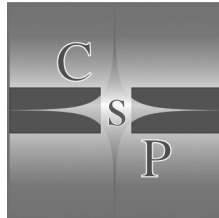


Gujaratis in the West:
Evolving Identities in Contemporary Society

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Edited by

Anjoom A. Mukadam and Sharmina Mawani



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book is dedicated to the first generation of Gujaratis, the pioneers, for their tolerance and resilience as they embraced change whilst keeping true to their cultural traditions. Their sacrifices and hard work have given their children a life very different from their own, one which is full of opportunities and potential.

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FOREWORD

Although Indians have traveled abroad for centuries, they did not start to migrate in large numbers and in a systematic way until the 1830s, when slavery was abolished in the British Empire and the tea and sugar plantations needed people to do the work the emancipated slaves were unwilling to do. That migration continued well into the early years of the twentieth century when it was discontinued under the pressure of the Indian National Congress. The next wave of migration began after the Second World War and has continued ever since. The history of the Indian diaspora thus is just under two hundred years old. Indians have settled in over thirty countries in fairly substantial numbers, and in each their struggles to retain and adopt their identity to new circumstances have generated ways of life that are both similar and different. Comparing and contrasting these communities would be a fascinating historical and sociological exercise.

Although the Indian diaspora of around fifteen million people is smaller than its Jewish, Chinese, African, British and other counterparts and represents just over one percent of the population of India, it is unique in several significant respects. It is far more varied than any other. Its members represent half a dozen religions, are drawn from seven different regions of India, belong to nearly a dozen castes, cover a wide variety of occupations ranging from farm labourers and factory workers to professionals and industrialists, and earn both the highest and the lowest *per capita* income in different countries.

With the exception of the Jews, few other diasporic communities have suffered as much harassment as the Indian. When they first arrived, they were despised by the indigenous people for doing the work avoided by the latter. Hindus, who constituted large majority of indentured labourers, aroused additional contempt for their physical size, “polytheism”, “heathen” practices, “strange” customs, “curious dress” of both men and women and “funny” rituals. As Indians improved their economic condition and were later joined by the professionals and traders, they aroused the opposition of the whites, and a few decades later that of the economically advancing natives. Once the colonies became free, Indians became targets of attack and were physically harassed in many countries, discriminated against in jobs (Kenya, Uganda and Guyana), expelled

(Aden, Burma and Uganda), sections of them repatriated (Sri Lanka), or made to feel so insecure that a large body of them left the country (Surinam and Fiji).

For decades overseas Indian communities had little contact with each other and, with a few exceptions, only a limited contact with India. Not surprisingly they followed different paths of development, evolved unique ways of life and thought, and acquired different identities. If we exclude the recent migration to the West about which it is too early to generalise, some differences are striking. Indians in Trinidad and Guyana produced a rich literature on their experiences of migration and settlement, but not their counterparts elsewhere. Only in South Africa were the Indians actively involved in anti-racist struggles from the very beginning, and threw up so many left wing leaders including communists. Only Trinidad threw up an Indian in the person of V.S. Naipaul with a deep and anguished curiosity about his ancestral civilisation. In no other country save Guyana, not even in the neighbouring Trinidad, have the Indians integrated so extensively with the indigenous people and helped evolve a common national culture. Only the East African Indians threw up a highly entrepreneurial and enterprising community and gave the Indians only a partially deserved reputation of being “born traders”. It is difficult to think of any other diaspora which contains such vast differences.

Indian migrants abroad came from different parts of the country. The Gujaratis are just over one third of the global Indian diaspora. Others came from eastern UP, western Bihar, Punjab, and parts of South India. Thanks to the skills and the local culture they brought with them and their experiences in the new country, these groups developed different forms of self-understanding and ways of life. At the risk of simplification and overgeneralisation, it seems to me that Gujaratis of all religions display certain strengths and weaknesses. As a rule, they tend to be flexible, tolerant, understanding, resilient, enterprising, ready to adjust to the wider society, family orientated, willing to help each other, and with a marked preference for business, commerce and legal and medical professions. Given Gujarat’s cultural history, the Gujarati Hindus and Muslims share many cultural beliefs and practices in common and are at ease with each other. It is striking that even after the atrocities against the Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, the overseas Gujarati Muslims rightly blamed the government of Gujarat but not its people, and continued to visit it as before. The Gujarati Hindus carry their own brand of soft *Hindutva* which creates some distance between them and the Muslims, but has not stood in the way of their good relations.

The Gujaratis, be they Hindus or Muslims, tend to avoid political life,

and few of them in any part of the world occupy important elected political positions. Although religious, they carry their religion rather lightly and are prepared to make such changes in it as the circumstances require. They are not given to critical self-reflection, have thrown up few artists and intellectuals, and few of them have written works exploring their experiences of migration and settlement. They retain close ties with Gujarat, and are more easily influenced by its religious and political movements than do those coming from other parts of India. They are generous in their philanthropic activities which, unlike in the past, are now no longer directed exclusively at India.

The present volume is an impressive contribution to the long overdue study of the Gujarati diaspora. It covers Gujarati religious communities, and looks closely at those settled in Europe and North America. Its rich insights and valuable data bring these communities alive, and help us to understand the kinds of identity related conflicts they face and the different ways in which they cope with them. I learned much from it, and sincerely hope that it will pave the way and set the scholarly standards for many more future studies of its kind.

Bhikhu Parekh
House of Lords and the
University of Westminster

INTRODUCTION

A JOURNEY ENRICHED BY TRADITION

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.

—Mahatma Gandhi

The study of Gujarat and Gujaratis has never been confined to one particular discipline. On the contrary, the diverse nature of its peoples and their traditions has been mirrored in academia by the plurality of disciplines under which it is studied. Gujarat studies is not located in a specific geographical space, rather there are communities within communities located globally. Furthermore, these communities should be viewed as fluid, dialogic and continuously evolving. This volume is therefore a snapshot of certain Gujarati communities in a specific time and space.

Gujarat studies can be viewed as being exemplary in that at times of increasing global movements of peoples and traditions these communities, through their own experiences of migration and upheaval, developed strategies to enable them to integrate whilst maintaining their own distinct linguistic, cultural and religious identities. This heterogeneity allows scholars to develop intellectual parameters that are interdisciplinary and which are built on individual specialisations. The adaptability and ingenuity of these communities enabled them to create new forms of their language, cuisine, clothing, etc., so that they could integrate into their new global environments. It is this creativity and chameleon-like ability that is their trademark. These are challenging times for Gujarati communities, especially those residing in the West, as they try to locate their identities in an increasingly complex global diversity.

The Gujarati community in the West is extremely heterogeneous and consists of two main groups, those that came directly from India and others who migrated via East Africa. Nevertheless, these people are bound together by a common ancestry, which lies in the state of Gujarat. Situated on the coast in the North-West of India with an area of 196,000 square

kilometres and a population of over 50 million, which accounts for around five percent of the country's population, Gujarat is the most industrialised state in India. Gujarati is the official language of the state, though several other languages, including Hindi and Kacchi, are also spoken. Gujarati is an Indo-European language and one of the 22 official languages of India. In addition to the 50 million Gujaratis in India, it is estimated that there are in excess of 700,000 Gujaratis residing in the United Kingdom and over 450,000 in North America. The Gujarati community is, by its very nature, diverse and includes individuals from many faith groups including Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Jainism and Christianity.

Mercantile castes of Western India, including Gujarat, have participated in overseas trade for many centuries and as new opportunities arose in different parts of the British Empire they were among the first to emigrate. Indian emigration has been divided into three primary phases, the first phase occurring pre-World War II, the second and third post-World War II (Madhavan, 1985; Peach, 1990). Although a small number of Indians appear to have migrated to nearby Sri Lanka, Malaya and Burma in the 1790s, it was not until the early 1830s, when slave labour was eliminated in the British territories, that Indians began emigrating in large numbers (Madhavan, 1985). This marked the first phase of Indian emigration, which Peach (1990:38) has termed "indentured migration". Indentured labour consisted of a three to five year contract during which time the labourer was given a wage and free passage. Some labourers appear to have been indentured for almost ten years before being granted free return passage (Buchignani, et al., 1985; Madhavan, 1985; Peach, 1990). Alongside indentured emigration, commercial migrants voluntarily emigrated in search of opportunities to acquire wealth. The commercial migrants, making up 20 percent of the total Indian emigration, prospered in the new lands and many became invaluable employees of the colonial governments. Between 1800 and 1945 an estimated three million Indians emigrated to various countries around the world—2.2 million emigrated to Ceylon, Burma and Malaysia; 420,000 to Mauritius and East Africa; 400,000 to Fiji and the West Indies; and 500,000 to Britain, Canada, the United States, and other countries (Madhavan, 1985).

The second phase of Indian emigration took place after World War II. Peach (1990:38) has termed this phase of emigration as "free market migration" which was "concentrated in areas strongly affected by the upheavals of the 1947 Partition, but the causes of the movement are not directly related to that event" (Ibid.). During this period 750,000 Indians migrated to developed countries, primarily Britain (44%), Canada (14%) and the United States (26%). The remaining 16 percent chose to settle in

Western Europe (11%) and Australia (5%) (Madhavan, 1985; Peach, 1990). Indian immigrants migrated to Western Europe, Canada, the United States, and Australia in large numbers due to a change in immigration policies, which focused on attracting immigrants based on their skills rather than their national origin. During the first phase of Indian emigration, emigrants were predominantly agricultural labourers. The second phase, however, saw an outflow of highly educated professional emigrants (Madhavan, 1985). The third phase of Indian emigration emerged after colonised countries gained independence. This phase consisted of the forced migration of Indians from countries outside of India, such as East Africa, Sri Lanka and Burma.

With the end of British rule in East Africa, the lives of South Asian communities were disrupted due to Africanisation and anti-Asian riots (Mukadam and Mawani, 2008). This upheaval culminated in 1972 when Idi Amin, the President of Uganda, expelled 40,000 to 80,000 South Asians from Uganda. It is believed that he received a message from God in a dream, which led him to the decision to make Uganda “a black man's country”, he stated: “I am going to ask Britain to take responsibility for all Asians in Uganda who are holding British passports, because they are sabotaging the economy of the country” (Keatley, 1972). The South Asians, which included the Gujaratis, were given ninety days to leave the country and were only allowed to take what they could carry; their assets were distributed without compensation to Amin's military favourites. Now penniless refugees, these individuals sought sanctuary primarily in Britain, Canada and the United States joining many who had already arrived from Kenya and Tanzania.

The immigration policies in these three countries were radically different and affected the numbers entering at this particular time. Government policy in the United Kingdom recommended that the East African refugees should be settled in areas of low South Asian representation:

In order to disperse them, Britain was divided into “red” and “green” zones. The “red” zones were those where the size of the Asian populations was deemed to be already “too high” and hence they were designated as out of bounds for Ugandan Asian refugees. The green zones, on the other hand, were defined as places where the Asian population was non-existent or so low that a slight rise in their numbers would be “tolerated” (Brah, 1996:34).

Following their ruthless expulsion from East Africa, they were forced into areas of rural Britain without community channels of support, be they

cultural or religious. Although they were isolated and in many cases dispirited and depressed, having already experienced life in another country, the East African Gujaratis had adapted strategies that would enable them to confront the challenges that lay ahead in their new home (Mukadam, 2003).

For other East African Gujaratis, their destiny lay in Canada whose position as a member of the British Commonwealth permitted the admission of refugees holding commonwealth passports. The acceptance and settlement of many, including a large Nizari Ismaili Muslim population, was fast tracked due to the intervention by Aga Khan IV (spiritual leader of the Nizari Ismaili Muslim community) who forged diplomatic links with Pierre Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, and arranged for over six thousand South Asians to enter Canada. These refugees included both business people and professionals who found themselves in the same situation as those that were unskilled. The former had no money to invest and the latter found it difficult to obtain jobs due to a prevalent economic recession (Mawani, 2006). The Gujarati community in Canada primarily resides in five major cities: Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal and Edmonton (Thakkar 2006).

This situation was very unlike that found in the United States whose immigration policy restricted entrance to professionals, including doctors, engineers, scientists and nurses (Williams, 2004). Despite the Immigration and Naturalization Law of 1965, which allowed greater freedom of entry, the majority of South Asians, including the Gujaratis expelled from East Africa, did not fulfil the required criteria. However, subsequently family members were reunited under the family reunification provisions of that law and continuing South Asian “immigration to the United States is part of the transnational movement of modern technological elites to urban areas” (Williams 2004, 234).

Overview of the Book

The present volume is a collection of papers originally presented at the 1st Gujarat Studies Association (www.gujaratstudies.org) conference held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London in May 2006. One of the primary outcomes of the conference was the emergence of scholarship focusing on the diverse nature of the Gujarati communities residing outside of Gujarat and specifically in the West. While studies on those who reside in Gujarat are equally important to Gujarat Studies, a volume that focuses primarily on those who left their ancestral homeland to create new homes in Europe, Canada and the United

States and the younger generations that were born and raised in the West has been long overdue. Most of the previous research on the identities of minorities in the West who originate in South Asia has focussed on disadvantaged and less-well integrated groups. The chapters in this volume investigate how Gujaratis, considered to be a successful and well-integrated minority group originating in South Asia, construct and express their complex identities in the contexts of the nations in which they live.

The volume begins with Pierre Lachai er's work, which maps the Gujarati Muslim communities in Paris. In Chapter One Lachai er briefly examines how three Muslim communities, the Mustalian Ismailis, Nizari Ismailis and Khoja Shiite Ithna Asheris, who in the nineteenth century migrated to the French speaking islands of the Indian Ocean, mainly Mauritius, Madagascar, and Reunion, made their way to France in the 1970s. Lachai er provides an in-depth insight into the Khoja Shiite Ithna Asheri community and concludes that whilst this community still has some contact with Gujarat, amongst the younger generation Gujarati is rapidly declining, yet, it is still the dominant language in religious ceremonies.

Sharmina Mawani continues this discussion in Chapter Two, as it relates to another minority Muslim community, the Nizari Ismailis. This chapter examines the changing use of the *ginans* (devotional songs) amongst young adult Nizari Ismaili Muslims of Gujarati ancestry in Toronto today. It traces the origins of the *ginans* and their migration from India to East Africa and subsequently to Canada, within the context of the historical and sociological milieu of the Nizari Ismaili community, from the advent of Islam to modern times. Mawani points out that to date the *ginans* have primarily been examined through textual analysis with emphasis placed on composition, classification as well as characteristics and themes. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to uncover the views of the adherents themselves on the significance of the *ginans* in their daily lives, an area which has, on the whole, been neglected. For many young adult Nizari Ismailis in Toronto their proficiency in Gujarati/Kacchi has decreased as these minority languages are no longer being regularly utilised and are rejected in favour of other dominant international languages. Despite these socio-linguistic changes, quantitative and qualitative data from Mawani's respondents shed light on personal accounts relating to the significance of the *ginans* as a form of congregational worship. A key finding of this study highlights that the *ginans* are no longer transmitters of religious knowledge, as they were in the past, however, they continue to be an integral part of a historical tradition that the young adults in this study are determined to maintain. In

addition, Mawani emphasises that the ginans play a central role in the formation of the respondents' ethno-religious and linguistic identities.

In Chapter Three the focus shifts to Western Canada, where Melissa Kelly looks at how the Hindu Gujarati community in Vancouver identify with labels such as "East Indian," a term used by the Canadian public when referring to those of Indian ancestry, regardless of their specific regional place of origin. Kelly specifically examines the manner in which the Gujarati Hindu identity has developed in Vancouver where the Gujarati community forms a small minority group within a larger Indian community dominated by individuals of Punjabi origin. Through interviews with representatives of selected culture-specific organizations, institutions and businesses, the chapter explores how these Gujarati Hindus relate to one another, the larger Indo-Canadian community and Canadian society as a whole and how this is reflected in the community's organizational behaviour. Kelly argues that these Gujarati Hindus have selectively emphasized different aspects of their identity through their conscious involvement or lack of involvement with one another as well as other cultural groups, and that to a large extent, organizations, institutions and businesses have been used to define the parameters of cultural identity. By investigating these concerns the chapter strives to provide new insights regarding what it means to be a Gujarati Hindu living in Vancouver.

Remaining with the theme of space as a means of forming and promoting identities, in Chapter Four Hanna H. Kim looks at a distinctive means by which the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, a Gujarati Hindu devotional movement, is transforming itself into and becoming recognised as a religion in dominantly non-Hindu locations. In this chapter Kim points out how the Swaminarayan emphasis on building temples and large-scale monuments provides a multivalent focal point for exploring the interface of Swaminarayan ways of being with Western ideas of religion. The Sanstha has constructed over six hundred and fifty temples since its founding in 1907, including the London Swaminarayan temple, itself the recipient of the Guinness World Records for the "largest traditional Hindu temple outside India." The Sanstha has also constructed two large monument and exhibition complexes in India and plans are underway for a similar structure in North America. Swaminarayan buildings are unambiguous signs of a well-funded and highly organised group operating on a transnational scale. While the temples address immigrant issues of belongingness and accommodating to living in the West, they are also rich sites for the generation and support of specific Swaminarayan ontologies.

In her discussion Kim directs attention to two simultaneous processes: (1) how Swaminarayan temples and monuments provide devotees tangible and visceral means by which to engage with and cultivate their devotional ideals; and, (2) how these Swaminarayan edifices provide a pragmatic and dramatically compelling means by which Swaminarayan practices can be anchored to the discourse on religion. This chapter suggests that the growth of the Swaminarayan community is connected to the imbrication of its devotional traditions with the dominant discourses on religion.

Prakash Shah continues this discussion of religious space in Chapter Five, as it relates to the Jain community in Britain. This chapter focuses on the *pratiśthā māhotsav* (ceremony of installing the *murtis*/images) at the Jain *derāsar* (temple) at Potters Bar in Hertfordshire in August 2005. The temple, funded and built on land acquired by the Visa Oshwal Jain community, marks the coming into its own of this rather low-profile section of the Gujarati and South Asian population in Britain. The chapter provides an overview of the Jain community in Britain and discusses the construction of the temple. Photographs taken by Shah during the *pratiśthā māhotsav*, capture the temple's magnificent architecture and some aspects of the installation rituals. Shah concludes that while this temple is a monument that indicates the Jain presence in Britain, it is, perhaps more importantly, a place that will help to preserve and promote Jain traditions amongst the younger generation.

The notion of encouraging the maintenance of cultural traditions is also raised by Chandrika Patel in Chapter Six, where she questions which type of South Asian theatre in Britain, Gujarati-language based or English-language based, is successfully endorsing the younger generation of Gujarati Hindus to uphold their cultural traditions. The chapter begins by exploring the spaces Gujarati-language based South Asian theatres occupy in relation to the English-language based South Asian theatres in Britain. Patel then examines the community framework behind their sustained practices and their exclusion from "race" and ethnicity-based government funding policies in the wider socio-political framework of Britain. In the context of the strikingly different spaces occupied by the Gujarati-language based and English-language based South Asian theatres, Patel compares the aesthetics of the Gujarati *natak* (play) *Lottery Lottery* by Shivam Theatre with *Strictly Dandia* by Tamasha Theatre with a particular focus on the types of Gujarati used in their texts. Patel concludes that second- and third-generation Gujarati Hindus are more likely to react positively to their culture if South Asian theatres address issues pertinent to them and the plays are portrayed in ways appreciated by the mainstream.

The notion that younger Gujarati Hindus are drawn towards aspects of their culture if it is portrayed as being harmoniously fused with that of the majority group is examined by Anjoom Mukadam in Chapter Seven, where she focuses on the shaping of a distinct identity amongst second-generation Swaminarayan Gujaratis in London and its environs. The formation of identity amongst adolescents from minority ethnic communities is a complex phenomenon which comprises the amalgamation of components which are of the individual's own selection and others over which they have no choice, but around which they must construct meaning. Mukadam stresses that ethnic identifiers are "tattooed" on the individual from birth and coming to terms with them can be a long and harrowing task leading to identity crisis at its extreme. Ethnic identity is essential to the psychological functioning of the individual and an individual's self-identity as well as their ethnic identity are highly influential on the individual's behaviour and personality. It is clear in today's multi-ethnic Britain that ethnic identity may not be straightforward and that there exist multiple identities, hyphenated identities and may be even new identities that are evolving as globalisation, devolution and Europeanisation unfold. In this chapter, Mukadam looks closely at ethnic self-identification (label chosen by an individual to express their individual ethnic identity) and cultural adaptation strategies (lifestyle choices made by an individual who is living in the West, but who belongs to a minority ethnic community) employed by Swaminarayan Gujarati youth in order to make sense of their bilingual and bicultural lives.

Bringing the volume to a close, John Mattausch, in Chapter Eight, builds on his previous work where he has suggested that the notably successful, highly adaptive British Gujarati Hindu community is partly a product of chance circumstances and that, rather than a diasporic group, it is better to view this community as an internationalised expression of caste settled in Britain by chance. Mattausch argues that caste itself may have a chance pedigree and that the reproduction of the rationale underlying caste involves prioritising the family: caste is merely a synonym for the extended family, for this community an extension straddling different continents.

This volume, then, offers a glimpse into the everyday lives of Gujarati communities whose evolving identities are negotiated through living in various locations in the Western hemisphere. The particular emphasis on the manner in which Gujarati communities are situating themselves in cities in the West by way of integrating yet maintaining aspects of their ancestral culture is highlighted by examining the complexities they face as a minority within a minority and the strategies they employ to confront the

challenges encountered in an attempt to maintain their ethno-religious and linguistic identities whilst residing in predominantly secular multicultural societies.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge all those whose support and generosity was paramount in making the conference and this volume possible. We extend our thanks to the team at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their assistance throughout the preparation of this book. And lastly, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the contributors, without whose co-operation this volume would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER ONE

MAPPING THE GUJARATI MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN PARIS

PIERRE LACHAIER

Introduction

In the nineteenth century, many Indian people migrated to the British colonies to replace the African slaves after the abolition of slavery¹. Less known however, is that this migratory flow also touched the French colonies and territories of the Indian Ocean. Whereas the first waves of migrants who came as indentured labour were mostly Tamils, a lesser number, who arrived later as free passengers, originated mostly from the Western part of India, including Sindh, Kacch, Saurashtra, mainland Gujarat and Mumbai. They belonged to a few well known so called “Business Communities” such as Hindu Lohanas and Bhatiyas, Jains, Sunni Muslims from Surat and Broach areas, Mustalian Ismaili (Bohras), Nizari Ismaili Muslims (Agakhanis) and Khoja Shiite Ithna Asheris (KSI)². After a brief overview of those French speaking Muslim communities established in Madagascar who have recently migrated to France, I will give a more detailed account of the history of the Khoja community, and describe the organisation of their La Courneuve *jamaat*, which we have started studying in the Paris area³.

The Settlement of Ismailis, Bohras and Khojas in Metropolitan France⁴

According to Ashok (1997), there are 425,000 people of Indian origin living in French national territories: 200,000 in the metropolitan area and 225,000 in overseas Department and Territories (65,000 in Reunion and 25,000 in Guadeloupe). They account for 0.6 percent of the whole French population (56.63 millions in 1990) and represent 7 percent of people of

foreign origin (4.87 million in 1990). Most of them are settled in Île de France (Paris area), and two-thirds of them arrived between 1975 and 1995. Among them, the most numerous are the Tamil speaking refugees from Sri Lanka and French citizens from Pondicherry (50-70,000). Gujaratis are second in number (5-6,000), followed in decreasing numbers by Bengalis, Bangladeshis and Punjabis. Some Gujarati speakers came from India,⁵ with a great majority of them arriving in the 1970s from Madagascar and Reunion (Ibid. 331-50); among them the Khojas, Ismailis and Bohras wholly form the largest group (4,500-5,000).⁶

In 1945, two Ismaili families from Madagascar settled in Paris (Delval 1987; Ashok 1997).⁷ After being joined by some other families, they founded a centre in one of the residences of Aga Khan III⁸ and established their first association called Centre Culturel Ismailien (Ismaili Cultural Centre) in 1952. There were thirty members in 1963 and up to fifty by 1965. With the arrival of some more students, who were later to welcome their families, the community increased in number after 1975. In 1984-87, the Ismailis numbered about 2,000 in France, half of them residing in the Paris area and in other French cities including Rouen, Nantes, Montpellier, Aix, Grenoble, Lyon and Strasbourg. The working Ismailis are professionals (40%), employees (40%) and business people (20%). In 1979, the seat of the Ismaili European Council was transferred from Brussels (established in 1974) to Paris and larger premises to relocate the Centre were bought by the Aga Khan Foundation with the financial help of the local community. In 1983, more than 3,000 people came from all over Europe for the Silver Jubilee of Prince Karim Aga Khan whose residence and secretariat are located in the northern Paris area. By 1997, about 3,500 Ismailis were residing in France and five centres had been established in the Paris area.

The first Bohras to arrive Paris in 1960 were students who did not intend to settle in France and in 1967 those who had completed their higher studies in surgery and pharmacy returned to Madagascar (Delval 1987; Fidahoussen 2005). However, in 1970 three Bohra business families and a hundred students were living in Paris. Their number increased significantly after 1975 and in 1976 they founded the Association de la Secte Dawoudi Bohra Jamat (Association of the Daudi Bohra Jamat Sect), that was renamed Association Dawoudi Bohra Jamat in 1979. In 1980, when their spiritual leader, the Dai Dr. Syedna Mohammed Barhanuddin Saheb came to France for the first time he was welcomed by some five hundred of his followers. In 1983, the French Bohra community was privileged to receive a permanent *Imam* (spiritual leader) who was the grandson of the previous Dai and in 1984 a new

association, Anjuman-e-Burhani, was started under his presidency. The same year, the Dai came to Paris again where he was welcomed by seven hundred members. In 1984-7, there were approximately 800-850 Bohras residing in France, 600-650 in the Paris area, while others resided in provincial cities. Most had arrived from Madagascar, with about 5 percent from Comoros, India and Morocco. More Bohras came again after the Madagascar political turmoil of 1987 and in 2005 about 1800-2000 Bohras (450 families) had settled in France, 90 percent of them in the Paris area (Fidahoussen 2005). Many invested in small shops and stores dealing with hardware, drugs, bakeries, toys, etc. Others are professionals such as dentists, pharmacists, physicians, lawyers, accountants, engineers, managers or are employed in public administration. Education is deemed very important and boys as well as girls are encouraged to pursue higher studies.

The first few Khojas who came and settled in France after the Second World War were business families. At the end of the 1960s, the first Khoja students, mostly from Tular, arrived in Aix-en-Provence, Montpellier, Marseille, Toulouse and Paris and their parents followed them later (Maalik Houssen, et al. 2006). In 1975 the Khojas, whose numbers had risen to 200 in the Paris area, established the first association Shia-Ithna-Ashri Jamat de la Région Parisienne (Twelver Shia Jamat of the Paris area).⁹ The majority of its thirty members were young (only ten of them being above the age of thirty) and apart from two older businessmen (44 and 51 years of age), most had modest jobs or occupations. In 1976 an *Imam* came from London to celebrate the month of Muharram (a month of mourning after the death of Imam Hussein) and in 1979 some 400 Khojas out of the 1,000 living in France participated in the ceremonies. Meetings were first held in St. Hyppolite Church (Paris southern district), but due to increasing affluence, new arrangements had to be made. The Association Shia Ithna-Ashri Jamat (Twelver Shia Jamat Association) was founded in 1983 to create a permanent and larger centre of their own where religious activities could be observed. However, from 1980 onwards, newcomers tended to concentrate in the northern suburb of Paris, where they started meeting at one of their own residences.¹⁰ Then they rented a room close to La Courneuve, and in 1984 created the Association Amicale des Français de Madagascar, AAFM (Friendly Association of the Frenchmen from Madagascar). At that time, the two rather rivalling associations separated after much discussion. Out of the 1,500 Khojas residing in France, 800 were in the Paris area, and the remainder were mostly in Marseille, Montpellier, Bordeaux and Lyon. They did not have a special room for their prayers, or an *Imam* to preach and dispense religious knowledge. In

1989, the AAFM moved into the La Courneuve synagogue that the local Jewish community had abandoned. However, as the area was unsafe, the AAFM left and moved into its own centre, one that was built in La Courneuve due to a generous donation.¹¹ In 1994, the two Parisian associations could finally inaugurate at one week intervals their own new community centres, one located in Bagneux (southern suburb), and the other in La Courneuve (northern suburb) (*Alamdar* 2006). According to my own data, in 2006 there were 900 Khojas in the Bagneux and 600 in the La Courneuve associations with only a very few living in other French cities.¹²

Past and Present History of the Khojas

It was in around the fifteenth century in Western India, that some Hindus, most of them presumably belonging to the Lohana caste,¹³ were converted to Ismailism. Ismailism, the Nizari branch of Shiite Islam, holds that at the death of the sixth Shiite *Imam* in 765 the *Imamate* ought to have descended to the posterity of his deceased eldest son Ismail. Their history in India is not very well known¹⁴ until the nineteenth century when Imam Hasan Ali Shah (Aga Khan I) left Persia to come to Mumbai where he was initially welcomed with enthusiasm by the local Ismaili community (Boivin 1998). However, dissention ensued when some Ismailis refused to recognize that the communities' assets belonged to the Aga Khan as the British court had determined (Aga Khan Case, 1866). Some of them became Sunnis, others joined the main branch of the Shia Muslims and called themselves Khojas Shiite Ithna Asheri (KSI).¹⁵ Shia Muslims accept the claim of Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and the fourth caliph, to be the first true successor of the Prophet. At that time, Ismailis were spread in Kacch, Saurashtra, Gujarat and Mumbai as well as in East Africa and Madagascar, where they had migrated in great numbers. The expatriate male Ismailis, who had converted to the Ithna Asheri faith in these distant lands, were however not cheerfully welcomed by their Ismaili families when they came back home to find a spouse. Henceforward, their contact with India subsided progressively and was finally completely lost. The following generations of Khojas did not care to maintain remembrances of their Indian past, nor were they concerned with their own history until recently. It was only around 2003-4, that the Toronto KSI *jamaat* started a History and Genealogy Project, the main purpose of which is to collect families' documents of historical interest.

The expatriate Khojas became prosperous and tended to remain within the well-knit framework of the *jamaat* and preserve their identity. In the

1930s, Khoja authors began to propagate the idea of a centralized organisation to which *jamaats* would be affiliated and in 1933, an important meeting was held in Kacch, which was documented by Alloo (2006, 20-22):

After severing the umbilical cord with the main stream Agha Khani Khojas, the new splinter group Khoja Shia Ithna Asheris succeeded to an acceptable degree in establishing a network of Shia mosques, imambarghas and madrasahs between 1880 and 1933 and was dreaming of creating a federation that would unite the community. The Cutchi merchants, were then in the forefront of mercantile activities in Bombay, Burma, Japan and Africa and Seth Dawood Haji Nasser Mawji took the most active part of them in this endeavour and presided the first Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Conference held in Cutch Mundra, 7th-9th November, 1933. It was attended by 52 delegates from 14 centres of Cutch among which Kera, Bharapur, Bhuj, Bhadil, Sinugara, Nagalpur, Lakadia, Mandvi, Jarpara, Kapaiya, Lakhapur, Samagoga, Mundra and by some guests from Mumbai.

It was however only in 1945 that some leading intellectual Khojas,¹⁶ concerned with the unity of the *jamaat*, met to discuss ways of strengthening it. Their efforts resulted in the creation of an Eastern Africa Provincial Council of the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri which organized the first Constitutional Conference in May 1946 in Dar es Salaam. The delegates from the *jamaats* from Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar who attended decided to form the Federation of Eastern Africa K.S.I. Jamats. Since its inception its Supreme Council has been sitting for an annual session. It organized Triennial Conferences where delegates of different *jamaats* could meet and discuss social, religious, sanitary and educational questions of common interest. In 1961, impressed by the success of the Federation, the *jamaats* established in Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Madagascar, Reunion, Maurice and Somalia joined it. It was then decided that holding the statutory meetings of the Supreme Council and of the Triennial Conferences in different places would reinforce the consciousness Khojas had of the unity of their community.

Three major events have particularly marked the course of life of the African Federation. The first one was of a religious nature and as one of its main objectives was to help propagate Shia Islam, the affiliated Khoja *jamaats* supported the Bilal Muslim Mission which, in accordance with and to the order of the last Ayatollah Syed Mohsin Al Hakeem, started its work of conversion and opened Shia centers in Africa in 1964. The two other events were to be consequential for the worldwide dispersion of the African Khojas and were linked to political troubles. They have been

documented on the website of the World Federation of the Khoja Shiite Ithna Asheri Muslim Communities (www.world-federation.org):

In 1964, The African Federation addressed the challenges of the revolution in Zanzibar. It assumed the unprecedented role of assisting displaced members of the community in the face of political upheaval. In 1972, the Federation faced another challenge stemming from the exodus from Uganda. Evicted from their homes under Idi Amin's racist regime, scores of families had no choice but to migrate. In the years following this mass exodus, Khojas continued to shift and resettle, for various reasons, to England, USA, Canada and other European countries.¹⁷

Since its beginning the African Federation has strictly adhered to its self assigned goals: uplifting the community in social, religious and educational areas, organizing collective religious and social activities under the auspices of the *jamaats*, strengthening the existing relations in the community and establishing relations with other Muslim communities within the purview of the Sharia. Organized into many boards and committees to whom specialized tasks have been assigned, the African Federation facilitated the establishment of relations between dispersed community members and thus also contributed to increase their circle of eligible matrimonial partners. And last but not least, its success incited the Khojas who were established elsewhere in the world to create similar institutions, among which the World Federation of Khoja Shiite Ithna Asheri Muslim Communities is prominent. The expulsion of the Ugandan Indians in 1972 also increased anxiety among the Indians living in countries not previously colonised by the British, such as Madagascar, where nationalist movements had developed and upheavals had burst out. It accelerated the ongoing flow of migrants and triggered new larger ones, which were directed mostly towards Western countries, and in a lesser extent towards Islamic ones, such as the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan. English speaking Khojas mostly went to Britain, the USA and Canada, and the French speaking ones to Reunion, France and Canada. Few Khojas also migrated to various other countries in Europe which offered them shelter, such as Switzerland and Sweden. After having overcome the difficulties of their settlement they founded local *jamaats*, which in a rather short span of time tried to federate in the same manner as the African Federation had previously done. Marhum Mulla Asgherali M.M. Jaffer, who was to be the future president of the World Federation, inaugurated its First Constitutional Conference with these words:

Let me begin at the beginning. The concept of the World Federation [WF] dawned upon us by the events in Uganda. While not merely a product of history, the WF's establishment was spurred by the emergence of a Khoja diaspora upon the eviction of non-Africans from the Ugandan homes under Idi Amin. As Khoja scattered, the East African Federation was inundated with requests from Khoja globally – for Islamic literature, alims, marital advice, educational and other services (www.world-federation.org).

The World Federation of the Shia Ithna Asheri Khojas¹⁸ was founded in London in 1976 in order to unify all the dispersed *jamaats*. Until today its aims have remained unchanged: promoting the Shia faith, relieving poverty stricken people, alleviating sufferings due to death and dependency, educating community members, granting financial support and encouraging enterprises and projects of community members and assisting Shiite communities throughout the world, as much as financially possible. The World Federation has organized itself into five boards and many desks. They are represented at its Triennial Conferences where new policies and resolutions are adopted:

The five boards are The Islamic Education Board (IEB) [1980]¹⁹, the Medical Advisory Board (MAB) [1979], the Careers Education and Training Advisory Board (CETAB) [<2002], the Zainabiyya Child Sponsorship Scheme (ZCSS) [1981], the Seniors Advisory Board (SAB) [2003]...the External Liaison Desk, Information Technology and Media Desk, Research and Development Desk, Youth Networking Desk, Women's Desk [2002], and Seniors' Desk.

After “The Formative years: 1976-85”, the World Federation had an “Era of Entrenchment: 1985-95” and a period of “Rising International Service and Stature: 1995-2005”. Throughout those years, donations financed the construction of many centres in the West, with the Hujjat Islamic Centre in the UK forming its headquarters. These Centres have aided development projects in India, assisted the victims of earthquakes (Gujarat in 2001, Bam in Iran in 2003, Asian Tsunami in 2004), provided relief to people enduring wars (Koweit, Iraq), contributed to the propagation of Shiism in Europe (Kosovo) as well as in America where the Bilal Muslim Mission of America opened a centre in New York. It has also contributed to establishing some other regional federations of local *jamaats*, such as the Gujarat Federation and the Kutch Federation, founded in 1979 and in 1990 respectively. Other regional federations have been created through a similar democratic process as the African Federation and the World Federation were in 1946 and in 1976 respectively, starting with the Conseil Régional de l'Océan Indien, CROI (Regional Council of the

Indian Ocean, Antananarivo, Madagascar) in 1964, followed by the North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities Organizations (NASIMCO) around 2004 and finally the Council of European Jamats (CoEJ) in about 2005-6.²⁰

The CROI federates all seventeen *jamaats* from Madagascar, Reunion and Mauritius²¹ and *jamaats* that are members of the CROI are rightfully admitted as members of the African Federation, which federates a total of fifty-one *jamaats* (41 “active” and 10 “sleeping”) from sixteen other African countries (South Africa, Burundi, Comoros-Mayetta, Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe). According to the preamble of its constitution, the NASIMCO is “an umbrella organization existing to serve and guide its constituent members to foster unity and promote religious, educational, social and economic advancement of the communities”. It federates altogether twenty-one *jamaats*, ten from Canada, ten from the USA, as well as one recently created in Trinidad. Based in London, the CoEJ has been recently created and does not seem to be firmly established yet. Its seventeen affiliated *jamaats* comprise the two we know in France, twelve from the United Kingdom, two from Sweden and possibly one from Switzerland (we could not find any *jamaat* in Portugal, Norway or in the Eastern European countries where a few Khojas also reside).

There are Gujarati and Kutchi Federations, but no all-Indian or all-Pakistani ones, although Khojas are found in the greatest concentration in India and Pakistan and have formed at least two *jamaats*, one in Mumbai and the other in Karachi. Similarly, although there are *jamaats* in Singapore, New Zealand and Australia as well as in the United Arab Emirates and Thailand, no federation seems to exist in these areas of the world. The global Khoja population amounts to 115-125,000 depending on the sources.²² They are 40,000 in India, 40,000 in Pakistan, 20,000 in Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands, and 15,000 in Europe, USA and Canada. In Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands, Khojas are dispersed in some fifty agglomerations located in more than a dozen countries. Apart from South Asia, the highest concentrations of Khojas are in Tanzania (11,000) Kenya (3,050), Madagascar (5,000) and Reunion (1,400).

The La Courneuve *Jamaat*

The La Courneuve *jamaat* has the legal status of an association registered under the French law of 1901. According to the statutes of such an association, it must have a president elected by the general assembly, a secretary, a treasurer and some advisers, who are members of the

executive bureau. The president appoints the heads of specialized committees, who may choose their own collaborators. All these voluntary officers are *jamaat* members and act on behalf of the association without any remuneration. The most important committees are the Youth Committee, the Women's Committee, the Funeral Committee, and the Educational Committee. The Youth Committee is the only one that has members of both genders. Under the supervision of the president, its members may take on certain responsibilities that prepare them to become future executives and leaders of the *jamaat*. The Funeral and Educational Committees have members from both Parisian *jamaats*. The former takes care of all administrative, financial, ceremonial and ritual funeral procedures for all members of both *jamaats*. The Khojas have been legally authorized to have their own section in one of the two Parisian cemeteries that have special arrangements for Muslims. The Educational Committee facilitates the young members from the Madagascar *jamaats* to come to France to study. It may welcome them upon arrival, grant them a scholarship and help them find accommodation. Some of these Committees have created specialized sub-committees for teaching at the madrasah, editing the *jamaati* paper and electronic publications and organizing ceremonies and festivals. The Women's Committee organizes and manages all female activities which are usually run in separate rooms in the Centre.

The president is the *jamaat's* top executive, who works in a voluntary capacity, in addition to being employed as a Director in a bank. As part of his presidential duties he maintains relations with the French local municipal authorities as well as with other *jamaats*, enforces the internal rules which ought to comply with the Sharia, keeps a community register of the personal statuses of the members (birth, marriages, death), delivers certificates of membership and morality, sanctions Islamic marriages and divorces (after they have been legally registered by the French authorities), authorizes certain events and festivals, participates in seminars and supervises the administration of the association. He may guide the prayer as any member who is deemed apt to do so, but he has no particular religious function, although he appoints the resident *Imam* who is to officiate at the *jamaat*.

The main activities of the *jamaat* are of a religious nature, the most important of which are the Thursday evening prayers for the dead (*Dua-e-Komel*²³) (Gobillot 1998), the collective Friday afternoon prayers (*Salat-e-jumah*), the Saturday evening religious sermons (*Majalis*) and classes of the madrasah, and the Sunday daybreak prayers (*Namaz-e-Fajr*). The most important annual religious event for the Khojas, as well as for Shiites