
'Indian Money', Intra-Shī'ī Polemics, and the Bohra and Khoja Pilgrimage Infrastructure in Iraq's Shrine

Cities, 1897–1932¹



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Abstract

Using sources in Arabic, Gujarati, Ottoman, Persian and Urdu, this article examines the foundation of Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage institutions straddling western India and Iraq's Shī'ī shrine cities between 1897 and 1932. As manifestations of 'locative piety', these institutions were an outgrowth of the commercial capital Bohra and Khoja merchants had acquired in Indian Ocean trade over the previous half century, and the distinct caste and sectarian identities this wealth augmented. The Bohra and Khoja (both Twelver and Ismā'īlī) mercantile and religious elites supplied their constituents with a well-ordered pilgrimage to Iraq, certainly by the standards of contemporary Hajj. To achieve this, community-run institutional nodes in Karachi, Bombay and the Shī'ī shrine cities were integrated into wider transport, administrative, and financial infrastructures connecting India and Iraq. Yet at a time when Najaf and Karbala's economic and religious fortunes were plagued by sectarianism, political upheavals and divisions among the mujtahids, the growing presence of western Indian Shī'īs in the shrine cities was fiercely condemned by some Twelver Shī'ī clerics. One of their number, Muḥammad Karīm Khurāsānī, published a substantial polemic against the Bohras and Khojas in 1932, signalling how these pilgrimage infrastructures worked to exacerbate intra-Shī'ī disputes.

Keywords: Iraq; India; Shī'ī Islam; Bohra; Khoja; Twelver Shī'ī; Ismā'īlī Shī'ī; pilgrimage

Introduction²

The title of this contribution echoes two excellent articles written by Juan Cole (1986) and Meir Litvak (2001) on the role of 'Indian money' in shaping the institutional contours of

¹Many people provided comments on this article at various stages in the production line. I am especially grateful to my three anonymous reviewers for their incisive comments on the first draft, which prompted me to substantially rethink the piece and add a variety of new material. My gratitude also extends to Frederick Walter Lorenz, Pauline Lewis, Kaleb Herman Adney, Roy Bar Sadeh and Sohaib Baig. Yusuf Mallu deserves special thanks for help in reading some of the material studied here. I am also grateful to Sarah Ansari for providing exceptional editorial assistance.

²The transliteration method adopted here depends on the language of the text being discussed. For example, while the transliteration qaum (community) is used when it appears in a Persian or Urdu text, when the term is

Twelver Shī'ism in late Ottoman Iraq.³ Those studies were respectively interested in the religious controversies stoked by Indian remittances to Najaf and Karbala from the mid-eighteenth century, and the Oudh Bequest, a massive endowment founded in 1850 by the Twelver Shī'ī rulers of the Princely State of Awadh. Overseen by British officials in India and Iraq, the bequest doled out funds to Shī'ī clerics in Iraq's shrine cities and was a central prop in the regional political economy until the end of colonial rule. But whereas Cole and Litvak focused on tensions among Indian Twelver Shī'īs, the *mujtahids*, and British colonial officials, here the concern is with the various Bohra and Khoja Shī'ī pilgrimage institutions connecting western India and the 'Atabāt-i 'Alīyāt (the "sublime thresholds") in the late Ottoman and British Mandate/early Hashemite periods. These institutions facilitated the pilgrimage, relocation and burial of Twelver and Ismā'īlī Shī'īs from western India to the matrix of sacred sites in Najaf, Karbala, Kazimain, Kufa, and Samarra associated with the first six Shī'ī *imāms*.

The western Indian Shī'ī communities studied here include two Ismā'īlī communities — the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Khojas (better known as the followers of the Aghā Khāns) and the Ṭayyībī Musta'īlī Ismā'īlī Bohras (popularly called the Dāwūdī Bohras). In addition, the influential constituency of Twelver Shī'ī Khojas, some of whom were formerly Nizārī Ismā'īlīs, are central protagonists here.⁴ Among the Khojas, priority is given in this article to the Twelver Khojas because of their more concerted interest in establishing pilgrimage institutions in the shrine cities. As for the Ismā'īlī Khojas, although pilgrimage to the shrine cities was demoted on occasion by the Aghā Khān III, the community continued to visit Iraq, and the expansion of Ismā'īlī foundations in Iraq after 1918 strengthened their presence. They are studied here partially as a foil to the Bohra and Twelver Khojas, but also because the religious and economic history of all three groups was so intertwined. Following a survey of Bohra and Khoja economic and religious activity in Iraq and the wider Indian Ocean from 1850–1918, this article first examines, through Gujarati and Urdu sources, the operation of the Bohra *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* (founded in Karachi in 1897). It then turns to Twelver Khoja institutions such as the *musāfirkhānas* (hostels) founded in Iraq by community

found in a Gujarati source *kom* is instead utilised. Likewise, when a Gujarati work is cited, the transliteration *Dallul Hujjāj* is used, rather than the proper Arabic transliteration *Dallīl al-Hujjāj*. However, in the case of the Bohra *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*, I have adopted Arabic transliteration as this more closely approximates the organisation's name in Arabic, English and Urdu sources than the Gujarati *Phayje/Faije Husenī*. Transliteration of Gujarati and Urdu terms is done according to the Library of Congress system. Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and Persian words are transliterated according to the system used in the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (*IJMES*). Proper names of individuals are transliterated throughout, with Gujarati transliterations used only with regards to Bohra and Khoja authors. Finally, it should be remembered that Gujarati spellings have changed substantially over the past century and a half and I have not changed historical usages to match today's conventions.

³Juan R. I. Cole, "'Indian money' and the Shi'i shrine cities of Iraq, 1786–1850", *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, 4 (1986), pp. 461–80; Meir Litvak, 'Money, Religion, and Politics: The Oudh Bequest in Najaf and Karbala', 1850–1903', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, 1 (Feb., 2001), pp. 1–21.

⁴Here I will refer to the Ṭayyībī Musta'īlīs as Bohras, and differentiate between Nizārī and Ithnā 'Asharī Khojas by calling the former Ismā'īlī Khojas and the latter Twelver Khojas. The first six *imāms* are revered by Ismā'īlī and Twelver Shī'a alike. Where the two depart is over who was the rightful successor of the sixth *imām*, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. The Ismā'īlīs believe the successor was Ismā'il b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (hence their name), while Imāmī Shī'a believe that because Ismā'il predeceased his father, Mūsā ibn Ja'far al-Kāzīm became the true heir. Over time the various branches of Ismā'īlīs developed competing interpretations of the *imāmate*, law and theology, and experienced distinct historical trajectories. For more on these matters see John Norman Hollister, *The Shi'a of India* (New Delhi, 1979); Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 2007) and the various articles on Ismā'īlīs in *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

merchants, and the *Anjuman-i Faiẓ-i Panjatanī* (established in Bombay in 1912). A final section concludes with an analysis of a lengthy anti-Bohra and Khoja polemic written in Persian by a Twelver Shī'ī *mujtahid* and published in Najaf in 1932, the same year Britain's Mandate in Iraq ended.

As argued here, the construction of Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage infrastructures between India and Iraq supplied a new paradigm of trans-national, caste-centric Shī'ī pilgrimage in each group. Mass pilgrimage was itself made possible by the mobilisation of community wealth and the integration of community institutions into colonial administrative and transport networks. Bohra and Khoja success in crafting this infrastructure increased their presence as never before in the sacred terrain revered by all Shī'a. It represented an iteration of what has been called "locative piety", whereby "new spaces of sacerdotal and soteriological significance" were transposed from the homeland to foreign territories.⁵ Here the meaning of locative piety refers more specifically to the Bohra and Khoja effort to embed India-based pilgrimage institutions within the religious economy of southern Iraq. For centuries, Bohras and Khojas had visited sacred sites in India, Yemen, Egypt, Arabia and Iran. But in line with other so-called "New Muslims" — a contemporary Urdu term reserved for the Bohras, Khojas, and Memons — their sacred geography was centred on places singular to their history and dedicated to their own religious dignitaries, with several locations in Gujarat of special prominence. The shrines to the first six imams in the *'Atabāt-i 'Alīyāt* were arguably a marginal node in the wider constellation of Bohra and Khoja religious life until around 1900, when overseas pilgrimage to Iraq and the Haramayn grew in importance. This gave both groups an increasingly public, albeit controversial, profile in the leading pilgrimage sites of the Islamic world. While generating novel itineraries of Bohra and Khoja devotional life, the institutional demands of locative piety guaranteed that each group's prominence in the urban fabric of Karachi, Bombay and other ports of the Indian Ocean was replicated in Iraq.

The Bohras' and Khojas' pivot to Iraq at the turn-of-the-century was dependent upon three interconnected processes dating to the mid-nineteenth century: the emergence of differentiated western Indian Shī'ī communities as a consequence of both strengthened religious hierarchies and the proliferation of sectarian polemics, associations and kinship networks in the Indian Ocean; the elevation of the proprietors of Shī'ī commercial firms into trans-imperial economic players and functionaries of colonial civic orders from Zanzibar to Hong Kong; and, in an echo of developments charted by John Slight for Hajj,⁶ the ability of Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage entities to integrate themselves into the transport and administrative systems linking British India and Ottoman/Mandate Iraq. This latter development assumed several forms, including membership on the influential Port Haj Committees of Bombay and Karachi.⁷

With the colonial nexus playing a significant role as it did in the studies by Cole and Litvak, this period thus marked another moment in which 'Indian money' transformed the religious landscape of Iraq's Shī'ī shrine cities. Nevertheless, several factors distinguished this phase from that studied by Cole and Litvak. The most obvious difference was that from

⁵Chirayu Thakkar, "Transposing *tirtha*: Understanding religious reforms and locative piety in early modern Hinduism", *International Journal of Dharma Studies* 5, 14 (2017).

⁶John Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj: 1865–1956* (Cambridge, 2015).

⁷*Report of the Haj Inquiry Committee* (Calcutta, 1931).

1918–32 Iraq was a British Mandate, which intensified colonial management of Iraq's pilgrimage traffic and eased Bohra and Khoja attempts to construct a pilgrimage infrastructure. Even so, the singular constitution of the Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure was of equal relevance in differentiating this age of 'Indian money' from its earlier iteration. For one, the institutional underpinnings of Bohra and Khoja money differed from the inland Twelver Shī'ī religious endowments in India that remitted funds to Iraq, the *khūms* levy that Twelver Shī'ī faithful allocated to choice scholars, and the substantial private donations of Arab, Iranian and Indian Twelver merchants. The circulation of this money undoubtedly reshaped the infrastructure of the shrine cities, but did not translate into a well-supervised, material apparatus that oversaw the pilgrim's journey from India to Iraq. By contrast, the Bohra and Khoja trusts headquartered in Bombay and Karachi were able to translate economic power into a trans-imperial pilgrimage infrastructure made up of both religious and mercantile entities. Besides pious endowments, the portfolios of these institutions included the assets of commercial firms, individual *jama'at* (congregations), civil associations, *musāfirkhānas* and *madrasas*. Print capitalism further enabled the functioning of the system, as a new breed of Gujarati pilgrimage manuals published by Bohra and Khoja authors helped pilgrims navigate these itineraries.

As several contemporary observers attest, with all this infrastructural density at the pilgrim's disposal, the experience of a Bohra or Khoja travelling to Iraq from Amreli or Benares was demonstrably unlike that of non-Khoja Twelver Shī'ī journeying to Iraq from Lucknow or Hyderabad. The latter were at the mercies of local accommodation, provisions and transport throughout their journey. While there was a heightened concern among Shī'ī communities in Iran and India about the exigencies of travel to Iraq, and charitable entities were created to mitigate the costs of pilgrimage, Twelver Shī'a did not enjoy the assistance of robust community organisations available to Bohras and Khojas.⁸ One Twelver Shī'ī notable travelling from Hyderabad to Iraq in the 1920s echoed many a contemporary Indian observer when two weeks into his pilgrimage he wrote "Up until now, only the administration [*intīzām*] of the Khoja and Bohra *jama'at* merit excessive praise, and, in this specific instance, are worthy of emulation [*qābil-i taqlīd*]."⁹ British officials took the prospect of emulation one step further. One admirer was John Gordon Lorrimer, who managed the Oudh Bequest and Indian pilgrimage traffic in the years before the First World War. In one instance, Lorrimer marvelled at the Bohras' work in the shrine cities and acknowledged that "the Oudh Bequest committees might well follow in the [Bohras'] steps by providing suitable hostels for ordinary Shi'ahs [*sic*] at the principal places, and by furnishing guides to interpret for them, make their travelling arrangements, and protect from the thousand and one rapacious harpies to whom they at present fall an easy prey".¹⁰

Although Iranian and Indian Twelver Shī'ī pilgrims utilised the infrastructures generated by various state entities and merchant investment in the region, Bohras and Khojas alone

⁸With that said, *Faiẓ-i Raẓāviyya* subsequent decades saw the further expansion of such organisations in India and Pakistan.

⁹Sayyid Muslim Raẓa, *Ruznāma-i Safar-i 'Irāq-o-Īrān* (Hyderabad, 1336 [1920]), p. 18.

¹⁰IOR/L/PS/10/77, File 1290/1905 'Mesopotamia: Oudh Bequest' 56r]. By his own account, Lorrimer himself used a stipend of Rs. 200 to "make arrangements of this sort at Kadhimain, Karbala, Najaf and Samarah" for Indian pilgrims.

enjoyed the added benefit of a relatively streamlined pilgrimage, with community wealth acting as institutional underwriter from India to Iraq. Nonetheless, there were also salient differences between the Bohra and the Khoja pilgrimage circuits, as kinship and caste solidarities distinguished each community from the other, and from other Shī'a in the shrine cities. Caste identity was by no means all-encompassing, but it did function as a primary boundary mechanism, often in surprising ways. In addition, whereas the Bohra network was run by a centralised committee overseen by the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*, Khoja pilgrimage infrastructures were divided between rival Twelver and Ismā'īlī Khoja factions. For the growing constituency of Twelver Khojas in particular, increased pilgrimage to Iraq's shrine cities became a means to deepen their links with Twelver *mujtahids* and reorient their sacred geography away from the Ismā'īlī *imām*, whose authority many of them had only recently renounced. In that sense, locative piety was held up as an alternative to the embodied piety centred on the figure of the Aghā Khān: With that said, Twelver Khoja enthusiasm for visiting the shrine cities was no guarantee that their caste affiliation was diluted in a wider Twelver melting pot. Just the opposite was the case: Twelver Khojas regularly invoked caste to keep non-Khoja Twelvers from using their pilgrimage institutions in both India and Iraq. But when compared to the Bohra *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*, evidence suggests that Twelver Khoja institutions, though presenting several advantages to community pilgrims, ultimately lacked the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*'s organisational depth.

Yet equally compelling for present purposes is that, as with the Oudh Bequest studied by Cole and Litvak, the expansion of Bohra and Khoja institutions in Iraq was a source of conflict with the local Twelver Shī'ī religious hierarchy. Unlike the money sent annually from the long-deposed rulers of Awadh—which nonetheless caused considerable resentment among the Twelver Shī'ī learned hierarchy despite the avowedly *imāmī* credentials of Awadh's royal family—the burgeoning Bohra and Khoja presence in Iraq's shrine cities was regarded by some local *mujtahids* as a threat to Shī'ī Islam. To these clerics, the Bohras and Khojas were heretical sects “who adorn themselves in the garments of the Shī'a” and whose presence in the shrine cities was only growing “at a time when the armies of Satan have invaded the abode of faith”. Those words were written in 1932 by Muḥammad Karīm Khurāsānī, a prominent Twelver Shī'ī scholar in the holy city of Najaf. His biting 364-page polemic against the Nizārī and Ṭayyibī Musta'īlī Ismā'īlīs, titled *Kitāb Tanbīhāt al-Jalīyah fī Kashf Asrār al-Bāṭinīyya fī Tārīkh al-Aghākhānīyya wa-l-Buhra* (The Book of Manifest Recriminations in Revealing the Secrets of the Esoteric Sects in the History of the Aghā Khānīs and Bohras) speaks to the swirl of competition and recrimination among various Shī'ī groups seeking in their own irreconcilable ways to speak authoritatively for Shī'ī Islam.¹¹

Displaying a deep familiarity with medieval Ismā'īlī history and the chronicles of the leading Mamluk-era Sunni historians of the Fatimids, Khurāsānī also evaluated the Bohras and Khojas through the prism of Muslim intellectual movements that had emerged in the Middle East and South Asia from the mid-nineteenth century. These included earlier offshoots of Twelver Shī'ism such as Bābīsm and Bahā'ism, but also the Ahmadiyya and the Sudanese Mahdi. As shown below, when read against the backdrop of fierce Gujarati polemics

¹¹Muḥammad Karīm Khurāsānī, *Kitāb Tanbīhāt al-Jalīyah fī Kashf Asrār al-Bāṭinīyya fī Tārīkh al-Aghākhānīyya wa-l-Buhra* (Najaf, 1932).

exchanged between Twelver and Ismā'īlī Khojas in this period, Khurāsānī's diatribe was perhaps the most fulsome statement of the temporally episodic and geographically disparate conflicts between Ismā'īlī and Twelver Shī'īs in the Indian Ocean from the 1860s onwards. At the same time, the polemic suggested that the Shī'ī *mujtahids* were uninformed of the precise fissures prevailing among western Indian Shī'a, and sometimes failed to distinguish their own Twelver congregants among the Khojas. Even so, Khurāsānī cast his eye far and wide, even to Bombay and Khorasan, where he also detected an Ismā'īlī assault on Twelver Shī'ism. Above all else, Khurāsānī's treatise verified that the advent of Bohra and Khoja infrastructures in the shrine cities had altered the public complexion of Shī'ī Islam in southern Iraq, aggravating perceptions among the *mujtahids* that their monopoly over the contours of Shī'ī Islam was at risk.

Ismā'īlī and Twelver Shī'ī Commerce and Religious Activism in the Indian Ocean, 1850–1914

While several scholars have examined how Shī'ī Muslims in Iraq, Lebanon and India created sectarian institutions in the interwar period to strengthen elective ties and obtain organisational autonomy from Sunni Muslims, far less attention has been reserved for internal stresses and strains within modern Shī'ī Islam.¹² This applies especially to the rich literature on 'the other Shī'īs', that is non-Twelver communities.¹³ An outstanding special issue in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*—which later became an edited volume—was, with the exception of one piece, less concerned with Ismā'īlī–Twelver Shī'ī interactions than with the equally worthy task of reconstructing the diverse strands within Indian Shī'ism and their international articulations.¹⁴ Likewise, while recent years have seen first-rate studies on the elaboration of a trans-imperial infrastructure for Hajj from the mid-nineteenth century, little attention has been paid to Shī'ī infrastructures as such, or the pilgrimage to the shrine cities.¹⁵ What is more, while exceptional studies of Karbala as an object of memory for South Asian Twelver Shī'a have appeared, there remains little sense of the physical mechanisms of pilgrimage from India to Iraq.¹⁶

Finally, most studies of the Bohras and Khojas tend to treat them in isolation, and rely largely on either contemporary ethnographic observation or colonial/English-language records.¹⁷ Scholarship has benefited enormously from these contributions, but unfortunately historians have overlooked the many unstudied Gujarati texts published throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Bohra and Khoja authors.¹⁸ These represent a

¹²Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism between Pakistan and the Middle East* (Durham, 2019); Justin Jones, *Shia Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2011); Max Weiss, *Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, 2010).

¹³Alessandro Monsutti and Farian Sabahi (eds.), *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia* (Bern, 2007).

¹⁴Justin Jones and Ali Usman Qasmi (eds.), *The Shi'a in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge, 2015).

¹⁵Michael Christopher Low, *Imperial Mecca: Ottoman Arabia and the Indian Ocean Hajj* (New York, 2020); Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*.

¹⁶Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (Oxford, 2006).

¹⁷Marc van Grondelle, *The Ismailis in the Colonial Era: Modernity, Empire and Islam* (New York, 2009); Soumen Mukherjee, *Ismailism and Islam in Modern South Asia: Community and Identity in the Age of Religious Internationals* (Cambridge, 2017).

¹⁸Of course, the exception is the literature devoted to the Khoja *ginans*.

hitherto largely untapped resource for the study of Islam in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Rather than quaint expressions of an 'Indic' Islam-set-apart, these works had significant consequences for the character of trans-regional Shī'ī Islam in the early twentieth century—as did the foundation of Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure in Iraq. These texts reveal that Bohras and Khojas (Twelver and Ismā'īlī alike) engaged with a range of Islamic texts—some written by those from outside their community—and supply an unrivalled perspective into how pilgrimage to Iraq became a leitmotif for the articulation of a cohesive, if particularistic, vision of Shī'ī Islam in each group. As a rubric for studying processes by which religious institutions founded in India were exported to Iraq, locative piety supplies a way of reimagining Bohra and Khoja Islam beyond the rigid paradigms of Indic/Arab Islam or that of self-contained communities standing outside of broader currents of global Islam.¹⁹

That new paradigm also requires reimagining prevailing narratives about Islam and capitalism. To a degree that far outweighed their comparatively small numbers, the multi-form Shī'ī communities who hailed from the patchwork territories that now make up Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and who comprised a many-centuries admixture of foreign emigres and local converts, were conspicuous international economic and religious players in the period under review. Their outsized presence was aided in no small measure by the fact that they boasted a disproportionate number of the colonial era's leading Muslim commercial firms. With some exceptions, in contrast to the Shī'a of the United Provinces, Bihar and Bengal, the Bohras and Khojas of western India became leading merchant actors in the Indian Ocean from the mid-nineteenth century. To be sure, there was a sizable contingent of non-Khoja Twelver Shī'ī merchants in the environs of Calcutta, and Twelver Shī'ī institutions like the Hughli *imāmbārah* boasted Shī'ī merchants as trustees and acted as a creditor in the local economy, but was, like the Oudh Bequest, supervised by the colonial state.²⁰

But despite these examples, the outsized predominance of three mercantile communities from western India—the Sunni Memons and the Shī'ī Khojas and Bohras—in modern company formation has been acknowledged since the 1970s, with several arguments of varying quality put forward for this.²¹ Instead of finding answers in primordial traits or 'Hindu' inheritance practices as is sometimes assumed,²² the best explanation for this divergence is found in institutional differences among Muslim populations. The Bohras, Khojas, and Memons all exemplified a common formula in which they were able to enmesh themselves in the colonial civic order, leverage their aberrant status in the colonial legal system to obtain

¹⁹Ashgar Ali Engineer, *The Muslim Communities of Gujarat: An Exploratory Study of Bohras, Khojas, and Memons* (New Delhi, 1989).

²⁰Ashraf al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i muḥsinīyya* (Calcutta, 1893).

²¹Hanna Papanek, 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim Separatism, Entrepreneurship, and Partial Modernization', *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 21, 1 (Oct., 1972), pp. 1–32; Claude Markovits, 'Muslim Businessman in South Asia c. 1900–1950, in Claude Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Era* (Basingstoke and New York, 2008), pp. 105–127.

²²H. Damodaran, *India's New Capitalists: Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern Nation* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 297; Timur Kuran and Anantdeep Singh, 'Economic Modernization in Late British India: Hindu-Muslim Differences', Economic Research Initiatives at Duke (ERID) Working Paper 53 (2010), pp. 1–50; Anantdeep Singh, 'The Divergence of the Economic Fortunes of Hindus and Muslims in British India: A Comparative Institutional Analysis' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2008).

particular privileges, and fuse their homegrown caste institutions with modern banks and firms. The homegrown caste institution common to all three groups was the *jamā'at*, which functioned as the principal, though by no means exclusive, economic and religious pivot of community life.

What is clear is that Bohra and Khoja merchant capital—as vested in the *jamā'at*—had the effect of intensifying intra-Shī'ī sectarian identities through a dual process of horizontal differentiation and vertical integration. While many excellent studies on Indian Ocean commerce in recent years have emphasised the trans-religious, often 'cosmopolitan' moral economies undergirding business enterprise,²³ that same literature has tended to miss the many instances in which commerce functioned as a motor accelerating intra-group sectarian conflict. The Bohra and Khoja experience offers one such example in which merchants assumed a central role in not only producing and exacerbating religious conflict, but also in strengthening the position of community religious elites, least of all the latter's oversight over geographically dispersed congregations in the Indian Ocean. This was distinct from the parallel process in which a Twelver Shī'ī sectarian identity was elaborated in colonial north India. There, as Justin Jones has shown, sustained conflicts among Twelver Shī'ī figures—including over the management of economic resources as vested in pious endowments—significantly molded the public character of Twelver Shī'ism, and intensified the sectarian encounter with strains of Sunni Islam in the subcontinent.²⁴ But given their constituent members' presence as merchant actors from Zanzibar to Japan, Bohra and Khoja struggles were played out on a wider geographic canvas. At stake were several antagonistic notions of religious authority, with newly assertive Ismā'īlī religious leaders in particular presenting a more integrated model of community hierarchy than that associated with Twelver Shī'ism, at least when bereft of explicit political patronage.

As Jonah Blank has remarked, whereas Twelver Shī'īs have a multitude of competing *mujtahids* from whom to choose, Ismā'īlīs “take their guidance from a single apex cleric”.²⁵ The Ismā'īlī Bohra and Khoja religious leadership oversaw a plethora of *jamā'at* scattered across the Indian Ocean, each possessing their own accountants, treasurers and committees that transmitted funds annually to Bombay and Karachi, and which ensured proper adherence to religious practice, settled disputes and acted as capital pools in their own right.²⁶ (Twelver Khojas and Sunnis from both the Khoja and Memon communities also benefited from the *jamā'at* to manage commercial and religious affairs, but they lacked a single 'apex' cleric that fused these entities together.²⁷) For both Ismā'īlī Bohras and Khojas, this had distinct institutional consequences, arguably in terms of both religious *and* commercial organisation. With that said, the installation of a single apex cleric among both the Ismā'īlī Bohras and Khojas was never an organic process, but one rife with conflict. And even the institution

²³Gagan Sood, *India and the Islamic Heartlands: An Eighteenth-Century World of Circulation and Exchange* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 32.

²⁴Justin Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2012).

²⁵Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Chicago, 2001), p. 283.

²⁶For example, the Khoja *jamā'at* in Zanzibar remitted Rs. 60,000 to Bombay as early as the 1870s when the Khoja population on the island was still relatively small. 'Great Britain and Zanzibar', in *British and Foreign State Papers, 1871–1872*, Vol. LXII (London, 1877), p. 1094.

²⁷*An Account of the Khoja Sunnat Jamaat Bombay* (Karachi, 1969).

of the *jamā'at*—with its rigid emphasis on obeying community norms and proclivity to fracture into sectarian groupings — was no guarantee of economic success.

The paradox was that sectarian tensions among the Shī'a of western India occurred in groups that had deep links with non-Muslim capital, who participated actively in a multitude of international pan-Islamic charitable campaigns (including nominally 'Sunni' ones), and who were prominent in All-India Muslim causes. Nonetheless, this preoccupation with internal boundaries over and above external opponents is in keeping with what scholars of religious polemics have recognised in recent years, especially those who work on nineteenth and twentieth-century South Asia.²⁸ Surprisingly, little evidence appears of Bohra and Khoja conflict with each other, and if contemporary Twelver Khoja accounts are any indication, Khojas did possess at least a passing literacy in the Bohras' religious doctrines and history, but rarely, if ever, presented these in the form of a heresiology.²⁹ Ismā'īlī and Twelver Khoja authors alike were far keener to refute the heresies propounded by their own constituents than to engage in polemics with other Muslim communities.³⁰ Unsurprisingly then, almsgiving and philanthropy became prominent sources of friction among Khoja constituencies. What was at stake was not mere considerations of mammon, but rather what should serve as the magnet of community devotion as expressed in monetary donations. As shown below, to many newly-minted Twelver Khoja merchants, building a *musāfirikhāna* in Bombay, Karachi, Zanzibar or Iraq was a means to express, in brick and mortar, their new Twelver Shī'ī dispensation. It was a gesture of locative piety.

For all the similarities, religious conflicts played out quite differently among the various Bohra and Khoja communities. Arguably, this had implications for the varied position the shrine cities of Iraq held in the pilgrimage itineraries of Ismā'īlī Khojas, on the one hand, and Bohras and Twelver Khojas, on the other. In contrast to the Khojas, with their fracturing among various Sunni and Shī'ī constituencies, the Dāwūdī Bohras remained a far more integrated community under the authority of a single religious head in the form of the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq* (cleric of absolute authority), the earthly vicars of the *imāms* who Bohras believed had entered into the state of occultation from the twelfth century.³¹ Based on the current state of historical knowledge concerning the Bohras, one can say tentatively that, unlike the Aghā Khān, the Bohra religious leadership was able to allay any serious threats to its leadership—with the exception of periodic disputes over the 1840 succession and the 1897 schism of the Mehdī Baghwālās³²—until the ascent of a reformist group in the interwar period, which still never threatened the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*'s control over religious matters.³³ The cardinal objection of that group was the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*'s arrogation of community assets to his own person, very far from the Twelver Khoja opposition to the Aghā Khān's claim to be visible *imām*.

Like their Nizārī Ismā'īlī counterparts, the succession of Bohra *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*s received regular donations from the faithful throughout the Indian Ocean, and substantially

²⁸SherAli Thareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN., 2020).

²⁹For example, compare how the Twelver Khoja polemicist, Edaljī Dhanajī Kābā, writes about the Bohras and Ismā'īlī Khojas: Edaljī Dhanajī Kābā, *Khojā Komnī Tavārīkh Kōmnī Tavārīkh* (Amreli, 1912), pp. 136–148.

³⁰This is not to deny that such polemics exist, only that the preponderance of Bohra and Khoja works concern the policing the boundaries of the *jamā'at*.

³¹Jamel Velji, 'Bohra', in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, (ed.) Judan Eduardo Campo (New York, 2009), p. 111.

³²Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe*, pp. 49–51.

³³Of course, religious conflicts among Bohras in earlier centuries had led to the emergence of separate 'Alavī and Sulaimānī Bohra communities.

benefitted from the meteoric rise of Bohra commercial firms throughout the region. This link between commercial capital and religious leadership was something that piqued the interest of late nineteenth-century Indian Sunni Muslim historians, even if they discovered that little else could be known about the Bohras' internal history, save that gleaned from medieval Sunni historians.³⁴ The expansion of Bohra merchant fortunes from that period did not prompt the fragmentation of the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*'s authority as it did among the Khojas, but, for a time at least, strengthened links between Bohra communities in the diaspora and the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*'s office in Bombay. By the First World War, the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*, though in no way insulated from threats to his authority by select members of the religious hierarchy and mercantile laity, stood at the apex of a vertical hierarchy that integrated the panoply of *jamā'ats* established by Bohras from Singapore to Galle and Basra.³⁵ The tenure of Ṭāhir Saif al-Dīn (r. 1915–65) would only strengthen this hold further, not least by his acquisition of direct administration over the religious institutions that facilitated pilgrimage to the shrine cities. This particular *dā'ī al-muṭlaq* visited Iraq on several occasions, as commemorative volumes published in his honour lavishly document.³⁶

For the Khojas, meanwhile, the famous Aghā Khān Case in 1866 was merely the catalyst for a series of strained, sometimes bloody, intra-caste religious confrontations that persisted into the interwar period.³⁷ As Nile Green has shown, the resurgence of neo-Ismā'īlī currents stemmed in large measure from Bombay's meteoric rise as the premier industrial metropolis of the Indian Ocean.³⁸ The growing commercial and political power exercised by the Nizārī Ismā'īlī religious and mercantile elite very soon expanded to east Africa and Burma, but conjured up acute discord with Twelver Shī'ī clerics and communities. Nizārī Ismā'īlī fundraising capabilities in particular, buttressed by a fusion of specially appointed accountants, an embrace of capitalist institutions, and links with non-Muslim capital, gave them the resources to define a new brand of public Shī'ī Islam to that propounded by the Twelver Shī'ī clerical hierarchy in Iraq, Iran and north India. From the 1840s, merchants became leading actors in the drama of intra-Khoja religious rivalry.³⁹ The formation of charitable and religious institutions was an inseparable prop of the business empires of many Khoja Ismā'īlī magnates in East Africa.⁴⁰ Similar acts of sectarian philanthropy were undertaken throughout all sites of the Khoja diaspora.

Deepening the ties between an embryonic Ismā'īlī Khoja interpretive community and a newly minted, publicly visible *imām* entailed a deliberate ploy to minimise interactions

³⁴Muḥammad 'Abbās Rifā'at Shīrwānī, *Qalāyid al-jawāhir fī ahvāl al-bavāhir: dar ahvāl-i ṭā'ī'fa-yi mazhab-i Ismā'īlīyya, mulaqqab bi 'umdat al-akhbār* ([Bombay]: 1301 [1883]), p. 24.

³⁵The role of the *jamā'at* in Bohra commercial success has long been hinted at in passing, see Cynthia Salvadori, *Through Open Doors: A View of Asian Cultures in Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 1989), p. 259.

³⁶Abdul Qaiyum Mulla Habibullah, *His Holiness Doctor Syedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb, Dai-ul-Muṭlaq of Dawoodi Bohra* ([Bombay, [196-?]), p. 12.

³⁷The case has been dissected at length by Teena Purohit. *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2012).

³⁸Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the Western Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge, 2011), Chapter 6.

³⁹A useful survey of these conflicts is Michel Boivin, *La rénovation du shi'isme ismaélien en Inde et au Pakistan: d'après les écrits et les discours de Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan (1902–1954)* (London, 2003), Chapter 10.

⁴⁰Margret Frenz, 'Doing Well but Also Doing Good? East African Indian Merchants and their Charitable Work', in *Knowledge and the Indian Ocean: Intangible Networks of Western India and Beyond*, (ed.) Sara Keller (Cham, 2019), pp. 173–189.

between Ismā'īlīs and Twelver Shī'īs. Ismā'īlī Khoja circulars (printed in both Gujarati and English) dispatched to the faithful in cities like Karachi, Rangoon and Poona threatened any congregant with immediate excommunication if they made contact with Twelver Shī'ī clerics.⁴¹ In time, however, Twelver Khoja religious and commercial firms responded with initiatives of their own to integrate 'wayward' Shī'ī back into the fold. Regulations for the ballooning Twelver Khoja *jamā'ats* at the turn of the century display retaliatory attempts to restrict interactions with those outside the group. They also feature the names of prominent members of local civil society institutions and professions and detail the panoply of funds founded by Twelver Khoja businessmen for the benefit of the *jamā'at*.⁴² What is more, from the 1890s, an energetic group of Khoja polemicists undertook persistent efforts to turn Khojas away from the Aghā Khāns and wrote caustic attacks on Khoja Ismā'īlī beliefs and practices. The development of a Twelver Khoja publishing culture, as embodied by newspapers like Bhavnagar's *Rāhe Najāt*, also fostered the emergence of this Twelver Khoja counter-public,⁴³ not least by cataloguing the names of those Khojas who donated funds to the poor of Karbala, and running regular pieces on the shrine cities.⁴⁴ From this point, pilgrimage to Iraq became a cornerstone of that strategy to turn the Khojas back to the 'true path'. Unlike the Bohras then, for the Khojas pilgrimage to Iraq had the potential to augment internal division rather than integrate the community under the apex religious head.

In traversing the terrain of inter-Shī'ī institution building and sectarian differentiation, this section has demonstrated that the boom in Bohra and Khoja commercial fortunes facilitated the emergence of an infrastructure of public Ismā'īlī and Twelver Shī'ī Islam which vied for the hearts and minds of the nominally Shī'a populations scattered from Karachi to Bombay and further afield. A host of community and commercial institutions underpinned these novel forms of public Shī'ism and were—in keeping with processes of locative piety—transferrable and extendable to new spaces. With their presence stretching from Darussalam to Singapore, Bohras and Khojas were well-positioned to pivot to Iraq at the turn-of-the-century. There, late Ottoman developmental policies and trade links with the subcontinent, intensified substantially by the advent of the British Mandate, encouraged the arrival of Bohra and Khoja merchant houses, and with them, recently created pilgrimage institutions.

The Bohra and Khoja Presence in Late Ottoman and Early Hashemite Iraq

Southern Iraq became a site of Bohra and Khoja commercial operations in the final decades of Ottoman rule. Several turn-of-the-century infrastructural changes in both the Ottoman and British empires facilitated their entrance. The last decades of the century had seen a boom of private enterprise in southern Iraq and tussles among British and Ottoman authorities over trade privileges, the control of internal markets, import duties and

⁴¹See the following missal to the Khoja *jamā'ats* in Poona and Rangoon threatening excommunication, Mawlana Sarkar, *The Khoja Shia Imāmi Ismā'īlī Council (Poona): Rules and Regulations* (Poona, 1913).

⁴²*Khojā śīā isnā asrī jamātnā kāyā buk* (Mumbai, 1901).

⁴³Iqbal Akhtar, *The Khojā of Tanzania: Discontinuities of a Postcolonial Religious Identity* (Leiden, 2016), p. 97.

⁴⁴For example, see 'Karbala', *Rāhe Najāt nō Vadhāro*, Vol. 26, [Unknown issue], (1337 [1921]), pp. 68–71.

sovereignty.⁴⁵ The foundation of an Ottoman consul-general in Karachi in 1891 (a Bombay branch had been founded in 1850) further strengthened trade and transport links between Iraq and western India.⁴⁶ Ottoman transport developments in the provinces of Baghdad and Basra from the 1890s also spurred the influx of Bohra and Khojas firms. Bohra and Khoja travelogues regularly mention the Baghdad Railway and tram networks in Najaf and Karbala, including the horse-tramway network running between Kazimain and Baghdad.⁴⁷ Without this expansion, Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage institutions would have been unable to integrate themselves into the dense infrastructural threads linking Iraq and India that only escalated after 1918.

Ottoman almanacs from this period bear witness to the litany of new railways, canals, roads, hostels, companies, and schools constructed by local authorities, as well as the high numbers of Persian and Indian pilgrims from various strands of the 'Shī'ī *madhhab*' visiting the shrine cities.⁴⁸ The influx of Shī'ī pilgrims also dovetailed with the conversion of large numbers of tribespeople from southern Iraq to Shī'ī Islam, an effort that Ottoman authorities tried unsuccessfully to forestall.⁴⁹ Even so, as a history of Najaf published by a Twelver scholar in the 1930s regularly noted, in the Hamidian era Ottoman authorities had financed the restoration of several Shī'ī sites in Iraq, richly supplementing the regular donations by private Arab, Indian, and Iranian merchants.⁵⁰

In the case of Bohras and Khojas, religious institutions followed on the heels of a new mercantile presence. Individual Bohras were already present in the shrine cities by the early nineteenth century, as Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥussain Karbalā'ī Karnātakī Hindī attested in passing in his pilgrimage diary compiled between 1815 and 1817.⁵¹ But a more emphatic Bohra presence can be found from the turn-of-the-century with the arrival of several Bohra commercial companies. A leading pre-war Bohra firm, Messrs. Abdul Ali & Co., operated two ice factories in Baghdad and one in Karbala before the onset of the war. The firm also ran a famous postcard business that produced images of the Shī'ī sacred sites in southern Iraq (see Figures 1–4). The records of the American Chamber of Commerce for Turkey in 1911 listed the firm in the same company as European and American companies, a telling indication of its prominence.⁵²

In fact, Abdul Ali & Co.'s ice-factory was one of the few private machine-driven industries in all of Iraq, with the remaining operations under the control of the Ottoman government in the form of an army clothing-factory and army flour mill.⁵³ Perhaps for this reason, beginning in 1910 the firm was on the receiving end of an effort on the part of the Ottoman

⁴⁵Hala Mundir Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, 1745–1900* (Albany, 1997), pp. 199–201; Frederick Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York, 1997).

⁴⁶Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877–1924* (Leiden, 1997), p. 113.

⁴⁷Gökhan Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890–1908* (London, 2006), p. 10.

⁴⁸Bağdād Vilāyet Sālnāmesi (Baghdad, 1907), p. 234; pp. 279–280; 289–290. An ice factory – presumably that operated by the Bohra firm, Abdul Ali & Co., (discussed below) – is mentioned on p. 208.

⁴⁹Selim Deringil, 'The Struggle Against Shi'ism in Hamidian Iraq, A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda', *Die Welt des Islams* XXX (1990), pp. 45–62.

⁵⁰Ja'far Bāqir Āl Maḥbubah Al-Najafī, *Mādī al-Najaf wa-ḥādīrūhā* (Najaf, 1955).

⁵¹Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥussain Karbalā'ī Karnātakī Hindī, *Tazkirat al-ṭarīq fī maṣā'ib ḥujjāj bayt Allāh al-'atīq: Shawwāl 1230-Jamādī al-Ūlā 1232* (Qom, [2007 or 2008]), p. 108.

⁵²See the numerous references to the firm in the pages of *The Levant Trade Review* from 1911.

⁵³IOR/L/MIL/17/15/41/3, 'Handbook of Mesopotamia. Vol. II. 1917', p. 379.

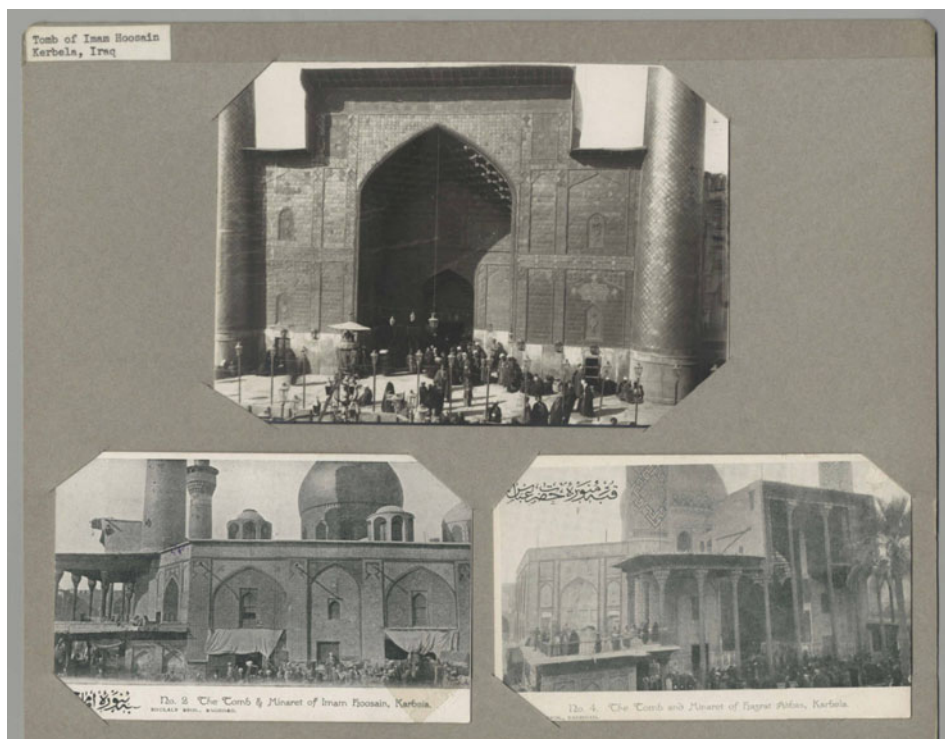


Fig. 1. Postcards from the shrine cities produced by the Bohra firm, Abdul Aly Bros. Reproduced with permission of The New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.

government to artificially depress the price of ice.⁵⁴ According to a consular report, several Ottoman officers had entered the firm's premises and threatened to pluck out the eyes of an employee, one Faiz Muḥammad ibn Nūr Muḥammad.⁵⁵ To enforce further compliance, the Ottoman governor had threatened to close the factories after Abdul Ali & Co. refused to comply with the price decrease, insisting that the factory was a violation of the Ottoman law of 1864, something that British authorities entirely rejected. British authorities assumed that local Ottoman officials in Baghdad had an interest in creating a monopoly over all local industries, making Abdul Ali & Co. a prime target.⁵⁶ In this and other episodes, the local British consular offices served as an important conduit for the redress of Bohra and Khoja grievances with Ottoman (and later Hashemite) authorities.⁵⁷ For example, when in 1912 Ottoman authorities attempted to expand a road, partially demolishing Bohra and Khoja

⁵⁴IOR/L/PS/10/188, 'Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey: Enclosure in No. 1', in *Mesopotamia: Baghdad affairs. Miscellaneous*, p. 133.

⁵⁵IOR/L/PS/10/188, 'Enclosure 20 in No. 1: Statement of Faiz Muhammad-ibn-Noor Muhammad, British Subject, in the Service of Messrs. Abdul Ali Brothers, Bagdad', *Mesopotamia: Baghdad affairs. Miscellaneous*, pp. 155–156.

⁵⁶IOR/L/PS/10/188, 'No. 1 Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey', in *Mesopotamia: Baghdad affairs. Miscellaneous*, p. 142.

⁵⁷IOR/L/PS/10/188, 'Enclosure 4 in No. 1 – Messrs. Abdul Ali Brothers to Consul-General Lorimer', *Mesopotamia: Baghdad affairs. Miscellaneous*, p. 151.

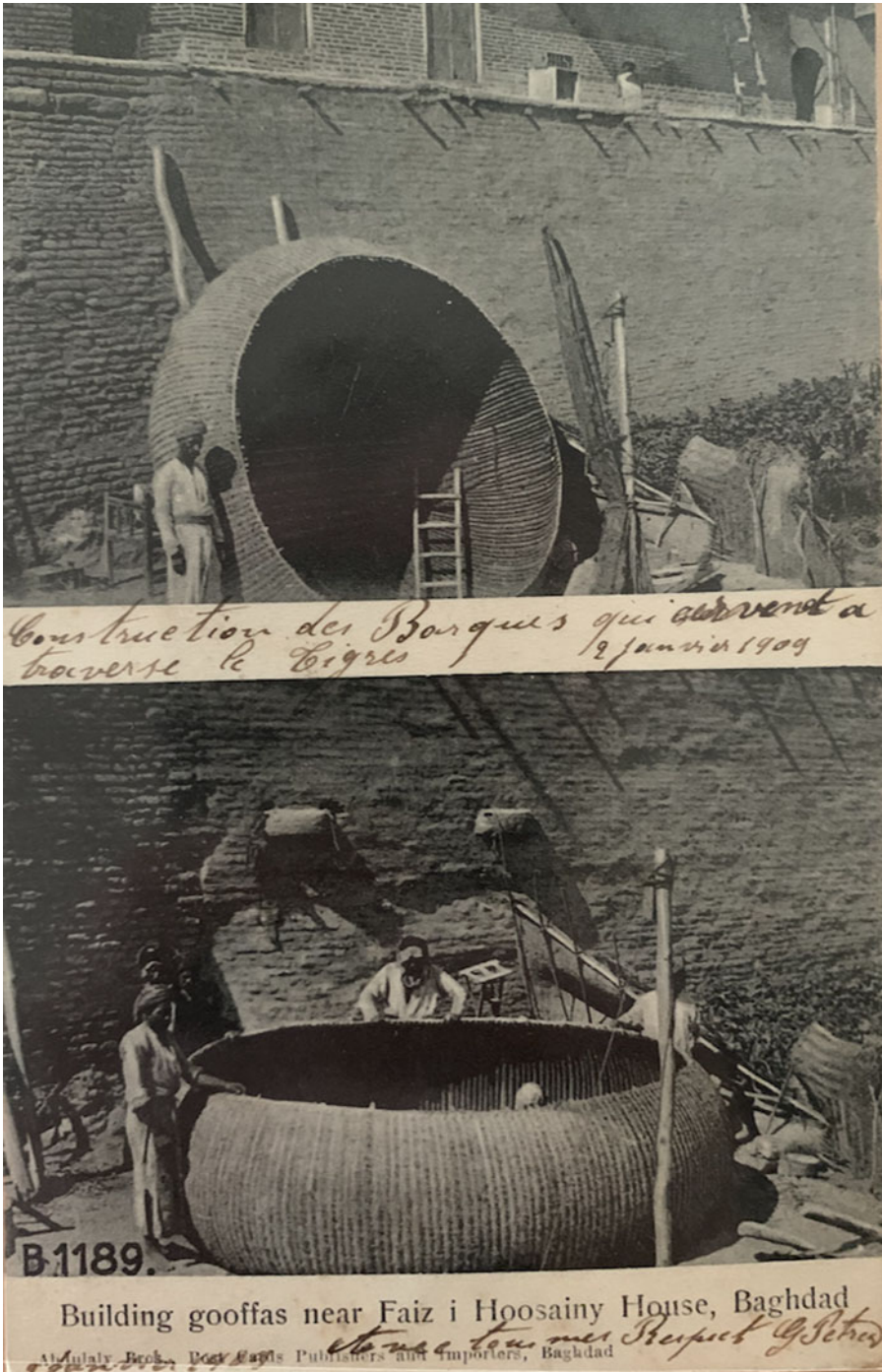


Fig. 2. A postcard produced by the Bohra firm, Abdul Aly & Co., showing 'gooffas' being produced outside the Faiz-i Hussaini. Author's personal collection.



Fig. 3. A postcard produced by the Bohra firm, Abdul Aly & Co., displaying the tramway that ran from Baghdad to Kazimayn. This transport method was used widely by Bohra and Khoja pilgrims. Author's personal collection.



Fig. 4. A postcard produced by the Bohra firm, Abdul Aly & Co., displaying the carriages that transported pilgrims to Karbala. Author's personal collection.

property, British officials intervened on the Indians' behalf. It appears the favour was returned: the namesake of Abdul Ali & Co. later claimed to be the first to raise the Union Jack in Baghdad following the city's fall to the British in 1917.⁵⁸ As Britain's mandate in Iraq began, Bohra invocation of their status as British subjects became more frequent, with the Bohra *dā'ī al-muṭlaq* petitioning colonial authorities on one occasion to intervene with Iraqi authorities on behalf of Bohra pilgrims harassed in the shrines of Karbala.⁵⁹

In fact, the end of Ottoman dominion in Iraq accelerated the arrival of western Indian capitalists in the region. They joined Punjabi and Bengali military and civilian labour, and ran the gamut from pilgrimage agents to banking firms with branches stretching to Basra and Baghdad. Alongside Bohras and Khojas, Iraq's transition to British rule also brought Parsi firms and travellers to Baghdad and Basra, as Māṇekjī noted in his own 1922 Zoroastrian pilgrimage account to Iraq and Iran.⁶⁰ Arriving in southern Iraq from an extended tour of Sasanian sites in Iran, Māṇekjī stressed the construction of new road networks and the influx of motorcars, as well as the cluster of Parsi firms in Basra. Another Parsi travel-book on Iran and Iraq spoke to a Parsi readership of the "conducted tours" run out of Bombay by the Jeena Company.⁶¹ Around the same time, the Tata consortium sought to expand its banking business in the region, though the Viceroy's office threw cold water on the idea.⁶² Perhaps the Twelver *mujtahid* Khurāsānī (examined below) was not merely employing a standard heresiological trope about the Ismā'īlīs when he dismissed the Bohras and Khojas as *majūs* (Zoroastrians). He likely saw the influx of Gujarati-speaking Parsis, Bohras and Khojas into Iraq as part of the same phenomenon, as it surely was.

While Ismā'īlī Khojas saw much commercial promise in Iraq, the precise place accorded to the Shī'ī shrine cities in Ismā'īlī Khoja devotional life during the *imāmate* of Aghā Khān III is difficult to gauge. Periodically, despite the fact that his own father was buried at the family mausoleum in Najaf,⁶³ the head of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs downplayed the importance of both pilgrimage to Iraq, such as in a *farmān* delivered in Mombasa in 1899 where he said "People go to Karbala, where they physically see the golden houses (shrines), stones and clay, so what? Make an inner house, which is profitable indeed".⁶⁴ (Unlike his father and mother, the Aghā Khān III was not interned in the family mausoleum in Najaf, but rather at a monumental facility in Aswan in Egypt.) This contrasted, however, with the Aghā Khān III's pronouncements before and during the First World War that Iraq represented a natural arena for Indian commercial expansion, beaming that the region's value would amount to "five East Africas".⁶⁵ His *India in Transition*, written in 1918, heralded the age when India's imperial borders would stretch "from Aden to Mesopotamia, from the two shores of the Gulf to

⁵⁸IOR/L/PS/10/570, No. S-148 of 17, p. 115.

⁵⁹NAI (National Archives of India), Progs., Nos. 820-X, 1923, 'Saiyid Saifuddin Mulla of Dawoodi Bohra respecting the ill-treatment of certain Bohra pilgrims at the shrines in Kerbala'.

⁶⁰Māṇekjī, *Irān ane Irāk-mā Musāpharī* (Karachi, 1922), pp. 141–142.

⁶¹Kaykhusro Ardašīr Phīr, *Irān-Irāk Musāpharīnī Ghāḍ* (Printer Unknown, 1931), p. 195.

⁶²IOR/L/PS/10/531/2, 'Telegram from Viceroy - 2 November 1918', in 'Mesopotamia: Banking Facilities', p. 136.

⁶³'Introduction', in *A Modern History of the Ismā'īlīs: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, (ed.) Farhad Daftary (London, 2011), p. 8.

⁶⁴'Khak-i Shafā', in *Encyclopaedia of Ismā'īlism*, (ed.) Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik (Karachi, 2006).

⁶⁵H.H. The Agha Khan, G.C.S.I., 'The Turkish Treasury Bonds', *The Comrade* (1 March 1913), pp. 182–3.

India proper".⁶⁶ It was perhaps for this reason that the British Foreign Office suggested the Aghā Khān as a potential leader of Iraq in the late 1910s, though his name was quickly dropped from the list of candidates.⁶⁷ All the same, some quarters of Muslim public opinion in India were scandalized by the announcement and the Aghā Khān was compelled to deny the charges publicly. In turn, some of his followers rose to his defense, with a lecture given at Bombay's Young Ismaili Vidhya Vinod Club on the subject.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, soon after Britain's conquest the Nizārī Ismā'īlī *imām* repeatedly emphasised that Iraq should not become a formal colony of the British empire, and in the early 1930s in a speech given as head of the League of Nations, the Aghā Khān congratulated Iraq on its independence and entry into the League, while stressing the "intimate spiritual, cultural, and economic ties" linking the country with India.⁶⁹

Barring some pre-war merchants in Basra, the modest influx of Khoja Ismā'īlī merchants into Iraq began in earnest with Britain's conquest of Ottoman Iraq in 1917–18. The site for the first Khoja Ismā'īlī *jamā'at khāna* was the Basra offices of M/S Pesan Allana Bros., a merchant who migrated from Karachi to Iraq after hearing the Aghā Khān encourage Ismā'īlīs to seek out business opportunities in the country.⁷⁰ The declaration was actually disseminated as a *farmān* (official decree), with the Aghā Khān stating

Those *muwīds* (followers) who are not running a business here [in Karachi], go to Mesopotamia, so as to make very good profits... Now this is nothing new, twenty or thirty years ago in Africa, Burma island, etc. no businesses of *muwīds* were in operation. They were begging us in such a way, then we gave an order to go to Africa, Rangoon, Burma Island, etc. and in turn our *muwīds* became millionaires (*lakhpātī*). Similarly, if you are not running a business here [Karachi], go there [Mesopotamia], and you will make very good profits. *Khānāvādān* (May your house be blessed).⁷¹

Although the Ismā'īlī Khoja *jamā'at* in Iraq did grow somewhat as a result, Iraq seems to have held a secondary importance in the pilgrimage landscape of Khoja Ismā'īlīs in this period, even if Karbala itself maintained its pride of place in the devotional literature of Ismā'īlī Khoja writers, and images of the Battle of Karbala were printed by Khoja commercial firms (Figure 5).

As for the Twelver Khojas, despite the fact that Iraq had been a key site of interaction between Twelver *mujtahids* and Twelver Khoja merchants from the 1870s, the latter do not appear to have set up branches of their commercial enterprises nor *jamā'at khānas* until the turn of the century, with a slight upward trend following the British conquest of Iraq.⁷² Jethabhā'ī Gokal, among the Twelver Khojas who set up a business in Karachi during the Khoja controversies of the 1890s, moved his operations to Basra in 1918 after the British conquest of the city. There he opened a shipping business and became the head of the Twelver Khoja community. In the 1930s the firm became the agents in Karachi, Muhammadarah and Basra for both Japanese and Swedish shipping companies.⁷³ One of the firm's partners in

⁶⁶Cited in Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge, Mass, 2013), p. 71.

⁶⁷Durham University, Abbas Hilmi II Papers, HIL/88/31–39.

⁶⁸E.J. Lakphati et al. (eds.), *Imānī Roṣānī* (Bombay, 1919 [?]), pp. 15–17.

⁶⁹*Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Vol. 2*, p. 911.

⁷⁰Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik, *101 Ismaili Heroes: Late 19th Century to Present Age, Vol. 1* (Karachi, 2003), p. 16.

⁷¹'Pharamān 212 mum', *Kalāme Imāme Mubīn: yānē, Nūr Maulānā Hājar Imāmma Pavitra Pharamāno, Ī.S. 1911 thī 1951 Sudhīnī*, Vol. 2 (Bombay, 1952 [?]), p. 42.

⁷²I base this on my knowledge of several Twelver Khoja firms from Zanzibar to Madagascar.

⁷³IOR/R/15/2/349 'File 9/8 Japanese trade activities in the Persian Gulf' [26r] (51/70); IOR/L/PS/12/3400 Coll 28/6 'Persia; Diaries: Khuzistan (Ahwaz) Diaries Jany 1931 – 1937.' [564r] (1138/1548)



Fig. 5. Late Nineteenth-Century Depiction of the Battle of Karbala. Produced by a commercial firm in western India. Author's private collection.

the 1940s was a director for *The Indian and Persian Gulf Bank*, which was founded as a means to shore up the region's weak banking sector. The Gokal consortium continued operations in Iraq—even starting joint cement ventures with Iraqi companies—until 1968, when the family patriarch was executed, along with thirteen Pakistanis, by the Iraqi Baathists on charges of spying for Israel. The firm's assets were subsequently nationalised by the Iraqi government.

Gokal's nephews left Iraq and would later be leading underwriters of the al-Khoei Foundation, an important transnational Twelver Shī'ī organisation, and carry on a brisk business with Iran during its war with Iraq in the 1980s.⁷⁴ Only after 2003 did the Twelver Khojas re-establish their pilgrimage infrastructures in Iraq's shrine cities.⁷⁵

But during the first decades of the twentieth century, as sovereign power in Iraq vacillated among the Ottomans, British and Hashemites, Bohra and Khoja firms remained a small, albeit consistent and successful, presence. The ability of commercial firms from these groups to assimilate themselves to local conditions assisted their efforts to construct a pilgrimage infrastructure between Iraq and western India and to participate in the transregional economy of locative piety. With the aid of existing community networks across the Indian Ocean and the increasing ease of travelling between Bombay, Karachi and Iraq, Bohra and Khoja commercial firms transitioned easily into the business of managing pilgrimages, which marked yet another addition to their ever-expanding, multifaceted business portfolios. It was not without cause that the new brand of Gujarati Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage guides studied in the next two sections were penned and financed by merchants. The narrative first examines the Bohra *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* before taking up the Khoja experience.

The *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* and the Making of the Bohra Pilgrimage

This section analyses the inner workings of the Bohra *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* in Iraq through interwar Urdu and Gujarati travelogues. The *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* best illustrates the close cooperation between Bohra merchants and the community's religious leaders in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁶ The institution owed its beginnings to two Bohra merchants, 'Alībhā'ī Karīmī and Shaykh 'Isājī Adamī, who around 1882 first established a reception hall at a Bohra mosque in Karachi. There, Bohra pilgrims travelling to Iraq could obtain comfortable accommodation and avoid the dire conditions of quarantine most travellers experienced while passing from Bombay through Karachi.⁷⁷ In 1887, 'Alībhā'ī Karīmī purchased a site in Karachi for Rs. 35,000 and built a complex for pilgrims, then handed its management over to the Bohra *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*, 'Abd al-Ḥussain Hussām al-Dīn. By 1897 a ten-person executive committee was established (*Kārobārī kamēṭī*) with a president and secretary, thus formally inaugurating the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*.⁷⁸

According to an Indian court case filed in Bombay in 1946 and concluded in 1950, this committee of trustees, in one form or another, administered the institution until May 1924. That year a minority of trustees altered the original 1897 deed of declaration and transferred the ownership stake in the trust to the Bohra *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*, Mullā Ṭāhīr Saif al-Dīn.⁷⁹ This

⁷⁴Philip Shenon, 'B.C.C.I.'s Best Customer Is Also Its Worst Customer', *The New York Times*, 6 August 1991, Section D., p. 1.

⁷⁵The history is briefly chronicled at <https://www.faizepanjetani.com/> (accessed 1 June 2020).

⁷⁶In 1984 the Indian police raided the offices of the trust on the pretext that it was a "havala den, a racket by which delivery of foreign currency is made abroad in return for the payment of a high exchange price in Indian rupees." This was done in return for Saudi Arabian Hajj visas. Coomi Kapoor, 'Foreign exchange scandal involving Dawoodi Bohra Haj pilgrims breaks out', *India Today* (30 September 1984).

⁷⁷'Phayje Husenī ṭraṣṭ', *Pakistānī Dāudī Vohrā Vastī Patrak* (Karachi, 1966), pp. 118–119.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹'Fazalhussain Mulla Haiderbhoy and another—Plaintiffs. vs. Abdullabhoy Shaikh Ismailji and another—Defendants. Suit No. 1227 of 1946, decided on 2nd August 1950', *The Dominion Law Reporter*, Nagpur, Vol. VI, Bombay High Court (Nagpur, 1951), pp. 39–47.

act led the non-signatory trustees to resign their posts, presumably in protest. The 1924 alteration continued to be a source of conflict until 1951 when the court case was finally settled. Notwithstanding these acrimonious quarrels, under the guidance of the trustees and the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*, the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*'s initial income of Rs.10–15,000 grew to mammoth proportions, with the property in its possession by 1928 said to be valued at 30–35 *lakhs*.⁸⁰ Part of that success stemmed from its linkages to other Dāwūdī Bohra religious institutions, such as the Dawoodi Fund, which was under the direct supervision of the *dā'ī*.⁸¹

A map printed by the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* in the 1960s gives a sense of the institution's scale of operations, and its role as the animating force behind Bohra overseas pilgrimage (Figure 6). Nowhere else was the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* more central to the smooth running of Bohra religious pilgrimage than in Iraq's Shī'ī shrine cities, although in time it enlarged its operations to include all-expenses-included pilgrimage tours to Mecca, Medina, Egypt, and Yemen, the latter two salient sites for Bohras on account of their links to the Fatimids. As mentioned earlier, Bohras had a tiny presence in Iraq throughout the nineteenth century. But only with the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* was a fully-fledged institutional framework created to ensure that Bohras visiting Iraq had adequate accommodation and provisions during their pilgrimage. Commercial interests facilitated the growth of this network, with the aforementioned Bohra firm, Abdul Ali & Co. functioning as the Baghdad agent of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*.

One attains an unparalleled glimpse of the everyday workings of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* in Adamjī Musajī's Gujarati 1924 pilgrimage guide titled *Rāhe Karbalā* (The Road to Karbala).⁸² Composed and published in Karachi following the author's third pilgrimage to the shrine cities, Musajī's guide offers unique insights into how Bohra-run institutions in Bombay, Karachi and Iraq facilitated the journey of Bohras from western India to the Iraq at a level of organisation unimaginable for many Indian Muslims who undertook Hajj and other pilgrimages in the same period. Indeed, *Rāhe Karbalā* was but a small blip in the cosmos of Urdu pilgrimage guides written for Hajj. But when these are read alongside Musajī's work it is evident how susceptible other Muslim communities were to the vicissitudes of weather, the dearth of banking facilities, the machinations of pilgrimage guides, and the paucity of local accommodation when undertaking pilgrimage.

Corroboration for this comes from many non-Bohra sources, such as the travelogue of Mīr Asad 'Alī Khān, a notable from Hyderabad who travelled to Iraq and Iran in the late 1920s. Visiting Najaf, where he lamented the poor state of hygiene compared to India, 'Alī Khān complained that there was no special organisation set up for the benefit of pilgrims, other than those institutions created by the Bohras for their own community.⁸³ In Karbala he observed a similar phenomenon of disorganisation, but there, in addition to the Bohra *musāfirkhānas*, he found that leading Indian Shī'ī *amīrs* had purchased properties for the benefit of pilgrims.⁸⁴ (In fact, many Indian landed gentry had sent money to refurbish select sites in the 'Atabāt, with the Raja of Mahmudabad funding the construction of a cupola

⁸⁰ *Bohras & the Waqf Act: being a plea for the application of The Mussalman Waqf Act of 1923 to the Dawoodi Bohra Community in the Bombay Presidency and elsewhere* (Burhanpur, 1929), p. 13.

⁸¹ 'New Borah High Priest: A Personal Sketch', *Times of India* (7 April 1906), p. 7.

⁸² Adamjī Musajī, *Rāhe Karbalā* (Karachi, 1924).

⁸³ Mīr Asad 'Alī Khān, *Irāq wa Irān: ya'nī, safarnāma-i maqāmāt-i muqaddasa* (Ḥaidarābād, 1931), p. 60.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

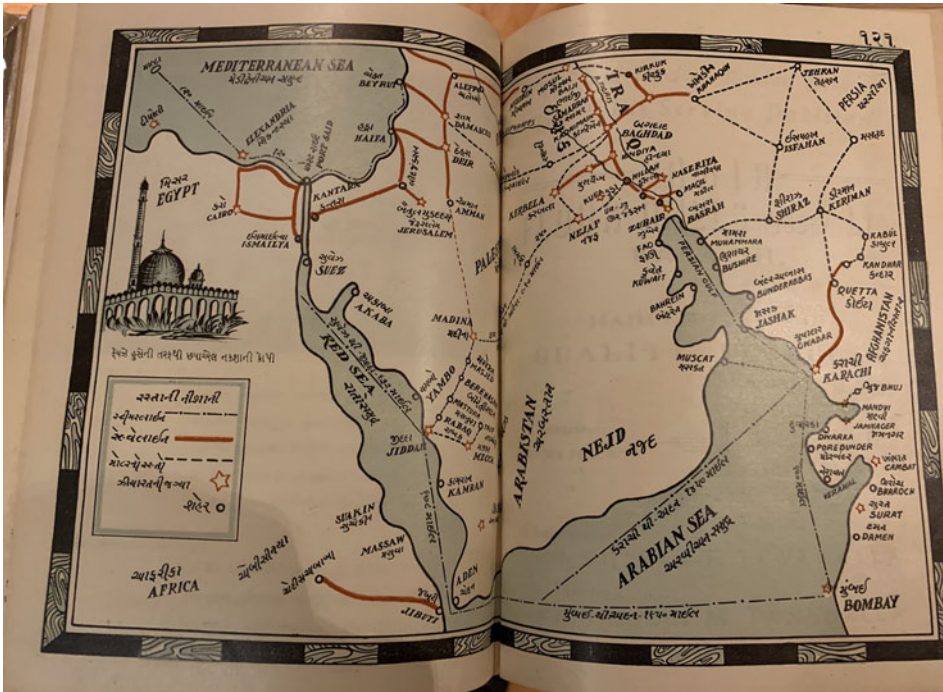


Fig. 6. Map of Bohra pilgrimage itinerary produced by the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī* in the 1960s. *Pakistāni Dāudi Vohrā Vastī Patrak* (Karachi: 1966), p. 129.

(*gumbad*) and an enclosure at the shrine of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.⁸⁵ Still, neither the accommodation facilities, nor the prestige projects subsidised by Indian Shīṭ *amīrs*, did much to alleviate the relative disorder that was a constant refrain in 'Alī Khān's account. This was not entirely fair, and other non-Khoja Twelver pilgrimage accounts do praise southern Iraq's transport infrastructure and the ready availability of good food and accommodation. But what unites them all is the conviction that Bohra and Khoja institutions were in a league of their own.

In actuality, Musājī's text was not the first Bohra printed pilgrimage guide: an earlier pilgrimage text focusing on the shrines of southern Iraq was composed in *Lisān al-Dawat* ('Bohra Gujarati'; Gujarati written in Arabic letters) and published in the years before the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī* was established. Its opening line assured the reader "There is a tradition narrated by the honorable Prophet of God—Peace be upon him and his family—where he decrees that the person who intends to undertake pilgrimage (*safar*), and offers prayers and supplications with veneration and humility, will have the hardships of his pilgrimage eased, adversities banished, and fear of the road traded for security by God Almighty".⁸⁶ But, despite passing references to the transport itinerary, this text was largely a description

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁶I purchased this item on consignment from a bookseller in India, but unfortunately the book was misplaced by the seller in the process of shipment. I am therefore unable to provide full bibliographic information about it, but I can verify its authenticity.

of the shrines themselves and a digest of prayers to say within them. It did not give the Bohra a sense of the practical logistics of pilgrimage as Musajī's 1924 guide did.

More akin to Musajī's text was 'Abd Allāh Ḥussain Hākīmī Buṭwāla's 1908 Gujarati *Dalīlul Hujjāj*, written for Bohras performing Hajj, Umrah and pilgrimage to sites in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Iraq.⁸⁷ Given his opening dedication to the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*, Sayyidnā 'Abd Allāh Burhān al-Dīn, it is fitting that Buṭwāla's guide contains passing references to the forty-ninth dai's creation, the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī*. Jeddah was one site where the local branch manager assisted pilgrims with billeting and luggage.⁸⁸ But it is plain that the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī* was still in a provisional stage at the time of Buṭwāla's travels. In Mecca, for example, the *musā-firḥāna* built by the Bohra millionaire Adamī Pīrbhā'ī housed pilgrims, not the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī*.⁸⁹ What is more, sizable portions of Buṭwāla's text show that he was dependent on local accommodation throughout his pilgrimage. Only once he departed Syria and entered Iraq did the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī* appear again on his itinerary, with the author encouraging pilgrims to cable the institution's local office in Baghdad upon arrival in Ramadi.⁹⁰

By contrast, Musajī, who published *Rāhe Karbalā* some fifteen years later, supplied a detailed insider's view of the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī*. As he explained, he had undertaken a pilgrimage to the 'Atabāt on three occasions: once as a child before the First World War, once during the conflict, and once more thereafter. His latest trip, completed a year before, formed the basis of his 1924 account (see Figure 7). How much changed from one journey to the next he does not say, but he did extol the British occupation of Iraq as a boost to the pilgrimage, noting that "the gracious British government took possession" (*māyālu Briṭīś angrej sarkārā hathmānī*) of the country and governed it according to the same customs of rule as Hindustan.⁹¹ But with the exception of his introductory section on passport control, the British presence is a phantom one throughout the pages of the guide. At least in the way Musajī depicted it, the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī*, which acted as both chaperone and intermediary between the pilgrims and state authorities in India and Iraq, was far more instrumental.

With a print run of over 2,000 copies, the opening pages of Musajī's text featured extensive advertisements from Bohra commercial firms, such as Karachi's 'B. Abdul Rahim & Sons. Co' and Poona's Fancy Leather Goods Factory under the ownership of one 'Abd al-Ḥussain Ja'farī, yet another indication of the intimate links between Dāwūdī Bohra mercantile firms and the infrastructure of religious devotionism between Iraq and western India.⁹² These advertisers were included in part because, as one early section declared, pilgrims had to purchase an array of items to make their journey as comfortable as possible.⁹³ These included everything from incense to ghee, and should the pilgrim fail to purchase any of these articles in advance, they were stored in abundance at the branches of the *Faiḏ-i Ḥussainī* within Iraq. In one memorable instance Musajī even remarked, "Fear on the roads should be no problem at all, for there...by the grace of God, our community has

⁸⁷ 'Abd Allāh Ḥussain Hākīmī Buṭwāla, *Dalīlul Hujjāj* (Mumbai, 1328 [1908]).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5. A key part of the Bohra itinerary in Mecca was *Jannat al-Mu'allā*, the cemetery destroyed by the Saudis in the 1920s, see pp. 6–7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹¹ Musajī, *Rāhe Karbalā*, p. 8.

⁹² *Ibid.* See advertisements in first unnumbered pages.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

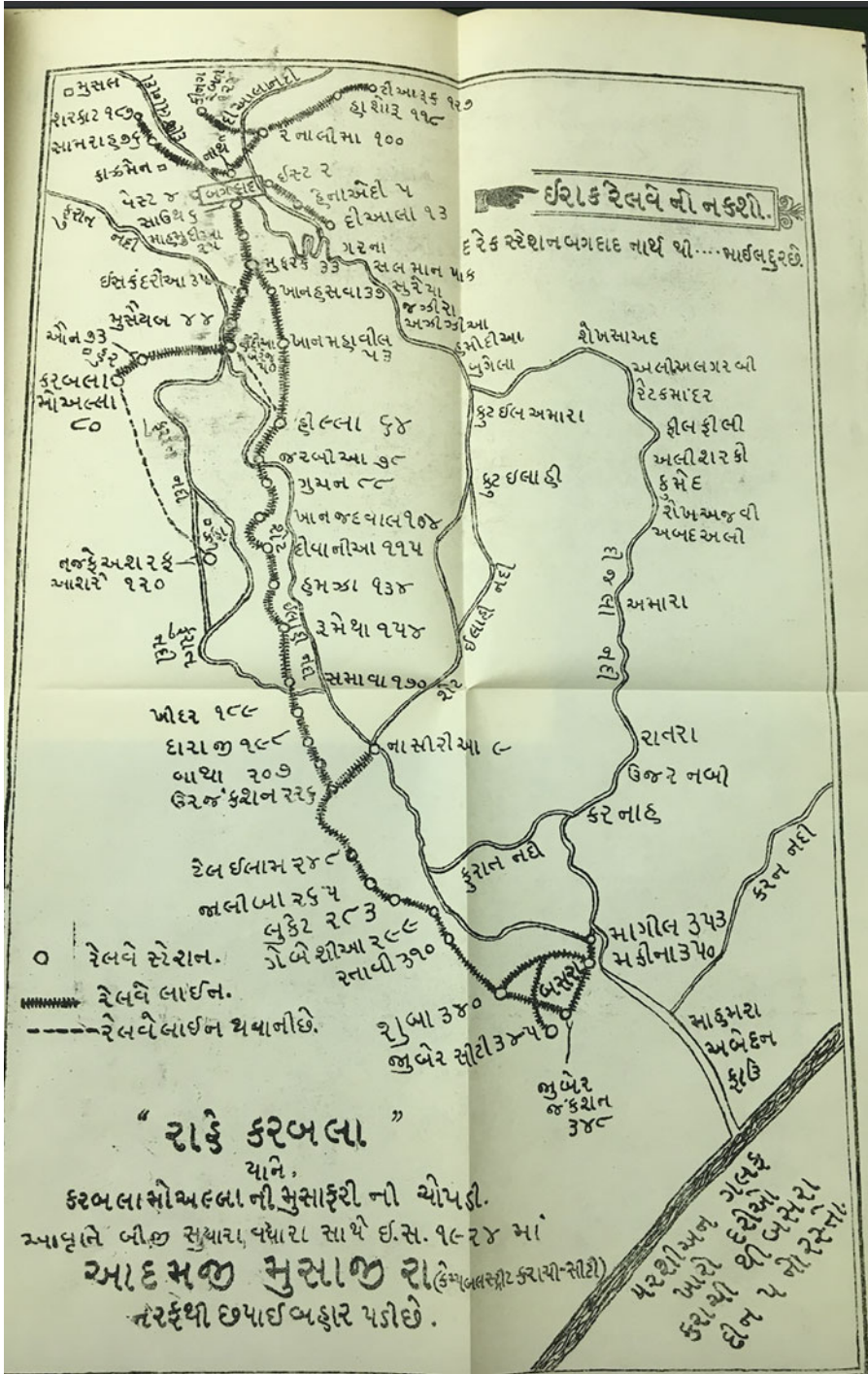


Fig. 7. Gujarati map of Iraq and its main railways included in Musaji’s Rahē Karbalā.

made the necessary provisions in all places, and the warmest of food and coldest of water is given to pilgrims by the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*.⁹⁴ Considering the paucity of fresh water in the shrine cities that other Indian Shī'ī pilgrims (such as Mīr Asad 'Alī Khān and a Khoja commentator below) complained about, this was a distinct edge.

Musajī supplied some useful background information on the beginnings of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*. At its creation, the fund was originally titled the '*Phaṇḍ (fund) Husenī*' and the brothers of the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq* and prominent merchants were appointed as custodians.⁹⁵ From the first, as part of its annual practice, the caretakers released an annual expenditure report, which supplied details on the inner workings of the fund.⁹⁶ Not unlike a modern-tour company, as part of the image of transparency that the managers of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* wished to project, pilgrims also had recourse to a telegraph complaint line, with Musajī bidding his readers to write to the "*sekratārī*" in Karachi should they experience any problems in the course of their interactions with the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*. For the contemporary *hajjī*, recourse to such resources would be largely unthinkable.

Karachi's meteoric advance by the century's end made it a natural contender for the head office of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*. The decision to place the headquarters of the fund in the city was applauded by Musajī, who hailed Karachi as a place whose development was intimately linked to that of his own community (*kom*). After all, Karachi was home to the *waqf* of Shaikh Jiwānjī Ibrāhīmī (a prominent Dāwūdī Bohra merchant), the *Ḥussainī* mosque and *madrassa*, and a booming Bohra merchant presence in the bazaar.⁹⁷ In fact, the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* quickly became the nerve centre of Bohra life in the metropolis, with pilgrims passing through Karachi from Bombay on their way to Iraq—and even "brothers coming to Karachi for work" finding a free meal and a bed at the city's branch.⁹⁸

Musajī's text offered the would-be pilgrim a handy *vade mecum* (guidebook) containing in-depth discussions of passport regulations, steamer ticket fares from Karachi to Basra, and the state of the Iraqi railways. When all expenses were taken into account, the costs incurred by a single pilgrim travelling in 'normal class' on steamers, trains, and horse carriages would amount to some Rs. 285.⁹⁹ This was a competitive price in light of the many goods and services the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* furnished, and the various transport costs associated with the trip. While the ferrying of Bohra pilgrims from Karachi to al-Muqal, the port of Basra, was handled by the British India Steam Navigation Company, the agents of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* immediately picked up the thread once the pilgrims touched down on Iraqi soil. A team of managers and bearers greeted pilgrims at the port and Basra's train station and, for a fee, transported their luggage to the local branch of the *Faiẓ*, and supplied horse carriages (*ghoḍā gāḍī*) and motor cars to convey the new arrivals.¹⁰⁰ The *Faiẓ*'s employees also collaborated with the pilgrim inspectors appointed by the Iraqi railroad, likely acting as translators for the Gujarati-speaking pilgrims and negotiating ticket rates and itineraries.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Once at the local branch of the *Faiẓ*, the pilgrims typically were served a meal, performed ablutions, and changed their clothes, while the institution's managers arranged for transport to the nearest holy sites. Such was the routine in Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, Musayyib, Kufa and Samarra, where the local branches of the *Faiẓ* assumed the role of minder.¹⁰² Once again, the contrast with the experience of most Indian Muslim pilgrims on Hajj, or even Indian Twelver pilgrims in Iraq—who regularly complained about the lack of clean water and the inability of Indian-owned companies to supply food to pilgrims¹⁰³—is rather striking.

All the same, the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* could not mitigate all problems associated with travelling in Iraq. As Musajī emphasised, one of the great disadvantages of undertaking pilgrimage there was that the currency in circulation was very sparse, the state of banking quite poor, and the exchange rate in the bazaar very unfavourable to Indian pilgrims (a Khoja traveller examined in the next section of this article offers an alternative impression of these matters). What Iraq did have to its advantage was a steady fleet of hireable automobiles that Bohras and Khojas alike chartered with great ease from the early 1920s. In Baghdad, a pilgrim could hire a four-passenger motor car for some Rs. 20, while one could travel by car from Najaf to Karbala in around three hours.¹⁰⁴ In many instances, Bohras also utilised horse-drawn carriages and tramways to move within cities and motorcars to shuttle between cities (see Figure 3).

Thanks to the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*, pilgrimage to Iraq only grew among the Bohras from the 1920s onwards. The fifty-first *dāʿī al-muṭlaq*, Ṭāhīr Saif al-Dīn, visited Iraq in 1934 with an entourage of 400 Bohras and met with Iraqi government representatives to discuss the state of Bohra *awqāf*.¹⁰⁵ In 1936 and 1940, he donated two massive *ḍarīḥī* to shrines of *Imām* 'Alī and *Imām Ḥussain* in Najaf and Karbala, the expenses of which came out to “2 lakhs of *tolas* of silver and 500 *tolas* of gold” for *Imām Ḥussain*'s tomb, and “6 lakhs of *tolas* of silver and 2,000 *tolas* of gold” for that of *Imām* 'Alī, as one official Bohra publication beamed.¹⁰⁶ Three decades later, he donated a newly refurbished *ḍarīḥī* for *Imām Abbās* in 1963. This was part and parcel of Ṭāhīr Saif al-Dīn's enthusiastic support for donating to a range of Islamic holy sites throughout the Middle East, acts that earned him a reputation as something of a connoisseur of Islamic antiquities. There were sizable donations to the Supreme Muslim Council of Palestine,¹⁰⁷ and to the Saudi government for the refitting of the *kiswan*, the ornamental carpet draped over the Ka'ba in the *Masjid al-Ḥarām* in Mecca.¹⁰⁸ Not all were impressed: the Egyptian critic Zakī Mubārak (who taught in Iraq in the 1930s) asked “What benefit is there for Iraq that the Sultan of the Bohras spends thousands of dinars to beautify holy places in Najaf and Karbala?”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 64–65.

¹⁰³ Abd al-Majīd Daryābādī, *Safar-i Ḥijāz: Ḥajj wa ziyārat kā muṣṣaṣṣal wa mukammal hidāyat nāma* (A'ẓamgarh, 1931), pp. 40–41.

¹⁰⁴ Musajī, *Rāhe Karbalā*, pp. 36, 72.

¹⁰⁵ Abd al-Razzāq Ḥasanī, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-'Irāqīyyah*, Vol. 4 (Ṣaida, 1953), p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ Habibullah, *His Holiness Doctor Syedna*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ Several Palestinian newspapers in the late 1930s published articles on the *dāʿī al-muṭlaq*'s visit to Palestine, Damascus and Cairo and the donations he made. Some even featured a front-page article with photos. See ‘Azīma Sulṭān al-Bohra fī Filasṭīn’ and subsidiary articles in *Filasṭīn* (6 May 1937).

¹⁰⁸ Muḥammad Diqīn, *Kiswat al-Ka'bah al-mu'azzamah 'abr al-tārīkh* (Cairo, 1986), p. 57.

¹⁰⁹ Zakī Mubārak, *Al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī fī al-'Adab wa al-'Akhlaq* (Beirut, 2020), p. 370.

It is worth briefly noting that the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* was also a significant fixture in the pilgrimage life of Mecca and Medina in this period. During Hajj in 1934, Ghulām Rasūl Mehr, the prolific historian and Ghalib biographer of Sunni background, was greatly impressed by the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*'s operation in Mecca. To his mind, no building in Mecca matched the beauty and density of the premises of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*, with its capacity to hold thousands of Bohra pilgrims. As in Iraq, pilgrims were provided three meals a day and it was open only to Bohras. The institution left such an impression on Rasūl Mehr that he wrote "Many would wish for the construction of a spacious, roomy *ribāṭ* for all Indian Muslims, with no consideration of distinction between Bohras or any other *jamā'at*, indeed for any Muslims from India who descend there". To achieve this he proposed that, with Saudi approval, the site of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* could be expanded to house 20,000 Muslims. Similar arrangements could be made at the *ribāṭs* constructed by the rulers of Hyderabad, Bhopal and Bahawalpur in Mecca. These would assume the care of Indian pilgrims and distribute provisions as the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* did.¹¹⁰ Although as a non-Bohra Rasūl Mehr was not permitted to stay in the Meccan branch of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*, he was invited to a large banquet there, where he marvelled at the quality of the food and Bohra dining practices, which included drinking from a communal glass cup. Rasūl Mehr's account once again underlines the ability of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* to craft a trans-imperial pilgrimage infrastructure in several places in the late Ottoman/post-Ottoman Middle East that other Indian Muslims saw as worth replicating.

In many ways, the Twelver Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure offers instructive parallels and divergences from the Bohra case. If the Bohra *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* gives the appearance of near total self-sufficiency (except in matters of transport), then the Khoja infrastructure was more diffuse, relying initially on unintegrated community institutions that only became organised under an umbrella trust in the 1930s. As with the Bohras, infrastructural development and the influx of Indian military and civilian labour and capital that accompanied Britain's Mandate in Iraq strengthened Twelver Khoja initiatives. But, as a travelogue examined in the next section demonstrates, a Twelver Khoja might be forced to turn to Hindu pearl merchants, Bengali *sepoys*, English railway station masters and Iraqi Jewish taxi drivers when in duress. Even so, none of this meant that caste ties were irrelevant, and Khoja caste status was a decisive means of differentiation, least of all from other Shī'a, Ismā'īlī and Twelver alike.

"In your *Faiẓ* will there be space for me this evening?": The Twelver Khoja Pilgrimage

The Twelver Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure in India and Iraq was the handiwork of leading community merchants, who funded local Arab guides and *mujtahids* alike. Just as the Bohra firm Abdul Ali & Co. acted as local manager for the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*, the head of Basra's Twelver Khoja *jamā'at*, Jethabhā'ī Gokal administered the local branch of the the *Anjuman-i Faiẓ-i Panjatanī*, which provided goods and services to Twelver Khoja during their pilgrimage to the shrine cities. The term *Panjatanī* invoked the five figures from the *ahl al-bayt*

¹¹⁰Samīr 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ibrāhīm (ed.), *Yawmiyāt riḥlah fī al-Ḥijāz*, 1348 H / 1930 M, Ghulam Rasul Mehr (Riyadh, 1417 [1996 or 7]), p. 69.

revered by Shī'īs: the Prophet Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥassan and Ḥussain. This institution was founded in Bombay in 1912, and, in keeping with Twelver Khoja communal life generally, was managed by leading Twelver Khoja merchants in Bombay, Karachi and Basra from its inception. Operating from its headquarters on Samuel Street in Bombay, the *Anjuman-i Faiẓ-i Panjatanī* was registered as a trust in 1932 and expanded its services to Hijaz, Iraq and Iran.¹¹¹ Throughout these years the *Anjuman-i Faiẓ-i Panjatanī* continued to rely on the support of Twelver Khoja business magnates, such as Ismā'īl 'Abd al-Karīm Panjū, senior partner of the firm Husein Abdulkarim Panju and E. A. Karim. Although a native son of Zanzibar, Panjū migrated to Bombay during the First World War, where he built a diverse business portfolio. He later served as treasurer of the *anjuman*, in addition to being a Director of Habib Bank, founded in 1941 by the Twelver Khoja Muḥammad Ḥabīb, which later became the cornerstone of Pakistan's early commercial banking sector and was active in the Gulf from the 1950s.¹¹²

Despite having a local *jamā'at* in Basra from the late 1910s, and though the managers of the *Anjuman-i Faiẓ-i Panjatanī* and Twelver Khoja merchants were energetic in the creation of *musāfirkhānas* (rest houses) in the shrine cities, the Twelver Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure was not quite as stage-managed as the Bohra *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*. Twelver Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure, nonetheless, functioned as a boundary mechanism to distinguish the community from Bohras, Ismā'īlī Khojas and other Twelver pilgrims. This is best demonstrated in the work, *Kāshūthī Karbalā* (From Kashi to Karbala), a Gujarati pilgrimage guide written by a Twelver Khoja, Khojā Lavjī Jhīṇā Māstar Banāras, who travelled to Iraq from his home in Benares (or Kashi as he, and many other Indian Muslims, called it).¹¹³ Even if Jhīṇā Māstar emphasised the crucial role of Twelver Khoja institutions in supplying accommodation and pilgrimage guides in Iraq, there is unfortunately no direct mention in *Kāshūthī Karbalā* of the *Anjuman-i Faiẓ-i Panjatanī*, which suggests that by the time of Jhīṇā Māstar's journey the institution had not yet achieved the critical mass that it did in later decades. It is likely that subsequent Twelver Khoja pilgrimage guides—such as one published in the early 1930s titled *Rāhnumā-i Faiẓ*—accorded greater value to the *anjuman*.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, this is not a fatal omission, for in *Kāshūthī Karbalā* one glimpses the consolidation of a Twelver Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure where caste and merchant wealth were decisive arbiters.

Tetchy and sardonic, Jhīṇā Māstar's account is in keeping with contemporary works of Twelver Khoja devotion, with its free use of vocabulary like *dharm* and *darśan* (as opposed to *dīn* and *dīdār*), terms that in the ensuing century have increasingly been coded as 'Hindu'. In his late 50s at the time he travelled to Iraq, Jhīṇā Māstar described himself as a "merchant and commission agent", and his text is replete with references to southern Iraq's commercial landscape, which he compared to his more familiar haunts in British India, such as Calcutta's Canning Road.¹¹⁵ In fact, a branch of his current employer,

¹¹¹'Anjuman-i-Faize-Panjetani (Pilgrim Institution)', *The Times of India Directory of Bombay (City & Province), including Karachi and Hyderabad State* (1940), p. 210.

¹¹²Esmail Abdulkarim Panju', in *The Indian Year Book, Vol. XXXIII*, (ed.) Sir Stanley Reed (Bombay & Calcutta, 1947), p. 1087.

¹¹³Khojā Lavjī Jhīṇā Māstar Banāras, *Kāshūthī Karbalā* (Ahmedabad: Amarsinhji Press, 1922 (?)).

¹¹⁴Unfortunately, I have not been able to track down this volume.

¹¹⁵Jhīṇā Māstar, *Kāshūthī Karbalā*, p. 31.

Seth R. Maherali & Sons, was located in Basra.¹¹⁶ The appendix to *Kāshīthī Karbalā* boasted that the author's name "Māstar" was registered in all the famous commercial directories of India, and also contained some self-interested remarks on the quality of his business. Based on references in the text, Jhīnā Māstar's business portfolio stretched, in one form or another, from Benares to Calcutta, Malaya, Ceylon and Siam. For all this galling, his conclusion was an overture to wealthy Twelver Khojas to not overlook the "sacred land" of Iraq in preference for travelling to Japan, China, America and England on business. Fortunes, both spiritual and material, were to be had in Iraq as well. Equally noteworthy is Jhīnā Māstar's passing comment that he was at one time the Benares branch manager for the enormous mercantile firm, Meherali Fazulbhoj Chinoy & Co., the namesake of which was a prominent Ismā'īlī Khoja and loyal supporter of the Aghā Khān. If Jhīnā Māstar was once an Ismā'īlī, then his employment history presents the tantalising question of whether, upon the 'conversion' of one member of the firm, Twelver and Ismā'īlī Khojas continued to collaborate as business partners or whether ties were severed.

Intra-Khoja rivalries are evident in the first pages of Jhīnā Māstar's text, where he cited for effect an opinion delivered in 1920–1 by a judge in the Bombay High Court who criticised the Khojas' religious illiteracy. To the author's mind, as the Khojas became more educated about Islam they would begin to identify themselves as Twelvers, as many in recent decades already had. Inexorably, Twelver Khoja mosques, madrasas, hostels, and thrifts (such as 'the Hidayat Fund' and the 'Khoja Indigent Fund') were being established in various regions to solidify this new status, and the circulation of monthlies like *Rāhe Najāt* and *Nure Hidayāt* deepened the Khojas' familiarity with Twelver Shī'ī doctrine.¹¹⁷ According to Jhīnā Māstar, the growing subset of Twelver Khojas likewise began to see Karbala as a focal point of their faith and to revere *Imām Ḥussain* as the saviour (*baḥāvanār*) of Islam.¹¹⁸ They were not alone, with Jhīnā Māstar remarking that even Mahatma Gandhi grasped the sanctity of Karbala and the example of self-sacrifice embodied by *Imām Ḥussain*.¹¹⁹ Pilgrimage, he added, was the surest expression of this love (*muhabbat*) for the line of 'true' *imāms* and an assertion of Twelver Khoja identity.

Jhīnā Māstar embarked upon his pilgrimage on 6 October 1921, proceeding, with his wife and young son, from Benares eastwards on the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway to Karachi, whence he took a steamer to Iraq, travelling intermediate class. From the start, the high proportion of Twelver Khoja civil servants assisted him handily: a friend who was a magistrate in Benares obtained a passport for him in a single day.¹²⁰ All the same, as Jhīnā Māstar himself stressed, pilgrimage was not merely for the wealthy Khoja, and pilgrims of any class could undertake the journey provided they did not leave much to fate (*kisimat*). By and large, the vicissitudes of *kisimat* could be mitigated because of Twelver Khoja merchant wealth, traces of which dotted the route from India to Iraq. "In Bombay", the author wrote, "there are 2–3 *musāfirkhānas* constructed by our [Khoja] brothers for pilgrims. Among

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁹ Worth noting is that in some Gujarati texts from this period *Imām Ḥussain* was described as a "*Muharram Mahatma*" and his final days a "*satyagraha*".

¹²⁰ Jhīnā Māstar, *Kāshīthī Karbalā*, p. 8.

these, Śeṭh Hajjī Devjībhai Jamāl's *musāfirkhāna* is open for all types of Twelver Shias, whereas two are only for Khoja pilgrims".¹²¹ Karachi meanwhile boasted a "beautiful *musāfirkhāna*" constructed by Śeṭh Hajjī Ghulām 'Alī Chalga, which could house "eight families at once easily". This hostel offered pilgrims water taps, electricity, toilets and cooking facilities, even fully furnished rooms. Yet once he departed Karachi, Jhīṇā Māstar learned the hard way that in Iraq itself Twelver Khoja infrastructure was not as well-managed.

When read alongside Musajī's *Rāhe Karbalā*, Jhīṇā Māstar's text conveys notable similarities and differences with the Bohra pilgrimage. While the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* appeared to shadow Musajī on every stage of his journey, Khoja institutions were more dispersed in Jhīṇā Māstar's account. They no doubt attenuated many inconveniences that Jhīṇā Māstar and his family endured, but more often than not the author had to turn to non-Khojas when in need. Helpfully, in sections Jhīṇā Māstar drew a contrast between Khoja institutions and the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* and even interacted with Bohra pilgrims. His high opinion of the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* was not entirely replicated in his depictions of the latter. In his section on passports he wrote:

An association [*sainstha*] has been established by the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī* of our Bohra brothers. Every wealthy member of the community, by giving it extensive financial help, has placed that association on a very sound footing. First-rate assistance is rendered by it to Bohra pilgrims in order to acquire passports and find passage on the steamer in Karachi. Besides this, superior arrangements for Bohra pilgrims are made by this association in Basra, Najaf Sharīf, Karbala Mu'allā and other places too.¹²²

Be that as it may, Jhīṇā Māstar learned firsthand that Bohra and Khoja caste distinctions died hard in the course of pilgrimage. Before discussing this in detail, however, some descriptive background from the travelogue is needed. Touching down in Basra, a city where he knew various Twelver Khojas by name only, he had a humorous exchange with a British customs officer over the tobacco that he was bringing into the country, though he suffered the indignity of having his family's luggage rummaged through and unpacked. Before disembarking and entering the city, Jhīṇā Māstar was warned by a Hindu merchant from Surat—who was on his way to collect pearls in Bahrain—that accommodation was very sparse in the city. The merchant advised the author that he should leave his son on board the vessel and find lodgings in the city on his own. Jhīṇā Māstar was troubled by this, writing that he never experienced such a thing in his travels to Penang, Singapore and Bangkok. When coupled with his annoyance at the lack of local Twelver Khoja-run accommodation, these remarks display show that, although Iraq was a site of increasing Twelver Khoja religious and economic interest, it as yet lacked the community institutions on which Jhīṇā Māstar and other Twelver Khojas depended in their travels from Southeast Asia to East Africa. This ensured that the Twelver Khoja pilgrimage experience necessitated moving in and out of caste boundaries, even if this was rarely by choice.

Khojas were certainly to be found in Iraq, though at times with difficulty. In contrast to Musajī's accent on the poor monetary situation, Jhīṇā Māstar was keen to point out that

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

Khojas were able to conveniently purchase hundis from “our brothers’ shops in Basra”.¹²³ Accommodation proved more difficult to come by. While struggling to find lodgings, the author managed to hire a car with the intervention of a Bengali *sepoy* at Basra’s train station (he evidently knew Bengali because of his time in Calcutta). In the train station Jhīṇā Māstar happened upon a group of finely dressed Bohras who were attempting, in a mix of broken English and Hindi, to purchase either first or second class train tickets from the British station master. When they were told that all first and second class tickets were sold out for the next two days, and that only third class tickets were available, Jhīṇā Māstar approached the window and asked the attendant, “Anything for this old man Sir [?]”¹²⁴ Sensing the author’s anxiety, the station master asked “Do you want to go in third class?” Though he offered this option, the station master later warned Jhīṇā Māstar that travelling in third class in Iraq was not like India, as some trains lacked toilet facilities. By Jhīṇā Māstar’s own admission, he froze upon hearing these words.

In the midst of this exchange, a white-bearded Bohra dressed in a black tunic stood at the window. Taking Jhīṇā Māstar to be a fellow Bohra, he asked the author: “How are you brother, why don’t you come to the *Faiẓ Mandī* (*fej mandī*)?”¹²⁵ In turn, Jhīṇā Māstar shrugged off the overture, saying that he could not come to the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*, but the Bohra persisted in his offer. When he eventually asked Jhīṇā Māstar why he refused to come, Jhīṇā Māstar retorted: “Sir, do you want to know the reason? I am of the Khoja caste. In your *Faiẓ* will there be space for me this evening?” Jhīṇā Māstar records that upon hearing this the Bohra went cold from head to toe, and silently began stroking his beard. While the Bohra remained speechless, Jhīṇā Māstar pressed him again for an answer, and when the interlocutor finally managed to muster a response the topic of conversation suddenly changed. Following the Bohra’s departure, the British station master asked Jhīṇā Māstar why he did not accompany him. Jhīṇā Māstar answered: “You stayed in Mumbai and Calcutta so you can understand. He was a member of the Bohra caste and I was a member of the Khoja caste. This was the reason I could not go with him up to his *dharmaśālā* for the evening”.¹²⁶

Just as he praised Bohra pilgrimage infrastructure, while also stressing the prevalence of caste distinctions, Jhīṇā Māstar also accented how Khoja caste identity differentiated Twelver Khojas both from Ismā‘īlīs and non-Khoja Twelvers. In particular, without the Twelver Khoja mercantile footprint in Iraq, Jhīṇā Māstar’s pilgrimage would have been a good deal more onerous than it already was. On occasion, Twelver Khoja merchants and their agents came to fetch the author from the train station and supplied accommodation.¹²⁷ Like the Bohra Musajī, Jhīṇā Māstar was able to rent automobiles at an affordable rate. In league with the clerk of a “Zanzibari Khoja”, on his way to Karbala from Hilla he chartered a taxi owned by an Iraqi Jew who could speak a smattering of broken English.¹²⁸ But once

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹²⁴ The quote is produced in English in the account.

¹²⁵ Jhīṇā Māstar notifies the reader that he has put the Bohra’s remarks in quotes because his Gujarati accent was quite irregular, saying “*faij*” instead of “*faiẓ*” when referring to the *Faiẓ-i Ḥussainī*. For the duration of his conversation with the Bohra, Jhīṇā Māstar attempted to replicate his accent, to humorous narrative effect in the text.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

in Karbala there was no guarantee of finding accommodation, and with two *lakh* pilgrims (200,000) huddled in the city, the author once again fretted about where to stay.¹²⁹ When the Iraqi Jewish taxi driver attempted to unceremoniously drop off his charges in this bustling crowd, the author and his fellow passengers refused. Eventually, the driver relented and dropped them off at the entrance of the bazaar.

Left unpropitiously at the bazaar gate, they were approached by an Arab *mutawallī* (trustee; pilgrimage guide), whom Jhīṇā Māstar initially compared to Hindu pilgrimage guides in Benares who sat in wait for pilgrims with children and automobiles, evidently the most lucrative catch. These *mutawallīs* performed the same task of shepherding Jhīṇā Māstar and his family as Faiz employees did in Musajī's account. According to Jhīṇā Māstar, such *mutawallīs* were employed by Twelver Khoja institutions. As an illustration, while in Karbala the *mutawallī* at the bazār greeted Jhīṇā Māstar and the other pilgrims in Kachchhi, asking "Are you Khojas?"¹³⁰ Jhīṇā Māstar remarked that though the *mutawallī* was an Arab, he was not surprised he spoke Kachchhi, surmising that the man had travelled to Karachi, Bombay and Calcutta. Consequently, Jhīṇā Māstar replied in Gujarati that they were indeed Khojas from Benares, by way of Bhavnagar. Upon hearing this, the *mutawallī* recalled the founder of the [Twelver Khoja] Hidayat Fund, Hajjī Ghulām 'Alī Ismā'īlī. Purportedly, the *mutawallī* had done rather well because of the Hidayat Fund, with Jhīṇā Māstar commenting that it was as if the *mutawallī* had been drenched in "the rain storm of the Hidayat Fund".¹³¹ It was money well-spent, as the *mutawallī* handled Jhīṇā Māstar's luggage with great care and found the group lodgings in the *musāfirkhāna* erected by Śeṭh Qāsim Nanjī, a Twelver Khoja merchant from Bombay. Several other Khoja *musāfirkhānas* also existed in the city.¹³²

Jhīṇā Māstar harboured less praise for the *mutawallī* in Najaf, who came from the Shamsa family and was named Shaykh Yūsuf bin Ḥasan.¹³³ Shaykh Yūsuf had likewise become wealthy as a result of the pilgrimage trade, though Jhīṇā Māstar did not mask his contempt for the man. Supposedly, Shaykh Yūsuf regularly asked pilgrims who had completed the normal circuit of *ziyārat* whether they wished to make any additional visits to sites in the city. The *mutawallī* would then chide pilgrims "Surely, you do not intend to visit the sacred chamber of *Imām* 'Alī empty-handed?"¹³⁴ Once at the shrine, unsuspecting pilgrims deposited their donations into the *jāṭī* [Ar. ḍaṭīḥ], the silver four-sided trellis housing the grave of the *imām*, only for the *mutawallī* to extract and pocket them.¹³⁵ Even if one had to reckon with such oily operators, at least in Najaf there were two *musāfirkhānas* for Khojas, one constructed by a Bombay business magnate, another by one from Zanzibar who had also constructed a charitable hospital on the island. For Iranian pilgrims, meanwhile, there were 25–30 *musāfirkhānas* in the city, and the "huge site" for Bohras built by the *Faiṣ-i Ḥussainī*.¹³⁶

Jhīṇā Māstar also made note of the Khoja Ismā'īlī presence in Najaf. There a compound housed the marble graves of "three elders of the Aghā Khān", and three readers were

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 30.

stationed on a kind of rotating railing upon which they recited the Qur'ān.¹³⁷ The author used the occasion to take a potshot at the Khoja Ismā'īlīs: "Ismā'īlīs like Vartejī try to cleverly show that the Ismā'īlīs are separate from Islam, but the honorable Aghā Khān's family thinks of themselves as Twelver Shī'a and put forward this [the Qur'ān readers] as proof".¹³⁸ The Vartejī to whom Jhīṇā Māstar referred was born into an Ismā'īlī family, became a Twelver Shī'ī as a young man, and eventually 'reverted' back to Nizārī Ismā'īlī Shī'ism, becoming a leading polemicist against Twelver Shī'ism in the interwar period and a proponent of the idea that Nizārī Ismā'īlī Shī'ism represented the consummate fusion of Hinduism and Islam.¹³⁹

This jab at Vartejī confirms that Jhīṇā Māstar was familiar with the swirl of Gujarati polemics exchanged by Twelver and Ismā'īlī Khoja authors in these years. These tracts, often numbering only a few dozen pages or so, merit extensive consideration of their own and were crucial in the elaboration of intra-Shī'ī polemics. In the next section, however, attention is reserved for an enormous anti-Bohra and Khoja polemic published in 1932 by a Twelver Shī'ī scholar of Iranian origin who had lived in Najaf for several years. Were he attentive to recent developments in Iraq, and he no doubt was, this scholar would have been well aware of the influx of Bohras and Khoja pilgrimage institutions into the shrine cities. His polemic is read here as a reaction against that presence, a reflection of how the Bohras' and Khojas' exercise in locative piety inspired detractors principally among fellow Shī'a.

A Twelver Shī'ī Polemic against the Nizārī and Musta'li Ismā'īlīs

The 1920s and 30s were hardly auspicious decades for Twelver Shī'ī religious scholars in Iraq and Iran. Even in the shrine cities, several events seriously undermined the power of the clerics, so much so that when the aforementioned Mīr Asad 'Alī Khān travelled through the country at the end of the decade he remarked that while the influence of the *mujtahids* in local and political affairs had previously been great, presently their status had sunk precipitously, both in Iraq and Iran.¹⁴⁰ Part of the problem lay with the procedure for establishing religious authority within the shrine cities. As Yitzhak Nakash has put it, "Although from the nineteenth century the Shī'ī religious leadership in Iraq had become more centralized than in previous periods, a formal Shī'ī religious hierarchy was not established and there did not develop any clear mechanism for the selection or appointment of the supreme *mujtahid*".¹⁴¹

Developments after the start of the British Mandate undermined this authority still further. While the two heads of India's largest Ismā'īlī communities could benefit from Britain's largely 'liberal' approach to intervening in religious affairs, the Shī'ī *mujtahids* had to fend off attacks from the new governmental authorities in Baghdad and Tehran, who vacillated between outright hostility and indifference towards Shī'ī religious authorities. Both policies had the effect of undermining the *mujtahids*' capacity to exercise local authority in the shrine

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Tajddin, *101 Ismaili Heroes, Vol. 1*, p. 194.

¹⁴⁰ Mīr Asad 'Alī Khān, *Irāq wa Irān*, p. 67.

¹⁴¹ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shī'īs of Iraq* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1995), p. 76.

cities. In Najaf and Karbala proper, British and Iraqi government control of the Oudh Bequest, conflicts between the *mujtahids*, tribal *shaiikhs* and bazaar merchants throughout the 1920s, and a dramatic schism between Arab and Iranian Shī'ī scholars in 1924, severely eroded the patronage networks that permitted the religious scholars to exercise power and attract students.¹⁴²

This was the context in which Khurāsānī wrote his *Kitāb Tanbīhāt al-Jalīyah fī Kashf al-Asrār al-Bāṭinīyya*. The title itself invoked the well-known anti-Isma'īlī tract *Kashf Asrār al-Bāṭinīyya wa-l-Akhhbār al-Qarāmiṭah* written by the Yemeni scholar, Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Faḍā'il al-Ḥammādī (d. 1077), which appeared in print edition four years after Khurāsānī's polemic. In fact, during the interwar many Muslim scholars in Egypt and India composed dedicated studies on the histories and beliefs of the Ismailis. These were not always heresiologies, but conformed more to the kinds of historiographical excursions then being undertaken by Vladimir Ivanow into the history of the Isma'īlīs. It does not appear that Khurāsānī was familiar with any contemporary European studies on Isma'īlism, but he was familiar with a host of other texts composed in the Islamicate world.

Shī'ī biographical dictionaries contain sparse information about Khurāsānī. One of them, *A'yān al-Shī'a*, notes only that he was a pupil of Shaykh Aghā Ziyā' al-'Irāqī and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥussain al-Nā'inī, two distinguished teachers of Najaf.¹⁴³ Khurāsānī appears to have spent a good portion of his life training students in Nishapur before emigrating to Iraq. In these same biographical entries, *Kitāb tanbīhāt* is the only treatise attributed to Khurāsānī, suggesting that it was the work that solidified his reputation, both in his lifetime and after. Several passages in the text suggest that Khurāsānī may have been an Isma'īlī at one point, or had regular interactions with Isma'īlīs in Khurasan. For example, in the introduction he states "this contemptible one was for a time, out of ignorance, immersed in this whirlpool of error [zā'ālat], until at long last, in conformity with 'but Allah guides whom He wills (2:272)' [he was led] to the righteous path".¹⁴⁴ This escape from the 'whirlpool of ignorance' could mean either that Khurāsānī was a Twelver who had been misled into thinking the Isma'īlīs were Shi'īs, or that he was a former Isma'īlī who renounced his faith and became a Twelver. Though the former seems more likely, an Isma'īlī identity cannot be ruled out entirely, not least because even now there are a few pockets of Isma'īlīs in villages like Qasimabad, on the road between Khurāsānī's native town of Nishapur and Mashhad.¹⁴⁵ As a matter of fact, Khurāsānī refers throughout the text to his own meetings and observations of the Isma'īlīs in Nishapur, Qasimabad and Dizabad, from whom he heard accounts of Isma'īlī beliefs and practices.¹⁴⁶ Beyond this, Khurāsānī's text displays a familiarity with Isma'īlī rituals and beliefs that many contemporary Sunni and Shī'ī heresiologists could not claim.

Printed in Najaf by al-Maṭba'a al-Murtaḍawīyya, a publishing house that produced numerous texts on Shī'ī hadith throughout the interwar period,¹⁴⁷ Khurāsānī's massive

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 85–90, 247–253.

¹⁴³Muḥsin Amīn, "Al-Maulvī Muḥammad Karīm bin Muḥammad 'Alī al-Khurāsānī," *A'yān al-Shī'a*, Vol. 14 (Beirut, 1998), p. 349.

¹⁴⁴Khurāsānī, *Kitāb tanbīhāt*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 11. These 'sources' appear to have been entirely Nizā'ī Isma'īlīs.

¹⁴⁷For a brief discussion of the press see al-Najafī, *Madī al-Najaf*, p. 119.

work appears to be the most extensive anti-Isma'īlī tract ever composed. It is worth noting that Khurāsānī chose to write the work in Persian, but this was in keeping with the growing divide between Arabic and Persian as scholarly languages in the contemporary shrine cities.¹⁴⁸ As Khurāsānī explained in the introduction, he wrote the text in rather unadorned Persian prose to make it beneficial for the general (male) religious public ('*umūm-i barādarān-i dīnī*'), but certain sections required a more technical discourse reserved for scholars. His sources were diverse, and hint at the range of printed texts at his disposal. They included the most famous anti-Bābī and anti-Bahā'ī treatises by Twelver Shī'ī scholars which were printed in Beirut, Cairo and Bombay from the mid-nineteenth century, but also a host of medieval Mamluk-era Sunni historians writing on the Fatimids, including Ibn Khallikān.¹⁴⁹ His textual sources also included Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī's *Radd-i Necharīyya*, a polemic against Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, the founder of the so-called Aligarh movement, who was accused of being a materialist and a British collaborator.¹⁵⁰ As such, Khurāsānī's description of the Khojas and Bohras as materialists likely carried two meanings: in the sense of how medieval Islamic thinkers used it—that is as a pejorative label for atheists—and as part of a bid to frame the Isma'īlīs as British stooges and as 'sects' connected to the Aligarh movement, the Ahmadiyya and other 'heresies' of more recent vintage emanating from British India.

For all this prodigious reading, and his reliance on these texts, Khurāsānī was adamant that the reader should not lean entirely on these sources for information about the Isma'īlīs. Indeed, his own meetings with Isma'īlīs in Khurasan furnished particulars unfound in written materials.¹⁵¹ Curiously, as Khurāsānī stressed in his introduction, the original title of the work was 'On the History and Beliefs of the Isma'īlīs'. However, he asserted—with some tendentious reasoning it has to be admitted—that a refutation (*radd*) that compared the "heretic Isma'īlīs" with the Bābīs was unnecessary. All that was demanded, he reassured his reader, was to demonstrate that the origins of the Isma'īlīs can be traced back to the "Magians (*majūs*) and the Sabeans".¹⁵²

Throughout the work, Khurāsānī referred to the Bohras and Khojas both by the more neutral language of *ṭā'ifa* (faction) or *firqa* (sect), but also by a deluge of insults such as *mulāhada* (heretics), *Qarāmīṭa* (name of a medieval Isma'īlī group notorious for sacking Mecca in the tenth century), *bāṭiniyya* (esoterics), *Ṣufiyya* (Sufis), and *Majūsiyya* (Zoroastrians). This had the intended effect of demonstrating that Isma'īlīs were beyond the pale of Islam.¹⁵³ Of greatest offence in the author's mind was the Isma'īlīs' belief in the transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*) and incarnation (*ḥulūl*), doctrines that Khurāsānī maintained were derived from non-Islamic sects that ran the gamut from materialists (*falāsafa-i dahriyya*) to Sabeans and Hindu Brahmins.¹⁵⁴ Elsewhere, however, he also castigated Sufis of the "Sunni and Ash'arī *madhhab*" for holding such beliefs—not least the notion that God had physical

¹⁴⁸Nakash, *The Shī'īs of Iraq*, pp. 256–257.

¹⁴⁹Ḥusayn Qulī Jadīd al-Islām, *Minhāj al-ṭālibīn kih radd bar firqah-i hālikah-i Bābīyah* (Bombay, 1320 [1902]); Muḥammad Mahdī Khān Tibrīzī, *Miftāḥ Bāb al-abwāb* (Cairo, 1321/1903–4).

¹⁵⁰Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London, 1999), p. 9.

¹⁵¹Khurāsānī, *Kitāb tanbīhāt*, p. 11.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, see unnumbered first folio.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 11, 17.

features—and blamed the Sunnis for giving birth to these various heretical sects that little by little “penetrated (*sirāyat kardan*) into the Shī'a”.¹⁵⁵

Sunni and Brahmin boogie men aside, no other groups bore more responsibility for the Ismā'īlī upsurge than the Bābīs and the Bahā'īs, who constituted the bugbear of many Twelver Shī'ī clerics. Hundreds of pages in Khurāsānī's treatise are dedicated to a dissection of their history and beliefs. Incredibly, Khurāsānī maintained at one point that the Bāb sent missionaries to Jabal Sanus and India to in order to “teach the claims of the *imāmate* to Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī Sanūsī, Sayyid Aḥmad [Khān], Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad Qadīānī, and Muḥammad Aḥmad Sudānī [the famed Mahdī]”.¹⁵⁶ This is a diverse set of characters, all of whom held irreconcilable and controversial views of Muslim political and religious authority, but they were all seen by Sunni and Shī'ī commentators of various persuasions as vestiges of a corrosion within Islam that had to be reined in. Khurāsānī lumped them all together, perhaps in a bid to show that earlier threats to Twelver Shī'ī clerical authority had spawned a cacophony of schismatics all claiming to be Muslim, with the Ismā'īlīs being among the worst offenders for the simple reason that they “adorned themselves in the garments of the Shī'a”.

There is a discrepancy between this picture of the Ismā'īlīs as a new phenomenon and Khurāsānī's recognition of their earlier history and his rather encyclopedic discussion of, among other things, the history of the Fatimids, Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ, and the activities of the first Aghā Khān in Iran and India. For present needs, his discussion of the latter is most compelling. After recreating the Aghā Khān's encounters with the Qajars at some length, he stated that he “went to India which was a country of freedom (*mamlakat-i azādī*) and the profusion of religions”.¹⁵⁷ Disingenuously, he framed the Aghā Khān's followers as entirely drawn from Hindu converts, writing that when the Aghā Khān arrived in Bombay he “opened up a hundred cotton stores and all of his customers were Hindus and they put their faith in him”.¹⁵⁸ The Aghā Khān's ability to command monetary donations was a repeated trope in Khurāsānī's work, and in one instance a parallel was made with the Bahā'ī leader, 'Abbās Effendī.¹⁵⁹ In another act of tendentious interpretation, Khurāsānī wrote that “there is a place in India called Kachchh (*kaj*) and everyone there is called Khoja. They have spread to India, Africa and Zanzibar, and they are Hindus and Fire Worshipers (Parsis), and they have transferred their faith to the Aghā Khān”.¹⁶⁰ In light of the many Twelver Khojas who had supported *mujtahids* and Shī'ī ritual life throughout the Indian Ocean, not least in Iraq, this betrayed a certain incomprehension of the complexity of western Indian Shī'ī groups, but it once again hints at the tendency to conflate all western Indian Shī'īs with the Ismā'īlīs.

In comparison with the Aghā Khān and the Khojas, Khurāsānī's discussion of the Bohras is more sporadic. While he knew that the Bohras were distinct from the Nizārīs, relaying

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 237.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 238–239.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

information about Bohra religious life was more onerous. This stemmed from the fact, as he admitted with frustration, that “all of their actions are very difficult because of their extreme fastidiousness in casting suspicion and concealing their beliefs”.¹⁶¹ The most he could claim was a brief meeting with a Bohra, whose prayers he heard but was unable to understand.¹⁶² He was nonetheless adamant that they were British lackies, not unlike the Druze with their French overlords in Mandate Syria.¹⁶³ One other vestige of Bohra life that Khurāsānī found especially mysterious was that Bohra pilgrims trekked in large numbers to the Great Mosque in Kufa, but never bothered to visit *Masjid al-Sahla* in the same city.¹⁶⁴ Though he did not venture an explanation, this may have been because the latter mosque holds a special place of reverence for Twelver Shī'īs, who believe that the twelfth *imām* will appear at this site when he has emerged from occultation, a doctrine that would have had little appeal to Bohras who adhere to a different line of *imāms* after Ismā'īl. In the same breath, however, the author did curiously add that “[the Bohras’] conduct conforms in external appearance to [proper] religious conduct, unlike the sect of the Nizāris, who do not follow the path of religion.” Perhaps this grudging concession to the Bohras stemmed from the fact that they made pilgrimage to the shrine cities, unlike most followers of the Aghā Khān. Even in the realm of heresiology then, the competing models of locative and embodied piety modulated the character of intra-Shī'ī relations and representations.¹⁶⁵ Khurāsānī's confusion exhibits the degree to which different traditions of contemporary Shī'ī Islam operated on distinct planes in this period, and when they intersected often did so with an amalgam of mutual incomprehension and suspicion.

The foregoing analysis of Khurāsānī's treatise has shown how the Bohra and Khoja presence in the shrine cities, and their self-representation as Shī'a, was seen by Twelver Shī'ī clerics as a menace to bona fide Shī'ī Islam, yet another vestige of a threat that had emerged with the Bahā'īs in the nineteenth century. As with the Bahā'īs, the Bohras and Khojas had proved to be efficient mobilisers of select institutions and technologies that permitted them to gain new followers, fundraise and construct interlinked religious and commercial institutions. This partly explains the animus with which the rise of the Bahā'īs and Ismā'īlīs was greeted in the writings of *mujtahids* like Khurāsānī. What is riveting about the Bohra and Khoja case is the fact that their attempts to forge circuits of locative piety in Iraq intersected with those of their Twelver Shī'ī counterparts in a way that those of the Bahā'īs did not. They also claimed to be Shī'a, which the Bahā'īs did not.¹⁶⁶ As Khurāsānī reiterated throughout his work, what made the Bohras and Khojas so offensive was their dissimulation within the Shī'ī fold. Indeed, as his own observations in Khurasan and Iraq confirmed, the Bohras and Khojas were proving impossible to avoid.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 321–322.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

¹⁶⁶ The one-time house of Bahā' Allāh near Baghdad, formerly an important Bahā'ī pilgrimage site, was seized by Iraqi authorities in 1925. John Walbridge, ‘Bahā'ī Shrines’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 3, (New York, 1989).

Conclusion

This article has shown how western Indian Shī'ī religious and commercial firms established a pilgrimage infrastructure that depended for its operation upon geographically dispersed community institutions, ties to political authorities and integration into various administrative and transport networks. The continued presence of the Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure in today's Iraq—and especially their resurgence after 2003—conveys how each group has successfully managed to weather Iraq's turbulent history over the past century and maintain a brand of Shī'ī particularism, despite (in the case of the Twelver Khojas) being the overt object of the Iraqi government's wrath. This owes to the further intensification of the dual processes of vertical integration and horizontal differentiation demonstrated throughout this article, processes sustained by the singular role of the *jamā'at* in both the Bohra and Khoja communities.

By elevating trans-imperial pilgrimage to a hitherto unattained height in community life, the creation of Bohra and Khoja infrastructures in Iraq represented an iteration of locative piety, whereby homegrown pilgrimage organisations were extended to the Shī'ī shrine cities. Although Awadh has rightfully been the centerpiece for many studies of Indian Shī'ism, the Bohra and Khoja cases suggest that Bombay and Karachi—to say nothing of Bhavnagar and Amreli—were crucial vectors in the story of trans-imperial Shī'ism. Private Bohra and Khoja efforts to make locative piety a social reality guaranteed that the human and logistical connections between urban centres in western India and Iraq were strengthened. As never before, sacred sites in Iraq (and the Hijaz) became a fulcrum of communal devotion and altered the form and content of Shī'ī Islam in each group. In turn, this amplified association with the physical terrain of Najaf, Karbala and other shrine cities provoked hostility from Twelver *mujtahids* in Iraq. But the turn to Iraq also escalated tensions within these communities, especially among Ismā'īlī and Twelver Khojas, with the latter viewing locative piety as an alternative to the embodied piety centered on the Aghā Khāns.

When viewed across an entire century, these developments permit us to write histories of Shī'ī Islam in ways that both complement and depart from older as well as more recent works examining Twelver Shī'ī transnational developments in South Asia and the Middle East. However numerically small the Bohras and Khojas are, their influence in the urban life of several parts of the Indian Ocean has been considerable from the mid-nineteenth century. This owes largely to their wealth, a fact that should encourage historians to rethink histories of Islam and modern capitalism, which are too often told as a story of dueling monoliths. Commercial wealth not only made possible the Bohra and Khoja pilgrimage infrastructure linking India and Iraq, but also accelerated communal rivalries, and at times, even gave birth to sectarian institution-building. Consequently, instead of being regarded as manifestations of an Islam-set-apart, or a minority within a minority, the Bohras and Khojas supply a pretext for thinking in new ways about fissures within modern Shī'ī Islam, but also economic divergences among Muslim communities over the past two and a half centuries, and the consequences for infrastructures of Muslim devotion.

In the final measure, the processes chartered in this article supply a means for better integrating Bohra and Khoja histories into studies of global Islam, and suggest a need for more work on Muslim texts in Gujarati. Outside of the field of Ismaili studies, Gujarati is rarely

privileged as a language of Islamic scholarship, much to the detriment of our conception of how Bohra and Khoja religiosity was transformed in the colonial period. Situating Gujarati within a wider intertextual field comprising Arabic, Persian and Urdu demonstrates that neither Gujarati nor Bohra and Khoja Islam represent a 'vernacular' or 'Indic' counterpart to a mythical 'Arab' Islamic mainstream. One must not overlook the institutional singularities of Bohra and Khoja Islam, and likewise acknowledge that their internal discourses inevitably carry elements that may roughly be called 'Indic' in origin. Yet that overemphasis has ignored the engagement with a range of Muslim texts from outside the strict boundaries of the community and the inescapably international dimensions of the Bohra and Khoja diasporas. The primacy of place cuts many ways, a fact that locative piety allows us to capture well. A constellation of geographically dispersed sacred sites from Yemen to Iraq, Iran to Gujarat, give Bohra and Khoja Islam their multivalent sense of place. But an over-accentuation on Bohra and Khoja Islam as distinct manifestations of religion risks missing just how insistent these groups have been in forging new public manifestations of Shī'ī Islam in the Middle East and South Asia, and how that has instigated both admiration and derision from other Muslims. Even if the pilgrimage infrastructures that the Bohras and Khojas crafted were intended to be caste-specific, they were imbricated within dense textual and institutional circuits that give the lie to any depiction of these communities and their Islam as insulated from wider shifts in the regional intellectual terrain.

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