

THE NORMATIVE AND THE FACTUAL: AN ANALYSIS OF EMIGRATION FACTORS AMONG THE JEWS OF INDIA

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JEWS have been settled in India for many centuries. Some of them even claim to be descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel and to have reached India about two thousand years ago. Their communities were inevitably influenced to some degree by the caste system, but they attempted with varying degrees of success to preserve their Jewish faith. They are remarkable, among other things, for not having experienced antisemitism in their host country, in contrast to most other Diaspora Jewries.¹

India's independence from British rule in 1947 and the establishment of the State of Israel the following year had a major impact on the Jews of India. In many years, for nearly three decades from 1949 onwards, hundreds of them (and in some years thousands) emigrated to Israel. According to the Jewish Agency, 25,214 Jews from India had come to settle in Israel by the end of 1987. S. B. Isenberg's compilations from the official censuses of population of India reflects this exodus: the 1941 census enumerated 22,480 Jews and a decade later the total had risen to 26,512. By 1961, there was a marked decline: 18,553 were returned; in 1971, 5,825; and at the last published census for 1981, 5,618.² The present paper is chiefly concerned with the causal factors in the emigration of Indian Jews to Israel, their *aliyah*. Clearly, they did not leave their native land in order to escape from the antisemitism of their compatriots or from discriminatory legislation.

The Jewish Settlement in India

There have been three principal Jewish communities in India, apart from the small number of Jews from Western countries: the Cochin Jews, the Bene Israel, and the Baghdadi Jews. Joan Roland states that 'at their maximum strength in 1951' the Bene Israel numbered about 20,000 and the Baghdadis about 5,000, while the Cochin Jews had always been a small group, and had never numbered more than 2,500.³

Israel soldiers were the pick of the Native Army of the Bombay Presidency, and constituted almost half of the number of native officers of each regiment of the Bombay Presidency for nearly a century and a half'. Other Bene Israel were skilled craftsmen, especially carpenters, and office clerks.⁶

Unlike the Cochin Jews and the Bene Israel, the Baghdadi Jews were comparatively late settlers in India; the term 'Baghdadi' referred also to Jews who had come from Basra, from Aleppo in Syria, from Iran, and from Aden. They came in some numbers to Bombay and to Calcutta in the early nineteenth century and several of them were wealthy traders who established very successful business enterprises, achieved immense economic success, attained prestigious positions, and became leaders of Indian Jewry. They established several charities and educational institutions for the benefit of both their correligionists and non-Jews, but they held themselves aloof from the native population and did not adopt any Indian practices. They looked upon the British as their social reference group and adopted British customs and a British life-style. Several of them were given honours, including knighthoods.⁷

The first decades of the twentieth century saw increased Indian nationalism and Zionism. These two movements were to give the Jews of India a heightened awareness of their ethnic and religious identity and to emphasize their minority status. Before India attained independence in 1947, the Jews of India had acquired privileged positions under the patronage of the British. Gussin has commented that the Bene Israel 'were favoured by the politics of insignificant numbers. Precisely because the community was so small and, therefore, presented no threat to the British overlords, it was disproportionately rewarded'.⁸

Although the Jewish communities in India did not have close relationships with the other religious groups in the country, they co-existed harmoniously. The Cochinites and the Bene Israel also adopted some of the Hindu practices and caste-like hierarchies. For example, the Bene Israel, in deference to their Hindu neighbours, usually abstained from beef, and sometimes from all meat; they also frowned upon widow remarriage. The three categories of Cochin Jews did not intermarry, and neither did the White and Black Bene Israel groups. Joan Roland also states that both the Cochinites and the Bene Israel objected to Black Jews coming near their cooking vessels and adds:⁹

The Baghdadi Jews also adopted castelike attitudes towards the Bene Israel because of their lack of ritual orthodoxy and supposed 'ancestral impurity'. In some, but not all, of these instances of 'caste' distinction, color played an important secondary role.

Under British rule in India, the small minorities, including the Jewish groups, were given special educational and job opportunities.

The Cochin Jews, settled on the Malabar coast of South India, claimed that they were descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel; but there is no reliable evidence about their distant origins or the precise period of their arrival in India. However, there is definite evidence that they were settled in the country in the ninth century and that they were granted many valuable privileges by the Rajas of Cochin.⁴ There were three groups of Cochin Jews: the Malabar or Black Jews, the Pardesi or White Jews, and the Manumitted or Brown Jews. The Malabar group are the earliest settlers; their dark complexion and the similarity of their physical features to those of the indigenous local people is presumed to be the result of past intermarriage with the non-Jewish native inhabitants. The Pardesi or White Jews are later arrivals; their community is smaller than that of the Malabar group, and they have maintained a separate Jewish identity and played an important part in the economic history of Cochin. The Manumitted or Brown Jews are the offspring of slaves of the Pardesi Jews (who had been given their freedom by the Pardesis and had voluntarily converted to Judaism) or of unions between Pardesi men and native women. During their settlement in India, these three groups of Cochin Jews adopted some of the customs and traditions of the local Hindu population but they were always strict in the observance of their Jewish faith and thus clearly differentiated themselves from the non-Jewish local inhabitants.

The Bene Israel, who were divided into two groups (the Gora or White Jews and the Kala or Black Jews), constituted the largest group in India and like the Cochin Jews they also claimed descent from the ten lost tribes of Israel. However, in contrast to the Cochin Jews, who were always aware of their Jewish identity and who maintained regular contact with other Diaspora communities over the centuries, the Bene Israel were isolated from other Jewish settlements for hundreds of years (when they had lived in the Konkan region of Maharashtra, on the west coast of India) and they had prolonged lapses in some religious observances. They were also partly assimilated into the Hindu caste structure. But they did retain some Jewish practices, such as circumcision, the observance of some dietary laws (*kashrut*) and of the Sabbath, as well as the recitation of the *Shema* (the Jewish confession of faith) on important occasions — at a circumcision, a wedding, and a death. They were traditionally known as ‘Saturday oil-pressers’ because they specialized in that trade but refrained from work on the Sabbath. These religious observances served to distinguish them from the local population and led the Cochin Jews to discover their existence in the eighteenth century and to acquaint them with a deeper knowledge of the principles and the practice of Judaism.⁵

It was also in the eighteenth century that a large group of Bene Israel moved to Bombay; many of them joined the East India Company’s regiments. Strizower quotes Kehimkar’s statement that ‘the Bene

The Indian Jews, in return for this patronage, showed loyalty to the British and increasingly distanced themselves from the Hindu and Muslim native population. They were reluctant to antagonize the British by participating actively in the Indian nationalist movement. Moreover, Zionist emissaries were striving to arouse in them a Jewish nationalism. The Bene Israel had received an invitation to attend the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897; in 1903, the Cochin Jews founded their first Zionist organization; and in 1920 three Baghdadis founded the Bombay Zionist Association.¹⁰ India's Independence in 1947 was perceived by the majority of the local Jews as the end of a golden era. When the State of Israel was established in 1948, they began to plan their *aliyah* and, as stated above, by the end of 1987, a total of 25,214 had settled in the Jewish State, leaving only about 5,000–6,000 Jews in India.¹¹

Emigration Factors

In 1987 and 1988, I conducted a total of 157 interviews with Indian Jews: 117 in India and 40 in Israel. My informants in India were Cochin, Bene Israel, and Baghdadi Jews. In each community I started with a few key individuals, and by the process known as 'snowballing' I was introduced to other informants. I endeavoured to make my selection from a broad range of socio-economic strata. I conducted the interviews mainly in English and sometimes in Malayalam; in two cases I required the services of an interpreter for two Bene Israel respondents who spoke only Marathi.

I asked all 157 informants, 'In your view, what are the factors which influenced or influence the Indian Jews to emigrate to Israel?'. I made it clear that I was referring to all Indian Jews — the Bene Israel, the Cochinites, and the Baghdadis. The informants in India were further asked whether they wished to settle in Israel. The 63 who said that they wanted to emigrate were asked to list the factors which influenced their desire to make *aliyah*, while the 54 who said that they wanted to remain in India were asked to list the factors which led to that decision. The 40 who were settled in Israel were asked to state the factors which had influenced them to make *aliyah*. The responses given by all 157 informants can be categorized into six broad sets of factors.

- 1) *Economic factors.* The main push factors were a lack of suitable job opportunities, low income, housing problems, inflation, and a low standard of living. The principal pull factors to emigrate to Israel were better employment opportunities, greater amenities, low-cost housing, loans to immigrants, and a comparatively high standard of living in terms of material possessions — such as a television set, a refrigerator, a cooking stove, or a video cassette recorder.

- 2) *Social factors.* There was a decline of Jewish social and cultural activities in India and it was likely that such activities would be widely available in Israel, as well as a better social status.
- 3) *Political factors* included the indirect consequences of communal tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims; and a lack of political viability in India as a minority community.
- 4) *Religious factors.* A profound desire to realize the dream of a return to the Holy Land, where Judaism is a way of life, where on the Sabbath and on the Jewish festivals one does not go to work, and where *Kasher* food can be easily obtained.
- 5) *Family factors.* To be reunited with other members of the family who had made *aliyah* and, among the younger generation, the greater likelihood of finding a suitable marriage partner in Israel.
- 6) *The age factor.* The right time to emigrate is when one is young and fit, while for the old it is very difficult to uproot oneself.

An analysis of the responses showed that informants differentiated between the factors which had influenced their own emigration to Israel and those which would influence the *aliyah* of their compatriots. Four-fifths of those who had settled in Israel (32 out of the total of 40, or 80 per cent) claimed that they had been primarily influenced by religious factors; slightly more than half cited economic factors (22 out of 40) and family factors (21 informants); while 12 mentioned political factors, only two cited social factors, and none referred to age as a consideration.

A majority of the 63 who stated that they wished to go on *aliyah* (45 informants out of the 63 or 72 per cent) cited economic factors while a smaller number (38 or 61 per cent) claimed that religious factors were important; 24 mentioned social factors, 17 cited family considerations, ten referred to their age, and only five out of the 63 referred to political factors.

However, when all 157 informants (both the 117 in India and the 40 who had settled in Israel) were asked to list the factors which in their opinion generally influenced the emigration of all Indian Jews, only 12 out of the 40 (30 per cent) who had made *aliyah* cited religious factors — whereas (as stated above) 80 per cent of that same group had claimed that the religious factors had been important in their own decision to settle in Israel. More than two-thirds of them (70 and 67.5 per cent) gave greater emphasis to political and economic factors respectively — factors which they had declared to be of much lesser importance in their own *aliyah*: 30 per cent of the immigrants interviewed in Israel cited political factors and 55 per cent referred to economic factors.

A similar pattern is revealed by the answers of the 117 respondents questioned in India: about three-quarters of them (77 per cent) stated

that Indian Jews generally would be influenced by economic factors when considering *aliyah* and 72 per cent cited political factors, while only 28 per cent of those interviewed in India and 30 per cent of those who had settled in Israel stated that religious factors would generally influence the members of all the main Jewish communities in India (the Bene Israel, the Cochinis, and the Baghdadis) to decide to go on *aliyah*.

How can this striking difference in the perceptions of one's own motivations and the motivations of fellow-Indian Jews to go on *aliyah* be explained? I believe that the answer lies in terms of the normative and the factual.¹²

The Normative

Jews throughout the Diaspora have prayed for centuries for the return to the Holy Land — 'Next year in Jerusalem'. Devout Jews generally consider it to be a religious imperative to live in *Eretz Israel*, the land of their ancestors which the Almighty had given them, according to the Bible. Consequently, it is not surprising that Indian Jews — whose own religious identity had been reinforced by the division of the Indian sub-continent into the Muslim state of Pakistan and the largely Hindu state of India, as well as by the Zionist movement — should stress religious factors as the main motivation for going on *aliyah*. To give more prominence to economic or political considerations would be to admit that, in their own case, materialistic values were more important than religious ideals, the mundane more important than the sacred. That may well be why they claimed that it was mainly religious fervour and love of Zion which would, and did, decide them to emigrate to Israel. A Bene Israel who had made *aliyah* said:

I came to Israel because I am religious and because our Jewish law teaches us that it is the religious duty of all Jews to return to the Promised Land. We have always prayed for the day when we will all be together in the Holy Land.

A Cochini immigrant stated:

While there are many members of the community, especially the poorer ones, who came to Israel to improve their economic situation, I and my family came because of religious sentiment. Even when we lived in India we never forgot our love of Zion. As soon as we got a chance to come to Israel, we came.

A Baghdadi who was interviewed in India stated:

I always wanted to go to Israel. Earlier I could not go because I had to look after my ailing mother, but now my mother is no more. I am an Orthodox Jew and want to fulfil the promise to return to Jerusalem. Also it is becoming harder and harder for us to maintain our religion in India. We cannot get a

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minyan [the quorum of ten Jewish male adults for communal prayers] without paying the people to come and it is not easy to observe *kashrut* here.

A Bene Israel who had remained in India told me:

My family and I want to leave India and go to Israel because of religious sentiment. Most of the [Indian] Jews have already left. We are economically comfortable here but for us Jews there is a calling, that is, to return to the Promised Land.

A Cochini who had also remained in India explained:

I stayed here in India till now because I like it here, but now I would like to go to Israel. It is becoming difficult for those of us who have remained here to continue practising our faith. Jewish religious life in India is slowly coming to a standstill in our community and I am an observant Jew. Besides, Israel has always been our spiritual homeland. All Jews at some point of their life want to return there and I want to fulfil that dream.

Clearly, respondents were aware that they would enhance their image by asserting that economic or political considerations were of lesser importance than the fulfilment of a religious imperative to settle in the Holy Land. Indeed, as is evident from the above statements, some of them were at pains to point out that it was neither poverty nor discrimination which would lead them to make *aliyah*. The motives which they cite are remarkably similar to some of those expressed by Canadian Jews who had settled in Israel; in the last issue of this *Journal* (vol. 32, no. 2 December 1990), Cyril Levitt and William Shaffir commented, when discussing the factors which had led their informants to decide to emigrate to Israel:¹³

Various reasons were given for the decision to go on *aliyah* but one which all the respondents mentioned was a desire to live in the Jewish State. They wanted to realise the long-standing dream of leading a Jewish life in a Jewish homeland.

The authors add that their informants did not say that they felt driven out of Canada because of rising levels of antisemitism or discrimination, but on the contrary spoke appreciatively about their native land. Moreover, they certainly did not wish to settle in Israel in order to raise their standard of living; they were aware that the opposite was likely to be true. One of them said:¹⁴

We knew that we wouldn't be able to live in Israel at the same standard we were living here . . . In fact, if we were really interested in making money, we knew that Israel wasn't the place to go. So, as far as economics were concerned, we were prepared to make sacrifices.

My Indian Jewish informants, while claiming that their own *aliyah* had been, or would be, undertaken mainly out of religious fervour and Zionist idealism, were not blinded to the fact that many of their

compatriots were likely to be influenced mainly by economic and political factors when considering emigration to Israel. Of course, it is possible that most of the 40 informants whom I interviewed in Israel had indeed been mainly motivated by religious fervour, that they neither deliberately over-emphasized the religious factors nor were deluding themselves about their actual motives for going on *aliyah*. Even if that were the case, however, it is not surprising that many of them believed that they differed from most Indian Jews, since the latter (like most emigrants from other countries and of other religions) could reasonably be presumed to wish to improve their standard of living in a country where they would not be a vulnerable minority group, without political power, and at the mercy of possible or threatened discriminatory practices.

The Factual

Economic Factors

When India was granted Independence in 1947, it was plunged into turmoil with the influx of a massive immigration of Hindus from newly-established Muslim Pakistan. The economic situation was precarious, with serious inflation; there was an acute shortage of housing as well as intense competition for job vacancies. The Indian Jews, many of whom had enjoyed privileged positions under British rule or in the service of Indian rajas, now had to compete with the local non-Jewish population on no more than equal terms.

Although India was in theory a secular state, religious affiliation acquired great importance in practice. After the communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims which had led to the partition of the sub-continent, the Hindus understandably tended to favour fellow-Hindus. None of my informants complained about antisemitism, but they did say that it became increasingly difficult for Jews to obtain satisfactory employment because preference was given to Hindus. They explained that although Indian law stipulated that all Indian citizens, whatever their race or creed, were to enjoy the same rights and privileges, employers in practice preferred to hire Hindus, if the latter's qualifications were of approximately the same level as those of non-Hindu applicants.

As stated above, in the eighteenth century the Bene Israel had begun to leave their villages in the Konkan area of Maharashtra to settle in the Bombay region. That exodus continued until the 1940s, but some Bene Israel remained in the rural areas of Maharashtra or retained the titles to their lands in that State. For a large number of them, land ownership was their main source of income. When new land laws were enacted, they were severely affected.

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Shalva Weil has commented:¹⁵

In 1949, the Government of Maharashtra passed the Bombay Tallugdari Tenure Abolition Act by which tenants were to be given full occupancy rights in the land held by landlords if they paid a limited fee. In 1955, the Bombay Act No. 1 abolished the rights of landlords altogether. Bene Israel landowners sold their land where they could and joined the ranks of the urban migrants. Unable to make a good living in Bombay, emigration to Israel seemed the better alternative. There, so reports went, immigrants were provided with housing, jobs, free blankets, a cash loan and other benefits.

Some of my informants referred to the financial difficulties which the new legislation engendered for members of their families or other Bene Israel landowners. They said that the position of the Bene Israel in the urban areas had also deteriorated; housing was a major problem in Bombay and most of my informants had to live in the suburbs and commute to work daily. Moreover, the cost of living was rising, while it was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain suitable employment. One informant living in India told me:

During the British rule, the Bene Israel had jobs. We were in the Civil Service, army, postal, and railways services. This changed with Independence — now there were more people looking for jobs. Obviously, there was a shortage of jobs. The standard of living changed. So many of our people left for Israel with the help of the Jewish Agency. They thought they would get good job opportunities and better housing there — so they left.

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, economic conditions in India worsened. There was rising inflation but a minimal rise in earnings, while affordable housing was deplorable and scarce. The Bene Israel generally found it increasingly difficult to manage on their wages. Only those few among them who were exceptionally well qualified or who had sizeable capital assets could maintain a satisfactory standard of living. Most members of the community therefore had to decide whether to remain in India in a state of deprivation or to emigrate to Israel, where they hoped that their situation would improve. During those decades, many thousands went on *aliyah*.

After Indian Independence and the economic and political instability which followed the departure of the British, the wealthier Baghdadi Jews decided to leave — not to emigrate to Israel but to settle mainly in the United Kingdom, where they had an economic basis and where the British way of life appealed to them. However, the many Baghdadis whom these men employed in their various commercial concerns did not have the resources to settle in Britain; one of them, who had remained in India commented:

We Baghdadis always mixed with our own people. Some of us worked in Baghdadi companies and we were happy. However, once the British left,

older people to adjust to living in a different country, but that the young should go to Israel to start a new life. On the other hand, some of the Baghdadis I interviewed in India said that the lack of adequate social welfare provisions for the old in India was a cause for concern and conditions in Israel would be more favourable.

Conclusion

The Jews of India lived harmoniously for centuries with the non-Jewish inhabitants of the country and some of them were granted special privileges by the local rulers and later by the British authorities. They retained their separate religious identity and supported the Zionist movement, but few of them emigrated to what was Palestine. The Independence of India in 1947 brought about political and economic changes which caused concern to the small minorities, including the Jewish groups.

Hindu nationalism and the acute tensions between Hindus and Muslims intensified the marginality of the Jews. However, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 gave them the possibility of realizing the Zionist dream, of settling in the Jewish State, where they elected to be part of the dominant Jewish majority and where they would have all the necessary facilities for practising their religion — observing the dietary laws and abstaining from work on the Sabbath and on religious holy days.

Most of my informants who had made *aliyah* stressed the importance of the religious factors in their own decision to emigrate. However, both they and those who still lived in India put more emphasis on economic and political considerations when they gave their opinions about the factors which would influence the *aliyah* of all the Jewish groups in India.

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NOTES

¹ See Margaret Abraham, *Ethnic Identity and Marginality: A Study of the Jews of India*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University, 1989; See also Joan G.

importance to religious factors as well as to economic considerations when discussing the *aliyah* of all Indian Jews.

Political factors

After Independence, the Indian Jewish minority could not expect the privileges and rewards which it had received from the British authorities or from the local maharajas. The introduction of an electoral system based on adult suffrage meant that numerically insignificant minorities would be rendered ineffective as political entities; the process of democratization necessarily had that result. Before Independence, there had been acute tension between India's Hindus and Muslims and the nationalist movement had acquired increasingly Hindu overtones. Shivaji, the seventeenth-century Hindu conqueror, was adopted as a heroic model for the victorious struggle for freedom. This affronted the Muslim nationalists, since Shivaji's struggle had been primarily against the Moguls.

The hostility between the Hindus and Muslims of India and the violence which ensued was viewed with great concern by the religious and the ethnic minorities of the country. After Independence, in the 1960s and the 1970s, there was an increasing trend for communal and caste affiliations to dominate the political process. Gussin has commented:¹⁷

... increasingly there has been a swing back to vernacular-speaking politicians, very much influenced by the traditional, communalist political ethic. These communal/traditional politicians have accepted the parliamentary system but are utilizing it primarily as a vehicle to raise their own and their caste status.

The Shiv Sena, a fundamentalist Hindu political party in Maharashtra (a region where some Bene Israel still lived) adopted a strongly militant dimension; it advocated the supremacy of the Hindus and directed most of its antagonism towards the local Muslim minority. In the late 1960s, the Shiv Sena's slogan was 'Maharashtra for Maharashtrians' — which meant 'for Hindus'.¹⁸

The Bene Israel, who clearly had a non-Hindu identity and who lived in a primarily Muslim-dominated area in Maharashtra, felt doubly excluded. Moreover, they had held in British India secure positions in the lower ranks of the administrative and political structure but now they were relegated to what appeared to be a precarious marginal position in Independent India. A Bene Israel who had emigrated to Israel commented:

The Shiva Sena is very powerful in Bombay. They have control over everything and want only their people to have good positions. This was most obvious during the late sixties. By then the problem of our status in Israel had improved and so many felt that we would be better off here.

His reference to the problem of the Bene Israel status in Israel is to the controversy regarding a marriage between a Bene Israel and a Jewish person who was not a member of the Bene Israel. Jean Roland has observed:¹⁹

Although the question of the Bene Israel's status as full Jews in regard to marriage with other Jews was raised in Israel in the 1950s by some Orthodox Jews, who feared that the Bene Israel's past ignorance of Jewish law relating to divorce and levirate marriage made them unacceptable, it was not until May 1961 that the controversy came to the fore. At that time — when the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbinate happened to be vacant — the Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Itzhak Nissim (from Iraq) refused to declare that the Bene Israel were acceptable as proper Jews for purposes of marriage. Individual rabbis could now refuse to perform marriages between Bene Israel and other Jews unless the Bene Israel party underwent ritual conversion.

The Bene Israel protested vigorously and organized mass demonstrations and hunger strikes in Israel. A Bene Israel scholar, Benjamin J. Israel, has commented that 'the slur of presumptive bastardy was cast on the whole community, rendering its members barred in perpetuity from marrying outside their own tainted group. This slur naturally reflected itself in all social dealings'.²⁰ Militant Bene Israel groups formed an Action Committee in Israel and a Bene Israel Purity Justification Committee in Bombay. Various compromises offered by the religious authorities of Israel were rejected by the Bene Israel. Finally, in August 1964 the Knesset passed Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's resolution 'that affirmed that the Knesset viewed the Bene Israel as Jews in all respects and with the same rights as all other Jews, including matters of personal status' and that 'called on the Chief Rabbinate to remove the causes of any feeling of discrimination among the Bene Israel'. The Chief Rabbinate did so a few days later.²¹ As a result, the Bene Israel emigrated to Israel in increasing numbers during the subsequent years, with the active encouragement of the Jewish Agency.

As noted above, the Baghdadi Jews throughout their stay in India kept apart from the native non-Jewish population and were demonstrably pro-British. When India attained Independence, the Hindu majority understandably viewed the Baghdadis as a foreign pro-colonial element. That Jewish group had lost its British protectors and had no close links with the new political masters. The Baghdadis in large numbers decided to leave India and settle elsewhere; the wealthiest segment went to Britain while others emigrated mainly to North America, Australia, and Israel. A small segment remained in India. Joan Roland states:²²

By the early 1980s, hardly eight hundred Baghdadi Jews remained in India. Some were engaged in domestic commerce. Many were elderly or retired

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professionals or businessmen who could not take their money out of India and/or who enjoyed a standard of living there that they could not maintain abroad. Others were indigent dependents of the Sassoon trust funds.

As for the Cochin Jews, they became uneasy after Independence because they suspected that political changes would have an adverse effect on their situation. A Cochini whom I interviewed in India said:

From the time that the Cochin Legislative Council was started in 1925, the Cochin Maharaja had a seat allotted for a Jewish representative. However, when the administration changed hands into the hands of the Congress ministry, this nomination of a Jew was cancelled . . . against the advice of the Cochin Maharaja. The protests of our community members had no impact on the decision of the ministry. This kind of situation had never happened before.

Other Cochini informants also referred with concern to the loss of a Jewish official representation. This was a warning signal that they could no longer rely on their traditional protection and privileges and many of them emigrated to Israel.

Social, Family, and Age Factors

The role of social factors in influencing *aliyah* was given the same weight by those informants who wished to emigrate to Israel as by those who were asked to evaluate their importance for all the Jews of India: 38.7 and 38.5 per cent respectively. The Cochinis and Baghdadis who had remained in India lamented in particular the present lack of cultural and social activities, which they attributed largely to the fact that their groups had been greatly depleted by emigration; there were fewer circumcisions, bar-mitzvahs, and weddings to celebrate. However, only two out of the 40 informants whom I interviewed in Israel cited the social factors; but just over half of them (21) claimed that family factors had led them to make *aliyah*. Frequent comments were that they had wished to join their relatives who had settled in the Holy Land because they wanted to live in close proximity to other members of their family. One person said that the decision to emigrate was taken because the children would have a better future in Israel. Such a focus on family life is not surprising in view of the fact that both Indian society and the Jewish people have greatly valued the unity and solidarity of the family.

Age was the factor least frequently cited as having an influence on *aliyah*. Not one of the 40 informants I interviewed in Israel referred to it in the context of their own emigration. On the other hand, a quarter of these same informants (10) said that age might be relevant when they were asked to give their opinion about the factors which would influence the *aliya* of all Indian Jews. These informants as well as those who had remained in India tended to comment that it was difficult for

things changed; the wealthy Baghdadis wanted to leave India. The company ownership gradually shifted to other people. There were new rules and regulations for promotions, benefits, etc. Jewish holy days were not observed. We are Orthodox Jews and this made it difficult. While we were not fired, many wanted to leave. Those who felt that they had better economic chances in Israel migrated there.

As for the Cochin Jews, economic conditions also led some of the less affluent among them to emigrate to Israel. These were mainly the households of small shopkeepers and petty traders; some of them had not been prosperous under British rule. In 1922, eight elders of two Cochin synagogues wrote to the President of the English Zionist Federation in London to seek help about resolving communal disputes. In their letter, they confessed that they had become 'a very backward' community, adding: 'Most of our people are illiterate and ignorant'.¹⁶ After India had achieved Independence, matters did not improve for the poorer Cochins. Moreover, the landowners among them were, like their Bene Israel correligious, adversely affected by new legislation: the Kerala state government enacted land ownership laws in the 1960s which diminished their income. One Cochin informant living in India told me:

For the poorer Cochins, it made economic sense to go to Israel. Here, many of them are making very little money. Some had a small area in their own homes where they would sell eggs, bananas, etc. Not only this, they were Orthodox. For them, going to Israel meant better economic opportunities as well as a chance to live in the Holy Land. And as you know, they have improved their standard of living. They worked hard and now they have better houses, a fridge, TV — things which they could never have got here. They are economically better off than most of us who have remained here.

Another Cochini, whom I interviewed in Israel, said:

There is no doubt that a lot of the Indian Jews came to Israel to make a better life for themselves, especially among the Bene Israel and the poorer Cochins. It was not that they did not like India or were discriminated against but because they heard that Israel gave immigrants jobs, loans, and houses. Religion also played a role, but it was not the most important reason. Here, in Israel, there are many who are less Orthodox than those in India.

Although economic factors were very important motives for going on *aliyah*, it must be stressed here that the Cochins were renowned throughout the centuries for their piety, for their meticulous adherence to Jewish religious principles and practices. In the quotations above, the Cochini informants spontaneously referred to the religious motivation as an additional factor in the decision to settle in Israel. Moreover, I noted when analysing the responses of all my informants in India and in Israel that the Cochins were the only group to give great

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² See Shirley Berry Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel. A Comprehensive Inquiry and Sourcebook*, published by Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1988, pp. 293-95.

³ See Roland, op. cit. in Note 1 above, p. 5.

⁴ See David G. Mandelbaum, 'Social Stratification among the Jews of Cochin in India and in Israel' in *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, vol. 17, no. 2, December 1975, pp. 166-69.

⁵ See Strizower, op. cit. in Note 1 above (*Exotic Jewish Communities*), pp. 53-54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

⁷ See Roland, op. cit. in Note 1 above, pp. 18-19, 157.

⁸ Carl Mark Gussin, *The Bene Israel: Politics, Religion and Systematic Change*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University, 1972, p. 74.

⁹ Roland, op. cit. in Note 1 above, p. 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82, 151.

¹¹ See Antony Lerman et al., eds., *The Jewish Communities of the World. A Contemporary Guide*, fourth edn, London, 1989, p. 78. See also *The Jewish Year Book 1987*, London, 1987, p. 150.

¹² See Ephraim H. Mizruchi and Robert Perucci, 'Norm Qualities and Deviant Behaviour' in Ephraim H. Mizruchi, ed., *The Substance of Sociology*, New York, 1973.

¹³ See Cyril Levitt and William Shaffir, 'Aliyah and Return Migration of Canadian Jews: Personal Accounts of Incentives and of Disappointed Hopes' in *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, vol. 32, no. 2, December 1990 (pp. 95-106), p. 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁵ Shalva Weil, *Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod, Israel: A Study of the Persistence of Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sussex, 1977, p. 62.

¹⁶ Fischel, 'Early Zionism in India', op. cit. in Note 1 above, pp. 327-28.

¹⁷ Gussin, op. cit. in Note 8 above, p. 77.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁹ Roland, op. cit. in Note 1 above, pp. 249-50.

²⁰ Israel, op. cit. in Note 1 above, p. 89.

²¹ Roland, op. cit. in Note 1 above, pp. 250, 251.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 242.