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THE BOHRA REFORM MOVEMENT—A CASE STUDY

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D E C L A R A T I O N

Certified that the dissertation entitled
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submitted by RATAN KUMAR SAHOO in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree
of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (M.Phil) of this University,
has not been previously submitted for any other
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We recommend that this dissertation may
be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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TO MY PARENTS

WITH LOVE

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To talk of reform for a community in which any voice against the religious head priest results in social boycott and the subsequent consequences faced due to it is certainly a difficult task. This was the feeling I developed while trying to take the interviews from the followers of the religious head priest among the Bohras. Intuitions carried me along uncharted paths and I was about to lose the direction when my Supervisor - Prof. C.P. Bhambhari's experience with his guidance saved me. Were it not for his constant persuasion and encouragement, I would have been still searching for a way out of that wilderness. It was he who introduced me to research and developed an interest in it.

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Ratan Kumar Sahoo.

RATAN KUMAR SAHOO

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PREFACE

The path of any reform movement is never smooth: so also the path of any attempt to bring into light the story of the reform movement . It becomes more difficult when any response is not found from the followers of the religious head priest about what they think of the reform movement . In this stage it becomes quite necessary to deal with this reform movement meticulously at every stage or else there is every fear of a biased analysis . This stimulated me put my efforts to bring in to lime light the Bohra reform Movement .

The first chapter tries to deal with the Reform movements among the Indian Muslims in general focussing special attention on some of the leaders of these movements. The second chapters starts what exactly the first chapter has tried to touch at the end . It provided the historical background of the Bohras. The third chapter highlights the emergence of reforms among the Bohras . The fourth chapter tries to bring into a focus the social roots of the Bohra reformists in particular . The fifth chapter deals with the strategies and goals of the reformists . The concluding chapter seeks to synthesize everything and tries to see upto what extend this reform movement has been able to arouse a feeling for change within the Bohra Community.

"By the first decade of the nineteenth century, indigenous rule had been ended; the attempt to establish fiscal stability had brought substantial change to the land-controlling class; and the society as a whole had begun to change to one dependent on the Western industrialized economy. Cottage industries faced the death blow. Now the economy was wholly agricultural and geared increasingly to the export of primary goods such as indigo and jute. Against this background, the Muslim peasantry rallied to the cause of Hajji Shari'atullah, to defend their interests against Hindu Zamindars and British Indigo planters. Under the leadership of his son Dudhu Miyan the Bengal peasantry became imbued with greater religious consciousness and began to attempt to protect their corporate and individual interests through the institutions of British State."¹³

1.3 SHAH WALIYULLAH :

"Two distinct patterns of Islamic response emerged in the Delhi region in the first half of the nineteenth century. One fostered by the sons and heirs of Shah Waliyullah, focussed on reformist religious guidance, but with a new urgency to reach beyond the old elites. A second, an offshoot of this same group, came to believe that the whole order of society had to be challenged and a new Islamic society created through jihad."¹⁴

"The consolidation of British control over India was dramatically challenged in 1857 when a military rebellion was joined by civil disorder in a series of uprisings that spread across the

north. During these years it was the activities of North Indian Muslims like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his associates who were involved in the foundation of the highly important Aligarh movement and school.¹⁵ This was a movement committed to collaboration of the more privileged classes of Indian Muslim society with the imperial regime. He wanted well-born Muslims to cherish Islam and a Muslim social identity while mastering modern European arts and sciences and social graces.

"In this period the Ulama chose a strategy of turning within, eschewing for the time all concern with the organization of the state and relations with other communities. Their sole concern was to preserve the religious heritage - the classic role of the Ulama from the post-Abbasid centuries on - and to disseminate instruction in authentic religious practice and belief. They sought to be and to create in others, personalities that embodied Islam. To this end they preached and wrote, offered advisory legal opinions and acted as spiritual guides to their followers."¹⁶

"Increasing numbers of Muslims were becoming, to put it in Clifford Geertz's words, "oppositional Muslims". Their religion was not traditional in the sense of being accepted without question. Rather it was self conscious, formulated often against the pirs of Sufi Shrines, against other Muslim Ulama, and against non-Muslims, both Indian & British. Most of the religious movements of the late nineteenth century were "modernist" or "syncre-

tist" but far more characteristic were those that worked within the repertoire of received beliefs, but always shifting emphases, reformulating and redefining. To put it in a single word in weberian sense religion was 'rationalizing' i.e. making religion self-conscious, systematic and based on abstract principles".¹⁷

During the twentieth century nationalist political activities gained momentum. "Most significant event was the foundation in 1919 of the Jamiat-i-Ulama-yi Hind many of whose leaders were involved in the post-world war I agitation in support of the Ottoman Caliphate."¹⁸ The Jamiat joined the Indian National Congress in working toward independence from Britain. The organizations of the Ulama stood apart from the league. The late nineteenth century Ulama of Deoband, had a clear coherent view of the way the world was and the way one ought to live within it."

There is no tradition of priesthood in Islam - no caste or family that has special power, no sacrament that sets some men apart from their fellows no monasticism. The people regarded as religious leader very often merge with the general population filling other occupational roles in society as well."¹⁹ "As Shah Waliyu'llah (1703-1762) explained those who have religious knowledge, whether they acquire it by means of revelation or wisdom or visions are recognized by others as having gifts of leadership and signs of grace, and are therefore obeyed - for this is the central requirement of Islam - in doing what is commanded and eschewing what is forbidden."²⁰ The true basis of authority has

been the standard of personal knowledge and its pious embodiment expected of men who are at once exemplars of their fellows and communal representatives to Muslims and to others.

Shah Waliyullah tried to bring out a proper balance of functions between the ruler and the Ulama. The importance of appropriate political leadership was as self-evident to him as was the importance of religious leadership. He understood history to follow an evolutionary pattern in which society progressed through increasingly complex and encompassing stages from primitive to urban to monarchical and finally to universal orders. In the final stage, a caliph would supervise Muslim monarchs who would appoint officials to enforce the religious law and foster to the extent possible an Islamic organization of society.

"His father Shaikh Abdur-Rahim (1644-1718) had been called on to assist in the collection of the Fatawa-yi 'Alamgiri, but he had disliked courtly life and had withdrawn to found a college the Madrasah-yi Rahimiyyah. Shah Waliyullah succeeded his father as director of that school and devoted his life wholly to study and teaching."

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"It was his success in mastering the intellectual tradition that gave him his influence. He made a major individual effort at intellectual synthesis and systematization, an unprecedented tatbiq of the whole range of Islamic knowledge. He thought knowledge of truth only would bring Muslims to religious obedience that would end the divisions and deviations. His

Hujjatu 'Mahul-Bali-ghah is a monument to his efforts to elucidate
and enshrine the glorious intellectual tradition of the faith." ²²

"He focussed on the necessity of the study of the 'hadis' a study
that had been peripheral for most of the 'Ulama'. ²³ He was
inspired by Shaikh Abu't Tahir bin Ibrahim and made 'hadis' his
major academic interest. He argued that unquestioning adherence
to late complications of legal decisions was an inadequate guide
to religious truth. He blamed this dominant approach to the law
known as taglid, for laxity in religious matters and for
differences among the law schools. Were the learned Muslims to
study revelation, they could unite in obedience to authentic
teachings'. He said an 'alim' should know the judgments of all
the law schools and consult them eclectically, using whichever
accorded best with 'hadis'. The 'hadis' he maintained, provided
an absolute standard, and he sought to demonstrate in his
writings how seeming conflicts among the hadis could invariably
be reconciled if they were properly understood and if only hadis
of unquestioned authenticity were accepted. "He made the same
point about the Quran, arguing cogently in his Quranic commentary
its consistency and clarity. His espousal of jurisprudential
eclecticism combined with consultation of Quran and hadis clearly
enhanced the responsibility of the Ulama for interpreting the law
to their followers." ²⁴

He translated Quran from Arabic into Persian, the cultural
and political lingua franca of the day. He was convinced of the
importance of this effort, and in his Fathur-Rahman he urged

This study has tried to analyze taking into consideration the views expressed by both- the reformists as well as the followers of the religious head priest . Though to get any response from the non-reformists is a difficult task yet with certain painstaking efforts it was made possible . It may not be sufficient but it is crucial for an overall understanding of the Bohra reform movement.

Chapter--1

REFORM MOVEMENTS AMONG THE INDIAN MUSLIMS

As the human civilization progresses it is a felt need that those events which have proved to be stumbling blocks are eased out and future generations lead a better life than the present one. But for better life there is no final word. It changes according to the needs of the time. For this cause "social reforms are inevitable to make living better responding to the newly emerging challenges from the society"

Certain practices evolve under certain social, geographical and territorial conditions and become part of the religions, cultural traditions which then acquired sanctity and are considered unalterable, immutable. These social, cultural and religious traditions acquire such degree of acceptance among the people that any talk of changing the tradition is condemned as unpardonable heresy. Apart from it any movement seeking change of traditions leads to intellectual debate and sometimes even to social turmoil which takes a great deal of time to subside because in the eyes of the people these traditions are as sacred as religion.

1.1 SOCIAL REFORM-MEANING :

In order to proceed further we must know what is Social Reform? What it is all about? "Social Reform is a step for altering, changing or even abandoning of certain social and religious practices which are considered to be in obstacle to the

new way of life which already exists or is in the process of emerging." ² In this course of action the reformer often sees himself much ahead of his or her time and tries to create measures to respond to newly emerging reality.

Very often while the reformer tries for a change he faces stiff resistance from the masses of that society. Various factors may be contributed for this sort of attitudes. The social reformer considers himself as wiser in comparison to the rest of the people which is one of the various causes for its resistance. The masses in general may not accept this at the first hand. "The age-old existence of the social practices, which the common masses believe is the sufficient proof of its validity and truth containedness. Hence any urge for upsetting it may not be accepted by the masses." ³

It is quite obvious also with its age old existence of social practices and traditions it brings certain pattern of life woven around it. When the tradition changes the entire pattern of life changes and such change results in uncertainty and doubt. "For the majority uncertainty and doubt, they feel may bring risks and failures which they do not want to take. Hence they want to be in safe water by accepting the traditional way of life and maintaining status quo and are disinterested in reforms." ⁴

Apart from it the major challenge comes from that group who in the process of maintenance of social traditions and traditional way of life has emerged as its leaders. This throws up its own leadership which guards and champions its cause. Any movement to

change the tradition not only leads to a different pattern of life but also demolishes the old leadership and throws up a new one. "Thus the old leadership, intellectual, social or religious oppose reforms or change to protect its own interests. Very often in the mind of the common masses, it is made to believe that they are fighting for the "sanctity" of traditions. However in actual fact they are concerned with the threat to their own position of leadership." ⁵ So the new tradition sought to be established is therefore described by them as 'heretical' and devoid of any sanction and in order to project their own interests the people are urged to oppose and reject it and thus a great struggle ensues in society.

Generally the intellectual elite which is aspiring for leadership of developing a new pattern of life sees reform as beneficial and readily accepts it. The mass of people often develop a hostile attitude towards it in the beginning. In a highly traditional society, social reform usually meets with tough resistance as most of the people feel threatened by the emerging new pattern of life which makes them lose their traditional sense of social identity and also tends to change the meaning and orientation of society. They perceive no immediate benefit in accepting it.

"The process of reform movement has never been safe in any society or in any community. There has been a great deal of resistance to social reforms in Indian society in general both

people to study the Quran directly, not even using a commentary and again insisting on the central role of the religious leadership - to consult a teacher if in doubt.

However he did not invite all Muslims to engage in ijtihad. He believed only religious elites could only understand it and with the amm it could easily slip into error. Hence on the matter of law he felt that most Ulama and believers should adhere to the Hanafi school of law.

"Shah Waliyullah also tried to resolve the controversy that was going on since the seventeenth century on Wahdatul-Wujud, literally unity of being, but commonly defined as ontological or existential monism or even as pantheism." ²⁵ The Wujudi position had been formulated by the thirteenth century spanish mystic Ibnul Arabi. It tried to define the basic relationship between man and God. In this view, the better to affirm the singleness of God, creation is denied anything but an illusory empirical existence for such identity to be possible, the human spirit has to be a direct emanation from the divine. Opponents have claimed that this view in fact denies tauhid, the unity and transcendence of God, and encourages the believer to be lax in matters of law. In India, opposition to this theory was associated with the early Naqshbandis above all with Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi, who asserted that the experience of Wahdatul-wujud did not represent an understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, but rather was merely a perception of unity that was superseded by perceptions

associated with yet higher stages of spiritual advancement.

Shah Waliyullah tried in his work to resolve the controversy on this issue. His arguments shared by his contemporary Naqshbandi Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan altered the previously dominant view of their order. Others - particularly Khwajah Mir Nasir Andalib his son Khwaja Mir Dard and Ghulam Yahya - all continued to adhere to the views of Shaikh Ahmad. But Shah Waliyullah argued that the Wujudi position was in fact legitimate and that is properly understood confirmed the Shuhudi position. The whole universe is pervaded by a common existence, he argued, an existence both immanent and transcendent, but beyond that existence is the original existence of God. Because of Shah Waliyullah's interpretation, the Wujudi position, a complex and important strand in Sufi thought has since been dominant in India.

"Moreover Shah Waliyullah tried to bridge the confrontation between the Shiah's & Sunnis. The Shiah's venerated the prophet's son-in-law Ali, his family and the Imams inherited his spiritual power which was not accepted by the Sunnis. This anger culminated in the attempts of the Emperor Bahadur Shah (1707-1712) to introduce Shi'i practices at the imperial court." ²⁶

Such Shi'i practices as the mourning assemblies and processions of Muharram were made the particular target of Sunnis seeking a scrupulous adherence to the law. Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan who focused on opposition to Shi'i practices met his death in 1780 by a Shi'i assassin. In this atmosphere, Waliyullah sought unity and reconciliation. He was personally devoted to

the veneration of Ali. However like other Sunnis, he insisted that the succession of the first four Caliphs was legitimate. Thus disagreeing with the Shiah who maintained that Ali and his family should have followed the prophet. He did take the original position that the first three caliphates were not all superior to that of the fourth, Alis, but rather judged only the first two, when there was unity and peace among Muslims to be superior. But he was not ably successful in persuading Shiah and Sunni either to accept this view or to be reconciled because of it.

The Sunnis remember his personality as tolerant and generous in spirit. He claimed to have created a synthesis beyond even that of al-Ghazali, uniting not only reason (aql) and tradition (naql) but the gnosis (marifat) of the Sufi as well.

The successors of Shah Waliyullah moved in two new directions. One was toward an emphasis on the study of legal codes (fiqh) and the concomitant writing of judicial opinions (fatawa) for increasing numbers of individual Muslims.

1.4 SHAH ABDUL AZIZ

"From the time of Shah Waliyullah's death in 1763 until his own in 1824 Shah Abdul Aziz eldest son of Shah Waliyullah's sons was the head of his family and the centre of an important circle of reformists teaching in Delhi. He and his three brothers taught the religious sciences, particularly hadis. The brothers also acted as Sufi Shaiks to chosen disciples and preached as well in the mosques of Delhi. Abdul Aziz in particu-

lar was known as an excellent teacher who provided advanced students an opportunity to offer their opinions and who supervised the initial teaching of those who had completed their studies." ²⁷

During the British rule the Muslims faced the problem so far as the interpretation of the administrative law was concerned. It was no more on the basis of Muslim or Hindu laws. All Muslim law had unfailingly recognized Christians as ahl-i-kitab, people of the book with whom tolerant relations were possible.

In this position Abdul Aziz opined if the state no longer provided a hierarchy of courts and personnel to administer Muslim law, then only the Ulama could fill what was evidently a trouble some legal void. They could not compel compliance to the law but they could offer direction to the faithful on such issues of civil behaviour as trade inheritance and family relations as well as on more narrowly religious matters. Abdul Aziz also emphasized the power of the British and with it made possible for Muslims to gain an advantage in certain economic matters that were more profitable in a condition daru'l-harb. He held it legitimate for Muslims to learn English and take employment under the British so long as they did not thereby oppress other Muslims. Thus they could secure needed employment. Most of Shah Abdul Aziz's fatwa that raised the question of the political situation were posed in the context of such economic concerns.

"Shah Abdul Aziz's approach which was gradualist and pragmatic was rejected by several of the Waliyullah family under the leadership of a dynamic visionary, Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly in Oudh (1786-1831). His lasting influence was his commitment to popular reform of custom and practice. Sayyid Ahmad's more radical reformist teaching was the product of what was perceived as a clearly intolerable political situation proof that Muslims had failed to fulfill the requirements of the law. Leaders of his movement found it incomprehensible that their religion itself was at fault, rather they felt that their commitment to it was lacking. Sayyid Ahmad brought his voice for widow remarriage. His reforms found expression in the Siratul-Mustaqim (the straight path) and Taqwiyatul-Imam on the strengthening of the faith. The two works stressed the centrality of tauhid, the transcendent unity of God and denounced all those practices and beliefs that were held in any way compromise that most fundamental of Islamic tenets. God alone was held to be omniscient and omnipotent. He alone entitled to worship and homage. There were three source of threat to this belief - false sufism, Shi'i doctrine and practice and popular custom. Sayyid Ahmad's movement did not denounce sufism. Indeed his position was primarily that of Sufi shaikh to his disciples. To emphasize the centrality of the law, he gave initiation not only in the traditional orders but in the Tariqat-i-muhammadiyah, the way of the prophet, which was characterized not by internal devotions but by external obedience to the law. Sayyid Ahmad thus opposed

not sufism but what were held to be deviations from correct sufism. He believed that there was no intermediary between the believer and God and condemned calling on "saints, apostles, imams, martyrs, angels and fairies naming children after them or wearing their special symbols. He criticised prostration at shrines and pilgrimages that entailed special dress, circumambulation, sacrificing animals, burning lights and sanctifying water.

Sayyid Ahmad was also opposed to Shi'i influence and urged Muslims to give up the keeping of taziyahs, the replicas of the tombs of the martyrs of Karbala taken in procession during the mourning ceremony of muharram.

"Finally Sayyid Ahmad denounced popular custom as a source of compromise to the doctrine of tawhid. He condemned expensive ceremonies associated with weddings, circumcisions and burials and the prohibition of widow remarriage as harmful not only to spiritual well-being but also to worldly well being. His approach to changing custom was practical and not intellectual. Most dramatic was the encouragement of widow remarriage."²⁹

The role of the reformers of 1820s and 1830s in shaping the language of urdu was substantial. Their goal was to reach a popular audience not limited to those accustomed to the subtleties of persinate diction. They focused on the scholarly works equally focusing on such subjects as correct method of prayer remarriage of widows and the elimination of idolatrous

practices. Through their various writing they preached that religious truths were not accessible to 'great pious men alone' but that even the contents of the Quran are very clear and plain. In this way they tried to bridge the practice of intermediary in between the man and God.

1.5 MODERN PHASE : (Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan)

To begin with the modern Islamic reform movements in India Sir Sayyid Ahmad deserves the first place. He was a great advocate of western education among the Indian Muslim elite of his time. The national awening among the Indian Muslims took place at a slower rate than among the Hindus. The anti-Muslim policy of the British government after the Mutiny intensified the anti-British feeling of the Muslims. This made the Muslims avoid any contact with the new culture and education which the British introduced in India. It was only by the end of the nineteenth century that the Muslims began to take to modern education. Gradually an intelligentsia trained in modern education came into being. A section of that intelligentsia steadily built up a nationalist outlook.

The first national awakening among the Muslims found expression in a movement which aimed at making the Indian Muslims politically conscious and spreading modern education among them. Sayeed Ahmad Khan was the founder of this movement. He was helped by his colleagues like the poet Khuaja Altaf Hussain Halli, Maulvi Nazir Ahmed and Maulvi Allama Shibli Numani. The liberal social reform and cultural movement founded by Sir Sayyied Ahmed

Khan is known as the Aligarh Movement because it was at Aligarh that the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College was established by him in 1875. This was later developed into the Aligarh Muslim University in 1890.

Alongwith it an All India Muslim Educational Conference was also organised. The Aligarh movement basically aimed at spreading western education among the muslims without weakening their allegiance to Islam. The second task before them was the social reforms in the Muslim society. It aimed at evolving a distinct social and cultural community among the Indian Muslims more or less on modern lines. It condemned polygamy and the social ban on widow remarriage which, though permitted by Islam, had crept on among some sections of the Muslims who were converts from Hinduism. It was based on the liberal interpretation of the Quran. It tried to harmonize Islam with the modern liberal culture and Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan condemned the institution of slavery and described it as un-Islamic. He brought out his progressive ideas through his magazine Tandhib-ul-Akhlagu (Improvement of Manners and Morals). He also advocated removal of purdah. He was also in favour of women's education, though it may be said for the elite class among the muslims only. Hence women education must have been limited to the elites only. He believed in religious toleration as he felt an underlying unity of practical morality to be present in all religions.

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However, he was against the political involvement of Indian Muslims whom he considered were not mature enough as yet to govern themselves. In this way he tried to keep the Muslim masses in general away from the National Congress. This sort of attitude may be due to his belief that the Western Democracy which gives importance to majority rule if allowed to prevail in India then the Hindus being a vast majority would get the dominant position. Being a part of the minority this suspicion was obvious. His proposal was that - "Muslims and Hindus should share power equally in India. That is to say if there were four hundred seats in the Central Assembly two hundred seats should be given to each of the community on the basis of separate electorates. But he was aware this formula would never be acceptable to the Hindu leaders whose attitude towards the Muslims was : "You are in a minority how can you be given equal rights?" True. But then the brute majority leads to the development of a mentality in which no tolerance is shown to any minority. The separatist tendencies in Muslims developed mainly on the apprehension that their rights would not be safeguarded under the brute majority rule of Hindus and this eventually led to the creation of Pakistan. Evidently that community could not be considered a minority which constitutes a majority in specific parts of regions of the same country. It must be considered and acknowledged as a nation." (This is drawn from a very broadly published interview with Dr. Justice Javid Iqbal, former Chief Justice of Lahore High court and Judge of Supreme court of Pakistan and son

of Dr. Sir Mohd. Iqbal. Dr. Mohammad Iqbal's famous Persian book "Javaid Nama" is related with the name of his son Javaid Iqbal. In his other writings, Javaid Iqbal is represented as a symbol for the young and modern Muslims on whom the future of Islam depended, (as Dr. Mohammad Iqbal believed). This interview was taken by Mr. Ather Farouqi and was published in three parts on 1st, 2nd & 4th Sept. 1992 in "The Nation" English Daily of Pakistan. A part of this interview was also brought out in Nawa-e-Waqt (Urdu daily, Lahore), Saptahik Hindustan, New Delhi (Hindi weekly and sister publication of the 'The Hindustan Times') National Herald and Qaumi Awaz (Urdu Daily) and others. (But this part is taken from the original text of the interview where every page is signed with date by Dr. Justice Javaid Iqbal for its authenticity).

1.6 Chirag Ali :

"Chirag Ali one among the modern reformist, developed his ideas with consummate scholarship. He was a close associate of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. His modernist approach brought out that the Quran is full of references to nature and the laws of nature and points the way to a natural theology. Islamic culture is distinguishable from other cultures in having evolved certain intellectual disciplines like the scrupulously investigated biographical dictionary, the principle of rational criticism (diraya) in the study of religious tradition and a scholasticism which reinterpreted Greek Science and presented Europe with that dialecti-

cal methodology on which the modern European civilization is based."
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He examined the four sources of Muslim Law, Wahi, hadis, ijma and the rights and methods of ijtihad to overcome the mental fossilization which he thinks the traditional theologian is still imposing on modern Islam. He is critical of the monotony and the impression of an artificial confusion which translations of the Quran in western languages tend to produce.

On his reexamination of the second source of Muslim law, the hadis; he shows a far greater critical acumen. He argued that hadis when narrated sometimes conveys the sense but not the exact word of the prophet and is therefore liable to a mutation or alteration of meaning. He regards the prophet primarily as a reformer who supplanted ancient Arabian superstition by monotheism, elevated the moral standard of Arabs and other peoples and improved the lot of women by restricting polygamy, discouraging slavery and abolishing infanticide.

"For establishing an anticlassical basis of Muslim law he said ijma of the Ulama could hardly be regarded as a finally binding source of law as it is rejected by jurists like Ahmad, by theologians like Ibn Hazm, by mystics such as Ibn-al-Arabi. Ijtihad is in itself not an independent source of law, but is dialectically related to the other three sources. Its rulings can therefore be neither final nor immutable."
32

He regards not the Islam of Muslim Common law, but the faith as preached in the Quran itself constitutes progress and a change for the better. Muhammad did not compile a code of law civil or canonical, nor did he enjoin the Muslims to do so. He left it to them in general to frame any code of civil or canon law and to found systems which would harmonize with the times and suit the political and social changes going around them. The classical Muslim law are mostly spurious and of consideration of humanity, reason, common sense and also, the principles of moral-fitness and public convenience.

"Chirag Ali claimed the equality of all citizens; Muslims and non-Muslims has to be established in theory as in practice." ³³ Rulings in Muslim common law prescribing legal disabilities against non-Muslims are disowned by him as having non real theological basis. So he argued that political and legal institutions of the western empires in which Muslims live also needed far more liberalization.

Likewise Chirag Ali also talked overcoming jihad and polygamy which he regards were relevant only in a historical situation. In term of historical sequence the offensive had already been taken by the hostile Meccans by torturing and humiliating the followers of the prophet. Military strategy demanded initiative against the enemy and its Beduin after the prophet's migration to Medina. Hence punitive measures were taken against the jews of Medina because of their treachery. So prophet's maghazi was relevant to specific situations. The Quranic verses referring to

them deal only with certain specific situations and cannot be regarded as the basis of any subsequent legal theory.

His writings on slavery in Islam were directed against the traditional theologians in Islamic India, especially against Muhammad Askari's refutation of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's theory that fresh enslavement was categorically forbidden by the Quran at a specific juncture.

"Islamic personal law should be viewed in the historical context of the pagan Arab practices of that time, which includes infanticide, unrestricted polygamy, and exploitation of women in every conceivable way."³⁴ "The Quran gradually raised the status of women by curtailing the unlimited plurality of wives to four and then making even this concession conditional on justice, which in sexual relationship could only be synonymous with love thus virtually abolishing polygamy. Justice in love cannot be meted out to more than one woman at a time by a man. Limiting its conditional permission by its psychological impossibility, the Quran gradually and almost imperceptibly prescribes the abolition of polygamy."³⁵

Similarly Muslim divorce laws have to be studied as gradualist reforms of the ancient Arabian excesses and taboo-creating vows. All that could be done at that stage was to restrict, at least to some extent, man's primitive freedom of willful separation through dowry and other obligations binding on the divorcing husband. Compared with paganism Judaism or Christianity Islam

gave the woman a fairer deal. The Muslim law of inheritance, giving a woman exclusive right to her own property, compares favourably with the British law. Man's superiority is recognized by the Quran only in matters relating to his natural physical attributes.

1.7 Anti-Traditionalist Modernism (Muhsin-Ali-Mulk)

Chirag Ali's position was more radical and a little more extravagant than Sayyid Ahmad Khan. It was in the writings of Sayyid Ahmad's associate and later successor Mahadi-Ali Khan (1837-1907) commonly known by his little Mushsal-Mulk a moderate trend originated.

Though he was having minor differences with Sayyid Ahmed he supported him and became a member of the Scientific society in 1864. He contributed for Sayyid Ahmad's journal Jahazib al-Askhlaq in 1870s. He fought against Sir Anthony MacDorell, the Lieutenant-Governor of the United provinces; for his anti-Urdu and pro-Hindu policies.

"Like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan he was opposed to pan-Islamism and to Muslim participation in the Indian National Congress though his personal relations with liberal congress leader Gokhale was cordial and he was in sympathy with certain aspects of the nationalist movement. He stood, however, strongly for inter-clomunal harmony and a peaceful modus vivendi with the Hindus." .

In 1905 started a controversy of religious education which was not convincing for the students of modern physical sciences who were more interested to go through the works of the modern Egyptian and Syrian scholars, Shykh Muhammad Abdul, Rasid Rida and other writers of the al-Manar group. Mushin al-Mulk brought the solution for this controversy by allowing religious education to be imparted at the primary and secondary school level and not at the belated stage of the university education. It was due to this balanced approach the opposition of the Ulama of Aligarh considerably decreased.

"The 1906 marked a turning point in the Muslim policies of this subcontinent. Separate Muslim electoral bodies not merely in proportion to their percentage in population but in accordance with their importance as a community was realized. These two policies - separate electoral bodies and weightage remained the sole focus until the demand for a separate Muslim state, Pakistan, gathered irreversible momentum in Muslim India in the 1940s."³⁷

The religious thought of Mushsin-al-Mulk is interesting for its moderation and its slightly more conservative restatement of some of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's views. "The main area of difference between Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mushsin-al-Mulk, is the concept of natural law. Whereas Khan regards it as immutable, admitting of no exceptions, the latter holds expectations to be within its range."³⁸ Nature argues Muhsin-al-Mulk is still a vague concept even in modern European thought. Laws of nature are being per-

petually rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern science. The Quran lays down the principle of possible exception to the familiar laws of nature.

"Muhsin-al-Mulk's fundamentalist modernism starts saying that everything has in itself a reality and a nature. If the reality is there but its nature altered, we should find the cause behind this, which could only be due to mixing or interjection of an extraneous element into the thing. In this way we shall have to find out whether it is in its original condition or mixed. If it is mixed it has to be analysed and its components isolated and distinguished by reliable criteria. The exercise of this criteria constitutes the principle of ijtihad, whereas mere traditional faith is imitative belief which can provide neither any real spiritual satisfaction nor certainty of truth." ³⁹

The present religious complex which is generally called Islam is not a monolithic religious unity, but a collection of numberless elements. In the collective belief called Islam we can brush aside the extraneous impurities and arrive at the basic minimum of religious faith, law and experience only by exclusive reliance on the Quran and the Sunna (practices) of the Prophet. The divine word would become more and more rationally intelligible with the advance of human knowledge and the march of science. He argues in the same line as Sayyid Ahmad Khan's that every Muslim to renounce traditionalism and to put forward his own speculative interpretations of theological problems to the well

known Wali-Allahi view, that hadis supersedes jurisprudence where a judicial ruling is demonstrably contrary to it and that the follower of a particular school of law can follow other schools in various matters of belief or conduct.

Muhsin al-Mulk does not totally reject the ijma of the ulama as a source of law, but considerably waters it down. Ijma of the Ulama cannot be an ultimate or indisputable source of law as in the final analysis it is the analogical deduction or decision or action of a body of people who do not possess prophetic intuition and these cannot be considered infallible." ⁴⁰

Muhsin-al-Mulk points out modern nationalism is based on demonstrable results of scientific truth. As rational creatures we are bound by unavoidable necessity to accept the realities of physical nature and of the revealed and simultaneously merge the knowledge received from both sources into a single and integrated formula of belief." ⁴¹

1.8 Mumtaz Ali and the Feminist Movement.

In 1878 Mumtaz Ali a scholar of the conservative school of Deoband under the influence of Sayyid Ahmad Khan devoted his life to an open championship for women's education and rights in Muslim India. His journal Tahzib al-niswan was for women, the counterpart of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Tahzibal-akhaq.

"In his Haquq-i-niswan Mumtaz Ali preaches complete equality between men and women. He argues no doubt women have to perform certain biological functions to which their nervous system and their emotional life is conditioned but this can neither presup-

pose nor prove any biological or intellectual inferiority." . On the question of polygamy Mumtaz Ali argued on the similar lines of Chirag Ali. Since love for more than one woman is impossible the strictly conditional formula of the permissibility of polygamy cancels polygamy itself by demonstrating it to be unjust.

In short, if there is any difference between man and woman, it is merely one of biological functions and does not justify any claim of superiority on the part of man who has placed himself in a dominant position by brute force and then tried to rationalize his position by individious arguments. Hence he argued female education is a historical necessity.

"Moreover for marriage which is meant to be based on love and mutual sharings of emotions and feelings and understanding each other better Mumtaz Ali argued women's education is a must."
43

On the question of purdah, he argues that the Quran refers to something like it only on one clear occasion. On another occasion it prescribes modesty and the concealing of ornament, other verses refer specifically to the social evils of ancient Arabia and therefore relevant only to that society and age. They cannot be treated as laying down a general and binding commandment. He argues an educated women can take care of herself, better than an inexperienced, uneducated, mentally confused

bundle of veils which has not been allowed to develop self-confidence and cannot take care of herself.

"Hence Mumtaz Ali argued marriage laws must be drastically reformed. Arranged marriages are disastrous where the women is uneducated and child marriage enforced by parents' feelings of insecurity are inhuman. Marriage should be based on love and natural choice, which is as much the birthright of woman as of man." ⁴⁴ Any violation of this human principle is tantamount to the exploitation of legal loopholes by jurist to sanctify customary laws of the various societies of Islam and are by the standards of today inhuman and immoral.

"Ahmadiya Movement founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889 was more or less based on liberal principles. It described itself as the standard bearer of Mahammedan Renaissance. It focussed on the universal religion of all humanity. The Ahmadiya Movement opposed Jihad or the sacred war against the non-Muslims. It preached fraternal relations among all peoples. The movement like the Aligarh movement tried to spread western liberal education among the Indian Muslims. It introduced a network of schools and colleges for that purpose and published periodicals and book both in English and Vernaculars. In spite of its liberalism it suffered from mysticism. It however made a sincere effort on the part of Islam to assimilate the principles of western liberalism. In that way atleast it tried to adopt Islam according to the needs of the society in a changed circumstances giving it a humanitarian liberal touch." ⁴⁵

1.9 Mohd. Iqbal

Sir Mohammad Iqbal the poet of world celebrity and the great Islamic philosopher who interpreted Islam as the most modern and revolutionary religion played an important role in the history of the Indian Muslims. He supported the liberal movement and asked the Muslims liberals to be in guard so that the broad human principle which Islam stood for was not thrown in the background by emphasis on the nation and the race. He was essentially a humanist and considered Islam as a religion of broadest humanism. It is very often commented that Iqbal in the later phase of his life exhibited a reactionary tendency, he opposed democracy as a system and become hostile to Indian Nationalists Movement. This seem to be an inadequate and misinterpretation of his basic ideas. If one tries to thoroughly analyse his thoughts as expressed in his book "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" it puts the researcher in a position to say without hesitation that the various allegations made against him are false. Iqbal's world view is based on his deep concern with the future of humanity as well as religion. He believes that religion is an instrument that acts for the moral upliftment of men. If there had been no man there would have been no religion. Therefore humanity and religion complement each other. After a deep insight into his writings it is interesting to note that the views which are being expressed by the liberal thinkers of today about the future of humanity, are more or less the same which had been

expressed by Iqbal in his writings more than fifty years ago."

From an introductory comment by Mr. Ather Farouqui in an exclusive interview with Dr. Javaid Iqbal former Chief Justice of Lahore High Court and Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and the son of Sir Mohammad Iqbal, it gets clear that Dr. Mohammad Iqbal is the pioneer of the new interpretation of Islamic Philosophy. He did not agree with the centuries old interpretations of Islam and commented "Islam will have to lose its relevance if the interpretations of the mundane affairs is not made in accordance with the philosophy of Islam based on the needs of time:." It was around a century ago Iqbal had thought and revealed the importance of family planning and birth control which he believed formed a part of Islamic teachings. He was of the opinion that Islamic Figha must be re-written according to the needs of the time. His book Reconstruction of the Religious thought in Islam is written on this basis. But even today the Mullahs in India and Pakistan do not agree to this interpretation of Islamic philosophy of Sir Iqbal. In his opinion, the Indian Mullahs have left no room for the young generation who wish to become modern while remaining Muslims."

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His Allahabad Address (1930) which contained his suggestion of the formation of Muslim state in the North-West of the Indian subcontinent is very often misunderstood by many. Its misinterpretation puts us in alleging false blames against him. "The present day Pakistan is not in accordance with the concept of a separate Muslim state as conceived by Iqbal. Iqbal imagined

the united Muslims, when he stated:-

"Ek Hon Muslim Haram Ki Pasbani Ke liye

Neel Ke Shail se Lakar Ta Be-Khak-E-Kashghar

(The Muslims, from the bank of Nile to the soil of Kashghar, must unite to defend the Haram, the place around the Kaaba and a symbol of unity of the Muslims).

Iqbal had the vision of such a state which could be called Islamistan. So the present Pakistan is not the full representation of what Iqbal had in mind so he has aptly commented:-

"Nations are born in the hearts of the poets, But they prosper
48
and die in the hands of the politicians."

In his poem titled "Mecca and Geneva" included in his poetic collection, "Zerb-e-Kalim" he points out that in this age nation seems to be mixing freely with one another, although the principle of human unity remains hidden from the discerning eye. This is so because the aim of western diplomacy is to divide the humanity into nations whereas the mission of Islam is to unify human beings into one fraternity. He was critical of the league of Nation from this point of view which was expressed in his letter to the City of Geneva stating "Are you content to be a seat of the League of Nations or would you prefer to be the
49
centre of united Humanity?" This was his basic idea in his mind when he asked the Muslim liberals to be on guard so that the broad human principle which Islam stood for was not thrown in the background by emphasis on the nation and the race. In his vision

nation and races had divided the huamnity into various parts. Such was his unsuppressed instinct for humanity. He was a poet of world celebrity and greater humanity.

He, two months before his death on 21st April, 1938 pointed out "The modern age prizes itself on its progress in knowledge and its matchless scientific developments. No doubt the prize is justified... But inspite of all these developments tyranny of imperialism...struts abroad, covering its face in the masks of capitalist democracy, territorial nationalism, communism, fascism and heaven knows what else besides. . Under these masks in every concern of the earth the spirit of freedom and the dignity of man are being trampled underfoot in a way which not even the darkest period of human history presents a parallels. So Iqbal was a critic of this sort of democracy which tried to establish the barriers in between the human beings on the basis of territorial nationality. For him this sort of democracy is inadequate for the greater concern of humanity. That is why he was against democracy as understood and interpreted by the west. He was against that sort of leadership which proved demons of bloodshed, tyranny and oppression, which kept subjugating the weaker peoples and sowed the seeds of division among the human beings and who had no voice for human sympathy. He was of the opinion that this world will remain a battle ground of ferocious beasts of prey unless and until the educational and moral forces of the whole world are directed to inculcate in man respect for mankind... Nations unity too is not a very durable force. Only one unity is dependable and

that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race ;nationality, colour or language... So long as men do not demonstrate by their actions that they believe that the whole world is the family of God, so long as the distinctions of race colour and geographical nationalities are not wiped out completely they will never be able to lead happy and contented life and the beautiful ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity will never materialise. ⁵¹ (speech and statements ed. By A.R. Tariq PP. 226-228). Iqbal is of the view that Modern man claims to be secular in the sense that he is indifferent towards religion. The reason is that according to his evaluation religion is in conflict with science and since the findings of science are rationally demonstrable, religion is reduced to mere superstitions providing solace to man in his stages of ignorance but no authentic relevance in the present and the future. In his view reality has outer as well as inner dimensions. Science is concerned with the external behaviour of Reality whereas the domain of religion is to discover the meanings of Reality in reference to its inner nature. In this respect both scientific and religious processes run parallel to each other. While commenting on these processes Iqbal states : "A careful study of the nature and purpose of these really complementary processes shows that both of them are directed to the purification of experience in their respective spheres. ⁵²

He divides religious life into three phases. In the first phase it appears as a form of discipline which is voluntarily accepted by the people as unconditional commands without rational understanding of the ultimate purpose of those commands. It is only in this sense that religion is based on dogma, ritual of some kind of priesthood. In the second phase; revelation is reconciled with reason and discipline is followed by a rational understanding of its authority. It is at this phase religion engenders hatred of one religion against the other as; well as within the religion itself when one mode of interpretation comes into conflict with another. In the third phase religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the ultimate reality and it is at this stage religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power.

For Iqbal this stage of religious life is, what he calls higher religion. He says this religion as a search for a larger life, is essentially experience and recognised the necessity of experience as its foundation long before science learnt to do so .
53
Iqbal does not agree with the two way western approach to secularism. In one way indifference towards religion which is followed by the capitalist democracies. The other type is based on the suppression of religion as was done by the socialist countries. Both the approaches of secularism have not been able to resolve the problem.

It is perhaps in this background that Iqbal rejected the methodologies of territorial nationalism capitalism, atheistic socialism as well as religious conservatism as drawing upon the psychological forces of hate suspicion and resentment which tend to impoverish the soul of man closing up his hidden sources of spiritual energy. So he says any religion which in its higher manifestation is neither dogma, nor ritual can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves and restore him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter.

As understood now the solution of the problem lies in the adoption of the policy neither of indifference nor of suppression of religion but of respecting all religions. Every religion must be seen in its higher phase. So says Iqbal each great religion, at the higher level, contains the absolute truth. Therefore, it is necessary for us to understand, to discover and to project the higher level of its religion. It is at this level that religion can restore to humanity its spiritual unity and ethically prepare man to respect his fellowman.

In this sense Iqbal does not consider Islam as a religion in the ancient sense of the word. For him, "it is an attitude - an attitude that is to say of freedom and even of defiance to the universe. It is really a protest against the entire outlook of the ancient world. Briefly it is the discovery of man"

Iqbal also tried to deduce the principle of higher religion from the verses of Quaran and bases his political idealism on them. In his Allahabad Address he pointed out "A community which is inspired by feelings of ill-will towards other communities, is low and ignoble. He had highest respect for the customs, laws religious and social institutions of other communities. He considered it to be his duty according to the teachings of the Quraan, even to defend their places of worship if need be".⁵⁵

For Iqbal Tahuid (Unity of God) stands for equality, solidarity and freedom of man. According to him the republican form of government is consistent with the spirit of Islam. He is convinced that the ultimate goal of Islam is the establishment "spiritual democracy".

He says Humanity, today, needs three things - a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual and basic principles of a universal import directing the evaluation of human society on a spiritual basis. So he calls the Muslims to appreciate his own position, reconstruct his social life in the light of the ultimate principles and evolve, out of the hitherto, partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.⁵⁴ Hence it is necessary for man to respect his fellowmen, to respect religions other than his own. It is only through the adoption of this moral and spiritual approach that man may rise to a fresh vision of his future:

In the course of time the movement for the emancipation of the Muslim women and for combating such institutions as purdah came into existence. Tyabji an enlightened and progressive Muslim was the founder of this movement in Bombay Sheikh Abdul Halim Sharada (1865-96) an outstanding author and journalist organised a veritable crusade against purdah in the United Provinces with the spread of liberal ideas among the Muslims. The movement to improve the social position of the Muslim women and to abolish customs which were detrimental to them began to gain strength. Polygamy began to diminish as also child marriage. The all India Muslim Conference made a special and regular financial provision for advancing the education of the Muslim women. The rise of Turkish and Arab nationalism and the establishment of a national secular state in Turkey had the effect of broadening the outlook of the Indian Muslims. The independent workers and peasants movement which developed rapidly in India later on and were mostly led by the communists, the socialists and the left nationalists like Jawaharlal Nehru, had the effect of making the Muslim masses national minded and class conscious. It was equally under the influence of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Muslims were nationalists for the national mainstream to fight against the British.

1.10 RECENT PHASE: SOCIAL REFORMS AMONG THE BOHRA MUSLIMS

While analysing the various reform movements among the Muslims it is appropriate to mention about one of the most important reform movements among the Dawoodi Bohra Muslims. Out of the two sects of Indian Muslims - the Shias and Sunnis - Dawood

Bohras are a subsect of Shias. It is a small, well knit and traditional community having a long history of continuous persecution by the Sunnis rulers in India. They were also threatened from the outside. At this time there was the need for a leadership to provide them with moral strength to fight against this external threat. Equal was the need to fight against the sunni rulers within the country by whom they were constantly threatened. This leadership was provided by the religious head priest. The religious head priest because of his social position was in a privilege to draw the unquestioning obedience from that community. However that was the need of that hour; where unflinching obedience of the whole community to the head priest placed him in a position to fight against the enemy with the faith that the unquestioning obedience as the proof of the support of the community, behind him. This was an historical necessity.

With the change in time and advent of British rule and subsequently gaining independence there was absolutely no fear of external threats for the community. But the authoritarian rule of the religious head priest still continues.

When the community is small, well knit, religious in nature and having a long history when they were subjected to external threats, so was the need for unquestioning obedience to the religious head priest who provided the leadership to protect them from those threats, there is least possibility of raising the voice against, that leadership even if the situation gets

normalised. The unquestioning obedience since long, by their past generations has almost legitimized this claim for obedience of the religious head priest. Any voice to be raised against this practice becomes more difficult when there is the fear of social boycott within this community.

With the advent of education and liberal thoughts, some modern educated professionals began to challenge the authority of the Dai over secular matters from the beginning of the twentieth century. The ten high priests turned down the request for opening a high school in Burhanpur. Those people who claimed for establishing an educational institution were excommunicated. A legal battle was fought right upto the Privy Council. In post-independent India, Norman Contractor, an industrialist from Bombay spearheaded the movement through the sixties.

The priestly establishment faced a massive revolt in Udaipur in 1983. Thousands of men, women, both young and old defied the priestly firman to dissolve the Bohra Youth Association formed mainly to provide social service of a purely secular nature to the community in Udaipur. The high priest wanted it to be dissolved as it was formed without his permission. The priesthood declared social boycott against these Bohras of Udaipur and prevented them from entering the Babaji Sahab mausoleum in Galia-kot, about 75 kms from Udaipur and molested some women belonging to the reformists group.

A person who keeps contact with a socially ostracised person is also excommunicated, be that person his father, mother, sister, wife, husband and so on. The high priest dissolved long standing marriages if one of the partners happened to be a votary of the reform movement. Many family faced social humiliation and torture of separations. The reformists were made to suffer a fate worse than that of untouchables.

The reformists claim that wearing a cap, keeping beards and women to be under purdah is obligatory. One who violates it is socially ostracised. One who keeps contact with the socially ostracised one is also excommunicated. For opening a school, charity funds etc., head priest's permission is a must. It is needed for contesting in the elections also. For marriage, birth day celebrations and performing death rituals head priest's permission is obligatory. Moreover maintaining bank balances is also denied to them in the name of 'interest system' which is a denial of the practice of Islam. The head priest also collects seven different taxes from the community. But no accountability is maintained. The community is feeling suffocated under such tight control.

The reformists claim that they do not challenge the religious authority of the head priest. But what they challenge is the authoritarianism and tyranny done on the community in the name of religion. They say that so long as the religious authority acts within the sphere of religious domain they have nothing to say. They contend that the priesthood has no right to control

the secular aspects of the community's affairs or of its individual members.

The reformists claim that Bohras like others should enjoy all constitutional rights, including fundamental rights which are denied to them by the head priest. Morarji Desai the former Prime Minister once called the ruling of the Bohra head priest as a "Government within a government". The reformists are fighting against the tyranny done in the name of religion. They force the government to implement laws against social boycott. Moreover they demand that as the taxes are collected from the community the religious head priest should be accountable to the community which has long been denied by the head priest to the whole community. They believe that religious authoritarianism with financial stability without accountability becomes a deadly weapon in the hands of the head priest which is almost difficult to be fought against by the reformists. Hence they demand the state intervention in those two aspects.

The reformists believe in the power of reason along with religious faith. Like Muhammad Abduh, the grand Mufti of Egypt until the early twentieth century they believe, that reason must be given precedence over the liberal meaning of the Divine law in case of a conflict between the two. This according to Mufti is the second principle of Islam. The grand Mufti says that there is general agreement among Muslims that in case of conflict between reason and the evident meaning of what has been by tradition

(naql), the conclusion, which have been arrived at by reason are to be given preference.

Society to be kept away from disruption it is essentially required that it must respond to the change and progresses for making living smooth. Since the emergence of Islam it has been found every sincere efforts are made by reformists to give it a humanitarian touch casting away the obscurantist practices devoid of reason and based on blind faiths. That is why reformists have never lost their confidence in Islam and have made every possible efforts to turn this confidence into a powerful instrument of change and progress. They are confident that reason and justice must prevail and that religious authoritarianism is bound to face its untimely death as it fails to provide a viable base for self respecting people.

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Chapter-2

THE BOHRAS - A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After a brief analysis about the Reform movements among The Indian Muslims in general and Bohra Reform Movement, which is the most recent one, in particular, in order to proceed further for a better understanding about this particular Bohra Reform Movement it is necessary to have a knowledge about the Bohras i.e. who they are, what is the source of their origin. Hence a historical background of Bohras is a necessity.

Dawoodi Bohras are Shia Mohamedans of the Ismaili sect, richest, best organised and most widely spread population class of Mohamedans. They being chiefly traders and having originally started their propoganda in Gujarat on the teaching of Arab preachers of Ismailia Sect (Abdullah and Ahmad, A.D. 1067) sent by Fatimite Caliphs of Egypt, they derive their name from the Gujarati word "Vehru (Trade)".

2.1 THE INCEPTION OF THE ISMAILI MOVEMENT

Islam soon after its origin in Arabia spread to North and Northwest Africa Persia, regions of Central Asia and Asia minor. The conquest by the Muslim Arabs converted those people into the fold of Islam. The people of such diverse ethnic stocks and culture created problems and gave rise to new doctrines. It was on the question of succession of the Prophet Muhammad the Sunnis and Shias split arose".

Shias says Joyntee are external proletariat of Islam whereas the Kharjis (Seceders) are the internal proletariat. Shias were mostly of non Arab ethnic stocks (Persians) whereas the Khayis were Arabs of Bedouin stock³. During the military campaign in Persia Kufa in Iraq grew into one of the major military camps. In this camp there were a large number of people of other ethnic stocks chiefly Persians.

Kufa consisted of Mawalis (Non-Arab clients) most of whom were either slaves, domestic servants or petty craftsman. They resented Their masters as an exploiting class and considered them inferious culturally and intellectually who happened to be the ruling race. This discontent become acute and socially explosive as the Umayyads adopted highly repressive measures against their political foes. Even the period of the first four Caliphs was not free of blemishes.

Hence the slaves mawalis and other exploited sections of the people in Kufa readily responded to any leader who promised either to better their lot or liberate them from the Umayyads.

"The Shia leaders who totally opposed the Umayyads found their adherants among those of Persian origin. That is why Mohammed's son-in-law "Ali" who was known for his simplicity, who had never discriminated between Arabs and Non-Arabs and treated all faithfuls equally and who was a victim of Umayyad conspiracies against his regime and his two sons Hassan and Hussains were killed by them, found ready appeal among these slaves and clients⁴". This naturally created sympathy for Ali and his family

among those who resented the Umayyad rule. The Shia doctrine of succession for the office of Imam was more appealing to the Persian mind than the principle of election which was an Arab tradition, because monarchy was their national institution.

Mukhatar who himself belonged to a noble Arab family led the first rebellion against the Umayyads after the martyrdom of Imam Husain and became the master of Kufa in A.D. 686. He treated them as equals in keeping with the true spirit of Islam and paid them their share for bait al-mal (state treasury) which was denied to them by the Umayyads. The nobles (Ashraf) were annoyed with Mukhatar for inciting these mawali. However this first rebellion against Umayyads by Mukhatar was crushed mercilessly by Umayyad rulers.

After the failure they learnt their mistakes and appointed a secret network of dai's throughout the Umayyad empire to canvass in favour of the House of Alids. Their activities of these missionaries were carefully coordinated and the identity of the main leader in whose name the propaganda was being carried out kept a well guarded secret.

"Between 749 A.D. and 750 the Umayyad dynasty fell and the Abbasids - the children of Abbas; the Prophet's uncle-came to power. The Abbasid government called itself dawlah. The Iraqi felt freed from Syrian tutelage. The Shiites considered themselves avenged. The clients became emancipated." .

However, the woes of the Shiites did not end with the installation of the Abbasid government. Abbasids were determined to monopolize power, eliminating all other claimants from the scene. The Abbasids knew that Shiites who themselves were divided in many sects and groups had their own aspirations as they considered themselves to be the rightful claimants to the Caliphal Throne. The second Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur himself had taken part in a meeting jointly organized by Alids and Abbasids in the last days of the Umayyads to chalk out their strategy. On behalf of the Alids Imam Jafar al-Sadiq Abdullah al-Mahd and his two sons Muhammad (called Nafs Zakiyyati) and Ibrahim were present whereas al-Mansur and others attended on behalf of the Abbasids. Abdullah al-Mahd suggested that they should establish a secret mission of which Nafs Zakiyyah should be the Head. Everyone except Imam Jafar al-Sadiq who told Abdullah al-Mahd that his suggestion would not work as ultimately the caliphate would go to the man in yellow robe (al-Mansur) No one paid any heed to Imam Ja'far at that time but his predictions came true and al-Mansur became Caliph.

Al-Mansur knew that Nafs Zakiyyah and others Alids had their own claims to power and that they would organise themselves to wrest political power from the Abbasids. So he initiated repressive measures against Alids in general and their leaders in particular. Mansur sent his forces against Nafs Zakiyyah defeated him and killed him.

The Shiites before and after the Abbasid revolution had split into a number of sects and subsects moderates as well as extremists (Ghulat) Zaydiyya Kaysaniyya; Hanafiyya, Imamiyya, Ismailiyya and many other extremists groups. Each being further subdivided into many small groups .

"Shia, the second largest group or community in Islam, who supported (Shayau) Amir al-Muminin Alib. Abi Talib-professed in his Imama and Khilafa. by mass and prophetic delegation whether openly or secretly that Imama cannot leave his line of succession except by usurpation and oppression by another without his consent or by taquyya (dissimulation) on his part for another" .

The shias split into two major groups Those who accepted Musa Kazim, the younger son as Imam after him and were called twelvers (Ithna ashari) because of the twelve Imams in that line beginning with Ali and those who accepted Ismail the elder son of Jafar as -Sadiq as Imam and were called Ismailis" .

Ismailis believe that Ismail was appointed Imam by mass by divine inspiration which continued to his progeny and could not be taken back from him. So Imam Ismail's son Muhammed became by mass of course the next Imam. Thus according to the Ismaili dogma Imamatus continued to be passed on from father to son. However the descendents of Imam Musa Kazim never made a serious bid for power like the Ismailis did and so felt no need for such doctrines or effective organisation. Some of the descendents of Imam Musa Kazim lacked shrewtness and political finesse. The Ismaili Imams were too shrewd to walk into such traps.

The character of the Abbasid empire was different from that of the Umayyad in as much as it was an empire of neo-Muslims of which the Arabs were only a part. It was mainly due to the support of these non-Arab sections of people that the Abbasids succeeded in establishing their rule. With the 'Abbasid', accession to power, the masses whether Arab or non-Arab expected to see the dawn of a new era of equality and prosperity.

The Ismaili movement was a religious-cum-political movement. It had and continues to have a well defined religious ideology with its own distinct features as well as political aim to establish a government based on this religious ideology. The Ismailis were unbentable on those religious doctrine and never compromised whatever the circumstances. However on the political front they took advantage of various socio-economic as well as political factors and suitably modified their tactics or even strategy to suit their political ends. It was due to this reason they could succeed in establishing their rule whereas all other rebellions fizzled out.

"The beginning of the Ismaili movement may be traced to the fifth (but according to the Ithana Ashari Shias, Sixth). Imam Jafar as-Sadiq from whose son Ismaili, this movement derives its name. According to this belief Imam Jafar as-Sadiq appointed his son Ismail as the next Imam he being his elder son. Says Mustafa Ghalib an Ismaili Scholar, Ismaili movement began around AH 128 as a religious, philosophical and esoteric movement in Iraq and

Kufa and was organized by Imam Jafar as-Sadiq who was the pillar of various schools of thought in Islam. According to Ismaile sources the sixth Imam Ismail died in AH 145 when his father Imam Jafar-As-Sadiq (who is reported to have died in 148 AH) was still alive"⁹

So Jafar-as-Sadiq realised the importance of a well knit, tight and secret organisation which would be able to make an effective challenge to the Abbasid power without the risk of a premature and consequently disastrous confrontations. For this he considered Maymun who had been his father's trusted mawla and disciple as a fit match.

"When the Abbasids came into power, the Persian who excelled the Arabs in learning and scholarship become associated with their empire"¹⁰. The Arabs due to lack of resources at their disposal in the desert could not achieve intellectual sophistication and hence both physically and intellectually very simple people. Islam too was a very simple faith devoid of any elaborate rituals intellectual sophistries and theological subtleties and laid more emphasis on sense perception than intuition on speculative thought. The Persians who embraced Islam had intuitive and speculative minds and they saw Islam with such minds. The Mutazila were the first to apply the criterion of reason in presenting Islamic teachings. Mysticism too grew side by side and the socio-political conditions acquired popularity. The mystics were influenced by neo-Platonism and its teachings and thus emanatist and immanentist doctrines became common among certain

mystic schools. Islam thus got the influence of speculative thought. The orthodoxy strongly reacted against this though it was hardly of any avail as the historical and social forces disfavoured orthodoxy itself.

2.2 THE ISMAILI DOCTRINES

"The Ismaili Dawa came into being in such circumstances. They tried to apply creatively Greek Philosophical concepts to the teachings of Islam" ⁱⁱ. The Ismaili missionaries worked out a creative synthesis of Islamic and Greek thought. This attracted a numbers of eminent persons who in course of time became its theoreticians, towards the Ismaili movement. It was due to this the orthodox Ulama vehemently opposed Ismaili teaching and falsely accused Ismailis of having suspended the operation of the Islamic Shariah of permitting their followers to drink and to indulge in all that Islam had prohibited and considering it no longer necessary to offer prayers to fast in the month of Ramzdan or to perform haji as laid down by Islam. However all this was not true.

The Ismailis have always believed in and practised all the practices laid down by the Islamic Shariat. Eminent chief dai Sayyidna Muayyad Shirazi says one who observes both batin (the hidden secret) and Zahir (the outward, open) together is from amongst the Ismailis whereas one who observe only one of the two without the other is worse than a dog and he is not from amongst the Ismailis. The Fatime Imams never allowed their followers to

disregard the observance of the outward injunctions of Islamic Shariat although they always believed in a hidden meaning of the Quranic verses.

The first Landmark of the synthesis of Islamic teachings and Greek philosophy and neo platonistic doctrines was marked by Imam Ahmad al-Masruri. Maynun al-Qaddah and his son Abdullah were very good organizers they set up; a network of this mission in many parts of the Abbasid empire and even outside it."

"Maynun al-Qaddah also worked as the hijab (veil) of the hidden Imam and thus protected him from the prying eyes of the Abbasid rulers"¹² Ismailism evolved into a well knit organisation based on certain religious world view. Formerly it was a religious mission with a political end. This mission had a definite vision of a future society. For the purposes of this mission the world was divided into twelve parts, each part being called a Jazira (usually translated as an Island). Prof Ivanov says Jazira does not mean the Island, but taken here in its basic sense, from the root J-Z-r = to cut off and therefore means a slice, cutting, or a part, a section. Therefore the 12 Jazir should be translated as the 12 sections of the world's population. They are Arabs, Turki, Berbers, Negroes, Abyssinians, Khazaas, China, Daylam (obviously for Persia in general), Rum (Byzantium) and Europe in general) and Saqaliba (Slavs-often confounded with Sicily). This classification is partly based on geographical and partly on ethnographical principle and plainly belongs to the fourth/tenth century.

Each Jazira was put in charge of a hijja or a chief dai. The dia played a very important role in organising the activities of the region under his charge. He appointed in turn two more functionaries - madhun (one permitted to propagate) and mukasin (one who demolished all the arguments of his opponents). The latter was expected to be thoroughly versed in the religion of his opponents in order to disarm them in arguments and create doubts their in other minds.

A functionary of the Ismaili dawa like a Madhun or Mukhasir would start debating on some principles of Shariat or contradiction in the apparent meaning of a Quranic verse with a person who showed some interest in the matter and creates doubts in his mind about his beliefs. After thorough screening he would be finally ushered in the presence of the dia of that region who then extracted an oath of allegiance from him. This oath or covenant is called methaq. Mithaq had a religio-political significance, religious because the text of the covenant expounded the religious doctrines the respondent had to subscribe to and political because the respondent had to take strict oath of loyalty to the supreme leader, the Imam and had to bind himself to certain conditions. The covenant is not to be used by way of corruption, trickery or fraud nor should it be used as a , flattery or syncophancy. It should rather be with sincere intention and pure conscience and purified soul.

The party to the covenant was required to maintain all religious as well as political secrets not to swerve from the right path and to remain steadfastly loyal to the supreme authority, the Imam.

As it was an underground movement, the highly centralised structure was also a political necessity. This centralised structure produced what is altogether absent in all other sects of Islam—the concept of priesthood. There is no priesthood in Islam and religious functions can be performed by any layman. The Imam appoints hujjas for different regions with dai's under them. Dai's then appoint madhuns and mukasins and other lower functionaries and all of them derive their legitimacy not directly from the Quaran, Sunna tradition or consensus of the community but from the Imam. The Imam is considered the absolute authority and it is he who interprets the Quaran and other teachings of Islam and his authority in all these matters is considered final. The dai in the absence of the Imam, claims inspiration from him and is supposed to represent his authority.

The Ismaili dai's spread far and wide in the twelve jazair. They took full advantage of local conditions to induce people to join the movement. The dai abu Abdullah Shii pointed out the services of the Berbu tribes of North Africa and with their help conquered that region for the Fatimids. Similarly the Quaramata dai's winning over entire tribes to their side in certain areas around Kufa established base areas from where they carried out daring raids against the Abbasids.

Lower mesopotamia which was fertile yet very unhealthy attracted large number of unsettled agricultural workers for employment. Hamdan and Qarmat found ready response among those hard pressed villagers from different districts. He organized a communistic set up and won over the sympathies of those lowly workers.

"Hamdan evolved an excellent economic system very close to the communistic pattern and due to this Ismaili movement became very popular among the tribes of the Arabs" ¹³ Qarmatians remained loyal to the hidden Imam's but their relations were strained after the establishment of the Fatimid state first in North Africa and then in Egypt. Hamdan al Qarmat and Abdan who become known as the Qarmatians broke off from the central Ismaili movements. This effected the whole movement by splitting the various da'wati units in their loyalty between the Fatimids and the Qarmatians.

Another ground of breach may be that while the Ismailis established their state and compromised their earlier revolutionary fervour, the Qarmatians continued to be revolutionary in zeal and opposed the established powers. It was their belief that the struggle should continue against the Abbasids without compromise or submission or showing indulgence till evil and anarchy are rooted out and a healthy communistic set up free of dirt and filth is set up.

"Ismaili teachings are undoubtedly a creative synthesis of Islam and Green Philosophy. Islam being the mainspring of its

chief doctrines. It is far fetched attempt to rationalize Islam in the light of Greek thought. The religious doctrines of Ismailism were evolved contrary to what is claimed by sacred literature over a period of time. It was a historical process. Its evolution began in the latter part of A.H. 200." ¹⁴

The Sunnite historians alleged that the Ismaili movement was a conspiracy hatched by the enemies of Islam to destroy it from within.

Arabs who came from the desert and had scarce means were having no tradition of speculative philosophy. Islam was equally moved by this and was devoid of mythology and emphasised on external observations. As there was no native tradition they had to turn to Greece. Islamic orthodoxy felt threatened more so when Abbasid ruler al-Manum himself encouraged a liberal trend. Says Mr. Engineer that the Ismailis were trying to evolve a new synthesis in order to save Islamic teachings from being swept away by the new flood of knowledge.

Ismaili teachings are based on a certain concepts k;. They believe that for each major period there is a Natiq (a pronouncer law giver) who lays down the shara for his period. He brings it out in simple terms as could be understood by the common masses. Every Natiq appoints an asas (base, executor). The asas lays down the foundation of ilm al-batin (hidden knowledge). For every apparent (zahir) ritual or teaching of the Sharia there is a hidden or allegorical (i.e. batin) aspect." ¹⁵ Prophet Muhammad was preceded by five Natiq each Natiq having cancelled his

predecessor's shara. Every Natiq had his asas and Imams. Muhammad bin Ismail, the seventh Imam from the progeny of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, was designated as another Natiq and a prophet who proclaimed that his predecessors sharia stands suspended. The Ismaili theory of a coming Natiq after completion of an epoch and cancelling his predecessor's laws is the spiritual expression of historical process and social changes. The same law need to be replaced by a new set of laws which would be keeping with the changed circumstances.

Imam is the central concept of Ismailism. The Ismaili and Ithana ashare are the two sects of Islam for which the concept of Imam remained the centre of gravity. However, the Ithana assaries made no serious and calculated bid for power. However the Ismailis made a careful attempt to built up the most efficient organization and a hirarchy of functionaries to achieve their religio-political goal. Hence they develop the concept of Imam which is otherwise absent in Islam. According to Ismaili belief the Imam is the supreme leader without whose existance the world of faithfuls cannot exist. The Imam not only enforces the sacred law among the community but also he is thought to be an heir to prophet's ministry and a proof of God on earth. Thus the Imam rules and guides in the name of God. The concept of Imam became so vital to it that the concept of every seventh Imam being Natiq was not given the importance it deserved after applying it to Imam Muhammad bin Ismail.

2.3 THE FATIMID CONCEPT

The Fatimids maintained those who believe in the attributes of God are concealed polytheists. When Ali was asked about tawhid he replied that tawhid meant that one should not conjecture about him. He is also reported to have said to describe him was to liken or compare him to praise him was to misrepresent him, to point at him was to exemplify him, to be silent about him was to estimate him and to talk about him was to limit him. Thus it can be estimated that among the Fatimids the concept of tawhid is very different from other muslims.

Another important Ismaili concept is Ibdaa i.e. creation (literally making something new). This entails the Ismaili theory of creation of universe. This believes that the first thing to be created was aql (Intelligence) as the Greeks believed. However, they differed with the Greeks on the modes of its coming into existence. Hamid al-Din Kirmani says in the Rahat al-aql that it is the nature of fayd (i.e. overflowing) that it is the same substance from which it flows and it partakes of it. For example the light which flows from the sun is nothing but part of the sun itself from which it flows as the essence of the sun is found in it and there is no difference between the two in this sense. It is constituted by two things the thing which is a part of it and is not separate from it and the thing which is separate from it.

Another important element of the Fatimid belief - system is the theory of Mathal and Mamthul i.e. for every corresponding corporeal appearance there is higher spiritual or super-sensible

form. Sayyidna Muayyad says on his Majalis that God designed the wise system of universe in such a way that whatever he created and his creature consists of mahsus (i.e. that falls within the realm of senses) and maqul (i.e. the realm of reason or super sensible) and mathal and mamthul.

The Fatimids point out that the contradiction of our world arise on accounts of the process of refinement. Suffering and evil are the products of this process. Each cycle begins with the coming into existence of Adam and ends with rise of Quim al-qiyama. In each cycle a particular quantum of matter is refined and reaches back into the fold of the spiritual realm. The running thread in this theory is the acknowledgement of hudud which is nothing but an ordered hierarchy in order to ensure complete obedience of the faithful to the Imam. The key element of the Fatimid belief system is walaya i.e. sincere friendship with or devotion to the house of the Prophet to which the Fatimid. Imams belonged. No other sect of Islam demands such absolute devotion to persons belonging to a lineage. The other sects of Islam are more democratic in the sense that the religious authority is not vested with one person. The Ulama of these sects hold different opinions and these differences are not looked down upon whereas among the Fatimids it is considered to be enormous interpretation of the Koran and Shara and, are therefore discouraged. The Imam, who is considered infallible is regarded as a final authority in such matters and his word is considered as final.

Another most important element in fact its forte - is the Ismaili belief in tawil (esoteric interpretation). Tawil provides greater latitude to the intellectual elite of this sect by lessening the rigors of orthodoxy and giving comparatively more freedom of interpretation. It enables the Ismaili intellectuals to integrate and assimilate certain ideas and concepts of Greek philosophy and give new interpretation to the Koranic verses and the Islamic Sharia.

The Ismaili faith is based on seven pillars and their exposition. The first of the pillars is walaya i.e. Devotion. Its mathal (Ideal example) is Adam. He was the first whose walaya and wilaya (Authority) was made obligatory and God ordered his angels to prostrate before him. The second pillar is taharat (purity, cleanness). In tawil it is likened to Nah (Noah). He was the first to receive God's mandate to purity and cleanse mankind of its sins. The third pillar is salat (prayer) and it points to the third great prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). And Zakat's mathalis Musa. He was first prophet to have been ordered by God to purify (Yazakka). The sixth pillar sawm (fasting) points to the prophet Isa (Christ) Hajj (pilgrimage) is the last of these things made obligatory by God and he is the last of the prophets. Now there remains from the pillars of Islam Jihad and it is indicative of the seventh Imam who happens to be the seventh of the group of seven Imams and he is also the Sahib al-Qiyama (Lord of the day of judgement).

So we have marked that the Fatimid duat (Summoners) and other religious functionaries interpret the Koranic verses and Islamic rituals and teachings as to reinforce the Ismaili dawa and its structure which was evolved in certain historical circumstances. So it was not only a great challenge to the Abbasid power but also a progressive intellectual movement which believed in the creative assimilation of the Islamic and non-Islamic teachings thus widening the scope of Arabian Islam and enriching it with non-Arabic thought. But after capturing power it lost the revolutionary élan of its earlier days. It was for this reason the Quramita remained committed to the earlier revolutionary élan of the Ismailis and found it difficult to read just to the Fatimids in their new role as rulers and the ostentation, political intrigues and conspiracies accompanying the role.

Moreover there is much debated and controversial question of Ismaili belief in practising sharia like other muslims. Some of these believe on Shara having been set aside and it was no longer obligatory in their case to follow it after the batini dawa had been established. Sayyidna Muayyad Shinazi Hamid al-Din Kirmani etc., who are considered as the pillars of tawil (esoteric interpretation) always emphasize in their writings that it is absolutely necessary to observe Zahir (open teaching of sharia) without which batin (hidden or esoteric aspects) has no significance at all. It is for this the Ulama and the laity among the Dawoodi Bohras have observed the teachings of Islamic sharia meticulously. It is often argued that the Zahir (apparent, manifest) and

batin are like body and soul and when the two combine advantages flow and purposes are recognised. Thus we find in observing Zahir sharia despite their belief in its esoteric interpretations. The Bohras are hardly different from other Muslims. They also reject the concept of the muta marriage (i.e. temporary marriage).

Ismaili movement had political ambitions and was organized with a view to wrest power at the appropriate moment. However, it was not possible to challenge the mighty Abbasid rulers openly and hence an underground network was spread throughout that empire especially in its most vulnerable areas. Imam who happened to be the highest authority, hence could be a legitimate ruler all others being mere usurpers. Whereas other Shia sects could not evolve an effective organization to become a real challenge to Abbasid rulers, the Ismailis did. The Imams maintained strict secrecy about their identity so much so that despite their powerful intelligence network the Abbasids could not succeed in tracing any of them (i.e. The Fatimid Imams). These Imams lived in disguise, mostly of rich traders and kept shifting from place to place in order to avoid the rulers' suspicion. They maintained good relations with provincial governors by giving them rich presents and projected themselves as rich and influential traders. They had not only to remain in disguise but had to flee from place to place to avoid being arrested by their enemies who were after him every where.

"The Fatimids had realised after long spell of underground functioning that it was not easy to dislodge the Abbasids or challenge them near the centre of their power. They therefore decided to strike at the periphery constituting the weak link".¹⁶ First they set their eyes upon Yemen which was in the South and they were quite hopeful of establishing their base there.

Ahmed Knew Yemen would be a promising field for Shiite propaganda and decided to send Ibn Hawshab to act as dai in Yemen. At first he claimed to be a simple merchant but his neighbours could recognize him and urged him to act openly as a Shiite missionary, who would be in every way welcome. As soon as they were strong enough Ibn Hawshab's companions took up arms and began raids upon neighbours who had not accepted the Shiite creed and met with much success in obtaining plunder.

When the dia Abu Sufyan of North Africa died, Ibn Hawshab chose Shii to fill the void. The Berbers of North Africa were highly independent and difficult to subjugate. All of them are Bedouins and members of groups and families. Whenever one trade was destroyed another took its place and as refractory and rebellions as the former one had been. Therefore it had taken the Arabs a long time to establish their dynasty in the land of Afriqiyah and the Maghrib.

Abu Abdullah Shi exploited this resentment of the Berbers and won a large number of them over to his side. Abdullah with the help of some important Kutama leaders, captured Tahirat which

was the base of the Fatimid rule in the Maghrib i.e. North West Africa.

Abdullah Shii due to wise policy and large following went on capturing town after town. At last he attacked Raqqada which was close to Ziyadat al-Lah's capital Qairwan and conquered it in A.H. 295 (907 A.D.). Ziyadat after the crushing defeat of his armies left Raqqadat and fled towards Egypt. Thus Abdullah Shii established his supremacy over the Aghlabid empire and ended Abbasid suzerainty over it. When the Abbasids issued orders to all their governors for arresting Imam Mahdi wherever he was found, Abu Abdullah Shii had already conquered Maghrib (North Africa) and written to his Lord Mahdi to come to Maghrib from Silmiyya where he was residing then and assume power. Al - Mahadi became the first ruler of the Fatimid dynasty essentially in the Maghrib. Al-Mahadi as pointed by Husayn Hamdani was cousin to his predecessor Imam Husayn al-Mostur. This brings us doubts did these Imams belong to the progeny of Fatimid, the prophet's daughter, as claimed by them? The Abbasids charged that they did not. The document of the Fatimids descent was forged and at best was based on hearsay. Two eminent historians Ibn Khaldun and Maqrizi uphold the Fatimid claim of having descended from Fatima. According to Ibn Khaldun most of those who reject the Fatimid claim rely on weak traditions forged by Abbasids were political rivals of the Fatimids. Abbasids wanted to denigrate their rivals and rejoice.

"The first Fatimid ruler was Imam al-Mahdi. He was born in A.H. 260. In A.H. 297 he assumed the reins of power in Maghrib (North Africa) and died in A.H. 322." He was a man of wisdom, courage and bold action. Politically he was shrewd and pragmatic. He did not remain content with the territory he got, he expanded its frontiers upto the Black Sea by conquering other parts of Africa. He tried to vanquished the Banu Idris also and tried to tried conquer Egypt but did not succeed. He strengthened his naval power so much that it could compete with Rome- the strongest sea power of that period. He devised proper administrative measures for every department which resulted in peace every corner of his country.

"Mahdi before his death had appointed al-Qaim as his successor. Thus on Mahadi's death in A.H. 322 (A.D. 934) he assumed powers". Al-Qaim was bold and courageous. He was equally interested in organising missionary activities to spread his religion. But he never used force. He was not harsh towards his opponents and was tolerant. He ruled for 12 years and died in A.H. 334 (A.D. 945-46).

Al-Qaim had appointed his son Ismail as his heir - apparent, who succeeded him A.H. 334 assuming the title al-Mansur billah. The city of Susa was under siege. Thus his first task was to relieve the city and take further steps to quell the rebellion. He personally took charge of the military operations and put an end of Abu Yazid's menace. Had Imam Mansur failed in checking this menace the Fatimid empire would not have survived long. His

death occurred in A.H. 341 (A.D. 953) He tolerated other faiths and never behaved like a bigot.

The Fatimid empire achieved its highest glory during the reign of al-Muizz, the fourth Fatimid Caliph. He ascended the throne in A.H. 341 and ruled for nearly 24 years. He conquered Egypt and made it the centre of his empire. He had organized different departments in order to ensure efficient administration. Department of finance was in the hands of the Ismailis themselves. The land tax was the main source of its income which was collected from the peasantry. But it was not feudal as there was no system of allotting Jagirs and there was no class of nobles owing Jagirs and maintaining troops. The Fatimid state was theocratic - autocratic. The theoreticians maintained that the world cannot exist without the Imam who was considered the only legitimate rulers, all others being usurpers.

Imam al-Muizz gave utmost importance to dispensation of justice according to the Laws laid down in the Koran and Shria as interpreted by the Fatimid school. His chief Qadi i.e. head of judiciary was Qadi Numan who was a man of integrity. He believed Qada (i.e. administration of justice) is Gods shape of justice on Earth. One, who turns away from it and strives against it, he invites Gods wrath and the curse of his friend. Al-Muizz had laid down strict norms for dispensation of justice and enforced them rigorously.

Al-Muizz was fond of building elegance structures. Moreover scholars from different fields of learning were always welcome to seek his patronage. In the matters like tawid (unity of God), affirmation of religion, refutation of atheists, innovations and deviationists Muizz's knowledge could not be matched. He appointed a Jew, Yaquab kils to reorganize the revenue system. Says Hasan Ibrahim that the old system of revenue collection was abolished and a new system introduced for estimation of properties and fixing rates of taxation.

Al-Muizz died in A.H. 365 (A.D. 975) and was succeeded by his son al-Aziz. He was generous humane, quite intelligent and brave. He preferred to pardon his enemy then to seek revenge. His period on the whole was one of peace and prosperity. He also patronized scholars and encouraged learning. His generosity became well-known. The common people were comparatively happier in his regime. He died in A.H. 386 (A.D. 996).

Al-Hakim, the son of Al-Aziz was appointed successor to the Fatimid throne when he was eight years old. Hakim was only eleven years old when his father al-Aziz died. Al-Aziz had appointed Barjwan - a man of proven ability before Aziz as the tutor to al-Hakim. Ustadh Barjwan could win the loyalty for him. Barjwan was a Turkish slave and hence his supermacy over state affairs aroused feelings of jealousy among the Berber nobles of the Kutama tribe who had played a very important role in establishing the Fatimid rule. Hence, power struggle started between the Turkish and the Berber groups.

Ustadh Barjwan pitted against his rival Ibn Ammar leader of the Kutama party, was compelled to become the Champion of the young Caliph. Being deprived of effective authority, Barjwan turned to his friend Manjutakin, - a fellow Turk and governor of Syria - for help. Manjutakin was defeated. However Ibn Ammar treated him well and was of the opinion that the Turks and the Berbers should unite to put an end to the supremacy of the Fatimid Caliphs.

Barjwan exploited this situation and when the army was away in Syria to deal with the developments there he struck at the right moment and compelled Ibn Ammar to retire from the public life. Barjwan became all powerful again and brought back al-Hakim in public and proclaimed Caliph and sovereign. However he wanted al-Hakim to remain subservient to him. When Hakim became matured and knew those things he did not waste much time to get rid of him.

Al-Hakim encouraged his subjects to adopt the Ismaili faith at times he even forced them. For Christians he put either to embrace Islam, leave the country or face execution. Even the Sunni Muslims faced certain stiff measures. Al-Hakim, attitude towards woman was extreme. He imposed severe restrictions on women in general and confiscated their properties including those of his mother and sister. For those steps he had become a very controversial figure.

He was deeply religious and preferred simplicity. His death is still shrouded in mystery. As usual he was riding an ass. He did not return to the royal palace after his visits from the cave which was a regular practice with him. The very next day his ass was found dead but there was no trace of Al-Hakim or his body.

Ismaili sources maintain that Imam Al-Hakim had appointed his son Zahir as his heir-apparent before he disappeared. Zahir was about 17 years old at that time. Satt al-Mulh al-Hakim's sister wielded great influence over her nephew and directly participated in the state affairs. Satt al-Mulh remained quite influential until her death in A.H. 415. In A.H. 427 Zahir fell sick of plague and was taken to the 'Garden of the Strand' at Maqs (today the port of Cairo). He died there, leaving behind his son al-Mustansir who was only seven years old at that time.

His mother - a Sudanese negress became all powerful and ruled from behind the Caliphal throne. Fight between the Turks and the negroes started. "In A.H. 442 al-Mustansir found a very capable minister in the person of al-Hazuru". After al-Hazuri's death the Turkish troops slowly increased their influence and their leaders acquired more and more authority. The Turks and the Negroes constantly clashed with each other. In A.H. 460 Nasir ad-Dawla, the Turkish general won over the Negro forces and dispersed them. He became very powerful and plundered the Caliph's place. Al-Mustansir was now reduced to dire straits. He captured Alexandria and stopped the movement of food grains to Egypt.

Nasir ad-Dawla was a tyrant and his own man killed him in A.H. 465.

After Nasir Ad-Dawla's assassination al-Mustansir invited Badrat-Jamali, an Armenian slave to take charge of the ministry who brought the situation under control and restored the caliphal authority.

However, the great famine from A.H. 459 to A.H. 465, the factional fights between the Turks and Negroes, the revolt of North Africa, the huge expenses on war against the Abbasids and the crusaders' attacks are some of the causes of the decline of the Fatimid power which was marked during the reigns of Al-Mustansir.

Mustali was the youngest son of al-Mustansir. Controversy arose from a section in and secular view point and the Fatimids split into two groups. (i) those who accepted Mustali as Imam and (ii) those who accepted the oldest son Nizar as the rightful successor both as Imam and Caliph. The Bohras belonged to the former group and the Nizars or the Khojas belonged to the latter.

Al-Mustali died in A.H. 495. The first crusade was launched in Mustali's reign in A.H. 489. That further weakened the Fatimid empire. He was liked by the army as well as the people. His effective power was wielded by his Wazir Afdal. He was reduced to the status of a titular head.

Al-Amir was only five years old at the time of his father's death. Afdal proclaimed his caliphate and continued his Caliphate and continued to rule himself. The crusaders continued their

attacks and succeeded in establishing their base in palestine and were threatening Egypt. However, they could not take Egypt. Imam Amir was killed by a group of assassins, supposedly the partisans of Nizar in A.H. 514 when he was going out either for hunting or to his palace in Fustat.

He before his death nominated his son Tayyib who was then two years and some months old. As Tayyib was just an infant, Amir appointed his cousin Abdat Majid as regent of the state.

This Imam Tayyib went into hiding and Bohras still believe that the Imam continues in his progeny although the identity of the Imam subsequent to Tayyib, is not known till today. The Fatimid caliphate Ayyubi an orthodox Sunni, took over the power in the name of Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad. There was the end of the Fatimid rule in Egypt and North Africa.

2.4 THE BOHRAS IN INDIA - THEIR RISE AND GROWTH

"The ;Ismaili movement spread the network of its mission-
aries to countries like Africa, Persia, Central Asia, Yemen and
20
India" . In India the missionary activities had not spread
beyond the Sindhu valley. It was during al-Mustansir's reign
(A.D. 1035-1095) the missionaries reached beyond Sindhu. The
Author of Mausam-e-Bahar says the ruler of Pattan Siddharaja
Jayasingha was intent upon killing Muslims. To set things right
two missionaries, Ahmad and Abdullah were sent to India and they
landed near Cambay. The activities of these missionaries were
quite peaceful and they had no political ambitions. So says Mr.

Satish C. Mishra that the foundation of Ismaili communities in Gujarat is a unique fact in Islam history.

"According to Satish Mishra, Raja Siddharaj Jayasingha (1094-1143) was very tolerant towards the other faiths but himself was never converted to any other religion".²¹ In Khojah memory he is said to have been converted by their first missionary, Nur Satgur. Finally in the Mirat-i-Ahmadi it recorded that he was secretly converted to the Sunni faith by a Fir of that persuasion. Mishra points out that there are popular traditions without any historical authenticity. No evidence suggests that the great Rajput ruler died in a faith different from that of his fathers.

Arab missionaries had no political ambition in India unlike the Ismaili missionaries of the second and third centuries hira in Arabia who had the definite political goal of capturing the state power. In their sectarian scheme of things Hind (India) was also one of the Jaziras (regions) where the mission had to spread. Among which class of people did the Ismaili propagandists succeed most and what were its social and political contradictions vis-a-vis other classes?

The legends point out that the Ismaili missionaries Abdullah first met a poor gardener and his wife who had been affected by famine and by his miracle could produce water at their dry well and hence they were converted to his faith. This brings out clearly that the dai first approached the local poor for whom religion was not an intellectual exercise in philosophic specula-

tion, but a spiritual solace in "ocean of poverty" as this world was for them. The first martyrs of this faith carrying missionary activities among the non-tribals in wagar Area of Rajasthan. This shows the first missionaries had spread out among the poor both in urban and rural areas. Maulai Muruddin who was in charge of the missionaries activities of Deccan was trying to convert people in the remote villages and towns when he died in Dongaon.

The caste hierarchy on the past was very oppressive and exploitative for those at the bottom or outside it. Islam had no such social stigma. However in case of the the Ismaili sect as this grew in the feudal environment of Persia it imbibed many elements of its religio-cultural outlook. As a result of this and also as it was forced to function underground it developed a religious hierarchy which basically militated against the spirit of the more democratic, orthodox Sunni sect.

The untouchables at the lowest rank of social hierarchy were more attracted towards the sunni Islam as it was more democratic and free from any notion of hierarchy.

However among the middle castes who had not only differences with the ruling feudal nobility but also with those untouchables, the notion of hierarchy was very much there in their mind. They were more indemed to adopt a partially hierarchical faith like Ismailism. It was probably for this reason the Arab missionaries found most of their converts from among the trading castes. The word 'Bhora' seem to have been derived from 'vohrwu'

or 'vyahwar' meaning to transact, to trade. It seems better to derive the word from the Gujarati Vohorvu to trade, the occupation followed by the first Hindu converts to Islam.

To distinguish converts from the armed Rajput and Koli castes the Musalman governors coined such names as Molesalam, Melik and sipare. For converts of the trading class the word Bhora was in use and this they extended to converts from all the unarmed castes, Brahmins husbandmen and craftsman. Thus the Bohras were traders before their conversion to the Shia Ismaili-faith and mostly belonged to big or small urban areas. Peasantry by and large remained outside its orbit. Many Brahaman and Bania traders were also converted to this new faith. However, there remained no trace of caste consciousness among them. Till today the Bohras eat together from a common thali. Praying as prescribed by Islam (namaz), fasting in the month of Ramadan, performing hajj, paying Zakat and all other Islamic injunctions - obligatory as well as voluntary - were observed fastidiously. It was a complete break from the past, although the traces of the past traditions continued in one form or the other.

Those converts underwent a complete cultural revolution, Hinduism does not prohibit fine arts like music, dancing and painting. Islam on the other hand has proscribed these arts. Soon after conversion these arts were prohibited and till today the Bohras by and large abide by this prohibition. The Bohras belonged to the class of petty traders which tends to be conservative and narrow in outlook. Moreover, it does not command

enough surplus in a feudal set up to develop a taste for the fine arts. Among the Bohras not only have music, painting and dancing been prohibited, there has been no tradition of literature either. At best one can find religious poetry-either didactic, elegiac or eulogistic but hardly any creative poetry. Mulla Abdul Hussain says in his account on Daudi Bohras, The new converts continued increasing considerably and for two centuries and half from AD 1130 to AD 1380 there was little check on the progress of Ismaili faith. The Dais of the Mastur (hidden) Imams in Yemen sent their deputies to the towns and tracks of India where the Ismaili Shias were spread. These deputies collected the tithes (zakat) for the Dai in Yemen and preached the Ismaili faith more freely than their coreligionist were able to do in Yemen, Persia and Syria. This clearly shows that the Indian people were more tolerant towards other faiths than the peoples of other countries.

But with the invasion of Muzaffar Shah (AD 1390-1413 things started changing for the Bohras" . When Muzaffar Shah's power was established in Gujarat, he noticed with great envy and jealousy the spread of the Ismaili Shias. He being a new Rajput Sunni convert, vigorously encouraged Sunni doctrine and the Bohras and the Ismaili Shias were suppressed persecuted and forcibly converted to Sunnism. The maximum trouble came during the reign of Sultan Ahmad (1411-1443 AD) son of Muzaffar Shah and Mahmud II (1536-1554 AD). Even under the more liberal Delhi

emperors, the Gujarati Bohras suffered much persecution at the hands of the wicked murderers i.e. Sunni subordinate Musalman officers invested with wide powers.

Moreover the role played by Jafar to convert the Ismailis into Sunni faith is equally of great drawback for the Ismailis. He had joined a madrasa in Ahmedabad started by Maulai Hasan who was the son of Maulai Adam Ibn Sulaiman. Jafar ignoring the advice of his teacher started for Yeman on his own for studies. So Maulai Hasan was disturbed and wrote to the Dai Sayyaidna Ali bin Sayyidna Abdullah about Jafar's defiance. However Jafar could win the favour at Yamen and stayed there for two years for his studies and returned to India. He was received by a great mass of people and they requested him to lead the prayer. After persistent request he led it.

Maulai Hasan when knew it got angry and told him to write those people to pray again as without specific permission no one could lead a prayer. Though Jafar felt sorry he did not write to the people to pray again and left for Patan.

The author of Daut al-Akramin says Jafar came to Patan and by his power of eloquence and persuasive ways succeeded in converting the people into Sunnite faith. Abdul Husain says about 90 per cent Ismailis separated at this juncture while according to Nazm al-Ghani Khan some twelve lakh become Sunnis. Then he came to Ahmedabad. He got Mahmud Shah's full support in his campaign to convert the Bohras to the Sunni faith. The harassment to shia Bohras continued till Jafar's assassination near Champrin

on 5th July 1441. However with his assassination the persecution of the Bohras did not come to an end after Mulla Hasan's death his son Mulla Raja became the deputy dai in India. Mulla Raja could satisfy all the queries of the Maulievi from those who embraced his faith. When this news reached Sultan Muzaffar Shah he was furious and by his orders Mulla Raja was arrested and executed which took place in AH 924.

However, till that time the Shia Bohras and Sunni Bohras had not developed separate identities. It was a century or so after the split with Jafar the formal separatism occurred this split took place during the eighteenth Yamani dai Sayyidna Ali bin Abdulla's time.

The nineteenth dai Sayyidna Idris bin Hasan was a great scholar and a historian. However the dawa was losing its hold in Yaman and the dais were worried about its future. But they had strong faith in their followers in India as they were convinced of their devotion. The dais were more inclined to shift their headquarters to India. In India the Ismaili sect offered complete surrender to the highest authority. This was alien to the outlook and mental make up of the Arabs. It was for this reason that this sect found their success with the non-Arab peoples who were long used to feudal and monarchic systems.

The twenty-third Yamani dai Sayyidna Muhammad 'Izzuddin, was disenchanted with his followers in Yaman and induced some Indian followers to send their children to Yaman for education and

training. Among them one was Yusuf bin Sulaiman Sayyidna Izuddin mentioned Yusuf bin Sulaiman as his successor before his death in AH 946 (1540 AD). Thus Yusuf Najamuddin become the twenty fourth in succession and the first Indian dai. Even since the headquarters of the dawa have remained in India. After him he also chose another Indian Hasan bin Jalal who become the twenty fifth dai. Hasan-bin Jalal in turn appointed Daud bin Ajab Shah as his successor.

By this time Mughal rule was established over Gujarat. The head of the Jafaree sect was Muhammed bin Jahir who was in good connections with the Mughal governor of Gujarat and was in sectarian rivalry with the Shia Ismailis. This made him to persecute those Shias when this become unbearable Sayyidna Daud drew the attention of Akbar who ensured peace and security for Bohras and their head. The taquyya (secrecy) was given up in this matter of observing religious practices and prayers were said publicly as prescribed by the Shia Ismaili religion.

Daud bin Ajab Shah was followed by Daud bin Qutub Shah. Here again a controversy arose on the issue of succession and the community got further divided. The majority in India followed Daud bin Qutub Shah and were called Daudi Bohras whereas the followers of Shaikh Sulaiman remained in a small minority and were called Sulaimanis.

Now the sectarian fight started between the Daudis and the Sulaimanis. In the beginning the Mughals remained neutral in the dispute. But Jabir whom Shaikh Sulaiman had sent to Gujarat from

Yamen established contact with a city mughal officer named Fateh Muhammad and through his help Ibrahim, filed a suit in the Court of Subedar Claiming eighteen lakhs of rupees as his share in the property. Many prominent Daudis including the Sayyidna himself were imprisoned on this charge. The Daudis, according to Mishra argued that since office was not hereditary among them and the dai did not own the properties governed by him but held it in trust for his people. This claim of Ibrahim was false and fraudulent. The dispute however did not come to an end.

Whatever might have happened the Sayyidna won the case he waited on the Emperor. The emperor granted a gold lettered firman and allowed him to return to Gujarat with due honour. The Bohra chief was not troubled thereafter during Akbars region. Akbar died in 1605 AD and this led to a change of governership. Shaikh Farid who took over from Aziz Koka maintained cordial relations with Sayyidna Daud till the later's death on 13th August, 1612. He was succeeded by his chief lieutenant Shaikh Adam Saiffuddin. He appointed Abdul Tayyab, Sayyidna Daud's son as his successor.

The community was faced with another split on the question of succession after Abdul Tayyab took over. Sayyidna Adams grand-son Ali was in question. This time Jahangir decided the case in favour of Abdul Tayyab. However Ali was not satisfied with it and a small group of people owing their allegiance to Ali seceded from the community they are called Alia Bohras and are confined

to the city of Baroda in Gujarat. This split might have occurred around 1627 AD or 1628.

Sayyidna Abdul Tayyab passed away on Rabi 1,8, 1041 and was succeeded by Sayyidna Ali Shamsuddin bin Maulai Hasan who died in AD 1042 and was succeeded by an Indian dai called Sayyidna Qasim Zainuddin bin Fri Khan. His tenure was peaceful. However this peace did not last very long. The appointment of Aurangzeb as governor of Gujarat on 27th April 1645 did not go well for the Daudis. Says Mishra his appointment spelt the commencement of a fresh wave of persecution for the community.

At the time of Aurangzeb's appointment as governor of Gujarat Sayyidna Qutubuddin became the thirty second dai. According to the author of Mausam-i-Bahar, Abdul Quyawi who arrived with Aurangzeb in Gujarat convinced him that the Bohras were heretics (rawafid) and their blood according to the book of God, could be shed. There was no charge which could be found out against Sayyidna Qutubuddin except the minor son who by a fraudulent deal was made to say his father "rafzi's that he believed in the Godhood of Ali ibn Abi Talib. Thus on this ground Sayyidna qutubuddin was killed on 10th August, 1646.

After his death campaign of terror was launched against the Daudi Bohras. This campaign continued for about four months when Aurangzeb decided to leave for the Deccan Shaista Khan was given charge of Gujarat. He was no fanatic and stopped the harassment of Bohras and permitted them to follow their religion in their own way.

Sayyidna Fir Khan Shujauddin the next Bohra Dai in succession who remained a prisoner was later freed. But this did not last long. He again was arrested by Dara Shekoh, Ghairat Khan. However, Sayyidna Fir Khan was released after a couple of months on receipt of an order from the Emperor's court at Agra.

Fir Khan was expecting something concrete to be done by the Ahmed which might have paved the way for his release however, it could not be done by Ahmad in Agra. So Ahmad even though was insulted by Fir Khan sent two prominent Bohras - Yusuf bin Chandji and Chand Miyan Abuji to Fir Khan for arranging reconciliation. Fir Khan rejected this move. This brought another split in the community.

By this time the Hujimiya group had gathered some strength and Ahmed succeeded in obtaining the favour of Murud when he was the Subedar of Gujarat and got the Sayyidna arrested. Sayyidna died on 10th September, 1655 and was succeeded by Sayyidna Mulla Raj. He made some efforts to win over the Hujumiya sect Ahmad but did not succeed. He passed away on 24th September, 1674 and was succeeded by his son Abdul Tayyab Zakiyuddin. No doubt the bigoted Sunnis considered the Shia Ismaili Bohras as rafdis i.e. those who have turned away from the faith. But the persecutory measures were not directly inspired by the religious bigotry alone. The Bohras had split into a number of sects mostly on the issue of succession. A close look at the Bohra history of this period also shows that as soon as the new governor or some influential

official arrived the rival groups vied with each other to win his favour. Besides this there were conflicting class interest at work.

Sayyidna Ismail Badruddin never visited Ahmedabad, Jamnagar being his headquarters. Sayyidna Abdul Tayyab remained there for a couple of years. He died in AH 1110 i.e. AD 1699. He was succeeded by Musa Kalimuddin.

"Sayyidna Nur Muhammad Nuruddin lived for about eight years and died in Rajab AH 1130 i.e. May 1718" ²³. He was succeeded by his cousin and brother-in-law Sayyidna Ismailiji Badruddin bin Sheikh Adam Safiyyuddin. The most notable thing of his period is that the Hyjumiyans who had split from the community at the time of Sayyidna Fir Khan Shiyauddin returned to the fold.

Ibrahim Wajihuddin was appointed the next dai. He made Ujjain his headquarters. It was for the first time that the headquarters of the Fatimi dawa in India were shifted to Malawa - a region outside Gujarat.

The unsettled period in the eighteenth century made the central government weak and the petty provincial rulers became more powerful. The Bohras who constituted the trading community attracted the attention of these petty rulers who needed more and more money for upholding their feudal glory. More often than not it used to be the case of a conflict between the feudal and Mercantile classes.

Such a conflict between the Bohras traders and the ruling dynasty arose in Surat also. The Sayyidna was arrested and released on payment of a security deposit of one lac rupees. Sayyidna left the city before the matter became worse.

The Hibtia sect came into existence at this juncture. Its founders were Shaikh Ismail and his son Shaikh Hibatullah.

Sayyidna Abdul Tayyab Zakiuddin, the son-in-law of Sayyidna Hibatullah took charge as his next dai. He shifted back the headquarters of dawa to Jamnagar. He died in Burhanpur on Safar 2, 1200. His son Muhammad Yusuf Najmuddin, 23 succeeded him.

Sayyidna Abde-ali-Saifuddin who succeeded him is another important personality among the Indian dias. His reign saw further consolidation of the British power in India and an end to persecution of the community.

Shaikh Jiwanji's son Muhammad Izzuddin of Aurangabad became the next dai. Before his death he nominated his elder brother Sayyidna Tayyab Zaimuddin as his successor. Due to the British rule Bohras got more security and peace. They also became more prosperous with the increased volume of trade. Thus like other trading communities the Bohras also welcomed the British whereas the artisans and the masses of people resented the foreign rule.

Sayyidna Badruddin was the son of Sayyidna Abde-ali-Saifuddin and was the last of the Rajput Dais. He died at 30 in August 1840. After the tragic death of Sayyidna Muhammad Badruddin, Sayyidna Abdul Qadar Najmuddin succeeded him. He was son of the forty fifth dai and great grandfather of the present dai

Sayyidna Muhammed Burhanuddin. Most of the Bohras accepted him as the legitimate successor but among the Ulama around him the question of clear pronouncement of nass in his favour was disputed and has not been resolved till now. The Ulama till then had enjoyed a good status in the Bohras society and were comparatively more free. They could perform the rituals on these occasions without any restraint from the ruling dai. The new mashaikh were the Sayyidna's creation and thus were more dependent on him. The controversy about the nass never completely died down. It brought about another split in the community.

Due to these dissensions the position of the dai was weakened and his authority seriously eroded. "Sayyidna Abdul Qadar Najmuddin passed away on Rajab 26, 1302 (May 11, 1885). He was succeeded by Sayyidna Abdul Husain Husamuddin"²⁴.

It is believed that the sons of Sayyidna Najmuddin had divided different areas among themselves establishing their right to collect money from their respective areas. This right they were not ready to surrender. Sayyidna Burhanuddin who later succeeded his uncle was the Amil of Bombay which was equally an important area, it being the centre of coastal trade.

Sayyidna Husamuddin constructed rest houses (musafir Khanas) and campaigned against superstitious beliefs in ghosts, vampires etc. He died in Ahmedabad in AH 1308 (Ad 1891).

Now his nephew Sayyidna Burhanuddin took over as the next dai. He faced strong opposition including from his own younger brother Abdullah Hakimuddin.

Financial troubles continued and were even further aggravated. The Sayyidna was heavily indebted. Now it was made obligatory for Amils to remit part of their collections to the centre.

Sayyidna Burhanuddin appointed his cousin Abdullah Badruddin as his successor after returning from haj, before he passed away on 22 February 1906. On the dispute about nass after the 46th dai another split in the community broke out during the period of Sayyidna Muhammad Burhanuddin. A new sect called Mahdibagh sect came into existence with its headquarter at Nagpur. Its founder was Abdul Husain bin Tiwaji of Kapadwanj.

Ghulam Husain became the successor of Abdul Hussain, in 1903 and remained head till 1922. Maulana Ibrahim Raza Saheb became head in 1922 and continued till 1956 when Maulana Hasan Nurani succeeded him in his high office". This sect believes that the Daur al-Kashf has begun and it is Sharia. What is necessary is to understand the hidden (batini) meaning of prayer, fasting, Hajj, zakat and koranic verses. So like other Bohras they do not pray or undertake fasts during the holy month of Ramazan or perform hajj. They reckon their era from the time when the light dawned on Maulana Malik Saheb with this the period of Zahur begins. However in all other respects its followers are like other Bohras. Their number does not exceed more than 1000 many of whom live in Nagpur and Bombay.

Sayyidna Abdullah Badruddin succeeded Sayyidna Muhammad Burhanuddin. It was during this time serious trouble broke out between the Bohras and other Muslims in Bhopal resulting in the flight of many Bohras from there. His successor Jahir Saifuddin during whose reign a decision about that case was made which made him unpopular among the Bohras of Bhopal. Before his death he had nominated his nephew Tahir Saifuddin as his successor and his successor happened to be Sayyidna Muhammad Burhanuddin in whose reign the whole of reformists gained its momentum and produced the unveiled picture of the community of the present day.

2.5 THE BOHRAS TODAY-- THEIR DISTRIBUTION

To find out the population of the Daudi Bohras in the absence of any authentic census figures is a difficult task. One of the possible sources is the central register of religious taxes maintained by the high priests establishment. The figures could be taken as reliable as the taxes are collected with strict regularity. According to Abdul Hussain the best census is from the tax register of the Head priest at Surat. A poll tax is collected every year in the month of Ramzan (fasting month) by the deputies of the Head priest at the rate of four (4) annas per head of every male and female. Children are not excepted. Even an embryo in the womb is not excluded. Bohras living in distant places pay their poll-tax as a religious duty.

The other source is a directory compiled by a Bohra from Ujjain S.K. Rayaq. It is called Gulshan-i-Malumat was published in 1975. According to it the current population of the Daudis is 317,844. This figure though not explicitly stated, seems to be that of the Bohras in India.

"More than 50 per cent of the Daudis live in Gujarat. Maharashtra comes next. The highest population of Daudis is in Bombay. There being 60,000 of them in this urbs prima. Outside India the highest number of Bohras is found in Karachi where there are around 25,000 of them. In India they are found in Madhya Pradesh (170 towns), Gujarat (164 towns), Maharashtra (101 towns), Rajasthan (53 towns), Kerala (5 towns), Tamilnadu (4 towns), Uttar Pradesh (4 towns), Mysore (3 towns), Andhra Pradesh (3 towns), Bihar (2 towns), Orissa (2 towns), Goa (1 town) and West Bengal (1 town). In India the major centres of Bohra population after Bombay are: Dohad, Gujarat (11,200), Udaipur, Rajasthan (10,000), Indore, Madhya Pradesh (7750), Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh (7143), Surat, Gujarat (7601), Ahmedabad, Gujarat (7830), Siddhpur, Gujarat (6675), Calcutta, West Bengal (5400), Godhra, Gujarat (5200), Jamnagar, Gujarat (4833), Poona, Maharashtra (4,127), and Madras, Tamilnadu (2757)."

"Outside India the Daudis are found in 31 countries. The Daudis population abroad is around 75,000. The foreign countries where the Bohras have settled are Pakistan (30,000), Tanzania (7500), Madagascar (6500), Ceylone (2500), Kuwait (2500), Kenya (5800), U.K. (2000), Uganda (1500), Yamen (2500), Singapore

(550), Malaysia (500), Hongkong (200), Thailand (900), Iraq
(125), Ethiopia (350), America (875), France (100), Muscat (100)
Maldiva (5), Mauritius (5), Saudi Arabia (550) and Sweden
27
(90)".

Foot Notes

1. H.K. Sanchwala, A Short note on Daudi Bohras
(Progressive, Surat, 1977), P. 1.
2. Ashghar Ali Engineer: The Bohras
(Vikas, New Delhi, 1980).
3. Ibid, P. 2.
4. Ibid, P. 3.
5. Ibid, P. 6.
6. Ibid, P. 7.
7. Subh Al-a'sha XII, 226, of P.J. Vatikiotis, "The Fatimid
Theory of State" (Oriental Publishers, Lahore, 1957)
8. Ashghar Ali Engineer, The Bohras, Op. cit, P. 8.
9. Ibid, P. 12.
10. Ibid, P. 20.
11. Ibid, P. 21.
12. Ibid, P. 24.
13. Ibid, P. 31.
14. Ibid, P. 37.
15. Ibid, PP.42-43.
16. Ibid, P. 63.
17. Ibid, P. 69.
18. Ibid, P. 71.
19. Ibid, P. 92.
20. Ibid, P. 100.
21. Ibid, P. 102.

22. Ibid, P. 108.
23. Ibid, P. 129.
24. Ibid, P. 136.
25. Ibid, P. 138.
26. Ibid, P. 145.
27. Ibid, P. 145.

CHAPTER-3

THE EMERGENCE OF REFORM AMONG THE BOHRAS

A brief knowledge about the historical background for the Bohras has now provided us to make out to what stage of development they have reached and what is at present going on their community. With this an attempt is made to find out the emergence of reform among the Bohras.

The contemporary Bohra Reform Movement is not a make of an overnight. It is an on going process of a long suppressed movement. The stages of its developments, achievements and failures demands it to be viewed from its inception of the reform movement among the Bohras. A brief look at the past history of the Reform movement gives us another clue for a correct and unbiased analysis about the present Bohra Reform Movement.

Says Theoder Wright, Jr. "The reform movement among the Daudi Bohras dates back to one such controversy in 1840 following the death of the forty-sixth Dai, Mohd. Badruddin. The new pontiff Abdul Qadir Najmuddin, apparently had to quiet doubts about the legitimacy of his title by liberal distribution of titles such as Shaikh and dues collecting perquisites among relatives and religious functionaries at the court... The continued but intermittent opposition of some of these Ulema (Islamic learned man) to the reigning Dai's was religious not modernist and was conducted largely through polemics in the Gujrati Language and therefore within the bounds of the community." ¹

"Began the modernist movement with the turn of the twentieth century. The fiftieth dai Sayyidna Abdullah Badruddin was opposed to the spreading of western education among his followers whereas some Bohras under the influence of the British rule determined to establish educational institution for the community " ² .The high priest carried on his vilification campaign against the school and its management with the result that it was totally starved of funds.

Then came the fifty-first dai Sayyidna Tahir Saifuddin in January 1915. An agreement was reached at between him and the Hakimia School authorities this was signed on 29th August, 1915. The school committee seems to have carried out its part of the agreement but the high priest started putting new obstacles as his main object was to prevent the spread of secular education in the community. Thus the strong difference arose between the committee and the high priest. The school committee decided to get the Hakimia School Society registered and accepted a government grant despite strong objections from the Sayyidna . The staunch follower of the Sayyidna withdrew from the committee the strong communal feelings were aroused.

3.1 ISSUE OF EXCOMMUNICATION

"Asghar Ali a pleader was to marry in April, 1917. His marriage dinner was attended by Hasanali editor of the Gulzar magazine Hasanali was excommunicated earlier by the Mullaji and inviting him to a community dinner was nothing short of sacrilege. The 'amil' fined the father of Asghar Ali for

extending an invitation to an excommunicated person. Aggrieved by this he filed an extortion case against the amil and the amil retorted by excommunicating the plaintiff, his father, K.B.Fakhruddin Habibullah pleader and Imranali, pleader in August 1917. In another incident in Bombay Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy and his sons were excommunicated along with other in July 1917." ³

3.2 issue of accountability

After Adamjee Peerbhoy's death his sons took over their father's activities in full vigour One of the important demands of the Bohra reformists from the very beginning has been the accountability of the head priest for the enormous funds collected by him "Near Badri Mahal- The official residence of the high priest There was a saint's mausoleum called Seth Chandabhai's mausoleum. The visitors put their offerings into a 'gulla' (a cash box) kept there for that purpose. The mosque had always been maintained by the offerings, and the surplus either invested or spent towards diverse charitable objects, like assisting the poor, maintaining madrassas(schools) and the giving of a fatyeh (fateha) dinner on the anniversary of the death of seth Chandabhoy" ⁴

However the head priest utilized the cash offering of the 'gulla' for buying four properties and a part of what afterwards constituted Badri Mahal in the year 1916-17. This action was not in keeping with the objectives of the said trust therefore the sons of Adamjee gave a notice to the managers of the charity box

at Chandabhai Seth Mausoleum for accounts. The manager in reply answered the 'gulla' was being managed from the instructions of Mullajee Sahab and if they need any account they should request him. So a notice was given to the head priest who replied he was the sole proprietor of the gulla and therefore was not bound to submit the accounts. The Advocate general also used to look after the public charities and so he filed a suit against the Bohra head priest in the High court of Bombay on 28th August, 1918. It is on this issue of accountability the major chunk of attention of the Bohra reforms is put till now. It still remains as unresolved problem for them.

"The trial judge J. Marten commented on the Chandabhai Gulla case that it is not disputed that if the donors want to make a personal gift to the Mullaji, they can do so. The gift known as 'salaam' are an instance of this. But the gulla offerings seem to stand on a totally different footing. The judge also pointed out that it is imperative on Mullaji Sahab to distribute these gulla offerings for the benefit of the community, and that he is a trustee in respect thereof."

The court held that according to the religious tenets and beliefs of the Dawoodi Bohra community, the control and authority of the Mullaji Sahab for the time being over the said mosque, tomb and box or gulla and all offerings to or in connection therewith are not absolute and do not exclude any interference from within the community or without and the said mosque tomb and box, or gulla and offerings are vested in the Mullaji Sahab

for the time being as trustee and not as absolute owner as claimed by him, on diverse Charitable trusts for the benefit of the community.

This was a legal victory of the leaders of the reform movement. However it has not made much of a dent in the community. The reformists claims that the sayyidna had taken severe steps against those Bohras who had supported this and excommunicated them.

"Ibrahimbhai the son of Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy was even physically assaulted who served notice on the high priest for rendering the account of gulla kept at Chandabhai mausoleum. Three of the assaulters were convicted and sentenced. However it is interesting to mention here that one of the assaulters, Shri Roshan Ali Muhammadali Badshah who was sentenced to a term in prison realized his mistake and later became one of the supporters of the reformist cause, say the reformists."

But here it cannot be denied that it may not be exactly the realization of mistakes by Mohammadali Badshah rather the fear of punishment which might have compelled him to be sided with the reformists.

Claim the reformists that a very sensational attack took place in Ujjain in 1917. The Mullaji Sahab called a meeting in Badri Mahal in Bombay on 28th July, 1917 to excommunicate those who supported the Chandabhai Gulla case. The news was disseminated in 250 towns. Ujjain was one of them. The Amil of Ujjain

Abdul Taiyyib Husaibhai called a meeting in support of the Mullajee's action on the sixth day of the Bombay meeting. In this meeting excommunication was declared for 90 year old shaikh Ali Muhammad and four others. As a result of this a mob of 500 Bohras went to Shaikh Ali Muhammad Ghodiwala's house beat him, his son, his daughter-in-law and cut off his nose. The culprits were caught and sentenced. Sindia the ruler of Ujjain made it clear that these who took the law into their hands would be severally punished.

The Barhanpur Durgah case was also an important case as it involved the question of dissemination of education within the community. The fiftieth and fifty-first dais were opposed to the spread of western Education. Those among the Boharas who supported western education were excommunicated.

About the power to excommunicate the judge observed the dai is the religious rulers and trustee of the properties of the community but even if the oath be taken to him he must still act in a constitutional manner. An alleged breaking of the oath no more excommunicates than does any other alleged departure from the faith.

However despite these judgments which deprived him of arbitrary action against the reformists the high priest continued to harass and persecute his dissenters as not every dissenter could afford to fight a costly legal battle. "It is very often commented by the reformists that after every defeat in the court of law the Dai ordered fathe Musbin (manifest Victory)

to be celebrated on a grand scale with illumination, fine works, processions and communal dinners. This gave the majority of the Bohras an impression that the dai had registered an impressive victory that his authority was invincible. The Bohras became more subdued and the reformists position more hopeless despite their legal victory. The dai thus derived immense benefit from such cleverly thought out moves"⁷

The judgment in the Chandabhai gulla case was delivered in 1922 .But nothing much had happed from 1922 and 1928. It again gathered momentum in 1928. The Central Assembly had passed the Mussalaman waks Acts in 1923. The reformists were hoping that the application of the wakf Acts would force the high priest to subject the Bohrawakf properties to the control of the wakf Board and thus would no longer be under his absolute control. However, in the Bombay providence the Bohra high priest managed to get exemption from the act initially for a period of three years. The reformists knew, if the exemption is not challenged in time then the high priest would managed to get it extended for a much longer period, perhaps even permanently.

"The exemption continued in force till 1931 when the government of Bombay withdrew it. The Bohra high priest organized demonstration and ordered his followers to take out processions with placards denouncing "gross interference in the religious affairs of the Bohra Community."⁸

The wakf Act was applied to the central provinces in May

1932. and the high priest had been exempted from the central provinces right away . Now he enjoyed this exemption in the central provinces whereas he lost it in the Bombay Province. For this a memorandum was submitted to the joint parliamentary committee on his behalf stating that this exemplifies the danger of allowing matters connected with religion to be left to the sweet will of the different government and legislatures. Moreover, there is great danger of such interference under the new constitution where all legislation will depend upon the will of the majority in any legislature. It is therefore essential in the interest of peace and good government that by a proper enacting of fundamental rights, it should be put beyond the powers of any legislature or government either by legislation or by executive action to do anything which either directly or indirectly has the effect of interfering with religion or religious belief of any community.

There is perhaps some truth of non interference of legislature or executive in religion affairs. However, for which the Bohra high priest was claiming non-interference make clear that he wanted in the name of religion to do whatever he pleased. Here lies the flaw of Syedna . If it would have been with a good intention there was much to support him. But for making his grip strong to do anything whatever he like under the cover of religion and claiming non-interference by legislature is a stupid and bogus act.

The reformists pleaded with the government to use its

powers executive or legislative to curb such exploitation and persecution of dissidents. They formed Dawoodi Bohra Wakfs and Trusts Welfare Associations to struggle for the withdrawal of the exemption of Bohra Wakf properties from the Mussalman Wakf Act of 1923. A memorandum was submitted on behalf of this association to the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on 7 October 1933 by its secretary, I.M. Mandviwala. All the claims of the Bohra high priest were refuted point by point, heavily substantiated by quotations from various religious scriptures and few from the observation of the learned judge on the Chandabhai Gulla case. They brought out categorically that it is absolutely false to say that the application of the Wakf Act is against the religion of the Bohras.

In another memorandum to the Governor of Bombay Sir Leslie Wilson, the reformists challenged the Mullaji's contention that there have been no complaints of mismanagement or misappropriation about the charitable trusts under him. In Karachi there is a trust called Faiz-e-Husseini which was managed by the trustees. The Syedna after his visit tried to insert a clause in the Trust Deed that the Trustees cannot do anything without first obtaining the Mullaji's permission and that on a vacancy of trustee no trustee could be appointed without his approval. Karachi legal advisers of the trustee did not advise them to comply with Mullaji's demand. The Mullaji instructed his solicitors in Bombay on behalf of the Trustees to draw up a deed transferring all

properties and everything to the Mullaji's name. The president of the trustee Yusufaly Alibhoy Karimji resigned. Thereafter the feast of the community was held at Jamatkhana and no Bhora should go out to the Jamatkhana was proclaimed. There were only two trustees in the Jamatkhana out of nine. One of them under Meesak said that the "Mullaji was Malik and Dhani and we hereby transfer the whole concern of Faiz-e-Husseini to our august Master Mullaji. In this way, the memorandum further continued, "The biggest charitable institution is swallowed up by the Mullaji".

Many more memoranda were given to the Governor of Bombay and other officials to press for the withdrawal of exemption from The Wakf Act. Tayyebali Musajee Koicha played a very leading role in this regard and was greatly persecuted by the Bohra High Priest. He was excommunicated and his two daughters who are now past 50 could not marry for that reason.

After 1937 elections and the formation of Ministries under 1935 constitution, the Bohra high priest through Muslim members tried to obtain permanent exemption from the Wakf Act. Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad spoke in favour of Sayyedna but Frontier Gandhi Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan said that if the Bohra high priest was a Muslim the Act should apply to him also and this was accepted.

"Shirim Mandiwala who delivered a speech on Women's liberation in a public function in 1935 in Karachi was blamed and considered speaking against the principles of the Bohra religion and the high priest ordered her to apologise. She refused. Thus she was declared as an enemy of religion and was excommunicated.

Hakim Alvi who was a reformist leader when his mother died. The high priest refused to give permission for her burial in the Bohra cemetery. When the dead body reached the cemetery it was found locked from inside and a number of Bohras were found guarding the entrance. To avoid bloodshed the burial was done in the nearby Muslim cemetery belonging to the Amyliman-e-Mulalmana-e-Punjab.

Dohab became another centre of reform movement in 1936. There an organization called Anjuman-e-Muhammadi was formed to arrange for funeral ceremonies at a nominal cost for the poor.

ISSUE OF MODERN EDUCATION

"Another important event of the Bohra reform movement was the conference of 1944. This conference emphasized the need for modern education for the community and considered it a fundamental task for its progress. A committee consisting of the prominent persons was constituted to implement the programme chalked out in the conference. From the corpus fund a building was bought and its income was utilized for giving scholarships to Bohra students.

Here it cannot be denied in this way the reformists tried to capture the public sympathy in general and community sympathy in particular.

The High priest also announced certain schemes which benefited the community. A girls' high school was established at Mohammadi Bagh, Khoka Bazar, Bombay; a scholarship society was

established to provide facilities for higher studies and a fund was raised to establish a hospital - a facility the community so far did not enjoy.

Here of course one thing gets clear that if those things were to be done why were it not done previously and why after the reformists did it ? From this the conclusion may be drawn perhaps the High priest felt compelled to do those things as he found the contribution of the reformists had caught the sympathy of the community. In this way to overcome it and to counter the efforts of the reformists he did it. But whatever it may be the benefits were certainly meant for the community as a whole which was very much desired.

"To strengthen their arguments the reformists also gave another example of Syedna's tyranny in the name of religion. They cited the example of the Abde-Fatima Case. In the family of Aminuddin whose son Abdeali was to marry Fatima. The high priest and his establishment refused to solemnize the marriage. The head Amil apparently gave the excuse that the bridegroom was clean shaven and so his marriage would not be solemnized. However the reformists say the real reason was not this but the participation by the bridegroom's father in the agitation for the withdrawal of the exemption given to Mullaji from the Mussalman.
11
Wakf Act of 1923".

The aggrieved party then filed a case on the Bombay High court for defamation. The high priest employed the best legal brains to win but could not. The high priest had to arrive at a

compromise. Despite this the high priest demanded that his permission or consent to be taken for marriage.

In the post independent era the reformists contacted the Congress Leaders of the then Bombay state and persuaded them to legislate against the practice of excommunication. A bill was introduced in the Bombay assembly when B.G. Kher was Chief Minister and Morarji Desai home minister. B.G. Kher and Morarji Desai while piloting the bill against excommunication pointed out that the Bohra high priest runs " a government within a government" and that he enjoys "monstrous powers".

The high priest challenged against it in the Bombay High Court. However, the Bombay High Court deprived the Bohra High priest of his right to excommunicate by upholding the piece of legislation passed by the Bombay legislature.

Then not satisfied by the High Court decision he filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court in 1958, under article 32 of the constitution. In view of its importance The Chief Justice, B.P. Sinha constituted a bench consisting of A.K. Sarkar, K.C. Dasgupta, J.R. Mudholkar and himself. The Chief Justice Sinha took a different view and considered excommunication invalid on any ground including that of religion. He also observed that the prevention of excommunication Act is aimed at ensuring human dignity and removing all those restrictions which prevent a person from living his own life so long as he did not interfere with similar rights of others. Nobody has the right to deprive

others of their civil rights simply because the latter did not conform to a particular pattern of conduct." ¹²

However, the majority of the judges decided otherwise and the "Prevention of Excommunication Act" passed by the Bombay Legislative Assembly was declared ultravires the constitution by the Supreme Court. This was a great set back for the Reformists. They claimed that the constitution which is supposed to have enshrined all the noble principles of equality justice and liberty was so interpreted as to deny the reformists the spirits of this.

The struggles waged by the Bohras was not confined to India only. East Africa has quite a good number of Bohras of Indian-origin. As against India, the Bohra high priest did not have much political leverage in East Africa. After a great deal of efforts on the part of the Bohras of East Africa, the high priest had to ultimately yield to their demand of granting a democratic constitution for managing the affairs of the community. The Jamat constitution called the "Constitution of the Dawoodi Bohra Jamat corporation" was blessed by the fifty first dai and implemented in 1955. "Later on in 1967 when his successor Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin was able to manoeuvre the situation in his favour with the help of his brother Dr. Yusuf Najmuddin, the constitution was abrogated. If the high priest is infallible as claimed by him, how could he have, on his divine wisdom sanctioned a constitution which had to be abrogated later ? " ¹³

"Another important addition in the reformist group was of

Norman Contractor, a self-made industrialist in December 1957 at a conference held in a small town of Kathiawad called Bagasra. Here important contribution was made by the sons of Adamjee Feerbhoy. The conveners for the first time avoided any religious controversy. The resolution passed called only for welfare measures like providing scholarships, hostels and technical education, a cooperative credit society to relieve unemployment and cooperative housing and social reforms like curbs on costly community dinners".

14

Alarmed by the reformists' efforts to regroup themselves the high priest revived his old strategy of wooing the politicians mainly belonging to the ruling party in order to frustrate their attempts at report in the community. Thus through his superior resources the high priest increased his political influence to frustrate the reformists attempt for social change. The high priest could dangle the bait of block voting as well as rich donations for the Congress party to win his way through. In this manner he converted his superior material resources into useful political leverage.

In the year 1959 May, the reformists decided to convene another conference. The high priest called on Fazal Abbas Zamin--dar and Norman L. Contractor and persuaded them to postpone the conference so as to call a joint conference later. The reform--ists agreed. However, the joint conference never materialized as the high priest was more interested in getting it postponed than

in a joint conference. Consequently the reformists alone met in December and founded the Madhyastha (Central) Pragati Mandal in order to give new direction to the Movement.

"Many more conferences followed like at Ahmedabad in February 1961, Dhari in May 1963 and Godhra in November 1963. Godhra became the hotbed of reformists activities. The reformists say that more than 50 per cent of the families in this town in Gujarat have reformist sympathies. Moreover, Norman Contractor hailed from this place. The reformists here once even planned black flag demonstrations against the high priest. The high priest declared barat (Social boycott) against all the reformists and instructed his 'amil' at Godhra not to perform their marriages or funeral rites. This drove many reformists away from this movement. In this way, the high priest through this instrument of social boycott has always tried to divert the attention of the masses from the reform movement .

15

Defectors of Allabux and Fazal Abbas Zamindar, the two leaders of the new trio the third leader being Norman Contractor, the reform movement received another setback. However Contractor Husenibhai Sarchawala, (The then editor of Bohra-Bulletin-now renamed 'Bohra Chronicle') Mohsin Nagree and some others kept the banner aloft.

These reformist leaders took out prabhat-pheris (Early morning processions) from the Bohra muhalla of Bhendi, Bazar on four consecutive Sundays in the holy month of Ramzan in 1965. The

satyagrahis had to face the fury of the high priest's followers.

Contractor and other from the reformist group took out a "shroud procession" to protest against the recurrent violent assaults on the reformists by the high priest's followers. There was heavy police protection. So nothing ugly happened.

"The fifty-first high priest Sayyidna Tahir Saifuddin died in November 1965. He was succeeded by his eldest son Muhammad Burhanuddin. He had visited East Africa in August 1968. His visit turned sour as the government of Tanzania took action against him for violation exchange control regulations. An expulsion order was served on him and was asked to leave the country within 24 hours"
16

"The government order as reported by east African standard of 15 Aug 1968 pointed out among other things, "freedom of religion, doesnot involve freedom to disregard or circumvent. The exchange control laws of Tanzania. Nor does it involve freedom for any individual or group of individuals to get rich by using the name of religion in order to exploit the poor.

But by that time as a matter of sheer coincidence Mr. Norman Contractor was there in Tanzania on his business visit. The high priest thought it to be child product of his brain. In an open letter addressed to Yusuf Najmuddin published by the Bohra Bulletin, he announced his intention ^{to withdraw} from the movement.

Contractor's withdrawal; though under duress caused a great set back to the reform movement and many friends and sympathizers were bitter about it.

H.K. Sanchawala in 1970 organised a conference in a remote and tiny village called Kunkavar in Gujarat. Now in Udaipur partly due to widespread education and partly due to corrupt practices of the priestly establishment things were working in different directions where the Bohra women came out openly challenging the tyranny done in the name of religion by the religious head priest. The development in Udaipur and its aftermath are of great significance in the history of the Bohra reform movement. The whole revolt continued around the democratic rights to contest elections or elect members of Jamat and not around any religious question or heresy.

In 1970 there was the municipal elections. The congress party requested the amil to nominate four candidates to whom the Congress ticket could be given. The amil was under the influence of Zakir Khurawala who was alleged to be corrupt by the reformists. So they did not agree with it. The youth party led by Ghulam Hussain put its own candidates independently. The results went in favour of the reformists which became the turning point in the struggle of the youth for democratic rights denied to them for a long a time.

The Bohra Youth Association due to its sincere works soon became very popular. It established an Urban Cooperative Bank in 1972. The High priest brought pressure on Ghulam Hussain to dissolve the Bohra Youth Association and the Urban Cooperative Bank on the ground that the Association was formed without the

prior permission of Syedna and the Urban Cooperative Bank takes interests out of the deposits which was forbidden in Islam. Ghulam Hussain refused to oblige the high priest. The high priest sent one of his family members Prince Qaid Jauhar to Udaipur in 1973. On 23 February he called a meeting of Jamat in Wazirpur mosque and announced the dissolution of the Anjeman-i-Najme which was a duly elected jamat committee. He constituted another committee where due representation for the Bohra Youth Association was also promised. However, it was never given. It was around 90 per cent of Bohras - men, women gathered for its claim. Thus the high priest's representatives saw no other course but to dissolve the committee nominated by him. 17

THE UDAIPUR INCIDENT

The events occurred in Galikot as it was the occasion of the death anniversary of the martyr Saint. Many women from Udaipur had also gone to that place. There a pamphlet came out indicating Imam Hussain was not given water or food for three days at Karbala and there was made martyr. It was also declared before the large gathering that the people of Udaipur did not give food and water for three days to the Shahzada Sahab (i.e. the prince, Qaid Jauhar) and insulted him. The blind followers were thus provoked. Thus started the terrible riot. What was indeed most shocking for these women was that all this happened in the presence of the high priest himself. After this incident these women became the staunch supporters of the Youth movement.

Zakir Hussain Khurahwala and others who had taken part in

attacking the women in Galiakot could not enter the city of Udaipur. Thus violence became a daily affair in Udaipur. Sukhadia who been the Chief Minister of Rajasthan tried to intervene in the dispute and sent some office bearers of the City Congress committee of Udaipur to Rampura. However, Yamani secretary to the Sayedna did not permit it. So they had to return being disappointed. Sukhadia persuaded the Youth leaders to resolve the dispute. 750 persons from Udaipur left for Rampura - a town in MP - to meet the high priest. They were not allowed to meet the Syedna. The people of Udaipur ever were not allowed to draw water from the nearby well. Thus these people returned to Udaipur without any hope of reconciliation with the Sayedna's party.

On 23 June 1973, some Youth leaders and supporters had gone to meet the local amil to complain against the violent attacks being made by the orthodox groups. While the Youths were standing near the amil's residence there started a shower of stones from inside the amil's house. The Youths retaliated by throwing stones from outside. The police which were called went into the Bohrawadi area and beat up women, children and old people. Now this was the second onslaught faced by the women who became more determined than ever to fight against the priestly establishment.

18

On 10 July 1974 more than 50 supporters of the Bohra Youth were arbitrarily arrested. M.S. Agwani in his article published in the Times of India 15th September 1974 commented the ruthless

manner in which the local administration has sought to crush the morale of the partisans of reform by parading them handcuffed along one of the main streets of the city even though most of the persons humiliated were from the cream of Udaipur society in terms of education, profession skilled and public servants. This clearly brought out the role of administration which smacked of partisanship. In this way the reformists have urged that there are many untold incidents which has been tolerated by the community. Now perhaps with the addition of the women in the protest movement, it has gained the required momentum.

When the group is very small well knit and having a history in which they were under the fear of external threat so the need of a higher authority to keep the community together, there is least a possibility of raising the voice against the higher authority even if the situation gets normalised. It becomes more difficult where there is the terrible consequence like social boycott within that particular community. Moreover in India our orthodox beliefs are so deep rooted that even a highly educated man finds it difficult to break the traditional beliefs more so when there is the fear of deadly consequence like social ostracism. The reformists claim that anyone of the Bohra community who deviates from the dictates of the Syedna is socially boycotted from the entire community. From the field study and personal interview with Mr. Moiz Lokhandwala - Registrar Burhani College of Commerce and Arts - a college run by the Syedna it was confirmed through conversations that they

believe the Syedna to be the descendent of Prophet Muhammad. So also they believe in the English saying 'that the king can do no wrong and hence their Syedna can do no wrong and hence the people in the community do not question his authority. If someone is not in line of the community then he is kept aside. They say frankly that they do not believe that someone can simultaneously be disagreeing with the Syedna and still be a member of their group.

From the above conversations it got cleared that they do not deviate from the sayings of the Syedna and anyone who deviates from it is kept aside. Hence the practice of social boycott for non-performance cannot be denied outrightly. Not only this, the Head Priest issues cards of three different colours - green for those who completely surrender to the dictates of Syedna, Yellow for those who partially obey him and Red for those who disobey him. The whole community is not permitted to keep bank balances of their own. Or to maintain life insurance cards. This becomes pretty clear what amount of difficulties it would be creating for the community whose basic source of income is based on Business. On the practice of wearing a cap and keeping the beards and women under purdah, from the field experience it was found that most of the Bohras practice it. This may not be compulsory for them. However they feel that the Syedna feels happy with it. So no one dares to be without this practice. Even little kids were found to be under purdah. Wearing a Cap or keeping a beard or

women to be in purdah does not harm anybody. However, this must not be compulsory. This should be allowed to one's own personal willingness.

The Bohra reformists say they are not opposed to this practice but what they oppose is that, to boycott one socially if he does not practice it.

Moreover, after the interview with Mr. Moiz Lokhandwala - Registrar Burhani College of Commerce and Arts - who is also a Bohra but without cap or beard even though he was working in the college run by the conservatives, things got cleared that this may not be compulsory. When these things were taken down in a written form before him he was bit reluctant to give further information. This again puts us in doubt whether wearing a cap or keeping beards is compulsory for all or not. If this is not so then what was there to fear if at all those things were taken down in a written form. Moreover there is every possibility that he might have got the prior permission of the Syedna to be without a cap or beards due to certain reasons, which he did not try to express. Or else when he was seen without cap or beard in that stage he tried to falsify the claim of the reformists. When those were taken in a written form he might have thought if at all those things are published and brought to the notice of Syedna things may go wrong for which he may be accused of, so he wanted to be in safe water.

SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS FOR THE BOHRAS

(Moreover men are forced to keep beards and women to wear

pardahs). Their marriage, divorce or funeral ceremony cannot be conducted without the sanctions of the Syedna. The Bohras are prevented from reading periodicals which are censored by the Syedna such as Bombay Samachar, The Blitz and the Bohra Bulletin, from establishing charitable institutions without the prior permission of the Syedna except by submitting to such conditions as he may impose, from contesting elections to municipal and legislative bodies without securing beforehand the blessings of the Syedna and above all from having any social contact with a person subjected to Baraat i.e. Social boycott, even if the person is one's husband, wife, brother, sister, father or so. Apart from those there are also cases of physical assaults on reformists and even of murder.

REFORMIST'S ARGUMENTS

Today in the Bohra community if there is any major problem it is authoritarianism. Authoritarianism as is quite natural refuses to accept doctrine of accountability in any form or any field.

A true religious spirit never leads to authoritarianism in any form nor even in religious form. The holy Prophet Muhammad was extremely gentle and polite and never showed any trace of authoritarianism. No wonder the holy Quran says about him, "And surely you have sublime morals (Khuluqin azim). His sublime morals won him great admiration even from his enemies who to referred to him as al-amin i.e., the trusted one. Thus he was

gentle polite and a model of honesty and integrity. No one could accuse of authoritarianism even in religious matters. It should be remembered that Islam categorically rejects authoritarianism and absolutism even in religious matters. It was not for nothing that the holy Quran says, "Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the best manner." Also the Quran has resonantly proclaimed, "There is no compulsion in religion",.

21

The Bohra priestly establishment's conduct on the other hand, represents total negation of open democratic conscientious and humane religio-cultural model represented by Islam and early Islamic society. The Bohra priestly model is authoritarianism to the core. It has no place for democratic openness let alone conscientious dissent. It is most intolerant and absolutist. It is highly coercive and far from persuasive.

Islam lays great emphasis on reason. All the Prophets of Allah rejected those earlier traditions which rested on sanctity of time but did not measure upto the criteria of reason. Whenever leaders of unbelievers (Kuffar) referred to their ancestral traditions the prophets exhorted them to use their own reason and bear testimony to the truth from Allah. Prophet Ibrahim Kalilullah defied idol worship of his father Azar and instead followed the course of deliberation, reasoning in keeping with the revelation from high on.

22

Islam, is not religion of blind faith. It calls upon mankind to follow rational faith - synthesis of faith and reason.

Even Imam-bi-al-ghayb (faith on unseen) cannot be constructed as irrational. Though it may at the most be described as supra-rational. It is in fact faith in future and its various potentialities as they unfold and of whom we have no knowledge and hence it is described as ghayb (unseen). The Ismailes and Mutaziles - two important sects of Islam laid great deal of emphasis on reason. It would be no exaggeration to say that the Ismailis in particular imbibed all the knowledge that was available even outside the Islamic world of the time and incorporated into and synthesised with the doctrines of Islam. They acted according to the Prophetic tradition al-hikmah dallah al-munim (wisdom and knowledge is cost property of the faithful, it should be appropriated from wherever available)"

23

The Ismaili and Fatimi da'is of yester years were great intellectuals of their time well versed not only in the Ismaili theology and philosophy but also in comparative religion; in natural sciences in mathematics and in Greek philosophy which was considered in those days as the highest achievement of human mind. They could take on any intellectual giant of their time in religious and philosophical polemics. Syedna J'afar Mansur-al-Yaman, Syedna Muayyad Shirazi and Hamid al-Din Kirmani are some of the shining examples. Muayyad Shirazi entered into polemics of number of questions with the great poet and intellectual Abdul Ala M'aarri.

"It was not easy to be a da'i. He had to fulfill more than

hundred rigorous conditions to qualify as one. A da'i has to be most knowledgeable - in fact competent in knowledge of other religions, secular philosophies of the time physical sciences etc - so that he could enter successfully into arguments with others in order to demonstrate superiority of his religion. A da'i has to be an efficient administrator, a statesman of high quality, shrewd in worldly matters, polite, gentle, compassionate and wise".²⁴

"However the present da'i hardly fulfils these conditions. The Ulama do not have adequate knowledge of their own religion, let alone competent knowledge of other religions, secular philosophy and physical sciences. They have been trained only to be obedient robots. It is considered great crime to think, to question to doubt. Questioning and doubting is not subversive and is severely punished. No wonder that this community has become intellectually most stagnant."²⁵

"There are four extremely significant words in the Quran which represents its real spirit. These words are adl, ihsan, rahmah , and hikmah (i.e. justice, benevolence, compassion and wisdom) All these represent essence of any religion and are most essential for building a humane society. We cannot build a humane society without justice, benevolence, compassion and wisdom"²⁶

In fact adl and rahmah (justice and compassion) are twins, one cannot exist without the other. Quran lays so much emphasis on adl (justice) that it equates it with taqwah (piety). The

Quran says, "Be just, it is nearest to piety" The Quran says for hikmah (wisdom), "And whoever is granted wisdom he indeed is given a great good.

As for 'rahmah' it is repeatedly asserted in the Quran that Allah is Rahim and Rahman (i.e. Merciful and Compassionate) It is thus more than clear that a true Islamic, Imanic and religious establishment, society on rule has to be based on these four fundamental virtues. If it lacks these it is anything but Islamic and humane.

A true faithful is also a true fearless creature. Faith and fearlessness are integrally connected. Only those who lack integrity of faith are fearful. Deliverance from exploitation cannot come without fearlessness.

When Prophet Shu'aib and his followers were threatened by the arrogant chiefs to be thrown out from the town they fearlessly replied: "Indeed we should have forged a lie against Allah, if we go back to your community after Allah has delivered us from it. And it is not for us to go back again to it unless Allah, our Sustainer please....."

However among the Bohras we do not find this spirit these days again. There is no more voice against social ostracism, no voice against religious tyranny and authoritarianism in the name of religion. All the ills this community is facing is due to the centralised control in the hands of the priesthood. In fact it has become virtual owner of all that which rightfully and legiti-

mately belongs to the community. The priesthood has become so powerful that this community is being treated as utter slaves and nothing but blind submission is demanded from the members of this community.

SOME INSTANCES

"The members of this community who keep themselves in touch with the socially ostracised persons are also socially ostracised by the Syedna. Instances of this sort are not less in this community. On 22nd Dec. 1989 Mr. Fakkruddin Khorakiwala and his brother Mr. Saifuddin Khorakiwala happened to be part of the 2000 guests attending a Bohra marriage reception in Bombay, which was also attended by a Shaitan (Satan). The Shaitan according to the Syedna establishment was Zain Rangoonwala, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director of the Bombay Mercantile Cooperative Bank, who already stands excommunicated for the sin of running Asia's largest cooperative bank on allegedly un-Islamic principles. According to the "true" Islamic lights of the Syedna no Bohra may choose to talk or even be seen with an excommunicated co-relegionist, except at the pain of being getting himself excommunicated.
27

Only the other day a young Bohra cobbler in Bombay was assaulted with a knife by a co-relegionist who was angry over his refusal to support the fundamentalists dictates of the Syedna. That despite knife wounds on the neck, chest and hand he still survives is little solace because he is terror stricken to the point of a breakdown.

There is an endless number of physical assaults on the reformists. In 1975 an elderly priest Sajjad Hussain, who sided with reformists was killed in mob violence in Surat, Gujarat. Another fellow Abbas Aurangabadi, a vocal reformist was first subjected to physical assault and later he was burnt alive by the followers of the Syedna at Karachi in Pakistan. Three attempts have been made on Mr. Aeghar Ali Engineer's life. Fortunately each time he managed to escape. The recent assault was made in Hyderabad where he had gone to attend a Seminar which had nothing to do with the Bohra issue. He was to read a paper on contemporary Islamic thought. He was attacked with a knife before he spoke.

SEVEN TAXES OF SYEDNA

To add another feather to the nest of this religious tyranny is the seven taxes levied by the priesthood which must be paid regularly to avoid their wrath. Morarji Desai had once described the rule of the Bohra high priest as 'government within government'. It is a matter of surprise that there is a taxation system enforced by the Bohra high priest. Can any non-official body levy taxes? Is it permissible?

Permissible it may not be but no one can deny its existence as far as the Bohras are concerned. Not only this, it tends to be highly oppressive and of course no less exploitative. Oppressive in the sense that these taxes are collected ruthlessly at the pain of social ostracism.

A Bohra has to pay to the high priest even before he is born and continues to pay until after he is dead. Thus a tax is levied on foetus as well as on dead ancestors. Taxes on foetus is a noble idea which perhaps no government in the world has ever tried. Perhaps the family planners can take cue from this. The levy on foetus is called hamal i.e. (literally pregnancy)

"In all seven taxes are levied on a Bohra in his lifetime before his birth and after his death".

28

They are as follows:

(i) Zakat This is an obligatory payment enjoined by the holy Quran and the Prophet fixed it at two and half percent of one's wealth and income at the end of the year. It is supposed to be spent on the poor; the needy; orphans, widows, travellers and for manumission of slaves and for paying off debts of the indebted. The Quran ordains it as taking from the rich and paying to the poor and needy. It is as would be evident a great humanitarian and welfare measure which was conceived by Islam much before the concept of a welfare state came into existence. It was no charity but a compulsory levy on the rich. Generally the Muslims pay Zakat directly to the needy in a country like India.

But the Bohras are not free to do so. The payment is to be compulsorily made to the Syedna who adds it to his family's income without any compunction. The poor and needy among the Bohras - and there are hordes of them - contrary to the general impression - dare not ask for the share which is their due."

29

(ii) Fitrah - It actually means payment at the end of the

month of fasting - Ramzaan. This was ordained by the Prophet and meant for the poor so that they can also partake of Eid celebration alongwith the others. Its quantum is supposed to be a few measures of grains or the monetary equivalent thereof and it is a humanitarian measure. Muslims pay directly to the needy a day before Eid.

However, the Bohras are compelled to pay the priest in cash which goes straight to line silken purse instead of the needy. The tax per head in the year 1987 was Rs. 28. The rate is enhanced every year in view of the inflation.

(iii) Sila - Literally means keeping contact. This is supposed to be collected as an offering for a hidden Imam who will appear one day and the amount is supposed to be passed on to him. However, as he is not seen just yet, it goes into the private coffer of the priestly family"

(iv) Khums - It literally means one fifth. In accordance with the Quran one fifth of the war booty was to be taken by the Prophet for his maintenance and that of his family and also for performing functions of the head of the community.

The Shias used to pay one-fifth of the sudden gain to their Imam from the progeny of the Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. The Bohras of course now pay to the high priest who is not Imam but a da'i (and his deputy) and is certainly not entitled to it. But the Bohras' have no choice. They have to pay to add to the da'i enormous wealth.

(v) Haggun nafs - It literally means payment for salvation of the soul. There is no mention of it in the Quran. This was invented by the da'is. A Bohra cannot be buried without paying this tax. Only when tax is paid does the priest give ruku chitti (a note to Allah) for the salvation of the soul and for entry into paradise. This note is kept on the chest of the deceased and buried along with him. A Bohra, the priests insists cannot enter paradise without this note from the da'i addressed to God even he had been highly virtuous and pious. Payment to the high priest is a must. The extent of payment generally depends on the financial status of the deceased and real hard bargaining is done by the priests on the matter. No Bohra can ever be buried without this payment. The relatives of the dead face a great deal of harassment. So intense is the pressure and so great the amount demanded that often next of kin forget their own sorrow and worry more about this payment. It is a most inhuman practice and deserves to be strongly condemned. It amounts to dishonouring the dead and the sentiments of the bereaved and all this for personal greed. It can be compared with the sale of indulgences by Pope during medieval ages. Perhaps it is more inhuman. Many dead bodies remain unburied for hours until the bargain has been struck.

(vi) Nazar mugam It is vow money kept aside for payment to the needy. However the present high priest takes this away too and now in the form of a compulsory levy.

Every Bohra family is covered into paying some amount of

nazar muqam every year. This also has nothing to do with the teachings of Islam. It was more of an individual belief converted into a compulsory levy for the priestly family's insatiable greed for wealth." ³⁴

"(vii) Salam and payment for titles. In addition to all these compulsory levies a Bohra also has to give voluntary personal offering to the high priest which may vary from a few rupees to a few lakhs depending on the financial capacity of the person concerned. The high priest may also decide to award a title to any rich or middle class Bohra and demand a capricious sum for it which may seen from a few thousands to a few lakhs of rupees. It becomes for a Bohra a question of his izzat (Social respect and prestige) and he can hardly refuse." ³⁵

Taking the population of the Bohra roughly about a million into account it is safe bet to say that the high priest and his family yearly collect not less than 20 crore rupees by way of these taxes and voluntary payments.

If the Bohra fails to pay, marriage, burial or any other functions of the defaulting family is held up. If a person goes for marriage or burial outside the domain of the high priest's authority i.e. through reformists or with the help of some other community he faces total boycott; a fate that is most dreaded by the Bohras. The Bohras have no option but to pay up and there are hardly any defaulters. All the payments are of course in black money. The more they collect, the more their coercive

power increases.

The priesthood has been using fascist tactics to suppress the reformist movement. They resort to lies; false propaganda against the reformists, are no match to them. They control the entire establishment, massive funds are at their disposal. Their annual income runs into not less than Rs. 20 crores and their assets are anybody's guess. When religion combines with wealth it becomes a formidable force, and it is not easy to challenge such a force.

Not only this - the Syedna's Eagle Eye equally captured the Bombay Mercantile Cooperative Bank under the threat of Baraat. Over Rs. 6 lakhs were withdrawn 3 to 4 Bohra employees quit their jobs. The mere threat of Baraat does all the job for Syedna. The purpose behind the agitation against the Bank and urge for interest free give and take according to the progressive elements as the religious leader's desire to get full control over the Bank.

The Bank was raised with a specific objective to help the weaker and down trodden section of the society for whom the banking facilities in the pre-independence days were not existent. The bank had lived upto its reputation and today every fourth taxi plying on the streets of Bombay is hypothecated to it. The bank is also extending loans for development programmes aimed at rehabilitating the poor. This still forms our major priority says Zain Rangoonwala who established the Bank in 1939 with a paltry amount of Rs. 10,500 and who is still its Managing

Director.

However, the Bank's persistence to extend its facilities to all the communities and not to only any particular one was perhaps too much for Syedna to swallow.

The religious leaders, says a reformist member will not give up easily. According to reports, a massive door to door campaign is presently being carried to gather support in favour of the agitation. The leaders are planning to court arrest and obstruct the functioning of the Bank. The chaos is likely to increase if the situation is not handled adequately by the government.

Some people try to trace the beginning of the reform movement in the 2nd half of the 19th century when the succession issue after the death of the 46th Da'i arose. However, an issue for succession is very much different from the issues involved in a reform movement. The reform movement is one which raises substantial issues about certain traditions and social change about religious authority and secular authority and functions of each.

If we judge from this perspective we can trace the beginning of the reform movement to certain issues raised in Udaipur towards the end of the 19th century and in Burhanpur in the beginning of the 20th century. In both these places the issues raised were pertaining to social and secular authority on one hand and religious authority on the other. Can both these authorities be combined into one? Or both these have separate and distinct

jurisdiction ?

The priesthood in the Bohra Community and its orthodox followers maintain that the religious and secular can harmoniously blend while the reformists believe that the two cannot be combined in the present democratic setup. Both in Udaipur in late 19th century and in Burhanpur towards beginning of 20th century the reformists asserted their secular rights vis-a-vis the Syedna without however, challenging his religious authority.

In both the cases litigation followed and interestingly enough in both the cases contention of the reformists that the high priest cannot exercise coercive authority in secular sphere was upheld in the court. It is also interesting to note that before consolidation of British rule in India most of the dissensions in the Bohra community were regarding successions to the office of the Da'i but after the consolidation of the British rule there was no dissension about the succession but mostly about legitimacy of exercising secular authority. Those who dissented on the succession issue should be referred to as religious dissenters as it often involved religious issue of nafs (doctrine of rightful appointment) and those who challenged the legitimacy of Da'i's secular authority should be referred to as reformists as in the latter case no religious doctrine or dogma was involved.

The exercise of secular authority by the Dai's on the past was part of their social contract with the community. It was done with the unspoken consent of the community, not against its

will. Moreover it was protective exercise of secular authority rather than coercive exercise.

In the past the community faced external threats. There were no democratic channels available then to fight these threats. The high priest with his high status and prestige in the society took the community in his protective cover and enabled it through his prestige and authority, to successfully face the external threats. The external threat in case of the Bohra community persisted for many centuries and centralisation of power remained a felt need for a long time. In fact over a period of time there evolved an unspoken, unwritten contract between the high priest and the Bohra community which legitimised this exercise of centralised authority.

However, with the advent of the British and later with the acceptance of political and social democracy things changed drastically. Now there no longer existed any external threat and there was no need for the high priest to exercise any secular authority. When the 51st and 52nd Da'is not only refused to leave the secular domain to community but intensified exercise of secular authority and that too increasingly coercively, there began a protest movement against it.

As the movement desired change in the social conditions of the community and attempted to define social and religious domain separately it can be rightfully described as reform movement. The reformists strongly feel that there should be not only com-

plete stop to the coercive exercise of secular authority by the Da'i but also he should restrict his religious authority to "wise and godly words" as described by the holy Quran.

Also the reformists believe that there is no place for blind and slavish submission to any authority religious or otherwise. The reformists thus refuse to submit blindly to any authority. They call upon their fellow religionists and others to exercise faculty of reason which is the highest gift of God. Thus it is very important aspect of the Bohra reform movement. Blind submission is uncalled for not only in secular matters but even in religious matters. The Syedna and his orthodox followers construe this as defiance of religion; this is untrue. In fact true religiosity can never be equated with blind submission. True religiosity is a creative synthesis between reason and faith and intellect and intuition. Thus the reformists justly claim that far from disowning religion they represent true religious spirit. The reformist Bohras thus upheld freedom of conscience. The Bohra high priest on the other hand ruthlessly suppresses freedom of conscience. Freedom of conscience is the noblest and highest achievement of human development. It cannot be sacrificed at the altar of any authority. The reformists consider it as cardinal doctrine of their movement.

The reformists also uphold human rights and human dignity. Violation of human rights is an integral part of authoritarian cultures. The reformists are, therefore, totally opposed to any form of authoritarianism and mental regimentation. The revolt by

the Bohra youth in Udaipur in 1973 was a challenge to this authoritarianism. They fought to uphold their rights and freedom of conscience. Subsequently the Bohra brothers and sisters in Bombay, Godhra, Surat, Ahmedabad, Lathi, Bhavnagar, Aurangabad, Hyderabad, Malegaon and several other places took up the fight. The Bohra high priest adopted like any authoritarian ruler highly coercive measures to suppress the voice of human conscience. Bohras from several other countries like the UK, Pakistan, Thailand, USA, East Africa, Canada, Sweden, Mauritius etc joined in to strengthen the reform movement.

The reformists take the doctrine of accountability in its widest sense. It is social, religious, political as well as financial accountability. What is worse in case of syedna is that he refuses to accept even financial accountability. He and his family members collect several crores of rupees every year from the community in a most coercive manner. The money collected is never accounted for.

The money should be spent on the welfare projects and uplift of the poor and needy and must be accounted for to the community through proper institutions.

Though the government has not enacted any law so far the reformist campaign against Baraat has created strong public opinion against it and has generated sympathy for its victims.

THE CONCEPT OF RAZA

Similarly the reformist Bohras are against the use of 'raza'

(Permission) from the priesthood for any religious or secular matter. Thus the reformists oppose the concept of raza. Raza thus has no place and must be thrown out. Every person who is sufficiently knowledgeable should be free to perform all religious rites like daily prayers, nikah, namaz-e-janaja (funeral prayer) and similar other things without any previous permission from any authority.

The reformists oppose nominated jamat bodies. They desire elected jamaat bodies and election should be through universal franchise and both men and women should have right to vote. The central Executive Committee and other office bearers of the central Board are also elected every two years. The accounts of funds collected and spent are audited and made public regularly by the reformists trusts and jamatas in Udaipur, Malegoan, Aurangabad, Hyderabad, Bombay, Birmingham and Leicester in UK and other places.

Thus it will be seen from above that the reformists stand for social reform and change. They are opposed to authoritarian, religious or secular, are votaries of democratic functioning and stand for human rights, freedom of conscience and doctrine of accountability. They totally reject coercive imposition of religious edicts in keeping with the Quarnic spirit. They oppose social boycott and raza as un-Islamic practices and violation of human rights. They totally reject coercive position of religious edicts in keeping with the Quarnic spirit. They oppose social boycott and raza as un-islamic practices and violative of rights.

They stand for true religious spirit and are sincere followers of Islam and Islamile Mustalian creed. They consider themselves as true Dawoodi Bohras and have never challenged any well established religious doctrines. They are thus not involve in any religious controversies of the logical nature. Their aim is to usher in social reforms.

NEED FOR STATE INTERVENTION

The reformists have been struggling for decades to liberate the Bohra Community from worst form of religious authoritarianism. However, besides their struggle support from the government is also necessary. State has important function to perform. Without legislation by the state, no reform movement can be institutionalized. Whether it is legislation against Sati or against untouchability the state had to intervene. One cannot consolidate the gains of social reforms without legal intervention by the state.

The demands being made by the reformists Bohras is far from being any kind of interference in Muslim personal Law. It is a mischievous propaganda on the part of the Syedna and his henchmen that the reformists are demanding interference from Government into Muslim affairs.

No one should ask for state intervention in religious matters as far as its core teachings are concerned. But the vested interests politicise religion for their own ends and to defend their interests. They invent doctrines not found in the

core teachings of religion. Here in the Bohra case it could be seen that how vested interests have turned in liberative religion like Islam into an instrument of slavery and added to its teachings what is totally alien to its spirit. Sati and untouchability too were not in keeping with the core teachings of Hinduism and hence state intervened and legislated against it. So is baraat (social boycott) totally alien to the liberative spirit of Islam. In fact Islam does not permit persecution at all and is against any form of Zulm. Social boycott has nothing to do with its core teachings. Any law to prevent persecution of innocent people would be quite in keeping with the spirit of Quran. Hence the State must intervene and legislate against it.

The Bohra priest hood has similarly slapped seven taxes on the community all of which are not in keeping with the Islamic principles. Of all these seven taxes Zakat which is obligatory as per the Quranic injunction and Fitra which is to be given at the end of the Ramzaan - the fasting month, to the poor are Islamic requirements and other five taxes have nothing to do with the Islam. The two i.e. Zakat and Fitra are never spent in keeping with the Islamic injunctions and are used for personal luxuries. The Quran has shown eight ways in which Zakat should be spent. However, the Syedna never accounts for all these funds collected from the community and severely punishes anyone who asks for the account.

"The reformists are therefore demanding state intervention in the financial matters too. The Acts like the Ajmer Dargah

Sharif Act or Tirupathi Temple Act etc., have been enacted for the same purpose. It is in the interests of the respective religious communities"
36

That's why the reformists are demanding a law on the lines of the Ajmer Dargah Sharif Act of 1954 to control the finances of the Bohra High Priest when the Muslims do not consider the Ajmer Dargah Sharif Act as interference in Islam, how can an Act on similar lines to control Syedna's finances could be considered as interference in Muslim personal, Law. In fact the Ajmer Dargah Sharif Act is to utilise the Dargah funds for the objectives for which they are offered. This is precisely what the reformists want. The Act would be in the interest of the community as these funds are misappropriated today and spent on personal luxury. It is for this reason that the reformists are demanding a law on the lines of Ajmer Dargah Sharif Act.

NATHWANI COMMISSION REPORT

"During the Janata Period in 1977 a commission was appointed by the Citizen For democracy (CFD) comprising two retired High Court Judges, eminent Lawyers and academics and headed by Justice Narendra Nathwani to inquire into the complaints of harassment and persecution at the hands of the Syedna"
37

"The Commission also collected a neat deal of documentary evidence. They concluded that "There is large, wide infringement of civil liberties and human rights of Reformists Bohras at the hands of the priestly class and that those who fail to obey the

orders of the Syedna and his amils (Local priests representing the Syedna) even in purely secular matters, are subjected to baraat resulting in complete social boycott, mental torture and frequent physical assault."

"The commission also further prevented, "The misaq - the oath of unquestioning obedience to the head priest, which every Bohra is enquired to give before he or she gains the age of majority is used as the main instrument for keeping the entire community under the fraugation of the Syedna and his trainees. On the threat of baraat (Social boycott) and resulting disabilities Bohras are prevented from reading periodicals which are censored by the Syedna such as the Bombay Samachar, the Jurat and the Bohra Bulletin; from establishing charitable institutions like orphanages, dispensaries, libraries, etc., without the prior permission of the Syedna." ³⁹

"Apart from those he may impose measures that would prevent a person from contesting elections to municipal and legislative bodies without securing before hand the blessings of the Syedna and above all from having any social contact even if the person is one's husband wife, brother, sister, father and so on. This was in short the findings of the Mathwani Commission. Besides the commission recorded several cases of physical assault on reformists, and even of murder. The commission brought on record what had happened upto 1979. The report was published in 1980 by the citizens for Democracy." ⁴⁰

However much has happened since the publication of the

report. Though it has not come on record of any inquiring commission it has been happening and persecution of reformists and other dissenters has, if anything, increased. Many fresh injunctions were issued by the high priest since early and middle eighties.

The Bohra high priest required all his followers to close down all their bank accounts which was later modified to refusal of accrual of interests stop taking overdrafts and withdraw all fixed deposits and life insurance policies as is prohibited under Islam. One can imagine what in-convenience it could cause to a business community and Bohras are a business community. This was done without providing any alternative to interest banking and hence has been causing much more difficulty than one can imagine.

The high priest also issued a firman that all women should observe purdah and all men should wear a cap and grow beard and those who defy this would have to go through the ordeal of social boycott. Not only this the high priest went a step further and required all obedient Bohras to carry a green card. Those not carrying such cards were to be treated as violators. It is strange that this apartheid is being tolerated right under the nose of the Government.

"The Nathwani Commission had then recommended that the Government of India should enact a legislation against social boycott to protect the rights and interests of the reformist Bohras, However more than a decade has passed since this

recommendation was made after thorough and meticulous study of the whole problem, but it remains unimplemented. Hundreds of representations were made to the Central Government and tens of resolutions were passed by the International Conference of the Reformist Bohras since 1977 urging upon the Government to implement the recommendation. The Government however, chose to ignore these pleas as the highest priest and his cohorts had close nexus with the Congress Government both at the State and the Central levels." ⁴¹

The demand is quite humanitarian and such a legislation cannot amount to interference in any one's religious belief. This piece of legislation against 'social boycott' is meant to protect human and democratic rights. Social boycott any scholar of Islam would agree is not an integral part of religion. It would be something as arguing that terrorism and persecution is part of anyone's religion. It would be ridiculous even to suggest that. But it is strange that the Syedna has always sought refuge behind religion and easily got away with it. How can one terrorise fellow religionists and claim to be doing so under his or her religion and seek protection under the constitution while those being terrorised cannot avail of any such protection. Is it Just? Can it be construed as a rule of Law? Such specious arguments on the part of any religious head should be rejected out right. They do not stand any scrutiny, either national or constitution.

"Even article 25 of the constitution guarantees freedom to profess and practice religion subject to public order, morality

and health. Can one reasonably argue that if some one practices social boycott to terrorise other, he is observing the above provision of maintaining social health, public order and morality? Certainly not. And what about freedom of conscience than as embodied in Article 25 ? Should it not be protected ? Are reformist Bohra not entitled to freedom of conscience ? Moreover the reformist Bohras follow the tenets of their religion meticulously. They are behind none in this regard. However, they do not legitimise terrorism in the name of religion and uphold freedom of conscience as meticulously as tenets of their religion. Nor do they want to reform their religion out of existence as unfortunately argued by the Supreme Court while striking down the prevention of Ex-Communication Act passed by the then Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1948. The reformist Bohras only want to reform the malpractices being penetrated in the name of religion."

42

"Moreover the draft legislation recommended by the Nathwani Commission fully takes care of the Supreme Court's objections. It has cast the Bill in a correct constitutional mould. If enacted, the Bill can bring great relief to the suffering Bohras. It would be a tragedy indeed, if this reformist trend is not given its due impetus through support from both the government and the social organisations in the country".

43

Moreover all the seven taxes are collected under pain of social boycott. According to Article 27 of the Indian Constitu-

tion no individual or organization other than the Government can collect taxes. The Article says, "No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.

Besides these taxes the Syedna has a huge income from various durgahs (Shrines) located in Burhanpur, Ujjain and Rampura (M.P.), Galiakot (Rajasthan), Ahmedabad, Surat and Jamnagar (Gujarat) and Bombay and Dongaon near Aurangabad (Maharashtra) and several smaller durgahs in several other places. At all these Durgahs cash boxes called gullahs are kept for the believers to put money. This income amounts to several lakhs annually and remains unaccounted for.

"Some durgahs do come under the Wakf Act of the State concerned but the Syedna manages to obtain exemption from the control of the Wakf Boards by influencing the members and thus exercises unchallenged control over the Durgah funds. Anyone who questions the Syedna (no one would dare in the first place) about this income and how it is spent would immediately face social boycott."
44

In 1955 the Central Government enacted a law in respect of the Ajmer Durgah of Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti. It was known as the Durgah Khawaja Saheb Act 1955. The purpose of the Act is to prevent misuse of the funds which accrue to the Durgah Sharif by way of offerings. What is to be noted is that the Act is not construed as an interference in religious matters.

"According to the Act, the administration, control and management of the Durgah Endowment shall be vested in a Committee constituted in a manner as follows. According to Section 5, "The Committee shall consist of not less than five and not more than nine members all of whom shall be Hanafi Muslims and shall be appointed by the Central Government. The members of the Committee so constituted shall hold office for a five year term as per sub-section (i) of Section 6. Also members can be removed by the Government for various reasons laid down in sub-section (2) of section 6. Among the reasons are moral turpitude and conviction form an offence."⁴⁵

"Section 8 lays down "If in the opinion of the Central Government the Committee is guilty of gross mismanagement of the affairs of the Durgah or of neglect in the performance of its functions, the Central Government may supersede the Committee and entrust any person with full powers of the Committee until a new Committee is constituted in accordance with the provision of the Act.

The Committee shall have power among others to (1) Receive all moneys and other incomes to the Durgah Endowment (2) to see that the Endowment funds are spent in the manner desired by the donors, (3) to determine the functions and powers if any, which the Sajjadanashin may exercise in relation to the Durgah".⁴⁶
(Sajjadanashin means heir to the Saint buried on the Durgah).

The Act provides for an Arbitration Board in case of dis-

putes between the Committee and Sajjadanashin on one hand and any Khadim or employee of the Durgah on the other. This provision has been made under Section 16(1). It is clear that the purpose of the Act is to prevent misuse of the Durgah Sharif funds and Endowment money. The idea is not to interfere with the faith of the believers or to transfer control of the Durgah funds to the Government but to see to it that funds are not misused.

The Bohra High Priest today holds absolute sway not on one but several durgahs located throughout four major states. The income from these durgahs specially those in Bombay, Burhanpur, Rampura, Ahmedabad and Galiakot runs into several lakhs annually (no proper estimates are available as the Syedna refuses to disclose the amounts collected committees if constituted at all are constituted by the Syedna himself and are answerable to none save himself.

As provided in the Ajmer Durgah Sharif Act a Committee should be set up consisting of prominent Dawoodi Bohras known for their integrity.

"This Committee which should also have representation of reformist Bohras should not be answerable to the Syedna but to the law of the land. It should be charged with the responsibility of administering the funds collected from all the Durgahs (they will have to be clubbed together for this purpose or separate Acts enacted for each durgah) as well as directly from the members of the Community for the purpose for which they are

collected. The Nathwani Commission had also after careful consideration recommended this measure." 47

"While everyone is free to preach professes, he has even right to persuade his followers to adopt in practice what he deems to be the religious injunctions. However he certainly has no right to impose his firmans on his/her unwilling followers. In a modern democratic society everyone should be left free to ones own conscience to follow certain percepts of a religion if he/she deems it necessary. The Bohra high priests seeks to impose these percepts on his followers under threat of social boycott." 49

"The Nathwani Commission which comprised eminent ex-judges, lawyers and academics had after careful consideration of the whole problem, recommended to the Government of India to (1) Bring a suitable legislation against social boycott of one individual against another (and for which they also suggested a draft) and (2) to enact a suitable act on the lines of Ajmer Dargah Sharif Act to control Bohra priesthood's finances." 50

These two suggestions by the Commission are very reasonable and highly useful. These measures will go a long way to relieve the Bohras of harassment and prosecution. Therefore the reformists are upon the Government at the Centre to enact above legislations at the earliest. It would not only be in the spirit of Indian Constitution but also in keeping with human dignity and freedom of conscience.

However no ruling party of this country wants to displease

the establishment of fear of losing votes. Substantial contributions are also made by the priesthood to the election kitties of various parties. Thus votes gets precedence over social reforms and political democracy is used to negate social democracy.

~~But what~~ is that in the hands of the Syedna which gives him so much of powers to keep the entire community in his clutches. Is it only the fear psychosis of Baraat (i.e. Social boycott)? Obviously it is one of the most important instruments but not the whole. It is this question that really now needs special attention.

"The clergy adopts tactics to terrorise the community and presents a facade of invincibility so that no one dares questions his actions. As the community is small and largely semi-literate, religious and having a long history where they were under the external threats, so the need for unquestioning obedience has almost got legitimised even without the written laws even though there is no external threats now for the community, it is easier to terrorise, subjugate and exploit the objectives of terror tactics are to facilitate exploitation for pecuniary, gains which is the corner stone of the Bohra priesthood's grand edifice."

"Apart from it purchase and sale of honorific titles such as mulla & Shaikh has reportedly become in recent years a wide spread indulgence. The titles are supposed to confer spiritual

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distinction." Earlier the titles were conferred on the religious learned only. The current rate for these titles is anywhere between half a million to million rupees.

Terror is not the only weapon in the clergy's arsenal. It employs other psychological ploys to hypnotise the community to perform its will. One such play is to project itself as larger than life. Syedna's relatives insist on being referred to as princes. The Bohras are not only to kiss their palms but kneel before them and kiss their feet.

It is this projection of superiority status before the whole community and placing them all in a psychological inferior status which also adds to the unquestioning obedience. Undoubtedly their long tradition of unquestioning acceptance has almost legitimised it even without written laws.

The forefathers of the Bohras were almost all converts largely from banias. The conversion began with the arrival of the first missionaries in Gujarat in the 11 century. The community was subjected to frequent persecution by the Sunni Muslim rulers as the Bohras are all shias. There have also been frequent schism within the Community. As a result of these schism the community was repeatedly divided. However Bohras of other seats are insignificant in number today, the overwhelming being the Dawoodis.

"The Bohra Banias are quite conservative. They have neither the means nor the inclination to devote themselves to intellectual pursuits. Struggle for economic survival has made them highly

individualistic. On the other hand their common beliefs and instincts have cemented the communal bonds. This as both the community's strength and weakness. While its togetherness has enabled it to survive as a community; its self-centredness has made it vulnerable to the machinations of the clergy." ⁵³

The Banias as a rule are quite indifferent to the suffering of others. They are also quick to suspect and persecute anyone whom they perceive as threat to the even tenor of their placid lives. They exclusively rely on the clergy to provide them rationalizations for their attitudes and action. The clergy is therefore in turn the Banias solid prop. Among this class again there are two distinct segments. The silent one and the more ambitious and vocal. The former though outwardly not as reverential nonetheless pays the clergy the obeisance and offerings it demands and thus buys its peace. Having seen through the clergy's game, the Bohras try to distance themselves and are quite critical of the clergy in private conversations. They too do not want the even tenor of their lives to be rippled and are quite attached to their newly-acquired luxuries. They are able to ease their conscience by pleading their helplessness in the face of all powerful clergy and are more concerned about their flourishing business than the community.

"It is however the other segment the new breed of Mullas & Shaiks the pretentious aristocratic bureaucracy which is not only the inexhaustible treasure house of the clergy but also its hand

maiden. It is from this class that the clergy appoints the overwhelming majority of members to the local Jamat Committees. The clergy not only oversees their functions but also tightly controls them. As these committees exist at the pleasure of the clergy they are servile to the clergy and therefore the clergy is able to enforce its dictates of social boycott of a Bohra through these committees."

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"While a Bohra priesthood is a law unto itself, the aristocracy in its executive arm. These New Rich were till yesterday petty traders. Through their newly acquired wealth they manifest pretensions which would be laughable if these did not have disastrous consequences for the community. They realm and exhibit all the characteristics of petty bourgeoisie. They employ their wealth to overcome their inferior positions in life. They hope that their quid pro quo with the clergy will raise them to a superior status and that they will be able to command respect within the community which they otherwise lack. They become zealous in the exercise of their new found power and imagine themselves as defenders of the faith."

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"Moreover to the question why are the Bohras afraid of the Syedna has the answer besides many other factors is the Bohra Women. She is docile by nature, very conservation in her outlook and her world is demarcated between Masjid (Mosque), majlis Saabak (religious discourses) Saify Mahal (Abode of Syedna) and her name. Masjid and majlis (Bohra women congregate here for prayers and to recite marsiahs, mournings the death of Imam

Hussain) provide for their social interaction, the Saify Mahal becomes a source of spiritual satisfaction. Without these the Bohra woman will be at a loss. She will feel a drift." 56

A Bohra women whether literate or well educated as the most brainwashed person, a superstitious and blind follower of the Syedna.

Hajra who stood first in the Pune University examination attributed her success to the Syedna's blessings. Fatima the mother of an eleven year old son who delivered twin girls attributed to the miraculous powers of the Syedna. Zulaikaha had a hole in her heart from childhood. In spite of expert medical advice she could not get permission from the Syedna to go through a surgery to suture the hole after a lapse of 32 years when her suffering became unbearable. The Syedna gave raza (permission). But the woman died on the operating table.

The above instances reveal the Bohra Woman's utter helplessness of which she is either not aware of and if aware is unable to confront. Sadly enough the woman herself starts believing that this is the way to live normally desirably because of consequences of disregarding are loss of respectability and isolation. When a girl reaches puberty, she is taken to the Syedna or his local representatives for misak to make her a dasi (i.e. servant). Besides accepting many other humiliating conditions she had to pledge that the Syedna has the right to divorce her from her husband if her husband is declared his enemy.

"This and many other customs have become articles of faith which the Syedna enforces scrupulously, to retain his grip. Like the secret agents for Bohra men-the 'Shababs', there is a female counterpart called 'Bunayyat' who vow to see all these customs implemented to their last measure by the Bohra women." ⁵⁷

Thus religious authorities consider women as their pillar of strength and put the maximum degrees of pressure on them to oppose change."

If some one is isolated and deprived of participation in a socio-religious get together due to Baraat (social boycott) it causes intense agony. This agony acquires greater sting in case of women whose degree of exterrorisation is practically negligible. Such socio-religious gatherings are the only forms of social life for women. It is precisely for this reason that the Bohra priesthood has been using the powerful weapon of social ⁵⁸ boycott to crush dissent within the community."

"Unless the government bring in legislation to ban excommunication and at the same time unless a woman realises that she is made to retreat to the medieval period, put underveil, refused jobs outside her home, discouraged to take higher education and exploited and oppressed in a systematic effort through a clever strategy of the Syedna, to further his own vested interest in the name of religion, there is no redemption and no freedom. She must see these intentions clearly and take the veil off literally and metaphorically. A Bohra woman will have to fight a

double battle to liberate herself from the authoritarian rule of the High Priest and also to assert and direct her own life as an individual." ⁵⁹

So it becomes clear here that it is not only the fear of social boycott but also the tactics to terrorise the community, the purchase and sale of honorific titles, the psychological ploys to hypnotise the community in general and women in particular to perform its will and the new breed of Mullas and Shaiks which acts as its executive arm really contribute equally to the strength of the Syedna to keep the entire community under his control. The reformists are mainly fighting for freedom of conscience, human dignity and democratic rights. However the Government has turned deaf ears to the elementary demands of those reformists for legislation against social boycott. They are now campaigning for introduction of a "prevention of Social Boycott Bill" in the Parliament to save lakhs of members of the Dawoodi Bohra Community from the despotic tendencies of the Syedna. Moreover the reformists' demand for a law on the lines of Ajmer Durgah Sharif Act to control the finances of the Syedna still needs attention of the Government.

The reformists are not against religion but against the tyranny done in the name of religion and terrors inflicted upon the whole community by the Syedna. They do not deny the authority of the Syedna what they deny is his authoritarianism in the name of religion.

FOOT NOTES

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2. A.A. Engineer, The Bohras (Vikas, New Delhi 1980), P. 166
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4. Vide Judgment of J. Marten in suit No. 941 of 1917 in The High Court of Judicature at Bombay, 19.3.1921, P. 5.
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6. Ibid P. 179
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34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. "The Reformists Bohras - Their problems and demands : Iqwanus Safa Trust and the Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra community (Bombay, 1990), P. 2.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid
42. Ibid P. 6.
43. Ibid P. 7
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45. Ibid P. 11.
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50. Ibid P. 20
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52. Ibid
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56. Zainab Jaher Poonawala : "The Bohra Women Victim of Persecution" ; (Illustrated Weekly of India, dated 22nd April, 1984), PP. 55-57.
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CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL ROOTS OF THE BOHRA REFORMISTS

After a brief analysis of the reform movement among the Bohras it is necessary to know the social roots of those people who lead this reform movement. The social background, from which they come, that consciously or unconsciously determines their way of looking at various problems of their society. Hence a look, at the social background of the reformists give us a better knowledge about this reform movement.

A man is the product of his environment. The Bohras are no exception to it. Hence a look at the social roots of the Bohras makes clear before us the way they respond to particular problems of their community including the reform movements also.

Most of the Bohras are converts. The Arab missionaries had no political ambitions in India unlike the Ismaili missionaries of the second and third centuries before in Arabia who had definite political goals of capturing the state power. In the Arab missionaries, sectarian scheme of things Hind (India) was also one of the Jaziras (regions) where mission had to spread.

The Arab dais' as legends show, tried to win over converts from among the rulers and the ruled, from the towns as well as villages. "The legends point out that the Ismaili missionary Abdullah first came across a poor gardner and his wife who were affected by famine. With his miraculous performance he produced water in their dry well. With this the poor couple were impressed and accepted conversion. This shows clearly that the dais' first

approached the local poor for whom religion was not a matter of intellectual exercise in philosophic speculations, rather a spiritual solace in the "vale of tears that this world was for them".¹

Mulai Fakhraddin who was killed while passing through a tribal belt in Rajasthan while carrying missionary activities if not among the tribal themselves atleast among the non - tribal villagers. It is mainly for his activities that we find today a sizable number of Bohras, who are mostly poor, having petty shops in the villages, in the wagar area of Rajasthan. Another missionary Maulia Naruddin was in charge of missionary activities for Deccan plateau. He was trying to convert the people in the remote villages and towns when he died in Dongaon. Perhaps the converts among the ruling nobility was less. Such conversions could have taken place only on grounds of personal convictions and thus were very few and far in between, whereas in the lower rungs of society certain social contradictions made the task of conversion relatively easier.

"The caste hierachy in India was higher opperasive and exploitative for those at the botton or outside. Islam suffered from no such social stigma. In Islam there is greater emphasis on equality. In the absence of any such social hierarchy. In this way Islam had great appeal for the lower castes as it promised them equal status with all other faithfuls."²

However, in case of the Ismaili sect which grew in the feudal environment of Persia it imbibed many elements of its religio-cultural outlook. As a result of this, moreover as it was forced to function underground it developed a religious hierarchy which basically militated against the spirit of the more democratic orthodox Sunni sect.

Ismailism was free from caste stigma. However, simultaneously it was hierarchical. This sort of social bent attracted certain classes in India. The untouchables at the lowest rung of the society were attracted more towards the sunni faith as it was more democratic and free from any notions of hierarchy.

"Those who were among the middle category of the social hierarchies in India had differences not only with the ruling feudal nobility but also with those who were lower in the caste hierarchy like the untouchables. These middle castes were not free of hierarchical notions and were more inclined towards a faith which partially accepted hierarchical faith like Ismailism. It was for this reason that these Arab missionaries found most of their converts from amongst the trading castes"

Most of the Daudis are from business community. But no where do they control big business or industries not even in India. The overwhelming majority is engaged in petty shop keeping and only a few can be said to be doing business on even a middle scale. Traditionally the Bohras have been doing petty business out of which it was not easy for them to accumulate the capital

needed for industrial enterprises. They were a persecuted community and often in the past the rich had to part with their wealth to save their faith or honour. "Religious leadership discouraged western learning as well as institutions like banking etc., due to religious inhibitions" Lack of knowledge of western science and technology made them dormant in their efficiency. Hence they were compelled to stick to those traditional occupations. Moreover as they were very much traditional and were not in a position to come out of the social and religious restrictions put by the religious heads such as not being allowed to maintain bank deposits their chances for betterment in profession got very much restricted. This acted as a barrier for which they could not realize the importance of developing industrial enterprises. It was also difficult for them to compete with other non-Muslim industrial giants. As they are a petty shopkeeper community the percentage of education is also not very high in comparison to other communities of India. Due to this reason we find relatively few academicians, university teachers, doctors, lawyers, management experts etc. And practically speaking there is no renowned scientists, poets, novelists, painters etc. In comparison to the Parsis the Daudis emerge in a poor light. The percentage of education among the Parsis is far higher than among the Daudis Bohras, especially among the women. Daudis being a business community had better resources at their disposal to promote higher degree of education. However, the religious leaders did

not permit the western education to be accepted within this community. When the people realized the importance of modern education, the priestly authority was undermined to certain extent.

"According to the compilers of Gulshan-i-Malumat the total number of shops among the Daudi Bohras is around 18,321 of which 3090 are of hardware followed by kirana (provision) shops numbering around 2088. Cutlery and cloth shops come next being around 1290 and 1027 respectively. The other business activities include tin-works, glass frames, shoe-selling, timber general merchandizing, paper electric goods, watch repairing, perfumeries, aerated drinks, plumbing, medicines, sewet-meats, book binding, hosiery, floor-mills rope and coin, book selling, gold and jewellery etc. At the bottom of the list come the fire works shops. These being not more than 25 in number. It is clear from the above list that wine-vending tobacco, narcotics etc are conspicuous by their absence. Drinking and smoking is strictly prohibited among the Bohras although tobacco chewing is not uncommon. Although due to impact of modernity many people drink and even smoke, still they refrain from dealing in these commodities"

As the majority of the Daudi Bohras are petty traders, they are more inward looking in nature. They are concerned more with maintaining their traditions and past practices. This is more common with the females who have low social interactions. The females equally exercise the restraining influence on their husband and family to maintain the traditions and past practices.

The percentage of educated Daudi women are much less. The priest hood supports this and prevents the spread of modern education among the ladies for which they work as the bulwork of priestly dominance.

"Until a few decades ago the practice of being in service was very uncommon among the Bohras. Most of them preferred to take up petty hawking rather to serve elsewhere. While many of them were forced to do so for lack of education. ⁷ Also being a petty business community, it was against their values to work for others. However, with the spread of modern education and rapid industrialisation this mental outlook is fast changing. "Most of the Dawoodi Bohras live by trade, some are merchants having large ⁸ dealings with Arabia, China, Siam and Zanzibar." "Bohras are mostly local traders in hardware, silk, hides, horns and live-cattles but most of them are town and village shopkeepers selling hardware, cloth, stationery, books, groceries and spices and a few in Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat and Bombay are confectioners and ⁹ hotel keepers."

Today due to the impact of modern education things have started changing. Many more Bohras have taken to various profession as well as other private or government jobs. "According to compilers of Gulshan-i-Maulmat there are around 608 engineers and 534 doctors. There are 89 lady doctors as well. The number of lawyers exceeds 387 and the government functionaries 317. Most of these professionals are concentrated in big cities.

In Bombay alone there are as many as 100 doctors followed by 60 in Hyderabad. There are also a large number of engineers among the Daudis in Hyderabad. Those who are called ~~mulkis~~ (i.e. natives) are quite prosperous and advanced in the field of education. Some Mulki families were connected with the court of the Nizam of Hyderabad holding some important positions. The Arastu family is one among them and it has produced a large number of doctors and engineers recently."

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"The third popular profession is that of Law. The largest number of lawyers are from Nagpur. No figures about the university teachers among the Bohras is available. But there are not many. There are said to be 15 judges. As far as the new professional groups in modern industries managerial and other related groups, financial experts, econometricians, statistician. There are hardly any. Moreover there are no reputed scientists, artists or writers either."

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From the above social background it is clear that till today they rely mostly on petty trades. Petty traders by nature are very inward looking. They also try to maintain their traditions and past practices. They are much more concerned about their family and business rather than the problems faced by the society. This sort of attitude has made them almost passive to the outer world. So they have become an early prey in the hands of their religious leaders. Lack of education among the Bohra women strengthens the grip of the religious leaders as the women motivate their husbands to be in line of the community as the

non-obedience would bring social boycott. If this social boycott is put on her family she knows it well. The greatest victim would be none other than herself. As she has very limited spheres of social interactions, like meeting the people on every Friday at the religious gathering at Badri Mahal; attending funeral or happy ceremonies etc. But if social boycott is put those places are also denied to her. Hence she would have to lead a life of virtual death even if she would breath.

The reformists are also mostly of those business communities. It can be understood through an analysis that even though the reformists are trying to bring an end to the restrictions put by the religious head priest they must be having the lust for material gains. An end to this sort of restrictions would give them a free had to persue their business and accumulation of property. Moreover as they are now put under the category of 'Reformists' they are now facing social boycott. It is hampering their business. Hence end end to this sort of practices would surely accelerate the full growth of their business. Of course in that way not only the reformists but also the Bohras in general are going to be benefitted. However, it cannot be denied few among the reformists are committed, to a cause; for them the urge for a better tomorrow for the community as a whole counts much. It is those few people who actually keep the social reform live all through the days. They are least bothered about the consequences whatever it may bring for them. Those

are the real protagonists of this reform movement by whose contributions this reform movement has survived even its day of hardships.

Footnotes

1. Asghar Ali Engineer: The Bohras (Vikas, New Delhi.
2. Ibid P. 104
3. Ibid P. 104-105
4. Ibid P. 145
5. Ibid P. 145
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7. Ibid P. 147
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9. Ibid P. 147
10. Ibid P. 148
11. Ibid P. 148

CHAPTER-V

STRATEGIES OF THE REFORMISTS AND GOALS

From the social roots of the Bohra reformists we could know that they are basically from among the business community. There are also others of different professions. From it now we could make an attempt to find out what could be the possible strategies followed by them to achieve their goals.

The movement led by the Bohra reformists is goal oriented. Hence they must be having certain strategies by which they could accelerate their actions. Hence to predict what ways they are going to follow and in what way they are going to achieve their goals an understanding of these strategies and goals is necessary.

The reform movement is led and followed mostly by the educated section of the community who have realised that the tyranny done in the name of religion by the head priest and his local representatives must come to an end. Their ultimate goal is to liberate the community from the bondage in the name of religion and to lead a life of dignity based on democratic rights.

Legislation against social boycott and the accountability of the "Syedna" to the community are the means which would facilitate this goal to be realised. They demand the expenditure of the various taxes that is collected from the community must be verified. Hence they claim the accountability of the "Syedna" to the community.

They also feel wearing a cap and keeping beards for men and women to under purdah should not be an imposition. Rather it should be left to one's own willingness. One should not be given the threat of social boycott for not obeying the dictates of the religious head priest.

The Bohra reformists also want that permission from the priest for performing jobs like marriage establishing a charity fund, hospital, schools etc should also come to an end. It should not be obligatory. It must not be at the threat of social boycott. As this community happen to be a business community they must be given rights to maintain their own bank accounts which would not only give them a chance to face the unforeseen situations of their business transactions in future but also extend their business capabilities. To speak more correctly the Bohra reformists are fighting to liberate the community from the bondage in the name of religion and to lead a life of dignity based on democratic rights.

The reformists try to spread their voice through public meetings, speeches, pamphlets, magazines, books, articles published in the News Papers. They also carry on public demonstrations fighting against the tyranny done in the name of religion. They try to capture the public support through their personal contacts and spreading their depressed sentiments. Political figures are equally their target. Of course they try to bring public sympathy by every possible peaceful means.

The reform movement is spearheaded by eminent person like Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer. Through his writings and publications he has always tried to bring out the suppressed voice of this community of which he is a part. "His much talked book 'The Bohras' provide us with the social history of the Bohra community tracing its historical antecedents and the roots of its contemporary turmoil".¹ Through his various writings he tries to articulate the reformists urges and provide a rational analysis for the desired reforms. His main object in writing 'The Bohras' is obviously to disseminate information about the sect and to create sympathy for the reform movement.

The Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra community has published a number of pamphlets and booklets in this regard. Few booklets like "The reformist Bohras their problems and demands". "The problems of the Bohra community what is to be done, some thoughts for consideration," are of great importance. Through those booklets they have tried to bring out the voice of the reformists. Through their logical arguments they have made every possible attempt and left no stone untouched, to gain public sympathy in their favour.

However what left here is that while trying to bring out the voice of the reformists they have remained completely indifferent towards the non-reformists. What is needed here is that the voice of the conservatives or non-reformists must be equally heard of.

An interview with the Registrar, Burhani college of Commerce and Arts in Bombay provides an opportunity to take into account what the non-reformists think about this Bohra Reform Movement. Burhani College is an educational institution run by the head priest - Syedna. The non-reformists believe that the reform movement led by the reformists is like enquiring the authenticity of one's father as his own father. "They say suppose X is said Y is your father, but if X denies it and says what is the proof that Y is my father? They say it cannot be proven if X is not willing to accept Y as his father".² Here what is important is one's belief and not the proofs to prove it. They further argue that the reformists challenge to the religious head priest is like challenging the authenticity of one's father as his father. They believe that the Syedna is the descendent of Prophet Mohhamad. Hence he can do no wrong. So they take it for granted that Syedna's authority cannot be and should not be questioned. There should be no doubts about his rightful actions and authenticity.

However, it is not like challenging the authenticity of one's father as his father rather what the reformists want is something which must be seen from rational basis. The belief of the non-reformists is valid up to that extent till the time it is confined to one's private life and is done at one's own willingness. It must not be at the risk of social boycott for not going with the lines of syedna. Belief and faith keep the society to function smoothly. But to take one's actions always absolutely

correct without looking into its rationality and validity is certainly not correct.

No religion permits to take everything as absolutely true forever. Sati system which prevailed quite for a long time in ancient and medieval India might have been viewed as correct by their time. But to encourage "sati" system now would be a bogus and stupid act. So what was thought to be correct and held with high esteem by that time has proved to be unacceptable by us now. In this way nothing in society can be taken for granted and said that it has reached its ultimate truth in the social developments. What is needed is to put everything in its social context and to give place to humanity first. If it serves the people without antagonising others that could be taken for granted for that particular time.,

Likewise in this regard there is much truth in the demands of the reformists who try to bring out a rational basis of their beliefs which would prove to be more humanitarian for their community.

The Bohra reformists also express their voice through speeches and public meetings. The reformists have their various support bases in Bombay which is led by the "Dawoodi Bohra Community" and "Ikhwanus Safa Trust", "Institute of Islamic Studies" of which Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer is the Director. Every sort of help is appreciated by the reformists. They need not only monetary helps from outside through various donations but also the

moral and material support. Their voice is readily accepted by the educated masses. But it seems to be both as a strength and weakness. It is their strength because it adds to the number of their supporters as reformists. Any argument which is having a rational basis is certainly going to be accepted by the majority of the educated masses. In this way if the Bohra reformists got support from outsiders there is nothing new in it.

What is actually lacking is the majority support within the Bohra community. The things must first get its acceptance within the community itself. It is easy to convince the educated masses through rational arguments but what really painful is to convince the majority of the illiterates for whom belief and faith in traditional authority is more important than the rationality of obedience, unconditional and unquestioning acceptance of the command of the religious leader is more important for them than the voice of the reformists. The uneducated Bohra knows for him what matters most is his petty business to run smoothly and his family to be in safe water. Whatever may be difficulties for others that concerns him least.

Once the majority of the masses who are uneducated within the Bohra community realise the significance of reform it would not be difficult on the part of the reformists to build their solid base and once this is achieved it will gain its momentum within no time in outside. In order to bring support from outside it is necessary to set the own house in order first. Unless

this is done first it would be difficult on the parts of the reformists to realise the fruits of their labour. It must be realised by the reformists.

Another book "A shortnote on Qaudi Bohras, compiled and published by Mian Bhai Mulla Abdul Husain and whose reprint has been published by H.K. Sanchawala an Advocate, and the Editor of the "Dawoodi Bohra Bulletin" - also provide us necessary informations about the community. This book has acquired historical and legal significance as it was produced as an exhibit in the famous Chandabhai Gulla Case (Case NO. 918 of 1917, Advocate General Vs. Yusufali Ebrahimji & Others, 24 B.L.R) as a proof that there had been a break in the chain and succession of Dail-ul-Mutlaq since 47th Dai. Hence the priest class frowned on the book and as many of them as they could lay their hands on were cornered and destroyed. The reformists could save few copies for which the reprint sees the light of the day.

It makes clear that the orthodox group has become very much revengeful. They even go to the extent of destroying the literature published by the reformists to make sure that the reformists voice remains parochialised or mostly local and confined. This proves that truth is always bitter it becomes bitterer when it becomes curt truth. Hence the reformists voice contains truths which may not be denied if viewed psychologically.

Mr. Saifuddin Insaf has taken a painstaking task of bringing out the details of the reform movement as published through various newspapers. In this collection of articles a

systematic attempt is made to bring out the details of the reform movement coronologically. This provides the reader a steady development of this reform movement. It brings out all about the reform movement as persued by the reformists. However it also lacks what the other group feel about the reform movement. In this way it provides us the story of one part of the whole struggle.

Shabbir Hussain Shaikh Badruddin Madraswala who leads the reform movement in Patna, Bihar has also through his various articles tried to add feathers in the nest of the reformists. His various articles like - "The Dawoodi Bohra - at Cross Roads", "The Dawoodi Bohras - The clergy and the community", "Dawoodi Bohra Fresthood - Money is all", "Dawoodi Bohras - The scourge of social boycott" "Dawoodi Bohra Priesthood - The myth makers", "Dawoodi Bohras - Waiting for Gorbachev" and "Dawoodi Bohras - The shame of Galiakot", has brought out the suppressed voice of the community and hence the urge for a support to the Bohra reformists.

Here also Mr. Madraswala makes no attempt to see the things from the non-reformists point of view. Of course being a part of the reformists movement it is surely a difficult task for him to do so. Moreover, even if he tries to do so respondents may not expect a just treatment at his hand. But it is sure without such an attempt it also gives only the partial picture of the whole story.

In Udaipur and Jaipur there are also quite a large number of supporters of Bohra reformists who are making efforts to give momentum to this reform movement. The Bohra women coming out to the streets to fight against the tyranny done in the name of religion in Udaipur, Rajasthan is unique of its kind. It has given the required enthusiasms from the Bohra women. Bohra women who happen to be the most conservative within the community for which the Syedna has maintained his strong hold, when they come out to join demonstrations, it provides the sufficient proof that there is really excessive tyranny in the name of religion. For Bohra women social boycott is perhaps the most hatred thing as she happens to be the greatest victim of it, as her entire world is confined to her own house, Badri Mahal (i.e. the place of religious discussions) and the place of Burial where the dead bodies of their ancestors are buried. Those are the only places where she meets her people and shares her happy and sorrow moments with others. Once it is denied, she virtually meets a death even if she breathes.

So she tries to keep her husband and entire family not to be the part of the reformists movement as social boycott becomes the first gift for the reformists from Syedna. Hence she always tries to keep her family away from it whatever may be the cost she would have to pay for it. However, when they have dared to come out to fight for their rights the justness of their demands cannot be questioned. It is the sufficient proof that it has by

now even quite difficult for the entire community to bear with the Syedna any more.

The reformists must have taken painstaking efforts to convince those women and to make them feel that they are constantly used as an instrument in the hands of the Syedna's establishment to keep the entire community under Syedna. Once the women realise it, perhaps it would be justified to call that the winds of the reform movement will lead to hurricane by which nothing would remain unturned.

By now it is equally time for the non-reformists to realise that their grips are gradually losing its firmness. The lamb who had given unquestioning obedience has now felt it to be quite unbearable on its part to become the 'yes man' any more. This must be a good lesson for the orthodox sect out of which they must findout their answers.

Apart from all above strategies the reformists also deliver their speeches in public meetings to draw attention of the masses. There are many forums in support of those reformists in many educational institutions. In Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, there is such a forum for Democratic Students activity which has arranged many seminars in the campus itself. Mr. Engineer and others through their speeches have disseminated informations about the Bohars and created public awareness about their reform movement.

Centre for political studies under School of Social Sciences, JNU, New Delhi had arranged a seminar on "The Bohra Reform Movement" on 31st January, 1992. It got a massive response. Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer's voice drew the attention of the academicians and studies in general for a sympathetic look towards the reform movement led by him.

A signature campaign was conducted for a memorandum on the Bohra issue which was later given to the Prime Minister. In this way every attempt is made by the reformists to bring mass consciousness on this issue.

Whereas the orthodox sect within this community is so inward looking that they never give any chance to their voice to be brought out publicly. For personal interviews during the field study at Bombay in October, 1992 some attempts were made but it proved to be insufficient. Letter correspondence brings no response from their side. An attempt was made to meet the Badri-Mahal people, which acts as an information department of the 'Bohras'. However they never gave any chance to meet the required persons directly. Of course during the field study as it was followed by Diwali celebration most of the required persons, from whom any information could have been collected, were out of India so meeting Mr. Ali Asghar Bhai Sahab, Qasim Bhai Sahab and Mufazzal Bhai Sahab was not possible. However, few others who were there and from whom some informations could have been collected to know the voice of the orthodox sect permission were not given to meet them directly. In this way if puts oneself in

doubts to deny the claims of the Bohra reformists as incorrect.

Even after that letter correspondence was made to Badri Mahal to get any response from them, it proved futile.

Another source where the response was collected from the non-reformists was Burhani College of commerce and Arts - a college run by the Syedna. Here an attempt was made to meet the principal of this college on 15th October, 1992. As he was busy by that time it was not possible to get his responses.

The Registrar Mr. Moil Lokhandwala, gave his few time for responses to be taken from him so far as their views on the reform movement, wearing of caps and keeping beards by men and women to be under purdah and practice of social boycott were taken. In the beginning things went on well and response was good. In the meanwhile he tried to talk to the Principal on phone enquiring whether he would like to give his responses on the required questions. They were talking in their local dialects. So it was difficult to make out anything out of the talks. Soon after the talks the Registrar suddenly denied to give any further information. He himself striked out the previous responses which he had given and which were noted down before him. He only told that the Principal was unhappy at the interview and he himself does not want to give any further information.

This shows that by telling something through personal interviews they fear that if at all it was going to be published in their name. They they may face the wrath of the Syedna. This

might have occurred with the Principal himself previously for which he did not want its repetition again. That is why he himself not only denied for his personal interviews but also of anybody else's from his staff.

This of course clears the doubts on our part that even if they are high placed they do not have their courage to call a spade a spade. They do not want to be the victim of Syedna's anger which would prove to be a costly affair not only for them but also for their family and relatives in the form of social boycott.

The reformists say they are fighting for social change which would bring a better tomorrow for the whole community. This is not a question of one community or the other rather it is a fight for human dignity and they say they would extend their support for every such reform movement for Democratic Rights and human dignity etc. So they say they need the support of the masses in general and Bohra community in particular.

Legislation against social boycott and accountability of Syedna to the community for the taxes collected from them are only the means which would facilitate this process of reform movement. The goal is to liberate the community from this bondage in the name of religion and to lead a life of dignity based on democratic rights. The ultimate goal is yet to be achieved in the future days to come to see smiles and a ray of hope in their faces is still an unfulfilled goal.

The contemporary reform movement has its own

distinctiveness. Generally within Islamic communities reformists' urges have found their fulfilment through the protagonists of reform articulating an alternate Theology, using the new ideology to break away from the main community and organizing the breakaway group on the basis of suggested reforms. The Bohra reform movement is distinctive in the sense that it tries neither to bring out an alternate theology nor to form a breakaway community rather to make the Bohra principles and practices quite adaptive according to the needs of the contemporary social values of equality, social justice and democracy.

They believe that coming out of the community and forming another group to fight against Syedna would not solve the problem of tyranny done in the name of religion. That would rather create another faction within this small community which would break the strength of this community and also its cohesiveness. They try to make it realised within the community as a whole and as a separate group. Hence they are not in favour of a separate theology or forming a breakaway group within this community.

Perhaps it is this distinctive feature of the Bohra reform movement that makes their reformist urges not merely a concern of the Bohra but of the larger Indian community.

Footnotes

1. Imtiaz Ahmad, in the Indian Economic and Social History Review 21,1,(1984).p.129
2. Part of the interview talks given by Mr. Moiz Lokhandwala, Registrar, Burhani College of Commerce and Arts, Byculla, Bombay.

CONCLUSION

This reforms movement among Bohras has shown its own differentiation from all other reform movements of the Indian Muslims. The Reformists want to be within the community and to get it reformed from within. Here they show the remarkable difference with their past reformers who have always tried to put another set of doctrines within the community and have always come out of the community in the name of reformist groups. "However the Bohra reformists have neither brought out an alternative theology nor they have tried to form another group".¹ In this way they have never tried to bring another division within this small community which would weaken its social fabric.

On this ground the Bohra reform movement remains not only a concern for the Bohras only but also for the social reform movements in general, in the larger social context of other communities also.²

However, why those reformists have not come out from the community even if they are harassed successively gives us another speculation in our mind. If viewed from the reformists' point of view as we have seen, they claim their aim is to bring an end to the tyranny done in the name of religion and to see that the people of this community lead a life based on equality, justice and democratic human rights; which is not to be violated at the threat of social boycott. They further argue keeping beards and wearing a cap for men and women to be under purdah should not be an Act of imposition. It must not be practised at the threat of

social boycott. It should not be obligatory. If it is done by one's own willingness then there is no wrong in it. But to make it obligatory sounds illogical for a rational man to accept it. They further say that the various taxes collected from the community and the expenditures of it must be brought to the notice of the whole community. The religious head priest must be accountable to the community from whom the money is being collected. The permission from the Head Priest for any sort of works like marriage, constructing a school, an association or a charitable institution must not be compulsory. If it is asked for by the community as a mark of regards for the high priest then it would be a welcome step. But to put an end to the efforts of the people for opening a school or hospital etc., for not taking the permission from the head priest sounds somewhat illogical.

Apart from it the women must realise that it is due to their silence they are persistently used for getting the grips of 'Syedna' stronger. For those women social boycott happens to be the greatest havoc in one's life. "Bohra women are the most orthodox sect within the community for whom social interaction is very much limited"³. Once her family faces social ostracism their chances of sharing some happy or sorrowful moments with others gets more narrowed. "Badri Mahal, weekly Friday prayer and Jamat Khanna are few places where the Bohra women meet others. If she is socially boycotted these few places are also denied to her"⁴. In that way it makes her lead a life of prisoner kept within the

boundary walls of her family. So she does not want to be socially boycotted whatever may be the imposition on her family. It is only due to this fear she tries to keep her family members and her husband in particular to be away from the wraths of the head priest. This fear psychosis of the Bohra women, perhaps gives the strength to the religious head priest to keep the community under his dictates and to see that no one is away from his voice. The local religious priest - 'amil' and their female counterparts take every step to make sure that the voice of 'Syedna' is kept within its spirits. Like the secret agents for Bohra men - the Shababs, there is a female counter part called Bunayyat who vows to see all the customs implemented to their last measure by the Bohra women.

"The purchase and sell of honorific titles like Shaikh, Mulla etc. are viewed with great esteem within this community. The reformists say previously those titles were given only to the persons of extraordinary knowledge over the religion. But it is now purchased on heavy prices." ⁵ Those Bohras who can afford to get those titles from 'Syedna' get special privileges from the community which helps their business to prosper. So they get better access to improve their business and to be in safe water and away from the wraths of the head priest.

But here the simple fact cannot be denied that the money which is collected from those sell of honorific titles, the various taxes collected from the community etc. give another strength to the 'Syedna'. He has celestial powers in him. When

religious power is added with monetary powers it becomes a strength that is quite difficult to fight against. Here lies the strength of the religious Head priest and the helplessness of the reformists.

It is through those monetary powers and religious authority the religious head priest has tried to keep the ruling party always in his favour. He provides the solid vote bank and monetary helps for the ruling party. In this way he keeps the ruling party silent. In both those accounts the reformists are not a fit match with the 'Syedna'. Hence the political voice of this country has not till now gone in favour of the reformists so far as their claims for "legislation against the social boycott" and "accountability of the 'Syedna'" for the expenditure of the various taxes collected from them are concerned.

It cannot be denied even though the reformists are demanding a law to be made against social boycott and religious head priest, it is not going to benefit only the reformists but the whole community would enjoy its fruits. Without the fear of social boycott, if their demands are accepted, they would of course be free to do whatever is permitted to other citizens of India which is not at all an unjust claim. Moreover by ending the collection of various taxes from them which is now almost obligatory they would have better deal in their business. As most of the Bohras are petty business people including most of the reformists it cannot be placed aside that they must have their

inner lust for wealth. The various taxes of the head priest must be working as an impediment for their business to have full expansion. It must be hampering their private accumulation of capitals. It may be due to this desire to be realised fully the Bohras reformists are motivated. But it must be realised if their claims are accepted. They are not going to be the gainers only. The whole community is certainly going to be benefited.

Moreover as the reformists through their various strategies like public speeches, pamphlets, books, meetings, signature campaignings etc., have tried to gain public sympathy. Once they win in their struggle they would surely have a better access with the public in general. It would surely help in their business interests. But this end is yet to be achieved and now they are facing various hardships.

The reformists claim that coming out of the community as a separate group having different ideological stand will break the inner strength and cohesiveness of the community". In that way there would be no end to the tyranny done in the name of religion and the various taxes collected from them. In that way there would be no demand for accountability of 'Syedna' to the community as by that time the reformists would have formed another group. So the tyranny would continue and in the gradual process it would get legitimised. So the reformists feel it is required to fight against the religious head priest from within i.e. being a part of this community by which the people could feel the pulse at every required moment.

But here the other latent interests cannot be kept aside. The Bohras are a petty business community. Most of their business are confined to the community and to the particular locality. It is generally expected that his business gets overwhelming support and grows rapidly who has better social linkages within the community. So once the reformists who are also mostly of this business community come out of this community. their business interest is certainly going to be hampered. This fear might have kept them till now within the community even though they belong to the reformists category.

But the mistake must not be made by putting all the reformists under the business category. There are many social activities, writers, journalists, academicians for whom this gain of private interest in business is not the sole cause for fighting against the religious head priest. For them to liberate the community from this bondage and to realise the importance of equality, justice and a life based on democratic human rights is more important.

The reformists are also now facing social ostracism. This social boycott within this small community virtually makes the life of a reformist more difficult than the life of untouchables as found among the Hindu community. He is boycotted from his family members, from his friends and relatives also. There are also instances where the husband is separated from wife and father from son and so on.

When the community is small, well knit, very inward looking and having a past history where unquestioning obedience to the religious head priest has become a regular practice, there is least possibility of breaking that practice and this continuous obedience has almost legitimised this practice. Hence the non performance of the dictates of the religious head priest is considered as a sacrilage in this community. The reformists as they have deviated from the orthodox line it is quite obvious that they are by now socially ostracised. One can very well realise the condition of a person within a small community who is denied even to talk to his most close kins, near and dear ones. This practice for a woman is perhaps like leading the life of practical death even if she breathes as her social interactions are very much limited.

So here it cannot be denied that this inner urge to share some happy moments and intimate relations with one's near and dears must have acted as a vital force for the reformists to see that this practice of social boycott comes to an end at any cost. The reformists have also their feelings, emotions etc. to be shared with their close ones. But once it is denied to them only on the ground that they take part in the reform movement there is no doubt, they can go to any extent to see that this tyranny comes to an end whatever may be the prices for it they have to pay for it.

The reformists also feel that there is no justification in taking the consent of the religious head priest as an obligation for contesting the elections. They say everyone has free access to contest in an election as a citizen of this country. But for the Bohras this practice of 'raza' or permission from head priest to contest and if denied failing to contest seems unjustified. The reformists have very often tested its bitterness so they urge this unjust practice must come to an end.

By now we have seen among the supporters of the reformists most of them are of educated masses. It is easier to motivate the educated masses on the logical arguments on any topic. But the difficulty lies in motivating those illiterate masses for whom religion is not something of intellectual discussions rather it is a solace to their day to day life as they practically realise it and try to overcome it taking the plea of religion. It is among those people that the Syedna has built his solid base. This must be realised by the Bohra reformists. Hence support from the educated masses outside this community is considered to be both, its strength and weakness. It is a strength so far as it increases the support base of the reformists. However, it is a weakness in that sense that it creates only outward strength. But So what is needed actually is that the masses within this community must realise first that they are continuously oppressed in the name of religion. The Bohra woman for whom modern education has by now been denied and who acts as the strength of 'Syedna' must be made to realise that she is constantly used as an instru-

ment for strengthening the tyrannical base of the 'Syedna'. It is among those the consciousness must be created first. Once they realise it, perhaps, that would mark the real beginning of this reform movement.

The event of Udaipur is the surest proof that women in the Bohra community who happened to be the most conservative part and acted as the barrier for her husband and family members to be a part of reform movement under the fear of social boycott has by now fully realised the intention of 'Syedna' that is why she has even dared to come to the streets to fight against this tyranny done in the name of religion. This clearly shows that these obedient who till now had given their unquestioning obedience to the religious head priest have also felt that time has come when their silence must be broken in order to see an end to this tyranny in the name of religion.

It must be the sufficient proof for 'Syedna' to realise that the most obedient support base has revolted and timely action must be taken to win over them. From this, sufficient strength must be collected by the reformists also to see that their long drawn reform movement has come to a point when the question of accountability of 'Syedna' and Laws against social boycott must be put forward.

Islam has two spheres of its working. In one sphere it deals with the Ibadaat i.e. the sphere of religion of Islam. It

includes practices like Kalima, Namaz, Fasting, Zakat and Hajj which are permanent. However, the other sphere Maumalaat deals with the laws which is subject to change.

Dr. Justice Javid Iqbal in his book titled "Islamic Modernism and Pakistan" which is yet to see the light of the day - also views three attitudes towards Islam. One of them is called Reformists attitude towards Islam. The second is the 'conventional' and the third is 'Populist'. He says a large majority of the poor and illiterate Muslims, who even do not know how to perform Namaz and may not know how to recite the Quran in Arabic or to understand it are an easy prey in the hands of the Fir, Mullah and Politicians. Their attitude towards Islam he calls as the 'Populist'. Their exploitation will continue in the Muslim world until they get modern education and become conscious of their duties and rights under Islam.

The 'Conventional' approach towards Islam says Justice Javid Iqbal, rejects the factor of change which is taking place and he says the movement one rejects the factor of change in life it means he has become static. Conventional approach is dependent on 'Taqlid' i.e. imitation owing to which he blames the Ulema who have ceased to exert themselves to find answers to new problems, but they only follow blindly their predecessors. They do not want to bear any responsibility on their shoulders. This slavish mentality has made the Islamic law static whereas the Muslim community is advancing forward. This has ultimately resulted in double standards in which masses in general seems to

step forward to keep pace with the 21st century whereas their laws which is meant to keep them intact still remains in the medieval age. This must reach balance.

Says Dr. (Justice) Javid Iqbal emphatically that it is only the reformist attitude towards Islam which is considered to be dynamic "The development of this approach is the greatest contribution of Indian Islam to the rest of the Muslim world." Islamic modernism according to him stands for a democratic order. It respects human rights and aspires for unity within diversity. It contemplates Islam as a 'spiritual democracy'.

It is always the need of time that fixes the value of ideas we are not living in a tribal society. Conditions today have drastically changed. Those are totally different from those prevailing twelve or fourteen hundred years ago. One cannot shut up his eyes to change one has to accept change as a reality. Therefore Islamic Modernism rejects backward looking romanticism and only approves of forward looking realism. It regards conventional way of looking at Islam as 'static' whereas reformist approach is 'Dynamic'. Islamic modernism means dynamic Islam. The Bohra Reform Movement is certainly a step forward in this direction.

The law against social boycott and accountability of 'Syed-na' to end corruption in that community are only the means by which the end - i.e. to liberate the community from this bondage in the name of religion and to lead a life of dignity based on

democratic human rights could be realised. The end is yet to be achieved. To see smiles and a ray of hope in the face of the Bohras, this fight of the reformists has continued since last two decades. It is still continuing and will continue till this tyranny in the name of religion comes to an end. It is worthy of fighting for it.

Foot Notes

1. Imtiaz Ahmad, in The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 21.,1, (SAGE, Delhi, 1984)
2. Ibid, P. 130.
3. Zainab Taher Poonawala, "Bohra Women Victim of Persecution", (Illustrated Weekly of India, 22 April,84) PP.56-67.
4. Ibid.
5. S.H.S.B. Madraswala, "Dawoodi Bohras - The Clergy and the Community" (Indian Express, Dt. 31 October, 1991))
6. Part of the Interview talk by Mr. A.A. Engineer

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