India

During the last years of the period under review, 1952-60, India's policy of "non-alignment" was under strong attack from many quarters. China's suppression of the Tibetan revolt in 1959 led to the flight of thousands of Tibetan refugees to India, and sympathy for the Tibetans was widespread in all sectors of the country. At the same time, popular resentment against Communist China was intensified by Chinese violations of the border between the two nations. While the disputed border areas were for the most part inaccessible and of little economic value, some of them had considerable potential strategic importance, and many Indians feared that the Chinese were planning an eventual threat to Indian territory on a much larger scale. Moreover, the Chinese incursions were accompanied by unprovoked attacks which resulted in the deaths of a number of Indians.

Many leading figures in Indian public life called for a rapprochement with Pakistan in the interest of their common defense against aggression from the Chinese. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was still unwilling to regard Chinese aggression as a major threat, although he denounced the Chinese for violating their agreements in regard to Tibet, as well as the Five Principles agreed upon by Nehru and Chou En-lai in 1954. He opposed any military alliance with Pakistan because of that country's participation in the system of Western alliances.

Tensions between India and Pakistan were, however, greatly reduced. Prime Minister Nehru and President Mohammed Ayub Khan of Pakistan exchanged visits in September 1959, various minor border disputes were settled the following month, and with the aid of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the two countries moved toward an amicable agreement for the exploitation of the waters of six rivers which passed through both. While the Kashmir question still remained a major obstacle to closer relations between the two countries, it appeared from statements by their leaders that progress toward a compromise was likely here too.

India's economy was still subject to great strains stemming from the effort to develop industry and agriculture fast enough to permit a rise in the standard of living notwithstanding the rapidly increasing population. In furtherance of this effort, India received substantial grants and loans from the United States as well as from the Soviet Union, and from other countries in both the Eastern and Western camps. Of particular importance was a 1956 agreement by which the United States pledged to sell to India, for local currency, enough grain to guarantee the satisfaction of India's basic food needs during the new five-year plan.

* For meaning of abbreviations, see p. 391.
Domestic Developments

Faced with passionate demands for linguistic states, in 1953 the central government reluctantly created the state of Andhra in the south, with Telegu as the state language, and in 1960 divided Bombay state into Maharashtra and Gujerat. The Marathi-speaking people, including the Bene Israel Jews, won official status for their language in Maharashtra, while Gujerati became the state language of Gujerat.

The national election of 1956, the second since India achieved independence, was the largest-scale democratic election in the world. The electorate exceeded 193 million, about 20 million more than those eligible to vote in the first election. The Communist vote increased, especially in Kerala and West Bengal, the home states of the Cochin and Calcutta Jews. In the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) the Communists, by winning only 27 of the 494 seats, became the second largest party after the ruling Indian National Congress.

In Kerala, a state of 14 million people with a high literacy rate, a Communist government, the first in India, was elected in March 1957. Disorders developed in the state, and were aggravated by the introduction of a bill to nationalize schools conducted by Roman Catholic, Hindu, and other groups. The resulting disturbances caused the central government to take over control of the state and hold new elections in February 1960. A coalition of the previously divided anti-Communist forces won a substantial majority, but the Communists increased their vote.

Jewish Community

In 1960 there were between 18,000 and 25,000 Jews among India’s population of approximately 370,000,000. More than half of the Jewish community was supported by communal funds.

The oldest and largest Jewish group were of the Bene Israel, numbering some 15,000. Most of these resided in the city of Bombay and the newly established Maharashtra state, and a few were in other cities of western India, such as Ahmedabad and New Delhi. Among them were skilled laborers—agriculturists, carpenters, and artisans—resembling their neighbors in physiognomy, dress, language, and social customs. Many were employed in government service, some occupying high posts in the civil administration and the armed forces. Others were teachers, lawyers, and physicians.

The second largest group of Jews was of Iraqi descent. Some of these engaged in commerce, mainly in Bombay and Calcutta, while others were white-collar workers or owned small stores. Arabic, the mother tongue of previous generations, was giving way to English, and Western dress replaced their traditional Arabic garb.

From 1949 to 1960, about 5,000 Bene Israel and Iraqi Jews emigrated to Israel. There was also substantial emigration to England, Canada, Australia, and the United States, especially among the Iraqis. Of 2,500 Jews of Iraqi descent in Calcutta before World War II, augmented by 1,000 Rangoon
Jewish refugees during the war, only about 1,000 remained in 1960. In Bombay, too, the Jewish population was fast diminishing.

A decrease in the opportunities open to small businessmen, as a result of the fiscal policies adopted after independence, was an important cause of emigration. Fear of Communism, stimulated by Communist electoral victories, was another contributing factor.

The third group, the Jews of Cochin, subdivided into racial groups of "black" and "white," numbered about 1,500 in 1949. Moved by a historic Zionist urge of a somewhat messianic character, most of the "blacks" liquidated their communal assets and migrated to Israel. About 500 Cochin Jews remained in India at the time of writing, most of them awaiting their turn to emigrate.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

In 1960 there were ten synagogues in Bombay (three Iraqi and seven Bene Israel); three in Calcutta, besides two prayer-halls, and six in Kerala—one each in Cochin, Parrur, Chennamangalam, and Mala and two in Ernakulam. (During the period under review two Cochin synagogues had been closed.) Poona's 200 Jews had two synagogues, while Thana and Alibag had one each and Ahmedabad (in Gujerat) had the Magen Abraham synagogue. Services were conducted by readers (hazzanim) who often also served as shohatim, mohalim, or soferim.

Though each of the three communities had its own distinctive rites, all followed a basic oriental pattern.

The Magen David synagogue of Calcutta, built in 1884, celebrated its 75th anniversary a little belatedly on February 7, 1960. A brochure published in honor of the occasion contained the history of the synagogue and a biography of the late Elias Moses Duck Cohen, its senior minister for 43 years. Even older was the Keneset Eliyahu synagogue of Bombay, built in 1883.

Up to the 20th century, men who had attended yeshivot in Bagdad or Palestine would settle in the far-flung Indian centers of Jewry and unofficially assume religious leadership while carrying on their own vocations. (Typical was Hakham Shelomoh Abid Twena, author, printer, teacher, and preacher, famous in Judeo-Arabic scholarship.) Given this framework, Orthodoxy was well preserved. In the present century, however, most synagogues suffered the effects of westernization, which brought with it a decline in synagogue attendance, neglect of dietary laws, and increasing intermarriage.

Rabbi Ezekiel N. Musleah, a 1952 graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, was appointed to a pulpit in his native Calcutta in December of that year. Despite difficulties arising from lack of stability in the community and the opposition of the more conservative, he succeeded in organizing Jewish youth, introducing modern methods of teaching Hebrew, and inaugurating an institute for adult studies.

Bombay's Bene Israel Jewish community, comparatively unaffected by the new changes, provided fertile ground for rivalry among the three major tendencies in Judaism. The Jewish Religious Union, affiliated to the World Union of Progressive Judaism, functioned at Rodef Shalom with an in-
creasing membership of English-speaking Bene Israels. Its first rabbi, Hugo Gryn, spent over two years with the congregation organizing Jewish education and a synagogue, housed in a building purchased with the aid of the Liberal movement. In 1959 he was succeeded by Rabbi Elisha Nattiv, an Israeli ordained at the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati.

To counter the Liberal advances, B. B. Benjamin, president of the Jewish Welfare Association of Delhi and Northern India, established the United Synagogue of India, a counterpart of its Conservative namesake in the United States.

At the time of writing the Orthodox Jews had indicated their intention to enter the competition for favor. Just what their course of action would be was not yet clear.

Community Organization and Communal Affairs

The Jewish institutions were represented in regional bodies such as the Central Jewish Board of Bombay, the Jewish Association of Calcutta, the South Indian Jews’ Association of Cochin, and the Jewish Welfare Association of New Delhi. These associations were organized comparatively recently to coordinate the activities of their affiliates and to develop communal solidarity. Concomitantly, they undertook additional functions: in Calcutta, for instance, they maintained the rabbinate, sponsored a religious committee under the jurisdiction of the London Beth Din, published a newspaper, and represented the community vis-à-vis the government. No all-India central body had yet come into being.

Aid to the more than half the total Jewish population that was indigent was furnished by the Sir Jacob and Lady Rachel Sassoon Welfare Trusts in Bombay and the Rahma and Benjamin Elias Trust and the Rachel and David Ezra Trusts in Calcutta, among other funds. The Lady Rachel Medical Dispensary and the ‘Oseh Hesed I. S. Musleah Memorial Clinic, in Bombay and Calcutta respectively, provided medical assistance.

Sports were organized by the Maccabi Association, and in Bombay the YM & YWHA conducted social and cultural activities.

WIZO and other Zionist associations in the principal cities sponsored celebrations for Israel’s independence day and other appropriate occasions and arranged showings of Israeli films. A fortnightly bulletin, the Indo-Israel Review, was published by the Bombay Zionist Association.

In the larger centers of Jewry, the Jewish communities undertook responsibility for the commercial preparation of matzot for Passover and wine for sacramental purposes.

Jewish Education

The aim of Jewish education seldom went beyond the achievement of a mechanical fluency in reading Hebrew. A rare accomplishment was an understanding of the Bible through the medium of Arabic or Mahrathi. Until recently no emphasis was laid on the meaning of religious concepts, the Jewish moral and ethical code, or Jewish history.

Bombay and Calcutta each had two Jewish schools which offered this limited curriculum along with secular education. In Bombay the classes
in the Sir Elly Kadoorie School were conducted in Mahrathi, while those in
the Sir Jacob Sassoon School were in English. In Calcutta Jewish subjects
were taught at the Jewish Girls' School and at the Elias Meyer Free School
and Talmud Torah.

In cooperation with the Bombay community, a representative of the de-
partment of Torah education and culture of the Jewish Agency conducted a
program of Jewish studies to train young boys and girls to become teachers.
Seven graduates were sent to Israel for a year and returned to India, but
their services were not fully utilized, because the congregations were unable
to finance their full-time employment.

ZIONISM AND RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

Influenced, perhaps, by its need for good relations with Moslem Pakistan
and by Prime Minister Nehru's friendship with UAR President Gamal Abdul
Nasser, India sided completely with Egypt during the Suez crisis of 1956,
the Israeli Sinai campaign, and the Anglo-French action against Egypt.

Nevertheless, India accorded Israel de facto, if not de jure, recognition.
Zionist organizations were permitted complete freedom of action. It was
under the auspices of the Jewish Agency Far East office in Bombay, for ex-
ample, that an average of 500 Indian Jews had migrated to Israel each year
since 1949.

(Hitahadut 'Ole Hoddu, an association of Indian immigrants in Israel,
assisted its members to adapt themselves to their new environment, while
preserving the cultural traditions of their native land, and assisted them in
their dealings with the government. Complaints of color discrimination
against immigrants of oriental stock in Israel declined.)

DISCRIMINATION AND ANTISEMITISM

Anti-Jewish feeling was nonexistent, although there was sympathy for the
Arab cause, especially in Moslem circles. Prime Minister Nehru's government
adhered to the Indian constitution's guarantees of equal rights, and the
numerically insignificant Jewish community enjoyed the political freedom
of a democratic society.

PERSONALIA

Meyer Nissim, Jewish community leader and former mayor of Bombay,
died on October 3, 1959, at the age of 77. A former director and president
of the Bank of Bombay, he also held many public offices, was prominent in
Jewish affairs, and served as chairman of the Central Jewish Board of Bom-
bay.

David Jacob Cohen, Jewish and civic leader, died in Calcutta on February
9, 1959, at the age of 75. His public offices included membership in the
Bengal legislative council from 1921 to 1947 and honorary presidency
magistrate of the Calcutta police court from 1917 to 1948. He was an active
leader in almost all communal institutions, and when the Jewish Associ-
ation of Calcutta was formed in 1945, he became its first president.

EZEKIEL N. MUSLEAH