty by refusing to appoint them to administrative posts, or by sending them to some remote areas where the sparse Bohra population was insufficient to support them.

At first, the excommunicated faction established their centres in Burhanpur, Bombay and Surat (2). This could not be considered a breach in the community, for although they were regarded as outcasts, pretenders (*mudda'ī*) (3) and objects of hatred, they still held themselves to be Dā'ūds. With the establishment of these three small groups, a few more individuals

(1) Before the original of the document was destroyed, the opposition had copies made, and these were introduced both in the Burhanpur Durgah case and in the Chānda Bha'ī Gulla case.

(2) Minor centres were also established in Kathiawar. The opposition soon began publishing two weekly Gujarati papers, *Baḡ-e-Mur'mān* in Amreli in Kathiawar, and *Guzār-e-Ḥakīmī* in Burhanpur. The first stopped publication at the death of its editor, the second still appears regularly. The Dā'ī's party, too, has its own paper, *Nasīm-e-Bahār*, which is published in Bombay.

(3) The term *mudda'ī* was first applied to the opposition when they filed the suit in the Bombay High Court. The opposition, on the other hand, calls the party in power *mudda'ī*, because they claim the Dā'īship.

were encouraged to oppose the ruling party and to join them; their life had by now become tolerable, after many privations resulting from the complete cessation of all social contacts with the rest of the community and the reprisals undertaken against them by the more fanatical followers of the Dā'ī.

The right of the Dā'ī to excommunicate was tested in court, in the famous Burhanpur Durgah case (1). After the case had passed through several stages, the Privy Council upheld the right of the head of the community in this respect.

In the thirties, another group consisting of about sixteen families was excommunicated in Karachi. The reason for excommunication was different here. The Burhanpur, Surat and Bombay groups were the orthodox opposition, whereas the Karachi party, consisting of the members of the Bohra Young Men's Association, ventured to question the validity of some of the more stringent measures which the Dā'ī had taken in order to control the community and collect the fees. The Karachi group claimed to be reformist and differed entirely in its outlook from the orthodox opposition. Their main complaints were against the necessity of securing the permission of the Dā'ī or of his agent for every ceremony, and against his high-handedness in the use of communal property (2).

In 1923 already, the Bombay government had put on the statute book the Waqf Act which required trustees, real or implied, to give an account of the trust property every year. The Dā'ī, supported by his followers, tried to be exempted from this provision; he claimed to be « the Lord of the wealth, the persons and the souls » of all his followers. The protests against the Act from the community were widespread and, for the most part, genuine, the response of the faithful to the wishes of the Dā'ī; but the Bombay Government did not yield.

Meanwhile, the opposition was not idle and a suit was

(1) Seth Tayyabali v. Mulla Abdulhuseein, Suit No. 25 of 1925 in the court of the First Class Sub-Judge of Burhanpur, C. P.; Hasanali v. Mansoorali, (1947) 75 I. A. 1; (1947) 50 Bom. L. R. 389.

(2) The Karachi party started its own monthly journal, which was discontinued after their readmission.

instituted in the Bombay High Court demanding that the Dā'ī should submit an account of the offerings made at the tomb of Chāndā Bhā'ī in Bombay (1). The suit became famous as the Chāndā Bhā'ī Galla case (2), *galla* being the Gujarati word for the wooden chest which is kept at all tombs for collecting donations from pious pilgrims. The case was decided against the Dā'ī who maintained that all contributions by pilgrims were for his personal use and that he, being the representative of the Imām, could not be called to account by anyone but him. After the decision, however, most of the more renowned and frequented tombs set up two chests: the old one within the precincts of the tomb, and a new one outside. The proceeds of the outside chest go to the Dā'ī, and as they are not of the nature of a trust, he is not required to render an account under the Waqf Act.

The right of excommunication, essentially a Hindu practice which was first adopted by the first Agha Khan against the twelve families of Bombay who called themselves Bārbhā'ī (3), has been freely used, but with great tact, by the present Dā'ī. It has prevented many dissidents from joining the opposition or even protesting against the measures taken by the Dā'ī or his agents. Complete social boycott in a community with a watertight and caste-ridden structure would be disastrous for the dissenters and their families. Consequently, the Karachi group and some members of the second generation of the other opposition factions recently applied for readmission to the community; this was allowed after they had made apologies for their previous actions and confessed their errors (4). In

(1) The tomb of a Bohra trader of the last century. Through the growth of the Bohra population in Bombay it has become an important sanctuary.

(2) Advocate General of Bombay v. Yusufali, (1921) 24 Bom. L. R. 1060. The judgment was approved by both parties, and each claimed that it had won the case.

(3) The trouble started in the twenties of the last century. Many Khoja cases went to the Bombay High Court. See Hirbal v. Sonbel (1847), Perry's Or. Cases 110; Morley, Digest II, 481; Advocate General v. Muhammad Husen Huseini, (1866) 12 Bom. H. C. R. 323 ff.

(4) The terms offered for readmission were originally very stringent. One condition was that the party desiring readmission should declare that any mar-

a recent decision, the Bombay High Court has absolutely denied the right of the head of any community to cast out any of its members. The High Court went to the extent of asserting that religion has nothing to do with the right of excommunication or expulsion (1).

The administration of the Bohras is wholly autocratic and chiefly in the hands of the Dā'ī, who governs every activity of the community with the help of his personally chosen assistants. The religious designation of the head is Dā'ī Mutlaq, a lesser rank in the Ismā'īlī religious hierarchy, but implying at present the uncontested and absolute leadership of the community. Under the Dā'ī and appointed by him are a Mā'dhun and a Mukāsir; these offices, too, are a remnant of the old Ismā'īlī hierarchy. After them come the Mashā'ikh (2), usually eighteen in number, of varying ranks and all addressed as Bhā'ī Šāhib. Every Dā'ī, on assuming office, creates his own Mashā'ikh. The Mashā'ikh are chosen among the persons most learned in Ismā'īlī doctrine and in Arabic, and they are usually trained by the Dā'īs themselves or in the Sayfī Dars in Surat (3), a seminary for religious dignitaries. Next in rank come the Amils (agents) who are addressed by the titles of Bhā'ī Šāhib, Miyān Šāhib and Mullā (4). The Bhā'ī Šāhibs and the Miyān Šāhibs are sent to cities with significant Bohra populations. Their main duty is to lead in prayer and to perform marriages and other ceremonies.

riages they had contracted during the period of excommunication were invalid, and the children born to them illegal. Recently the Dā'ī has become more liberal.

(1) Taher v. Teyyebhai, (1953) Bom. 183. In 1949 a Prevention of Excommunication Act was promulgated in Bombay; it made excommunication not only invalid but punishable by a fine.

(2) They are also referred to as Hudūd.

(3) The Sayfī Dars was founded by the 43rd Dā'ī, 'Abdu'l-'Alī Sayfu'd-Dīn, in 1232/1817. The opposition, soon after its excommunication, started a similar institute at Burhanpur; this has now ceased to function.

(4) Bhā'ī Šāhib means 'reverend brother'. The Dā'ī is referred to as Bā'ī Šāhib 'reverend father', and a female member of the Dā'īs family is known as Ā'ī Šāhib 'reverend mother'. About a generation ago the Bhā'ī Šāhibs were always relations of the Dā'īs. Nowadays Bhā'ī Šāhibs are created from all classes, and Miyān Šāhibs are gradually disappearing.

For every ceremony the permission of the 'Āmil is necessary. It probably dates back to the days when the initiation of neophytes was entirely dependent on the teacher. But now the reasons for it go deeper. For every ceremony that the 'Āmil performs and for every license he grants, he receives a fee, a large part of which goes to the Dā'ī's treasury and the remainder to himself. The permission of the 'Āmil is necessary for inviting the community to a feast. Marriage ceremonies can only take place by permission of the 'Āmil or of his authorized deputy, and it is usually he who officiates at such ceremonies (1). Although permission would rarely be refused, an agent could prove difficult if the usual fee was not forthcoming. In one case, on some pretext or other, the 'Āmil refused to officiate at a marriage, and so the parties were married before a Qāḍī. Thereupon, the 'Āmil wrote to the parties, intimating that they were not properly married and that the children born of the union would be illegitimate. The parties filed a suit for libel. The 'Āmil, supported indirectly by the Dā'ī, claimed that marriages among Bohras could only be valid if they were performed by the Dā'ī, his agents or agents' authorised deputies. This defence was withdrawn for fear of creating animosity between the other Muslims and the Bohras, and the case was settled out of court.

The Mullāship is the lowest stage of the present Bohra hierarchy. Mullās are numerous, and they generally belong to the cities where they are appointed. In big towns there is a post of Wā'il Mullā, upon whom devolves the duty of leading the prayers in the absence of the 'Āmil, whose permission to perform this office he has received. Most of the Mullās are instructed in the Ismā'īlī ritual.

(1) Up to ten years ago, every male Bohra was expected to grow a beard. This rule was strictly enforced. Since only the young men of the community proved recalcitrant, they were brought to book at the time of their marriage. When a young man, accustomed to shaving, was noticed to be growing a beard it was usually regarded as a sign of his approaching marriage. Before the ceremony, the groom had to give an undertaking with a deposit of money, determined according to the social status of the persons involved, that he would grow a beard. The deposit was, however, rarely returned.

The Mullās are also employed in the madrasas, which are for Bohra children exclusively. These madrasas are elementary schools where Gujarati, Urdu and religious instruction are given; the religious training is in the hands of the Mullās. These schools are supported by local funds (1). If not thus employed, a Mullā usually pursues some sort of trade and looks forward to the days of feasts and ceremonies when he, too, will collect a small offering, together with the 'Āmil, from the members of the community (2).

For his livelihood, the 'Āmil depends almost exclusively on the community. Nowadays he usually gets a small monthly allowance from the Dā'ī, while the rest of his needs is met from offerings. In the past, it was considered below the dignity of the members of this class, specially the Bhā'ī Ṣāhibs and Miyān Ṣāhibs, to engage in trade, but nowadays, partly because modern sceptic Bohras are less inclined to contribute liberally, some of the Miyān Ṣāhibs and Bhā'ī Ṣāhibs have adopted the peaceful and at times more profitable profession of traders. The Dā'ī never allows his 'Āmils to stay in any place for more than a few years. These transfers are made mainly in order to prevent any 'Āmil from gaining sufficient local experience to enable him successfully to misappropriate funds due to the Dā'ī.

The Dā'ī himself visits different Bohra centres from time to time, accompanied by his retinue. His present headquarters are in Bombay; he moved there from Surat early in the present century. On his visits the Dā'ī is received royally by his followers, and all expenses are paid by his hosts. Such invitations are usually suggested to the community by the Dā'ī's agent. The agent usually sends a few leading members

(1) The first modern Bohra school was started by the orthodox opposition at Burhanpur. The Dā'ī, too, opened one of his own at the same place, and another in Bombay. Because of lack of funds, the opposition school was transformed into a technical college, which is now open to all communities.

(2) These offerings differ according to the status of payee and payer. They are called *sa'dām* because the devout, when passing the money, kiss the hand of the dignitary. The excommunication is referred to as *sa'dām-barāh* i. e. refusing the right to kiss the hand.

of the local population to beg the Dā'ī to honour them by a visit, and after some initial show of reluctance, the invitation is accepted. The visit is usually a great drain on the purse of the Bohras, though highly profitable to the treasury of the Dā'ī. A city such as Surat could easily spend Rs. 100,000 on a single visit. The visits are therefore carefully planned so that no city is overburdened. Out of collected offerings, the Dā'ī maintains his retinue, his agents, the Dars in Surat, and a couple of high schools. Recently, scholarships for higher studies abroad have become a further item of expenditure.

The Dars at Surat used to be one of the best centres both for Arabic and Ismā'īlī studies. It still retains its past reputation through a few scholars, who have devoted their life to teaching. The Ismā'īlī studies are controlled by the Dā'ī. The study of Ismā'īlī esoteric philosophy has, since the beginnings of Ismā'īlī propaganda (1), always been very secret, and the first part of *Kitāb al-Azhār* gives a long list of Ismā'īlī books and recommends that they should be read only in that order and with the permission of the proper spiritual guide (2). The matter has now reached a stage when no Ismā'īlī work, not even the *Dā'īmu'l-Isām*, can be studied without the consent of the Dā'ī (3). Consequently very few people in the community know the teachings of their religious books, and they have to comfort themselves with the thought that only the learned can understand them.

Belief in the Dā'ī is an article of faith for every Bohra. The presence of this central figure managing the affairs of the community, has preserved its unity and kept them a separate entity.

The Bohras have retained many Hindu customs connected with marriage and other ceremonies. These have lost, more or

less, their old associations, and efforts are sometimes made to explain them in terms of Ismā'īlī esoteric philosophy. None of these ceremonies are contrary to Islamic law, so they could easily be retained.

In the last few generations, the Bohras have taken great care to prove themselves good Muslims. Listening to music and smoking are considered unlawful, and have only recently been introduced. The wireless has greatly modified the hostile attitude towards music in all circles, but smoking is still frowned upon even among some liberals. The Bohras, as a trading section of the Gujarat society, have kept contact with their Hindu counterparts while, as a wealthy Muslim class, their contacts with the other Muslims have not been free of envy and jealousy. *Taqīya*, the doctrine of dissimulation, was till very recently known by every individual. Although conditions have been better for the last few decades, care is always taken not to hurt the susceptibilities of the other Muslims.

Bohra contacts with Hindus and with other Muslims have raised some interesting legal questions which were settled in the light of the then existing social conditions. A study of the *Masā'il* of Aminjī ibn Jalāl, the *Masā'il Zaynīya*, the *Masā'il* of Ismā'īl ibn 'Abdī'r-Rasūl, the *Masā'il Sayfīya* and many other compositions of the period of Yamani and Indian Dā'īs (1) would produce interesting results. Even now an orthodox Bohra will refer all new problems to the Dā'ī, and his decision will then become law. Although modern collections of a similar character have not been made, a perusal of the periodicals and other publications of the community would provide ample material (2). An investigation of modern cus-

(1) There is substantial material on the subject. Nearly twenty compilations have been made of legal and quasi-legal questions during the period of the Yamani and Indian Dā'īs. The last of these works was the *Masā'il Zaynīya* by Zaynib Zaynu'd-dīn, the 45th Dā'ī. These works exist in manuscripts and are not as difficult to obtain as other Ismā'īlī writings.

(2) The present Dā'ī used to write a yearly epistle called *Risāla ar-Ramaḡānīya*, but they were discontinued because of criticism from the Ja'fari Bohras. The periodicals of the opposition, too, contain much useful material, most of it in Gujarati. The Burhanpur weekly *Gulzar-e-Hakimi* started publishing a translation of the *Rasā'il Ikhwānī'ya-Sāda*.

(1) The main reason for continuing the secrecy, even after the Ismā'īlīs established themselves as a political power, must have been the marked hostility shown towards them by the other Muslims.

(2) The author is Hasan b. Nūh Bhardaji. See Ivanow, *Guide*, 65.

(3) The library of the Dā'ī is reputed to have the richest collection of Ismā'īlī manuscripts. Many private collections have been incorporated in it by the present Dā'ī.

toms, conventions and recent developments must be a subject of a separate inquiry, and we will limit ourselves here to the discussion of a few topics of major interest.

The Ismā'īlī reckoning of the lunar calendar is based on the astronomical calculation of the appearance of the new moon. The other Muslims, on the other hand, rely on the moon being seen by two persons. The Ismā'īlī calendar is therefore fixed and definite, with six months of thirty days and six months of twenty nine days, alternating one after the other. Every third year there are seven months of thirty days. This astronomical calculation was adopted at the time when Greek science was finding a firm foothold among the Ismā'īlīs. It was approved by the Fāṭimī Imāms after the establishment of their rule in North Africa; more probably during the time of Mu'izz, because none of the earlier works of their illustrious Qāḍī, Qāḍī Nu'mān, has anything to say about this innovation. In his last work, the *Da'ā'imu'l-Islām*, he discusses at length the merits and the acceptability of the new reckoning, but in his chapter on *shahāda* (evidence) he refers to the general rule of Islamic law concerning the number of witnesses necessary to prove whether the new moon was seen or not (1). During the Yamanī period, Dā'ī Idrīs ibn al-Ḥasan defended the Ismā'īlī method of computing the calendar (2).

In India this difference between the Bohras and the other Muslims has been a source of trouble, in which the former have suffered intermittently. The fact that they are the only people celebrating the Muslim festivals one day, or sometimes two days before the general celebration, has roused animosity. Moreover their dates coincide with the Hindu calendar. This adds to the bad feeling, for it makes it seem that the Bohras have adopted the Hindu calendar. During Muslim rule in Gujarat, the Bohras had always to be careful about celebrating their

(1) *Da'ā'im*, ed. A. A. A. Fyzee, Cairo 1951. The theory is vaguely introduced on p. 323. For contradictory traditions, see pp. 225, 322 and 333. The second part of *Da'ā'im* which is not yet published, contains a few more such traditions.
(2) 19th Dhī; his treatise is entitled *R. Iqāḍu'l-'ilām fi kamāli 'iddati'l-'aḥd*. See Guide, 64. The Dhī also tries to explain the apparent contradiction. Qāḍī Nu'mān.

festivals. It was done as secretly as possible, and children were taught not to tell anyone. Nowadays, however, Bohras celebrate both festivals, their own and the general one. The religious ceremony is performed on their own day, and a general celebration held on the following day.

Another point to note about the Bohras is that they do not recite the *khuṭba* at the Friday or festival prayers. The *khuṭba* can be said only under an Imām, and since the disappearance of the 21st Imām, Tayyib, the infant son of the Fāṭimī caliph Amir bi-Amrillāh, no one is entitled to say it (1). The *khuṭba* reduces the four *rak'as* of the ordinary mid-day prayer to two. Muslim law demands that anyone who misses the Friday *khuṭba* and the congregational prayer shall perform the ordinary four *rak'as* of the mid-day prayer. The Bohras accordingly perform the ordinary mid-day prayer, without the *khuṭba*, on Fridays. On feast days they perform two additional *rak'as*, which are called *iwaḍu'l-khuṭba*, the equivalent of the *khuṭba*. At the end of the prayer, the person who leads the prayer stands up and, facing the *qibla* and not the congregation, as he would do when delivering the *khuṭba*, recites a prayer, asking God to make manifest the Imām. This innovation was introduced under the Dā'īs in the Yaman, when the political power of the Ismā'īlīs had disappeared. How far the Ithnā-'Asharī innovation of letting the appointed time for the sunset prayer pass, in expectation of the arrival of the Mahdī who would then lead the prayer, has influenced this Ismā'īlī practice, is difficult to say (2).

The practice of letting the hands hang down when performing the ritual prayers, and of wiping over, instead of washing, the

(1) The Bohras have, therefore, no *minbars* in their mosques. If they are found in some places, this is due to *taqiya*. During the month of Muharram and on other ceremonial occasions a special high chair with cushions is erected for the Wā'iz (preacher), who is usually the 'Amīr of the place.

(2) The influence of Ithnā-'Asharī Shi'ism is evident in the form of *adhān* used by the Bohras. It contains the additional formula 'Muḥammad and 'Alī are the best of mankind, and their progeny is the best of progenies' (twice). It was first introduced in the time of the caliph Ḥākim, and Dā'ī Idrīs in his *'Uyūnu'l-akhbār* states that it was taken over from the Imāmī (Ithnā-'Asharī) Shi'as.

fest in the ritual ablutions, belong to those points which exact argument and heated discussion, but are not exclusively distinctive of the Bohras.

The 18th of the month of Dhu'l-Hijja is celebrated as the Idu'l-Ghadir. This is a general Shi'ite festival commemorating the day when, according to Shi'ite belief, the Prophet appointed 'Ali as his successor. On that day every Bohra fasts and on no account misses the mid-day prayer, when the covenant with the Imāms and Dā'is is renewed ⁽¹⁾.

The meeting places for community gatherings and celebrations are the mosques and Jamā'at Khānas (assembly houses). Both are maintained by contributions of the local communities. A committee of a few leading persons is appointed by the 'Āmil to manage them and to look after the accounts ⁽²⁾.

The religious taxes (*zakāt* and *ṣadaqatu'l-ṣifr*) are usually collected by a special envoy of the Dā'i who is called Ṣāhibu'd-Da'wa. He travels to all important centres of the Bohras. The strict letter of the law is not observed as far as the payment of *zakāt* is concerned, and the sum is usually settled between the envoy and the payer after some initial bargaining.

During the last few years before the partition of India, common political interests tended to supersede purely communal affinities. Thereby, contacts between the Bohras and the other Muslim communities increased, and it is not surprising to come across Bohras deeply influenced by Wahhābism. This also affected the relations between Bohras and Hindus, with whom they had always been on more or less cordial terms. Since the partition, the Bohras stand politically divided. Both groups are making efforts to keep in close touch with each other across the political frontier. The results have been promising so far, but a lasting success can only be guaranteed by the continued goodwill of both the Indian and the Pakistan

Governments. Even if this is forthcoming, the influences at work on each of the two groups are entirely different, and the future is difficult to predict. The separatist tendencies of the Bohras of Karachi, together with the appealing slogan of Islam, may determine what this future will be in Pakistan. The policy of the present Dā'i in recent years has become somewhat more liberal than formerly, and probably this may help to keep the differing factions together for some time to come.

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(1) Cf. Ivanow, *A Creed of the Fatimids*, 13-15.

(2) These appointments are usually decided by the social status of the persons concerned. The Dā'i has recently started conferring titles on leading Bohras in every city. These title-holders have the first claim to membership in the committees.