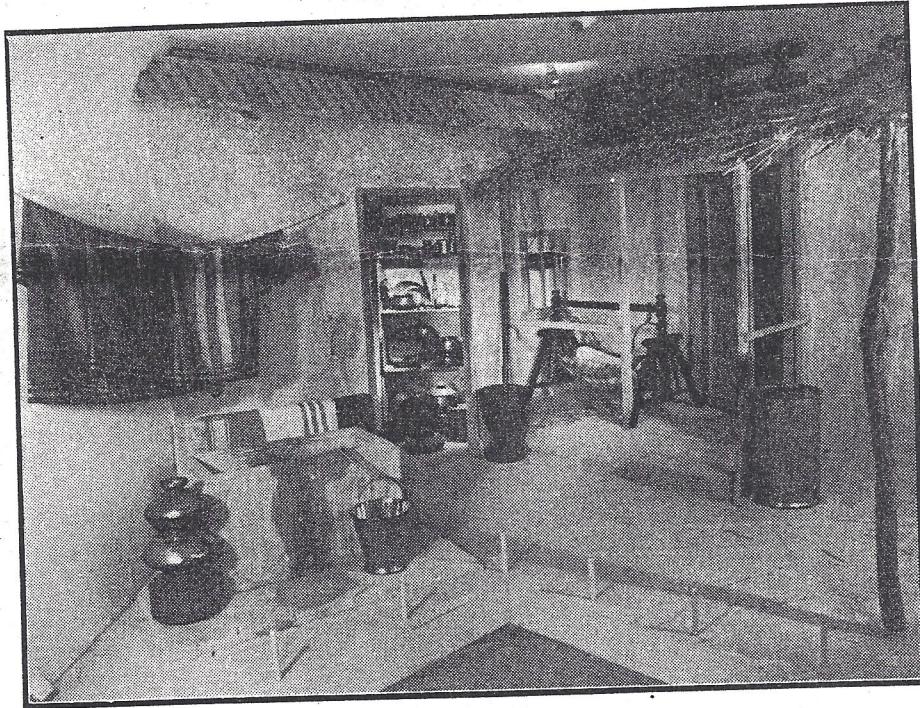




...n family, early 20th century; (below) replica of a home in which the Bene Israel lived.

(PHOTOS COURTESY OF ISRAEL MUSEUM)



towns, mostly settling in Bombay, where they became construction workers, long-shoremen, carpenters and civil servants.

Then in the 19th century teachers from Cochin came north to teach the Bene Israel Hebrew and religion. At the same time, Christian missionaries unsuccessfully tried to convert them. All this only served to weld the Bene Israel into a community.

In Israel this community has swelled to 45,000 and lives in Lod, Ramle, Dimona, Beersheba and Haifa.

The smaller but influential Baghdadi community (a generic term covering Jews from Iraq and Syria and later Yemen, Iran and Afghanistan) were mostly merchants, bankers and industrialists.

The first Baghdadis to arrive in India, in the mid-18th century, were merchants from Basra, Aleppo and Baghdad who traded or worked with the East India Company. They first settled in the port of Surat before moving south to Bombay and

founders of commercial empires and family dynasties. One such was David Sassoon, who together with other members of his family, established educational, medical and charitable institutions vital to the development of Bombay. Sassoon also built two synagogues and in 1847, a public library, a photo of which is presented here.

The Baghdadi community in Calcutta was founded by Moses Dwek Hacohen from Aleppo and boasted three synagogues.

The Baghdadi 19th-century synagogues were opulent and Western in style, sometimes reminiscent of churches. In contrast, Bene Israel village synagogues were often more like *stieblach*, a hall with a niche serving as a Tora ark; but in town Bene Israel synagogues were also of Western influence. The Cochinese were more traditional, holding onto to their hallowed ritual designs.

Some Cochinese came to Bombay to work in the Sassoon cotton mills. Some of the *paradesi* married into Baghdadi fami-

way imitative of the British, the Baghdadi communities, some 5,000 in all, left India as the British departed; only a few came to Israel, the rest going to English-speaking countries.



CHRISTIAN MUSICOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF INDIA

A special section of this show deals with Hebrew publications.

By the mid-19th century the Baghdadi community felt a need for a local Hebrew press. Among its many considerations was the fact that missionaries were printing Christian tracts in Hebrew.

The first Hebrew printer in India was a Cochin-born Yemenite, Elazar Aaron Araki, who set up a Hebrew press in Calcutta in 1841. His elegant and impeccably proofed and printed books dealt with ritual laws, prayers, folk legends and poetry. Later, Hebrew presses were set up in Bombay as well as Calcutta.

By 1855, the first periodical, *Doresh Tov l'Ammo*, brought world and local news to the Bombay Jewish community. The following year saw the printing of Iraqi Arabic-Jewish books providing translations of the Bible and Hebrew and world literature. Some five Hebrew periodicals subsequently appeared in Calcutta, the last established in 1901.

Many of the customs and ceremonies of the Jewish communities were a mix of Jewish, Hindu and Moslem traditions. A shared custom was the singing of songs by women when working at household tasks as well as at community events and holidays; only the content of the songs was different. Women's wedding saris were similar to regular Indian saris; and colorful Indian decorations were used on celebratory baby cribs, like the one on view here.

The Bene Israel, like other Oriental Jewish communities, celebrated a henna ceremony in which the ring fingers of bride and groom were smeared with henna paste.

A canopy bed, the *manara*, was a feature of Cochinese Jewish marriage festivities, which once lasted three weeks; in Israel, the marriage *ketuba*, the *harei at* ceremony and the wedding itself are all marked in one day. The bridal couple used to receive guests while seated under the *manara* canopy. A similar *manara* canopy was also erected in the synagogue to display the Tora scrolls on Simhat Tora; one is installed in the synagogue here.

Other Indian Jewish customs, like the naming customs for girls, are also featured in this show, as are the recreational games played by all the communities except for the peculiarly Cochinese *asha*.

Other games were imported from Iraq, like *tar'i* (backgammon) or from China, like mah-jongg, originally a man's game but long beloved of Jewish matrons from Finchley to Florida. *Karum* was a version of a British game.

Sadly, there's no mention of cricket, that universally admired Indian sport. In the not so distant past, many of the Israeli cricket league's most notable players were those who had brought their skills with them from India. Now basketball is more popular and the community's (and Israel's) pride is Maccabi Tel Aviv's Doron Jamchee.

A fascinating show, don't miss it. An