



David Joseph Solomon.  
(*The Cincinnati* [1901]: 87.)

# *A South-Asian Jew in Cincinnati 1896–1902: Notes Toward a Biography of David Joseph Solomon*

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From the middle of 1959 and continuing into 1960, newspapers around the United States, for both Jewish and general readership, announced the arrival of student Saul Joel at the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati, Ohio. The eighteen-year-old was hailed by the *American Israelite* as “the first Indian in the 85-year college history.”<sup>1</sup> With the support of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, Joel began the preparatory program in the 1958–1959 school year, stating that he hoped “to return to India after ordination and join Bombay’s Reform congregation—if they will have me as their rabbi.”<sup>2</sup> His arrival was noteworthy and his time at HUC relatively short, but the coverage highlights the significant growth of American-style Reform Judaism around the world. Sadly, though, the reporting makes clear that, by the time of his arrival, the story of the actual “first Indian” in the history of the College was already lost. In an age before air travel or instant communication, that earlier student’s journey was remarkable. His travel from colonial India to Cincinnati in 1896 reveals the extraordinary interconnectedness of the Jewish world in the late nineteenth century.

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\*In memory of my teacher and friend David Ellenson *z”l*.

1 “Bombay Youth at HUC Hopes for Pulpit in India,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 7 May 1959, 11; “Well Experienced,” *Kennebec Journal* (Maine), 1 March 1960, 5. In the period after World War II various Jewish denominations actively sought connections with India’s Jewish communities. I am grateful to Benjamin Steiner for sharing his manuscript of an article on American Orthodox and Conservative efforts; see “The Postwar Battle for the Souls of Indian Jews,” *Modern Judaism* (forthcoming).

2 “Bombay Lad Seeking Semicha at HUC-JIR,” *Detroit Jewish News*, 1 May 1959, 12.

## Building Global Jewish Networks: American Jews' Interest in the Bene Israel of India

Already a hundred years before Joel's arrival, the *Israelite*, edited by Isaac Mayer Wise in Cincinnati, had begun reprinting material from London's *Jewish Chronicle* that introduced its readers to the Bene Israel communities of India.<sup>3</sup> This early example demonstrates how Jewish periodicals served as vital conduits for transnational consciousness in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Fascination with these "exotic" Jews so very far away endured as some twenty articles about the community and its activities were published in the *Israelite* (after 1874, the *American Israelite*) during Wise's tenure. For more than two decades, the *American Israelite* had fostered interest in the Jewish communities of India, particularly the Bene Israel community in Bombay (now Mumbai).<sup>5</sup> Beyond the specifics of religious practices, there was significant interest in the size of the population—an editorial note in October 1885 described a population of twelve thousand Jews in India, mostly in Bombay—and articles regularly described the civilizing efforts of the Anglo-Jewish Association. Once the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) was formed in 1873, the idea of civilizing local Jews in the United States led to sympathy for similar projects abroad. The UAHC had officially

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3 "Religious Festivals of the Beni-Israel of Bombay, Hindostan," *Israelite* (Cincinnati), 5 September 1856, 69 and 12 September 1856, 77.

4 For a comparable story, see Philip E. Keisman, "Publishing the Pan-Jewish: The First Hebrew Newspaper and its Modernities" (PhD diss., CUNY Graduate Center, 2023).

5 See, e.g., "Israelites in Bombay," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 5 March 1875, 1; A. Tourist, "A Glance at Bombay," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 3 September 1875, 2, continued 10 Sept 1875, 6; 17 September 1875, 1; 24 September 1875, 1; 1 October 1875, 1; "The Beni Israel," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 11 August 1872, 2; *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 12 April 1878, 2; *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 15 August 1879, 8; "Foreign Record," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 29 August 1878, 8; "Foreign Record," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 19 August 1878, 6; Samuel Kehimer Haem, "The Beni Israel," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 19 October 1888, 4. It was in this same period that the Anglo-Jewish Association began providing detailed reports on the community of Bene Israel in India. See, e.g., the letters from members of the community in *The Fifth Annual Report of the Anglo-Jewish Association* (London: Officers of the Anglo-Jewish Association, 1876), 12, 43–51.

supported the Anglo-Jewish Association as early as 1880, noting that “it may be assumed for all practical purposes affecting the emancipation and elevation of Hebrews in the Orient that the relations of American Israelites with these organizations are those of reciprocal good will and hearty cooperation.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Reverse Currents: Indian Jews’ Interest in the Israelites of America**

American Jews’ interest in their Indian coreligionists was matched by Indian Jews’ interest in American Jewish communities. This bidirectional flow of ideas and information illustrates how Jewish communities across the British Empire and beyond maintained active intellectual connections despite vast geographical distances. As early as 1892, Wise received a letter from Solomon Samson (Penkar, 1867–1948):

I am a Bene-Israel of Bombay with a sincere desire to see any brethren following in the footsteps of the American and the English Jews and thus enjoy the benefits and comforts which education and civilization have favoured them with.

We Bene-Israel here have been doing our utmost in this attempt and with the feeling of self-duty, I intend to read a paper in Marathi (a language generally spoken on this side of British India), on “the Present Condition of the Bene-Israel as compared with that of Foreign Jews.”<sup>7</sup>

Samson would go on to explain that he had collected a good deal of information about Jews in Europe. He hoped that Wise could provide “[a] brief sketch of the History of American Jews, their date of Immigration, their Educational, Civil, Military and Religious Positions, with short lives of Eminent Men who have distinguished themselves in these lines, with their Photos, and Sketches of Some Important Institutions.” Wise would send him such information and encouraged others to do so, as Samson wrote in December 1896 to Henry S.

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6 *Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, Volume 2 (1879–1885), 900.

7 “A Petition of a Literary Member of the Bene Israel in Bombay,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 10 November 1892, 4.

Morais (1860–1935), soon to be the acting clergy at Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia and formerly the managing editor of the *Jewish Exponent*, explaining that he had received positive replies from

B. Bettman and Rev Dr. I. M. Wise of Cincinnati, Rabbis Hahn of Cleveland, L. Grossman of Detroit, H. P. Mendes & Gotheil [*sic*] of New York, Misses F. D. Moeatta, C. G. Montefiore, Rev. Dr. Prof. D. W. Marks & Lady Magnus, of London, the Chief Rabbi of France, Dr. Friedman of Vienna & Prof. Lazarus of Germany.

All of these individuals shared copies of sermons and lectures with him. He lamented that his work had to be done in support of the Bene Israel community absent any Indian “theological institutions or societies.”<sup>8</sup> In March 1896, the HUC Board of Governors moved to help Samson again. The men had Wise and the HUC librarian Sigmund Mannheimer assemble a small collection of books, mostly works by Wise and his colleagues, which they shipped to Bombay.<sup>9</sup>

During this same period, HUC Professor Gotthard Deutsch was in active correspondence with Ezekiel Joseph (Kurulker), who served as secretary of the Bene Israel Culture Society and Library and helped him to acquire books and pamphlets about Judaism.<sup>10</sup> Very little of the correspondence is preserved. It appears that Deutsch had, in fact, reached out to Kurulker for information about the Bene Israel community, perhaps as part of his own scholarly efforts to accumulate and organize data about world Jewry.<sup>11</sup> In October 1894, responding to an earlier

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8 “Letter from Samson, Solomon to Morais, Henry S. Bombay, India; Dec 1896,” Sabato Morais Digital Repository, <https://www.judaicadhpenn.org/legacyprojects/s/morais/item/89766>.

9 *Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, Volume 4 (1892–1896), 3598–3599.

10 Kurulker to Deutsch, 26 October 1894, MS-123, Gotthard Deutsch, Box 2/14, K, General, American Jewish Archives (hereafter AJA), Cincinnati, Ohio. For Kurulker’s role, see Joseph Jacobs, ed., *The Jewish Yearbook: An Annual Record of Matters Jewish 5659: 17th September, 1898–4th September, 1899* (London: Greenberg, 1898), 127; David Joseph Solomon, “The Influence of Judaism on the Bene-Israel Community of India,” *H.U.C. Journal* 1, no. 8 (April 1897): 167–171, here 169.

11 It is clear from Deutsch’s correspondence that he reached out to the Baghdadi Jewish

query from Deutsch, Kurulker would report that many American Jewish newspapers were unavailable in India, and that he would appreciate any efforts the professor could make to arrange for gratis subscriptions from the various publishers. Kurulker especially hoped that Deutsch would encourage Wise to send copies of his own writings.<sup>12</sup>

The Society and Library, established in 1889, were already known to Wise. Although many American Jewish periodicals were unavailable in Bombay, the *American Israelite* was known to Kurulker and other members of the Bene Israel community, who would send news of the society's activities for publication in the Cincinnati Jewish newspaper.<sup>13</sup> Wise already reported in 1893 that

The ISRAELITE has quite a number of readers among the Beni Israel, the native Jews of India. They take a great interest in the progress of Judaism, not only in their own country, British India, but in America as well. We have received and placed a number of book orders for them, and they write to us frequently...<sup>14</sup>

Wise was almost certainly exaggerating, but the letters from Ezekiel Joseph Kurulker and Solomon Samson testify that at least some readers were found among the Bene Israel.<sup>15</sup>

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philanthropist David Sassoon in Bombay and others for such information. At the same time Haeem Samuel, the head of the Israelite School (see notes 37 and 38 below), offered him historical information and sent materials. See Samuel to Deutsch, 17 April 1894, which reports that Samuel was following up on a communication from Deutsch to Sassoon, MS-123, Gotthard Deutsch, Box 3/13, SA-Sc, General, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio. On Deutsch's efforts to attain and organize this kind of information, see Jason Lustig, "Mere Chips from His Workshop': Gotthard Deutsch's Monumental Card Index of Jewish History," *History of the Human Sciences* 32, no. 3 (2019): 49–75. Deutsch maintained his correspondence with Joseph over several years, and in 1897 he agreed to write an article on the Bene Israel for the encyclopedia of Jewish theology that Deutsch had begun editing; see MS-123, Gotthard Deutsch, Box 1/26, E, General, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio. On the encyclopedia and its fate, see Shuly Rubin Schwartz, *The Emergence of Jewish Scholarship* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1991), 31–33. 12 Kurulker to Deutsch, 26 October 1894, MS-123, Gotthard Deutsch, Box 2/14, K, General, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

13 "Jottings," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 26 January 1893, 7.

14 "Jottings," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 26 January 1893, 7.

15 Access by the Bene Israel community in India to Jewish publications from Cincinnati

Knowledge of American Jewry, particularly of the liberal sort, came to the Bene Israel by other channels as well. After his return from the United States to attend the parliament of religions at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, B. B. (Balwant Bhau) Nagarkar (sometimes Nagarker), spoke at the Bene Israel Library in Bombay on 22 September 1895 on the subject of "The American Jews; their Religion and Social Condition."<sup>16</sup> At the same library in Bombay in November 1895, the Reverend Jabez T. Sunderland of Ann Arbor, Michigan spoke on "'The Mission of Israel' as illustrated by liberal Judaism in America."<sup>17</sup> These lectures demonstrate how international religious conferences like the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions served as catalysts for global religious exchange, with ideas and connections formed in Chicago reverberating in Bombay lecture halls. Who were these men, and on what authority did they speak of liberal Judaism in America? Nagarkar was a promoter of Brahmo Samaj, a montheistic Hindu reformist movement that had begun in Kolkata (then Calcutta) in 1828. He had been in the United States to speak at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in September 1893.<sup>18</sup> Sunderland was a Baptist turned Unitarian minister. At the conference, he became much enamored with Brahmo Samaj. He helped arrange speaking opportunities for Nagarkar around the United States and then travelled to India himself in 1896 to tour and speak, with the situation flipped.<sup>19</sup> In later decades, Sunderland would align himself with the International (American and European) Council of Religious Liberals and become an outspoken advocate for Indian independence.<sup>20</sup> Both Nagarkar and Sunderland had the opportunity to interact with Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch of Chicago at the conference, and there was a significant discussion of American Judaism at the exhibition.

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and Chicago is noted in E. M. Ezekiel, "Inde Anglaises," *Archives israélites* 56 (1895): 356.

16 "Foreign," *American Hebrew* (Cincinnati), 1 November 1895, 661.

17 "Foreign," *Jewish Messenger* (New York), 10 January 1896, 5.

18 Balwant Bhau Nagarkar, *The Message of the Brahmo Samaj: Text of the Speech Delivered at the World Parliament of Religions* (Bombay: Navavidhan Chitabindoni Trust, 1976).

19 Paul E. Teed, "Interfaith Encounter and Religious Pluralism: J. T. Sunderland's Mission to Brahmo Samajes of India, 1895–1896," *American Studies* 50, nos. 1–2 (2009): 51–69.

20 "Dr. Jabez T. Sunderland, Noted Pastor, Dies At 94," *Ann Arbor News*, 14 August 1936, 3.

In fact, eleven speakers addressed Jewish matters, including Wise, Gustav Gottheil, Moses Mielziner, Gotthard Deutsch, and Louis Grossman, all who in various ways had played or would come to play significant roles in Hebrew Union College and American liberal Judaism.<sup>21</sup> It was this shared commitment to promoting a liberal religious culture that saw both Nagarkar and Sunderland promoting liberal Jewish values to the Bene Israel of Bombay. Sunderland's lecture in Bombay was reported in some detail by the *American Israelite*:

The lecturer addressed the meeting for more than an hour dealing with the subject in its different aspects.

He alluded briefly to the progress made by the American Jews and gave the names of some of the famous rabbis of New York, Cincinnati and Chicago among others Drs. Gottheil, I. M. Wise and E. G. Hirsch who have been doing such noble work among their brethren and countrymen. The subject was very interesting, the lecturer reminded his hearers of their glorious past, and of the still more glorious future which lay before them if they were prepared to accept the great responsibilities of the high mission entrusted by the Almighty to Israel. His remarks were specially addressed to the young men in whose hands, as he said, the future of the community rests. His remarks were frequently interrupted by loud claps and he sat down amidst loud applause.<sup>22</sup>

Sunderland used the trip as an opportunity to study the religious diversity of the Indian population. In part, he was studying ways for Christian missionizing to plant a stronger foothold. As he reflected on what he had seen on his trip, he imagined that Christian expansion was possible among the general population of lower-caste Hindus. While he made no specific comment about the Jews of India, some sense of his approach can be seen in his thoughts about missionizing to upper-caste Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and Persians:

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21 *Judaism at the World's Parliament of Religions: Comprising the Papers on Judaism Read at the Parliament, at the Jewish Denominational Congress, and the Jewish Presentation* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Robert Clarke, 1894).

22 "The Bene Israel Culture Society of Bombay, India," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 9 January 1896, 6.

Can Christianity, no matter with how high a civilization it may be allied, conquer strong, proud, highly organized, historic religions? Toward the answer to this crucial question it must be confessed the history of India thus far furnishes very little data. The only thing that seems clear is that, if Christianity ever does gain any considerable acceptance among leading native minds, Mohammedan, Hindu, Parsee, Buddhist or Jain, it must be a form of Christianity less theological, less peculiarly "Western," more sympathetic towards other faiths, and in every way broader and more liberal than that which has been generally preached in India up to this time.<sup>23</sup>

Sunderland, like Pandita Ramabai, who will be discussed below, was influenced by the Oxford scholar Max Müller's "Fulfillment Theology" with its "willingness to accept, on a limited basis, the truth of non-Christian religions."<sup>24</sup> This approach, which is the one Sunderland himself appears to have adopted, made missionaries like him, who were devoted to the promotion of liberalism and ethical culture, a useful resource for the Bene Israel.<sup>25</sup> By 1898, the Society and Library were using whatever networks they could establish to acquire these liberal Jewish materials, including having American Christian missionaries who had visited India petition Jewish newspapers like the *Reform Advocate* of Chicago.<sup>26</sup> The competing efforts of Samson, apparently acting on his own, and Kurulker, acting for the Society, eventually caused some conflict with Kurulker's successor, who eventually suggested to HUC in early 1897 that Samson may have been misrepresenting himself. It was recommended to the Board of Governors that they speak to "Mr. David Joseph Solomon, a member of this society, at present a student in the Hebrew Union College who, if necessary will satisfy you on this subject."<sup>27</sup>

23 Jabez T. Sunderland, "Christian Missions in India: Will India Become Christian?," *New World* 7, no. 5 (1898): 53.

24 Teed, "Interfaith Encounter," 54. On Ramabai and Müller, see his account in *Auld Lang Syne, Second Series: My Indian Friends* (London: Longmans, Green, 1899), 121–134.

25 For Sunderland's understanding of the role of liberal Christian clergymen, see J. T. Sunderland, *The Liberal Christian Ministry* (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1889).

26 "A Voice From India," *Reform Advocate* (Chicago), 21 March 1896, 102–103; "Resolution of Thanks," *Reform Advocate* (Chicago), 30 May 1896, 305.

27 Reuben to Bloom, 19 March 1897, MS-5, E-1/1, Correspondence, 1895–1899, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

## Educational Migration in the Age of Empire: Bene Israel Applicants to Hebrew Union College

In hindsight, it might appear remarkable that a country that received little more than the *American Israelite* until the late 1890s so quickly inspired a student to attend HUC from abroad. Solomon's journey, however, reflects broader patterns of educational migration that characterized the colonial period at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ambitious young people from across the British Empire sought advanced training in Europe, the United Kingdom, and America.<sup>28</sup> In fact, already in 1878 the College received an application from M. J. Cohn, a young man in Kolkata (then Calcutta) who desired "passage" to the United States and "to be admitted as a student to the Hebrew Union College."<sup>29</sup> The editor of the *American Israelite*, perhaps sensing that passage to America was the primary concern, suggested that the letter be shared with "Her Majesty, the Empress of India, and Lord Beaconsfield."<sup>30</sup> The Board chose to file the application without further action.<sup>31</sup> It is unknown whether Cohn was native-born Indian or a member of the Syrian or Baghdadi community, or from a family from elsewhere.

The applications from the 1890s, however, were distinctly from native-born Indian Jews. The *Beni-Israelite*, a Bombay-based Jewish newspaper, reported in April 1896 that its editors were aware of at least ten young men from the Bene Israel communities in Bombay, Karachi, Poona (now Pune), and Deesa who had considered travelling for a rabbinic education.<sup>32</sup> Two applied to HUC for the 1896–1897 school year. One, a student with the Bene Israel equivalent of *yichus* from Bombay,

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28 Sara Legrandjacques, "Colonial Students in Europe," *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe*, 18 April 2022, <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/migrations-in-europe/migration-elites/colonial-students-in-europe> and Sumita Mukerjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities: The England-Returned* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–29.

29 *Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, Volume 1 (1873–1879), 625.

30 "A Hindoo Customer," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 8 November 1878, 4.

31 *Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, Volume 1 (1873–1879), 625.

32 *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 1 April 1896, 2.

was accepted but did not attend. The other was David Joseph Solomon (Kurulkar), the younger brother of Ezekiel Joseph (Kurulker) and the secretary of the Bene Israel Cultural Society, and he would eventually arrive in the Queen City of the West.<sup>33</sup>

The application of Joseph Hyams (Joseph Haem Samuel Kehimkar, 1873–1957) was brought to the attention of the HUC Board of Governors at the first meeting of the men in January 1896.<sup>34</sup> Hyams's application came as a surprise to the Bene Israel community, who learned about it through coverage in the *American Israelite*.<sup>35</sup> It also made international news, as he was "the first Bene-Israel to venture a trip to the new world."<sup>36</sup> In contrast to many of the young Indian men considering the rabbinate, Hyams had stature as the son of Haem Samuel Kehimkar (1831–1908), a historian of the Bene Israel community who founded the Bene Israel Benevolent Society (1853), the Israelite School (elementary grades 1875, high school 1881), and the Etz Haem Prayer Hall (1888).<sup>37</sup> He was also somewhat known to the American Jewish community by way of several articles about the history and practices of the Bene Israel community carried in the *American Israelite* and other Jewish newspapers.<sup>38</sup> Reports suggested that Hyams had the capacity to

33 Most frequently he used Solomon as his family name: David Joseph Solomon or D. J. Solomon. Sometimes he is referenced as "Kurulkar"; unlike his brother, he used "Kurulker."

34 *Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, Volume 4 (1892–1896), 3589. See Benei Israel Heritage Family Tree, MyHeritage, <https://www.myheritage.com/site-family-tree-74099411/benei-israel-heritage>.

35 *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 1 April 1896, 2.

36 "India," *Jewish Chronicle* (London), 3 April 1896, 17; "From India," *Australasian Hebrew* (Sydney), 17 April 1896, 366.

37 Haem Samuel Kehimkar, *History of the Bene Israel of India* (Tel Aviv: Dayag, 1937), iii–viii; Shirley Berry Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel: A Comprehensive Inquiry and Sourcebook* (Berkeley: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 1988), ix–x. On the role of Kehimkar's articles as a defense of the essential Judaism of the Bene Israel community in colonial terms, see Mitch Numark, "Constructing a Jewish Nation in Colonial India: History, Narratives of *Discent*, and the Vocabulary of Modernity," *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 2 (2001): 89–113.

38 See, e.g., "The Beni Israel of India," *Jewish Messenger* (New York), 4 August 1876, 5; Haem Samuel Kehimker, "The Beni-Israel," *Jewish Messenger* (New York), 21 September 1888, 5; 28 September 1888, 4; 5 October 1888, 4; 12 October 1888, 5; Kehimker, "The Beni Israel," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 19 October 1888, 4.

travel to the United States to study because there was family wealth from several deceased aunts and uncles to support him.<sup>39</sup> The editors of the *Bene Israelite* had much criticism of both father and son, so the reporting must be taken with a grain of salt. By the estimate of the editors, Hyams was unfit for HUC and, based on his academic record, would not be able to pass the entrance examinations.<sup>40</sup> As quickly as he had applied and the news became known among the Bene Israel community, his father stepped in and found him a role at the Israelite School.<sup>41</sup> By October, the *Bene Israelite* would complain again about the leadership of the Israelite School. By their estimation, Kehimkar created “a vacancy of a clerk of Rs. 40 per month for his own son, failing to secure any appointment outside.”<sup>42</sup>

Since Solomon’s acceptance and departure were not covered with any of the same specificity in the Jewish press, there is a suggestion that some communal politics were at play, and some caution must be maintained regarding these explanations for Hyams’s absence from Cincinnati. It is certainly possible that, watching what unfolded with Hyams, Solomon chose a quieter route to the rabbinate. The acceptance of these students raised some questions for overseas correspondents but suggested some sympathy with Wise’s reforming project elsewhere in the Anglo-Jewish world:

From India to Ohio: according to our American exchanges there is a desire among the native Jews of India to go and study theology in the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati. The leading scholar of the Poonah College is soon to undertake this task.<sup>43</sup> Our American contemporaries

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39 *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 1 April 1896, 2.

40 *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 1 April 1896, 3.

41 *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 1 April 1896, 3.

42 *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 8 October 1896, 3.

43 Without the original letter it is difficult to ascertain if or where Solomon attended school; he does not mention it in his extant writings. Since the Ramabai’s school was for young women, it is possible that the editor here blended the fact that Ramabai was a school director with her endorsement of Kurulker. Fergusson College was founded at Pune in 1885 by the Deccan Education Society. I have not been able to locate evidence that Solomon attended. The term “Poonah College” could also have referred to Deccan College, which had

cannot tell how in the world the reputation of the H. U. C. reached distant India, when almost all British and Australian Jewish papers steadily ignore it or condemn it as a hothouse of heresy! *The Hebrew* may claim exemption from this reproach as it has already given due prominence to the splendid results produced by the Union College, and being regularly dispatched to Poonah, as well as to all the large cities of India, may have been the medium for conveying to that country the fame of the Cincinnati institute.<sup>44</sup>

Both young Indian men, it seems, had been warned by contemporaries in India that they would be better served by attending more traditional schools of rabbinic learning in London, Paris, New York, or just about anywhere other than Hebrew Union College. Yet both insisted that HUC was the right place for them.<sup>45</sup> Such advice may help explain why Hyams's father, already facing pressure in the community for his overly close relationship with the Anglo-Jewish Society, might have prevented, or at least intervened, in his son's attendance. Solomon would move forward and head to Cincinnati but the advice, sadly, would prove prescient.

Solomon's application was received in late August or early September 1895.<sup>46</sup> At his arrival a year later, it was reported that "He is one of the B'ne Israel, who settled in India many centuries ago, or were perhaps native converts. He is the first of them to come to this country."<sup>47</sup> Despite the influx of Eastern European Jews to the shores of the United States, a student anecdote about Solomon from the early twentieth century suggests that HUC's model of a Jew still highlighted German roots.

It must have been around 1905 that Professor Deutsch told us of a young student from India who came to enroll in the Hebrew Union College. He belonged to the Beni Israel community, and in his native

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been established as Hindoo College in 1821, changed its name to Poona College in 1842, and to Deccan College in 1864. Again, I have yet to confirm that Solomon attended.

44 *Australasian Hebrew* (Sydney), 7 August 1896, 189.

45 *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 2 January 1896, 4.

46 "From India," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8 September 1895, 4.

47 "Domestic Notes," *Menorah* 21, no. 4 (New York), October 1896, 253.

dress he was quite picturesque. Dr. Deutsch wanted Mr. Julius Freiberg, the then president of the Board of Governor's, to meet this oriental Jew.

Mr. Freiberg was both interested and somewhat suspicious. He asked Dr. Deutsch, "Ist der Mann ein Yehudi?" The answer was in the affirmative. Not content with the professorial assurances, he said, "I'll find out for myself!" Turning to the young man, he asked, "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?"

The student looked puzzled. Mr. Freiberg was only a little less so. The young Indian's inability to speak German simply confirmed his doubts: What Jew could not speak German?<sup>48</sup>

Following Solomon's arrival at HUC in Cincinnati, notice of the novel situation was finally covered by the press. The voice of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the *Archives Israelites*, reported from their India correspondent that there was a curious matter worthy of note when David Joseph Solomon took up his studies in Cincinnati, marking the first real encounter between Indian and liberal American Jews, and highlighted it as precedent setting.<sup>49</sup> Solomon spent five years studying at HUC while he completed high school and a bachelor's degree at the University of Cincinnati.<sup>50</sup>

### David Joseph Solomon: At Home

Solomon grew up in Poona with his widowed mother, Sipporah, and brother, Ezekiel Joseph.<sup>51</sup> His father, Joseph Solomon Kurulker (1840–1875) died when David Joseph Solomon was about six years old.<sup>52</sup> Jewish practice was a part of his youth, and he recalled trudging to the

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48 Reported by Rabbi Jacob Singer in Stanley R. Brav, *Telling Tales Out of School* (Cincinnati: Alumni Association of HUC-JIR, 1965), 10.

49 E. M. Ezekiel, "Indes-Orientales, 16 October 1896," *Archives Israelites* 57 (1896): 372.

50 *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 23 January 1902, 6.

51 "Interesting Sermons," *Fort Wayne Sentinel* (Indiana), 2 January 1897, 8.

52 See the biographical information collected online in the Benei Israel Heritage Family Tree, MyHeritage, <https://www.myheritage.com/profile-74099411-5011542/joseph-solomon-kurulkar#>.

Sassoon synagogue in Poona.<sup>53</sup> The “Ohel David Synagogue” had been built by the Baghdadi Jewish philanthropist David Sassoon beginning in 1863 and was completed in 1867, a few years before Solomon’s birth. Sassoon had established himself in Bombay sometime before 1832 and set up a summer home in Poona. The difficulty was that this synagogue promoted the rites familiar to Sassoon, practices that were more halakhically rigorous than those of the Bene Israel community.<sup>54</sup> While the synagogue could educate and inform the Bene Israel who travelled there, the hierarchy was explicit. The Succath Shelomo Synagogue of the Bene Israel in Poona was not dedicated until 1921. Solomon eventually moved from Poona by the 1890s and was living in Kalyan, about thirty miles outside Bombay, with his mother.<sup>55</sup>

Solomon’s upbringing exemplifies how colonial social hierarchies shaped individual ambitions. Young Bene Israel men looked to education and imperial service as pathways to advancement within the constraints of British rule. What is clear is that in his youth and young adulthood Solomon was much influenced by both men and women who had gained upward mobility through advancement in the British military, something Bene Israel men appear to have been able to do in a way that other Indians could not. Advanced university education abroad either in England or the United States or closer to home after the establishment of the university at Bombay also provided such mobility.<sup>56</sup> He was taught to admire men like his future father-in-law, Abraham Samuel Nagawkar (1843–1919, Bombay University 1871), the first Bene Israel to graduate from university.<sup>57</sup> “How he loomed large in our young days,

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53 David Joseph Solomon, “Presidential Address,” in *Report of the Seventh Bene-Israel Conference Held in December 1923 at Bombay* (Bombay, 1924), 61.

54 Shalva Weil, “The Legacy of David Sassoon,” *Asian Jewish Life* 14 (2014): 4–6.

55 Solomon, “Influence,” 168. In 1882, Kalyan and the surrounding towns were home to 775 Bene Israel (Isenberg, *India’s Bene Israel*, 173).

56 On military advancement, see Mitch Numark, “Perspectives from the Periphery: The East India Company’s Jewish Sepoys, Anglo-Jewry, and the Image of ‘the Jew,’” in *On the Word of a Jew: Religion, Reliability, and the Dynamics of Trust*, ed. Nina Caputo and Mitchell B. Hart (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019), 247–275.

57 On Nagawkar (also Nagavkar, Nagaonkar), see Nina Haems, ed., *Rebecca Reuben* (Mumbai: Vacha Trust, 2000), 42–50.

and served as a beacon cannot be adequately described in appropriate words. As a pioneer he deserves our admiration; for with him started the intellectual movement of which we are now reaping the fruit.”<sup>58</sup>

At the time of his application to HUC, Solomon was working as a clerk and supporting his aged mother.<sup>59</sup> Solomon’s ambitions with regard to education and liberal Judaism need be understood against the backdrop of British colonialism in India. The British created a hierarchy of peoples in which Muslims and Hindus were at the lowest rank. Indian Jews, Christians, Parsis, and Anglo-Indians were thought more reliable and gained access to work and resources not available to others.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, American liberal Judaism, with its own efforts to Americanize Jews, offered a model for accessing greater social mobility in British India. It was evidently working for Baghdadi Jews. They, however, discriminated against the Bene Israel. Perhaps, in Solomon’s eyes, gaining standing through association and adoption of liberal Judaism offered a way to work around his Baghdadi brethren.

Despite the warnings received about coming to study at a liberal seminary in Cincinnati, Solomon found great appeal in the movement he read about in the *American Israelite*. Additionally, he heard about the development of American Jewry in Nagarkar’s lectures at the Bene Israel Culture Society in Bombay where he was a member of both its managing committee and of its temperance society.<sup>61</sup> The adoption of English opened up a world to Solomon that would not have been possible otherwise, and he would maintain that acquiring English was absolutely necessary for the community’s advancement thirty years later when he was in a position of leadership.<sup>62</sup> His brother’s role as secretary of the

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58 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 38.

59 “Interesting Sermons,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel* (Indiana), 2 January 1897, 8.

60 Joan G. Roland, “Indian-Jewish Identity of the Bene Israel during the British Raj,” in *Studies of Indian Jewish Identity*, ed. Nathan Katz (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 126–127.

61 Solomon, “Influence,” 169. For his membership roles see *The Beni-Israel Culture Society. Reading Room and Library, and General Transactions of the Society for the Period Dating From November 1888, to Dec 1892* (Bombay: The English and Vernacular Printing Press, 1893), 2, 11.

62 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 62–63.

Bene Israel Culture Society was only one part of Solomon's circle of Jewish reformers in India. His brother actively worked in Bombay while he was applying to study at HUC, and in his hometown of Poona, his uncle, Moses Samson, worked to build a Jewish Chautauqua Circle.<sup>63</sup> On 3 November 1895, the "Association for the Study of the Jewish Religion" enrolled as a member of the Jewish Chautauqua Organization with twenty-one members. Moses Samson, who served as secretary, was then the head assistant at the commissariat department in Poona.<sup>64</sup> His work in Poona was lauded by the Bene Israel of Bombay as well. Writing of Samson's accomplishments, the *Bene Israelite* proclaimed, "The Jews in India who are far ignorant of their ancestral Faith, require 'no preachers,' but actual workers in the cause of Judaism."<sup>65</sup>

At around the same time, Moses Samson had also corresponded with Simon Wolf of the International Order of B'nai B'rith about establishing a chapter in British India.<sup>66</sup> In early 1897, Solomon attested to the American Jewish audience the good work his uncle was doing:

Of Mr. Samson, he says, that there is not a man in the whole community who is truly in a position to be the guide of the reform movement on account of his enlightenment and education, and that he is truly awakened to the higher call of his duty to his fellow beings.<sup>67</sup>

The editors of the *Jewish Review of Cleveland*, where the summary of the letter initially appeared, would go on to laud Samson's work under difficult conditions without access to the necessary books as an inspiration. If such good work could be done so far away, certainly greater efforts could be made to expand the educational program in the United States.<sup>68</sup> Toward the end of 1897, Moses Samson was appointed to a place on the

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63 That he was Solomon's maternal uncle seems most likely. Available biographical information for his father suggests that he had no siblings. His mother's family name is unknown, and biographical information for her and Moses Samson is lacking.

64 "The Jewish Chautauqua," *Jewish Voice* (St. Louis), 10 January 1896, 8.

65 In fact, the Bene Israelite had called for establishing a Jewish Chautauqua in India already in mid-1895; see *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 3 July 1896, 1.

66 "I.O.B.B.," *Jewish Voice* (St. Louis), 13 September 1895, 6.

67 "Jewish Chautauqua," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 25 February 1897, 6.

68 "Jewish Chautauqua," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 25 February 1897, 6.

Jewish Chautauqua Society executive board as a non-resident member.<sup>69</sup> Samson, like his nephew, was an advocate for women's education and created a women's study group:

Ladies' meeting is an innovation among the Bene Israel and, as might be expected, there was a considerable heart-burning on that score. This has unfortunately been taken advantage of by the reactionaries to prejudice the people against education and the reform movement... Though I am somewhat dampened in spirit, yet I am not going to give way under such hostile circumstances. I will or rather hope to renew my efforts again before long and to set matters right.<sup>70</sup>

By the middle of November 1897, Ezekiel Joseph Kurulker would report a new Jewish Chautauqua Circle in Bombay sponsored by the Bene Israel Culture Society. At its first lecture, twelve young men, including university students, enrolled.<sup>71</sup> By 1901 there were four active circles in India.<sup>72</sup> The multiplication may not have been a sign a growth, as the Bombay *Bene Israelite* explained it:

Our young men are rather prone to form societies and institute organizations with high-flown titles, and show the people living abroad that they are at the helm of such good-in-name societies. Not being satisfied with the existing societies, each one, wishing to be president or treasurer, institutes a new one with a result well known to everyone.<sup>73</sup>

That the *Bene Israelite* took issue with what was being taught is clear from the remainder of the article. However, the description of the development of Jewish organizations in India may explain why Solomon needed to write in support of his uncle. These educational networks

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69 "Jewish Chautauqua Notes," *American Hebrew* (New York), 7 January 1898, 308.

70 "Chautauqua Notes," *Emanu-El* (San Francisco), 5 February 1897, 13.

71 "Jewish Chautauqua Notes," *American Hebrew* (New York), 7 January 1898, 308.

72 Henry Berkowitz, "The Secret of Israel's Youthfulness," *Jewish American* (Detroit), 20 December 1901, 1–2. Moses Samson's Association for the Study of Jewish Religion continued to be active, as evidenced by its membership in the Jewish Publication Society in Philadelphia in 1902–1903; see "Report of the Fourteenth Year of the Jewish Publication Society," *American Jewish Year Book* (1902–1903): 283.

73 Cited in "A Moral from Bombay," *Jewish Messenger* (New York), 4 May 1900, 4.

spanning from Ohio to Maharashtra demonstrate how reformist Jewish movements created transnational communities of learning that transcended imperial boundaries. They also show the remarkable speed at which the Jewish press could encourage cultural transfer. The Jewish Chautauqua Society, founded in Philadelphia in 1893, was barely two years old when Moses Samson found an audience for it in Poona.<sup>74</sup> These collective efforts suggest that, at the moment David Joseph Solomon Kurulkar decided to make the trip to the United States, he was part of a small but active movement that appeared to be making headway in educating and liberalizing the Bene Israel community.

### **A Pioneer's Journey: Arrival in Cincinnati**

Although Solomon's reminiscences of his travels en route to the United States are not recorded, contemporary accounts suggest that the journey took about three weeks. Sunderland described a similar travel time from his home in Ann Arbor to India in 1895–1896.<sup>75</sup> In an era when transcontinental communication took weeks and international travel required careful planning across multiple steamship and railway connections, Solomon's journey took personal courage and highlights globalizing forces that made such educational migration possible. The trip would have involved trains and steamships travelling via Southampton and New York. Solomon arrived in New York on 4 September 1896 aboard the *S. S. St. Paul*.<sup>76</sup> By his own account, he was only the fourth

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74 On the history of the society, see Peggy K. Pearlstein, "Understanding through Education: One Hundred Years of the Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1893–1993," (PhD diss., George Washington University, 1993); Pearlstein, "Assemblies by the Sea: The Jewish Chautauqua Society in Atlantic City, 1897–1907," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 10, nos. 1–2 (1998): 5–17; Pearlstein, "From Self-Culture to College Lecture: A Century of Programs and Publications of the Jewish Chautauqua Society: 1893–1993," *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 3, no. 2 (2000): 89–118.

75 Jabez T. Sunderland, *India in Bondage: Her Right to Freedom and a Place Among the Great Nations* (New York: Lewis Copeland, 1929), xiv–xv.

76 See the passenger list online in New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820–1957, Ancestry.com, [https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/4018314053:7488?tid=&pid=&queryid=49ba9171-da3e-4efe-82c3-ef5841899dd5&\\_phsrc=Ihx63&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/4018314053:7488?tid=&pid=&queryid=49ba9171-da3e-4efe-82c3-ef5841899dd5&_phsrc=Ihx63&_phstart=successSource). More basic data can

member of the Bene Israel community to travel abroad for education. The first three had gone to England, and he was the first to travel to the United States.<sup>77</sup> He was, however, acquainted with two women who had made the trip to the United States, Ramabai and Anandi Joshi.<sup>78</sup> Anandibai Joshi (1865–1887), a cousin of Pandita Ramabai, had successfully earned her MD at the University of Pennsylvania in 1886.<sup>79</sup>

According to reports, Solomon was approximately twenty-seven years old when he arrived in Cincinnati.<sup>80</sup> The US arrivals list and the US Census identify his birthdate as April 1869.<sup>81</sup> It likely would have been 6 September before he could arrive in Cincinnati via train, and the new semester began almost immediately for the preparatory program at HUC. When it opened on 10 September 1896, it was reported that he was one of forty students enrolled, but only his physical form is described: “His skin is dark and hair raven black. He is one of the collection of Hebrews known as the B’nai Israel, whose tradition leads them to believe they are descendants of the lost tribes of Israel.”<sup>82</sup> His skin tone was a regular subject of reporting:

One of the new students at the Hebrew Union College is a swa[r]thy member of the Beni Israel of India. He has come all the way to learn his profession in America. That he did not go to England is surely remarkable. But, then, England begins to admit that even Rabbis can come out of America.<sup>83</sup>

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be searched at The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc, [heritage.statueofliberty.org](https://heritage.statueofliberty.org).

77 David Joseph Solomon, “The Bene-Israel Community of Bombay,” *H.U.C. Journal* 1, no. 2 (November 1896): 46.

78 Solomon, “Influence,” 168. Ramabai is discussed at length below.

79 On Joshi, see Hareesha Rishab Bharadwaj, Priyal Dalal, Joecelyn Kirani Tan, Trishtha Agarwal, and Mahnoor Javed, “Journey across the World to Study Medicine: The Anandi Joshi Story,” *Journal of Medical Biography* 32 no. 4 (2024): 372–379.

80 “From India,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8 September 1895, 4.

81 See the sources in note 76 above and the 1900 US Census, Ohio, Hamilton, Cincinnati Ward 26, District 0221, Ancestry.com, [https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/40388676:7602?tid=&pid=&queryid=a769f845-54b3-47c3-911b-16396facd395&\\_phsrc=Ihx66&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/40388676:7602?tid=&pid=&queryid=a769f845-54b3-47c3-911b-16396facd395&_phsrc=Ihx66&_phstart=successSource).

82 “Auspicious,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 11 September 1896, 10.

83 “Russo-Jewish News,” *Emanu-El* (San Francisco), 6 November 1896, 13.

That Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger took the opportunity to note this is significant. The arrival of a foreign student was a feather in the cap for HUC. In this period, some liberal congregations like Sinai in Chicago still insisted that an American-born boy could be hired only if he had received his education in Europe.<sup>84</sup>

The fascination with Solomon as the exotic foreigner is a theme repeated in correspondence and reporting. His precise housing situation is unclear, but, for at least part of his time in Cincinnati, he was a boarder in the home of Maurice Goldberg (Hungary 1845–Cincinnati 1927) and Fannie Morgenroth Goldberg (Bellefontaine, Ohio 1855–Cincinnati, Ohio 1933).<sup>85</sup> Goldberg founded an insurance business in 1896 after the dissolution of his hat business and kept working into his 80s.<sup>86</sup> Goldberg's business was new when Solomon arrived, which might explain their need for a boarder.

### **Navigating American Academia: Studying at Hebrew Union College**

Initially it was reported that Solomon's expenses at HUC would be paid for "by a wealthy woman of Bombay."<sup>87</sup> However, the actual source of his support was rather different. Solomon was supported in part by the social reformer and Christian missionary Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati (1858–1922), who relied on American philanthropy to support her projects. The culturing agenda Solomon saw in Reform Judaism aligned with Ramabai's commitment to education as key to social reform and social mobility.<sup>88</sup> According to Solomon, after Ramabai travelled in the United States from 1882 to 1886, she returned to India. Establishing herself in his home town of Poona, she provided the Bene Israel community accounts of the advances made by

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84 Tobias Brinkmann, *Sunday's at Sinai* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 115–116.

85 See the census data in note 81 above and "Goldberg," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 5 August 1927, 20, and "Goldberg," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 June 1933, 21.

86 "Young at 80," *Cincinnati Post*, 29 August 1925, 3.

87 "From India," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8 September 1895, 4.

88 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 242.

Jews in America with the hope of encouraging similar efforts in India. In fact, by the early 1890s Ramabai was both a donor and honorary member of the Bene Israel Culture Society.<sup>89</sup> He would later describe her as an acquaintance who had been to the United States and had done “praiseworthy” work for women in India.<sup>90</sup> Given Ramabai’s reliance on American philanthropy to support her school, the fact that she imagined Solomon as an ambassador of sorts to reach potential non-Christian but religiously liberal donors may explain some of her support of his studies in Cincinnati. She had already encountered liberal Jewish communities on her earlier visit.

Christian missionaries played a complex role in the Bene Israel community. Solomon would note that, for many Bene Israel, their knowledge of the Bible had come through Christian missionizing. “The Bible may be said to have been given to the Bene-Israel of Bombay by the Christian missionaries, as Moses and the later prophets gave it to the Jews and the world.”<sup>91</sup> No doubt, Christian missionaries were both ally and enemy. As in the United States, their efforts brought knowledge of the Bible and Hebrew to Jewish audiences who were not producing educational resources in their own communities. At the same time, the education had as its goal the conversion of these same Jews to Christianity.<sup>92</sup>

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89 Solomon, “Influence,” 169. Solomon’s reporting was not quite accurate, as Ramabai was in the United States from 1886 until 1888. On her connection to the Society see *The Beni-Israel Culture Society. Reading Room and Library, and General Transactions of the Society for the Period Dating From November 1888, to Dec 1892* (Bombay: The English and Vernacular Printing Press, 1893), 2, 8.

90 Solomon, “Influence,” 168.

91 Solomon, “Bene-Israel Community,” 45–46. On the role of education by Christian missionaries in scaffolding the Jewish identity of the Bene Israel community, see Mitch Numark, “Hebrew School in Nineteenth-Century Bombay: Protestant Missionaries, Cochinites, and the Hebraization of India’s Bene Israel Community,” *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 6 (2012): 1764–1808.

92 Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Impact of Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions on American Jews,” in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 232–254. On the contribution of Christian missionaries to the education of the Bene Israel, see Isenberg, *India’s Bene Israel*, 65–90.

Ramabai, however, was cut from different missionary cloth. She had written to HUC on Solomon's behalf in support of his application.

Among the young men of the Bene Israel, as the native Jews of East India call themselves, the desire seems to be roused, to go to Cincinnati and study theology in the Hebrew Union College. No inducements of any kind were held out to those enthusiastic aspirants. Still the Principal of the Poona school, Madame Ramabas [*sic*], informs the president of the H. U. C., that her special favorite, Mr. David Joseph Kuralkar [*sic*], is to come some of these days all the way from Bombay to Cincinnati, to study theology in the H. U. C... The young Bene Israel coming to us to learn, will be welcomed, we think, to all the college has to offer, especially if the good men and women of Bombay will provide for him a fair livelihood and his character be as good as Madame Ramabas [*sic*] maintains. There is no color line in this college.<sup>93</sup>

At around the same time, Ramabai was sending another student abroad for advanced education in England, her daughter Mano. The correspondence related to that effort is valuable for highlighting that, in the few years before this, Ramabai had employed a Jewish woman as head teacher in her school, Mary (Miriam) Samuel. She appears to have been the daughter of Samuel Peri, a Persian-Jewish merchant who settled in India.<sup>94</sup> Samuel had been educated in Poona at the school run by the Community of St. Mary the Virgin and then served as teacher there. During this time, she taught Mano, and Mano continued to study with her when Samuel moved to Ramabai's employ. Samuel held tightly to her Jewish identity and, although Ramabai's circle hoped that she might convert, she does not appear to have been pressed to do so.<sup>95</sup> Until

93 *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 28 May 1896, 4, reprinted in "Social Column," *Emanuel* (San Francisco), 5 June 1896, 15.

94 "Indian," *Der Israelit* (Mainz), 30 January 1888, 146; "A Persian Jewess Bachelor of Arts," *Pall Mall Gazette* (London), 11 February 1889, 2; "In Foreign Realms: India," *Jewish Times* (San Francisco), 8 March 1889, 1.

95 Pandita Ramabai, *The Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai*, ed. A. B. Shah (Bombay: Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1977), 163–175; Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (New York: Oxford

the late 1890s, Ramabai rejected any proactive form of proselytizing, although she hoped her own practice and devotion might inspire others to the Christian faith.<sup>96</sup> The school did no active proselytizing of its students.<sup>97</sup> That being said, by the late 1890s, Ramabai's conversion to Christianity and her mission would make other Indians and some members of the Bene Israel hesitate before affiliating with her institutions, even as they admired what she had accomplished.<sup>98</sup>

The challenge of cross-cultural integration is evident in contemporary reactions to Solomon's presence. The question of racism raised in the account of Ramabai's support of Solomon's education highlights both the admissions policy of HUC and the welcoming nature of Cincinnati more broadly. A local reporter seemingly reminded his fellow Cincinnatians of their obligations: "No doubt [Solomon] will be cordially welcomed in a social way and made to feel thoroughly at

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University Press, 2008), 404–406. Samuel studied for her BA degree in the late 1880s. The sources are consistent on this fact but not on the school she attended, in part due to a lack of distinction between the city of Bombay and the Bombay Presidency (i.e., the administrative jurisdiction): "Miss Mary Samuel, a Jewess, of Poona, has passed the B.A. Examination. This is the first instance of a Jewish young lady reaching the B.A. standard in India" (*Allen's Indian Mail*, 27 December 1887, 1240). She may not have been only the first Jewish woman, but the first Jew at all in India to study at this level. "This is the first instance of a young lady of her race reaching the B. A. standard, and it redounds greatly to her credit, especially as none of their boys have as yet been successful" ("Record of Women," *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1888, 290). It is most likely that she attended Poona College (the Deccan College); see "Education among Jews in India," *Hebrew Standard of Australasia* (Sydney), 16 September 1898, 9; Ramabai, *Letters and Correspondence*, 163. In the United States, the success of "Miriam Samuel" at "the College at Puna" only highlighted the failings of the American higher education system: "It is just about the time that Columbia College, in the City of New York, in the United States of America, determined upon conferring the same degree upon such women who should pass a satisfactory examination" ("Away Off in the Far East," *American Hebrew* [New York], 17 February 1888, 1). It seems that, at least briefly, she considered studying medicine in London in order to return to practice in India. See the sources in the previous note.

96 Frykenberg, *Christianity*, 403.

97 David W. Kling, *A History of Christian Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 542.

98 Rebecca Solomon, "Condition of the Bene-Israel Woman in India," *Reform Advocate*, 30 October 1897, 603.

home, to do which well Cincinnatians of all people possess the knack.”<sup>99</sup> All evidence suggests that, although he was looked upon as exotic and became the token Indian when insight on India was needed, he was welcomed among HUC and University of Cincinnati students and faculty, as well as the extended community. Despite a complex history with race, the University of Cincinnati had admitted small numbers of African American students as early as the 1870s and certainly into the 1890s.<sup>100</sup> During his time in Cincinnati, he was also supported by the HUC Fund, the Chicago Sinai Congregation Stipendiary Fund, and a group of local Cincinnati business people.<sup>101</sup>

To understand both Solomon’s exotic status and his isolation, consider that according to the 1900 US Census, there were only 2,069 people of Indian origin living in the entire United States, mostly concentrated on the West Coast.<sup>102</sup> A brief anecdote clarifies his situation. In July 1901, an Indian man from Lahore (then British India) who had emigrated to Detroit in early 1900 met with Solomon on a visit to Cincinnati. It was reported that it had been more than a year since the man had met another Indian person.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, at his arrival, Solomon was on average a decade older than the other students in the preparatory program. A review of census data on his “Grade C” classmates in 1896–1897 shows that they were born between 1878 and 1882.<sup>104</sup> According to reports, he completed the Cincinnati High School

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99 “Looked Upon as Great Wrong,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 18 October 1896, 9.

100 See, e.g., Wendell P. Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens: Historical, Sociological and Biographical* (Cincinnati: Dabney, 1926), 108–109, 419.

101 “Chicago Sinai Congregation,” *Reform Advocate* (Chicago), 9 April 1898, 129.

102 See the mapped data at Henry Gannett, “Map of the Foreign-Born Population of the United States, 1900,” Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/map-foreign-born-population-united-states-1900>. On South Asian immigration to North America in this period, see Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 1–42.

103 “Hindus Had to Converse in English: Two Men from India Meet in Cincinnati,” *Cincinnati Post*, 11 July 1901, 3.

104 See the class list in *Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, Volume 5 (1897–1902), 3836.

and then began at the University of Cincinnati, where his classmates were still younger but less so.<sup>105</sup>

As a “man of good education and address” during his time in Cincinnati, he became the local expert on any matter related to India.<sup>106</sup> Already in October 1896 he was approached for his opinion on the impact of demonetization of silver in India. He assured the Cincinnati audience that he saw no immediate impact on the price of wheat, although technically the value of the rupee had dropped. More importantly, though, he described the demonetization as an error made by the ruling British, who decided on a policy that would help the banking class immediately and harm the locals severely over time.<sup>107</sup> This theme of appreciating the modernization and upward mobility available to the Bene Israel under British rule as something he admired is well-represented in his writings, but he would continue to maintain that the problems of India could be solved only by proper British investment in India.<sup>108</sup> At the time, the reporter characterized Solomon as “a young man of alert intelligence, quick observation and logical mind, but modest about intruding his views upon strangers, and a trifle too unyielding under the reporter’s pump, but this latter point will be overcome if he remains for a fair amount of time in the United States.”<sup>109</sup> The following week, Solomon lectured to seventy-five men and women in an evening salon on the status of women in India and Indian marriage practices. What is in evidence is that he was already concerned about the low status of women in Indian society and saw it as something to be remedied.<sup>110</sup> Solomon was clearly influenced by Ramabai’s efforts at social reform, and he paid tribute that evening to her school for Indian widows in Poona, which was noted as being supported entirely by Americans. In this context, it is noteworthy that the reporter assumed “the famous

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105 *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 23 January 1902, 6.

106 “A Native of Bombay,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, 19 October 1896, 5.

107 “Looked Upon as a Great Wrong,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 18 October 1896, 9.

108 See, e.g., his depiction of the British investment in the education of Indians in Solomon, “Influence,” 167–168.

109 “Looked Upon as a Great Wrong,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 18 October 1896, 9.

110 “Women of India,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 22 October 1896, 6.

Ramabai” was known to the audience, given that her public talks during her time in the United States from 1886 until 1888 had been well covered in the national press.<sup>111</sup> Solomon’s role as cultural interpreter reflects the broader dynamics of how international students served as bridges between distant worlds, educating American audiences about global realities while navigating their own processes of cultural adaptation.

### **Academic Life at HUC**

Only some of the record of Solomon’s coursework at HUC is preserved. In 1897–1898, he studied the Psalms with Moses Buttenwieser (1862–1939), Bible and Hebrew grammar with Caspar Levias (1864–1939), Mishnah and Talmud with Sigmund Mannheimer (1835–1909), and Second Temple history with Charles S. Levi (1868–1939). In 1898–1899, he studied Bible, Talmud, and Leviticus with commentaries with Mannheimer, Bible and the biblical accents with Buttenwieser, and Mishnah and Talmud with Ephraim Feldman (1860–1910). In 1899–1900, he studied Bible with Mannheimer, History with Gotthard Deutsch (1859–1921), and Talmud and philosophy with Feldman.<sup>112</sup> Solomon developed a close relationship with Deutsch, perhaps because Deutsch had already been a correspondent with his older brother. In 1897 he travelled with Deutsch to speak in Fort Wayne, Indiana about the Bene Israel community. He was introduced by the local press as the first “Hindoo Israelite” to visit the United States.<sup>113</sup> By his own recollection, only three members of the community had ever left to study abroad, all in England.<sup>114</sup> In his address, Solomon compared himself to Jacob’s family, forced to travel from a distant land. He explained that he had learned from American newspapers about the success of Judaism in the United States and wished to accomplish the same for his people in India. He had previously supported his aged mother as a clerk in India, and he aspired to return home to support her again and, in his free time,

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111 “Women of India,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 22 October 1896, 6. On her American reception, see Frykenberg, *Christianity*, 393–394.

112 See the grades recorded in MS-5, B-1, Folder 3, Gradebook, 1895–1900, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

113 “Interesting Sermons,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel* (Indiana), 2 January 1897, 8.

114 Solomon, “Bene-Israel Community,” 46.

to provide his people with desperately needed religious instruction. He also aspired to unify the Bene Israel as they, at the time, were divided among several synagogue communities. Deutsch hoped that through his work in India, Solomon would one day fulfill the prophecy “I will make her that halteth a remnant and her that was cast off a strong nation” (Micah 4:7).<sup>115</sup>

### Studying at the University of Cincinnati

At the same time, Solomon advanced in his collegiate classes at the University of Cincinnati. His records are not preserved, but his studies with the historian Philip van Ness Myers (1846–1937), professor of economics and history, stood out in his own recollections. Myers’s teachings on the nature of revolution and reformation in Europe particularly informed his own understanding of what the Bene Israel community would need to do in order to advance.<sup>116</sup> Myers also had some familiarity with India, having travelled there on a scientific mission in the early 1870s.<sup>117</sup> Solomon would also report that English professor Edward Miles Brown (1854–1908) was “a man who took personal interest in his students; and, somehow, had a soft spot in his heart for me.”<sup>118</sup>

Solomon wrote for the student publication *McMicken Review*, recounting his travels in India before coming to the United States. Writing about the Taj Mahal in Agra, some 750 miles from Bombay, he recalled:

The material of which it is made is pure white marble. The complexity of its design and the delicate intricacy of the workmanship baffled description. The mausoleum stands on a raised platform of marble, at the corners of which rises a tall and slender minaret, resembling the Indian palm tree, of graceful proportion and exquisite beauty...in regard to the color and design the interior of the Taj Mahal may rank first in the world for purely decorative workmanship.<sup>119</sup>

115 “Interesting Sermons,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel* (Indiana), 2 January 1897, 8.

116 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 42.

117 “Historian Taken by Death,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 21 September 1937, 1.

118 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 74. On Brown, see Bryant Venable with Caroline Neff Maxwell and John Miller Burnam, *Memorabilia of Edward Miles Brown* (Cincinnati: Alumna Association of the University of Cincinnati, 1909).

119 David Joseph Solomon, “From India,” *McMicken Review* 13, no. 5 (February 1899): 99–101, here 100.

About Bombay he would write in poetic terms:

Bombay, as seen from the reservoir on the top of the Malabar Hill, just before sunset, during a break in the monsoon rains, when the atmosphere is at its clearest, presents a spectacle of such striking beauty, that the sight is justly regarded as one of the half dozen finest sights in the world.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to writing, Solomon lectured during the summer of 1898 in a technical school for boys run by Mannheimer's wife, Louise Herschman Mannheimer (1845–1920) and sponsored by the United Hebrew Charities.<sup>121</sup> During his free time, he also became active in local community events. Having been “reckoned one of the best players in the country,” Solomon captained the pickup team for several cricket tournaments.<sup>122</sup> Although his team lost both series in August 1900, he was instrumental in the return of cricket to Cincinnati after a three-decade hiatus and, in all fairness, the other team had a ringer in a recent arrival who had previously played on a renowned Scottish team.<sup>123</sup>

### **A Plan to Return Home**

By the beginning of the school year in 1899, Solomon had decided that he would not remain in Cincinnati to complete rabbinical studies. Writing to the Board of Governors, he would explain:

It is my intention to return to my native country after two years when I expect to graduate from the university. This will not permit me to take the collegiate course of the college at all, I wish, therefore, to complete the preparatory department only before I leave here. I shall be very much thankful to your honourable body if you will allow me to extend

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120 Solomon, “From India,” 100–101.

121 “Boys’ School,” *Cincinnati Post*, 14 July 1898, 5.

122 “Cricketers Play Today,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, 11 August 1900, 8; “Cricketers,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8 August 1900, 4. For a game the following month in which the Cincinnati team was defeated by another from Newport, Kentucky, see “Defeated,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 4 September 1900, 4.

123 “Success,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 12 August 1900, 10; “Cricket,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 26 August 1900, 14.

my A grade studies to two years that I may devote some time to my university work.<sup>124</sup>

The gradebooks make clear that the plan was approved by the faculty. In truth, Solomon was passing his HUC courses but performed exceptionally only in his history class with Deutsch.<sup>125</sup> This may have influenced his choice, but there were pressures from home as well. Solomon's decision reflected the competing demands of family obligation and community responsibility, intensified by the plague epidemic that made his distant homeland feel urgently present. The bubonic plague epidemic that tore through the west of India beginning in the summer of 1896 took members of his family.<sup>126</sup> Solomon became the intermediary to help his classmates, and Americans more broadly, understand the destruction overseas, as he spoke to the press. Based on a letter from his mother, he could offer the following report:

My home, at Poonah, is right in the heart of the plague district.<sup>127</sup> This terrible scourge is raging throughout the west of India. My mother tells me that all the towns there are quarantined against each other. So strict is the watch kept that it was some weeks before she learned of the death of my aunt at Bombay, only a little more than 100 miles away.

My aunt did not die of the plague, but some of my relatives have fallen victim. Forty deaths daily is the average at Bombay, and 80 is the rate at Poonah. Victims die between one and three days after they have been stricken.... Stricken ones rarely recovery though cure is not impossible. I left home last August, just one month before the plague broke out.<sup>128</sup>

Through these years and those that followed, famine would add to the difficulties faced by Indians generally, and the Bene Israel community

124 Samson to the Faculty, 11 September 1899, MS-5, B-6, Folder 1, Correspondence, tests, and invitations to examinations, 1883–1903, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

125 See the records of his work in MS-5, B-1, Folder 3, Gradebook, 1895–1900, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

126 On the plague in Bombay, see Myron Echenberg, *Plague Ports: The Global Urban Impact of Bubonic Plague, 1894–1901* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 47–78.

127 He had previously resided at Kalyan. See note 55 above.

128 "Plague in India Described by Cincinnati Student," *Cincinnati Post*, 20 January 1898, 2.

in particular. The *American Israelite* throughout this period actively encouraged American Jews to contribute to the care of the starving Jews of India.<sup>129</sup> In fact, the work of the *American Israelite* was recognized by the *Bene Israelite*, which noted,

It is a matter of perfect gratification for one to learn that our American Jewish contemporaries have made suggestions to gather subscriptions for Jews suffering either from plague or famine in India. Our esteemed contemporary, the *Israelite*, of Cincinnati, has gone a step further and opened a fund in its columns. So far as we are aware, the present is the first opportunity when our American coreligionists have come forward to help us.<sup>130</sup>

The degree to which Solomon's presence in Cincinnati strengthened local resolve to help suffering Indians in Bombay and elsewhere is not identifiable, but it is clear that it did play a role. The reporting reveals that, in addition to letters and publications from India, Wise relied on discussion with Solomon to help support his efforts to raise money for his suffering coreligionists in South Asia: "The Bene Israel, we are told by their representative at Hebrew Union College, being very poor occupy the most unhealthy quarters of Bombay and are generally poorly fed and still more poorly housed."<sup>131</sup> Fellow students at the University of Cincinnati were also concerned and sympathetic and, in discussion with a somewhat reluctant Solomon, wanted to raise money to help.<sup>132</sup> Solomon seemed to distinguish between the good that American Jewry could do for Indian Jews and the unlikelihood that a group of college students could have any impact on the millions of starving people in India. When approached by a sympathetic female student at UC, he "asked what we could really collect for such an enormous number. I told her that our feeble attempt would do nothing and I proposed that we

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129 See, inter alia, "Plague and Famine in India," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 28 January 1897, 4; "India Famine Fund," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 18 February 1897, 6; "Editorial," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 9 August 1900, 4.

130 *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 10 March 1897, 1.

131 *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 21 January 1897, 4.

132 Solomon, "Presidential Address," 74.

should do nothing.”<sup>133</sup> To Solomon, the size of the problem required government-level intervention. He differentiated between feeling like one was contributing and actually bringing about a benefit. Moreso, perhaps, the overwhelming nature of the problem likely prevented Solomon from encouraging action. His UC Professor, Edward M. Brown, explained it to the two students as a distinction between a western attitude and an eastern attitude, with westerners needing to feel like they were contributing to the effort.<sup>134</sup> However Solomon framed it, the story highlights that he was welcomed as a member of the university community, and that his presence encouraged the kind of global outlook and concern that higher education was supposed to promote. All this having been said, Solomon was studying in Cincinnati while a heartbreaking disaster continued at home, and this turn may have shaped his desire to return home sooner than originally planned.

In addition to his comments to the Jewish and general press, Solomon sought to inform his classmates and American Jewry about the Bene Israel community with a series of articles in the *H.U.C. Journal*. The three pieces offer an assessment of life for the Bene Israel community by an individual who knew the community from the inside but also had a solid understanding of his audience and was thus able to translate Jewish life in South Asia into American Jewish terms. They provide a first-hand perspective of a particular moment in history. In them, Solomon was quick to highlight the work that needed to be done among the Bene Israel to counteract the fact that the community was “unprogressive.” In order for reform to succeed, a plan was needed to end bigamy; elevate women to higher status in the home; cultivate English language learning such that members of the community could access literature and engage with modern thinking, which could encourage individuals to feel a genuine bond with other Jews; and encourage the community to invest in building educational institutions instead of focusing on arranging prayer times.<sup>135</sup>

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133 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 74.

134 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 74.

135 David Solomon Joseph, “The Bene-Israel Congregations of India,” *H.U.C. Journal* 5, nos. 5–6 (January 1901): 125–127.

## Graduation

At his graduation from the University of Cincinnati, the local paper noted the distinctive features of members of the class: "David Joseph Solomon wears a 'fez' on all state occasions, for he comes from Bombay, India, and still preserves some of the traditions. He is something of a linguist, and expects to teach English in his native Country."<sup>136</sup> Noteworthy is that when he graduated the University of Cincinnati in 1901, the class included nineteen women, eighteen men, and an additional ten men who were also pursuing studies at HUC, including Julian Morgenstern, Henry Englander, and Solomon Foster. After his years of study at HUC, he graduated with his BHL, conferred by Mielziner on 15 June 1901 at Mound Street Temple.<sup>137</sup> That it was Mielziner who officiated is an important reminder that Solomon had the opportunity to know Wise, whose writings so influenced him. Solomon witnessed the outpouring of grief by thousands when Wise died in 1900, necessitating Mielziner officiating graduation.

While his University of Cincinnati graduation was announced that June, he and several other HUC students completed their remaining university coursework over the summer and received their University of Cincinnati degrees at the December 1901 convocation.<sup>138</sup> The students of the University of Cincinnati would record that

India has sent us an excellent representative in our friend Mr. Solomon. Unconsciously, he has given us a glimpse into the noblest side of the Indian character by his presence among us. During his stay at McMicken Mr. Solomon has won the hearts of all who were fortunate enough to know him, and carries with him for his work the best wishes of his many friends."<sup>139</sup>

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136 "University of Cincinnati Graduating Class, 1901," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 7 Jan. 1901, 3.

137 "Hebrew Union College Commencement," *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 13 June 1901, 6.

138 A mosaic of the photos of the graduating class is included with "Entire Graduating Class of University of Cincinnati for the Year 1901," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, 9 June 1901, 23; "Convocation at the University," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, 22 December 1901, 16.

139 *The Cincinnati 1901* (Cincinnati: Senior and Junior Class, 1901), 87.

Within HUC and the Jewish community it was noted that Solomon would leave “behind many friends” who would “watch his future career with deepest interest.” The locals who had helped fund his five years in Cincinnati felt “that the money given to Mr. Solomon has been well spent and are sanguine that as a teacher and leader among his people in India he will do much good work that they feel that they never used money to better purpose.”<sup>140</sup>

### Returning Home

In January 1902, Solomon made his way to New York en route to Bombay via London.<sup>141</sup> He left Cincinnati on 7 January with plans on his way home to “visit the places and cities of interest in this country [i.e., the United States], as well as those of Europe.”<sup>142</sup> Regarding Solomon’s arrival in New York on 15 January 1902, local correspondents suggested that he use the opportunity of time in the city to make arrangements “for some literary work” that was to appear in “*Review of Reviews*, and other leading magazines.”<sup>143</sup> However, the only material appearing in these journals are Solomon’s solutions to the chess puzzles offered in their pages a few years earlier.<sup>144</sup> As he departed, his actions were again held up as an inspirational model for American Jewry by a contributor who was likely Rabbi Clifton Harby Levi (1867–1962):

The fact that this young man should have left home and friends and come to the United States to study for five years in order to return to India and aid in the work of uplifting his coreligionists is a notable instance of the altruism which is still possible in this work-a-day twentieth century.

He continued, “I can sympathize with the ambitions of this young man.... May his work prosper as it deserves to.”<sup>145</sup>

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140 “Jottings,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 23 January 1902, 6.

141 “Jottings,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 23 January 1902, 6.

142 “Notes,” *H.U.C. Journal* 6, no. 4 (January 1902): 86.

143 “What New Yorkers are Doing,” *Reform Advocate* (Chicago), 18 January 1902, 523.

144 See, e.g., “Chess,” *Literary Digest* 19, no. 14 (30 September 1899): 420.

145 “What New Yorkers are Doing,” *Reform Advocate* (Chicago), 18 January 1902, 523.

Unfortunately, his return to the Jewish community in India was less than smooth. After leaving HUC, he maintained some institutional contact, ordering books from the CCAR, for example.<sup>146</sup> It appears, however, that his new Jewish learning did not translate into an immediate role in the life of the Bene Israel communities. In a rather harsh judgment, Shirley Berry Isenberg suggested that the outcome of Solomon's story "exemplifies Bene Israel ineptitude, in the failure to employ David J. Solomon at the Israelite School, not taking advantage of his academic Jewish education."<sup>147</sup> In 1902, the school was still under the supervision of Haeem Samuel Kehimkar and his family, the same man who had seemingly interfered to keep his own son from travelling to Cincinnati to study at HUC. The Israelite school had been and would remain Orthodox in its orientation even after more liberal leadership took the reins of the school in the 1920s (see more below). Solomon had to know that the return would not be as smooth as he had hoped. Through the years he resided in Cincinnati, the *Bene Israelite* newspaper had been available to him. Already in 1897, it had warned of the difficulties American-trained Jewish leadership would face in India, but also suggested the possibilities for a Marathi-speaking Indian Jew who was both fluent in English and had an advanced Jewish education.

Hearing that some American rabbis are willing to come to India and serve as ministers in the Jewish synagogues, a question is likely to arise as to the utility of their services. In India some of the Jews talk Marathi, while others speak Arabic. The Ashkenazi Jews in Bombay talked different languages, according to the countries they come from. An American rabbi will not be very successful so far as sermons are concerned. Secondly, the Israelite community in India are strictly orthodox, and consequently the welcome accorded to an American rabbi will be far cooled. For the present, taking into consideration the present circumstances of our people as well as their religious beliefs, an English or American rabbi from an orthodox college will be much liked.<sup>148</sup>

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146 "Exhibit F," *CCAR Yearbook* 17 (1907): 59.

147 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 242.

148 *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 10 March 1897, 2–3.

## Back at Home

By 1905, Solomon found himself living apart from the Bene Israel community altogether, as he would report to Deutsch:

I am very sorry, indeed, to say that there has been absolutely no change for the better in my affairs. I am finding out for myself how utterly worthless were my hopes to be of some use to the Bene-Israel Community. I am in such a confused state of mind that I feel I committed a great mistake in thinking of returning to this country in the very beginning. Some of the best years of my life are being wasted without any future or goal of amelioration. There is hardly an outlook for me under the present circumstances I am always on the lookout for some work which might bring a change in my fortune but the doors of prosperity seem to be closed for good against me. I am hoping apparently against hopes for something to turn up but nothing seems to avail.

Doctor [Louis] Grossman must have told you the purport of his letter to me which he wrote in February last. Unfortunately that letter remained unnoticed till a week before when it was found by mere accident. I have written to him and have told him that at present I could not decide as to what I am going to do.

I am waiting and hoping for the day when the people will wake up to do something for themselves. I am not so badly off but I am not satisfied with the people at Kedgaon.<sup>149</sup> I feel there that I am entirely out of place and that I should be among Jews, at any rate, within sight of the Bene-Israel Community.

What line of action must now be followed will be decided after some time. In the meanwhile I am doing my most to make my position better.

I shall close this letter with best regards to Mrs Deutsch and yourself and the children. Please do remember me to the Mielziners and those who may yet remember me at the College. How are the Malters and the Levias's?<sup>150</sup>

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149 About 160 miles east of Bombay/Mumbai and 34 miles from Pune. At the time it was about a 90-minute train ride from Pune to Kedgaon. See John Jackson, "A Day with Pandita Ramabai," *All Nations* 1, no. 8 (June 1901): 1.

150 Solomon to Deutsch, 26 August 1905, MS-123, Gotthard Deutsch Papers, Box 3, Folder 16, Se-So, General, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The return address on the letter to Deutsch is Mukti Sadan, the institute established by Ramabai, which she moved from Poona to Kedgaon.<sup>151</sup> In certain ways, Solomon was back where he started, now seemingly helping in the education of the widows and young children. Precisely what the conditions were like is difficult to say. A visit by foreign missionaries a few years earlier in the wake of the great plague provided a moving description:

Our first call was upon the Kindergarten School, in which eight classes, numbering upwards of 200 little waifs, from three to six years old, were receiving such instruction as their undeveloped minds are capable of absorbing.... In the next large building we found no fewer than 750 girls, also busy with their lessons.... In other schoolrooms hundreds more were at work, while about 150 were in Hospital with fever, and other mild and ordinary ailments.<sup>152</sup>

Ramabai relied on a 150 young female volunteers, forty-five matrons each responsible for thirty children and a number of professionals. Among the widows were thirty-two mothers under the age of sixteen.<sup>153</sup> According to missionary reports, by 1905, some four hundred young women had converted to Christianity. During this period Ramabai issued circulars “[a]sking for names of (1) Indian Christians, and (2) members of the house of Israel to be sent to her for these praying women to lay daily before the Lord as they give themselves to the ministry of intercession. The names of missionaries, Rabbis, Jewish families, are asked for.”<sup>154</sup> The request suggests that Ramabai continued in her concern for the well-being of the Bene Israel community and broader Indian Jewish community, seeing their mission intertwined with hers, and was still avoiding active evangelizing. At the same time, “ministry

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151 By the end of the 1890s, Ramabai had taken a rather more proactive stance as a Christian missionary, which partially explains the need to move her mission; see Kling, *History*, 543.

152 Jackson, “Day,” 1.

153 Jackson, “Day,” 2.

154 “The Labors of Others: Notes from All Missions and Workers,” *Trusting and Toiling on Israel’s Behalf* 10 (16 October 1905): 158.

of intercession” was a tactic that sought to encourage God to show the Jewish community the light.

In this context, Solomon’s role at the Mukti Sadan remains unclear. His distress at not finding a place in the Bene Israel community might be explained merely by his having been a man ahead of his time. In the years following Solomon’s return to India, ongoing intracommunal conflict would have made hiring Solomon difficult, connected as he was to a liberalizing camp. The greatest tensions in the community were between the wealthy Baghdadi Jews who had come and settled in Bombay earlier in the century and the native-born Bene Israel. Skin color and socioeconomic status were certainly a part of the dispute between the two communities—the Baghdadi Jews looking down on their native Indian brethren. The conflict also played out in the synagogues of the community where the practices of the Bene Israel community were seen as less stringent, improperly performed, and as an indication that they might not even be Jewish.<sup>155</sup> Given this tremendous push from the right, aligning with Solomon on the left may still have been a step too far for the Bene Israel community even if his ideology would have supported efforts to improve its quality of life.

### **Marriage and Family Life**

By the following year, Solomon’s life circumstances improved when he married Leah Nagawkar. Leah was the daughter of Abraham Nagawkar, the first Bene Israel graduate of Bombay University. After their marriage, Leah would become the first female Bene Israel graduate of Bombay University, with a bachelors degree in French and math.<sup>156</sup> In his wife, Solomon found both a like-minded spouse and inclusion in a liberal-minded Jewish family. He would come to see in her a model for the potential of the Bene Israel’s young women:

A fair share of the credit of this intellectual awakening among our girls must be given the High School for Indian Girls, so ably conducted by

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155 Joan G. Roland, *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (Hanover: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1989), 19–21.

156 Haeems, *Rebecca Reuben*, 44; *Bombay University: The Calendar for the Year 1908–1909 Volume I* (Bombay, 1908), i.

the Poona Deccan Educational Society with the active co-operation of the Bombay Government. The First Bene-Israel lady-graduate happened to be the daughter of the first graduate among us. Then came the examples of girls who set the whole people thinking of the intellectual potentialities lying dormant among us...<sup>157</sup>

The marriage and schooling suggest that Solomon had returned to Bombay sometime soon after writing to Deutsch. However, his own activities in this period and through the war years are largely obscure. In 1910, they had a son, Benjamin David Solomon.<sup>158</sup> In the midst of World War I, it appears that Solomon was stationed aboard His Majesty's Hospital Ship Takada at Bombay. A letter to the editor written from the ship is consistent with Solomon's communal concerns, although it is difficult at this stage to confirm this is the same "D. J. Solomon." The letter shows continued concern for the well-being of the Bene Israel Community and engagement in Jewish affairs. Writing from the ship, he lamented that the Jewish teachers in the Bene Israel community still tended to be Baghdadi or Cochin Jews who looked down on their Bene Israel brethren. He was most vociferous in his encouragement that local Bene Israel men be educated for the rabbinate abroad.

My present position gave me the opportunity [*sic*] to meet and make friends with several young European Jews. I found they possessed a deeper knowledge of religion and a wider outlook on Judaism.

The only remedy in my opinion to banish the ignorance and superstitions in religious matters from our community is to send every year a Bene-Israel boy or two to the Jewish College in London or to any Rabbinical [*sic*] Seminary in Europe. They will return to us well-qualified and competent Ministers and teachers; only then will

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157 Solomon, "Presidential Address," 41.

158 The date and name rely on Benei Israel Heritage Family Tree, MyHeritage, <https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-1-74099411-5-1560/benjamin-david-solomon-kurulkar-in-myheritage-family-trees>. That the couple had only one son is confirmed by the announcement of Leah's death in 1924. See Resolution No. IV in *Report of the 8th Bene-Israel Conference 1924* (Bombay: Jacob Ezekiel, 1924).

religious and communal questions be treated and decided properly and authoritatively.<sup>159</sup>

The exclusion of HUC from the list may have had more to do with the nature of travel in wartime than with any particular concern about his alma mater. The assertion of having met European Jews with “wider outlook” is attested by a letter to the editor on the previous page. A second letter to the editor published on the same page is signed G. Lewis of the Royal Army Medical Corps. His letter complains about the treatment of Bene Israel women who were excluded from the Shabbat dinner table, even as the Eshet Ḥayil was recited, a scene he had witnessed, having been invited home by members of the community he had met in Bombay.<sup>160</sup>

Solomon’s signature on the letter provides the name of the ship and its location in Bombay. Unlike other writers, he has no military acronym or abbreviation with his name to suggest that he was a civilian worker or volunteer. Almost 900,000 men signed on to the war efforts as combatants and nearly 600,000 as noncombatant laborers.<sup>161</sup> With their previous history of military service, Bene Israel men were quick to enlist.<sup>162</sup> Hospital ships were often operated by merchant marine crews and carried civilian personnel. The H.M.H.S Takada supported the eastern front carrying wounded from Basra to Bombay.<sup>163</sup>

Fights about the management of the Israelite School and the Gate of Mercy Synagogue in Bombay endured through the first two decades of the new century. Solomon described himself as “a passive onlooker” to

159 “Letter to the Editor,” *Israelite* (Bombay), June 1917, 114.

160 “Letter to the Editor,” *Israelite* (Bombay), June 1917, 114.

161 Radhika Singha, *The Coolie’s Great War: Indian Labour in a Global Conflict 1914–1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3.

162 Ran Amitai, “Jewish Servicemen in the Indian Subcontinent,” in *Jewish Communities in Modern Asia: Their Rise, Demise and Resurgence*, ed. Rotem Kower (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 120.

163 Circa February 1917 the ship was caring for more than five hundred injured or wounded soldiers on board; see Jerry Murland, *Departed Warriors: The Story of a Family in War* (Leicester: Matador, 2008), 185.

these events.<sup>164</sup> The divisions that had become evident in fights about the synagogue, between religious conservatives and liberals, between those sympathetic to British rule and those sympathetic to Indian nationalism, and Zionists and anti-Zionists all became more pronounced as efforts to unite the Bene Israel community institutionally came to the fore at the end of the war and in the decade thereafter.

### **An Opportunity for Leadership: Solomon and the Bene Israel Conferences**

Some eighteen years after Solomon had reported to Deutsch on his sad state, Solomon appeared as the president of the Seventh Bene Israel Conference in December 1923, which highlighted his continued efforts to unite the Bene Israel communities. The first conference had been held in Bombay in late December 1917. Although intended to bring together the community, some groups refused to participate.<sup>165</sup> A rival group established its own conference the following year, the All India Israelite League. The first conference had tended to attract “the educated communal leaders and a larger mass following.”<sup>166</sup> By the time of the second conference in 1918 Solomon was residing in Junagadh, some 495 miles from Bombay, and serving as headmaster of the Bahadur Khanji High School.<sup>167</sup> Solomon, along with his brother-in-law, Ezra Reuben (Nowgaonkar), a lawyer who had become the chief judicial

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164 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 41. On the communal divisions and the battle over the management of the synagogue, see Joan G. Roland, “A Decade of Vitality,” in *Jews in India*, ed. Thomas A. Timberg (New York: Advent, 1986), 288–292, 303–307.

165 Roland, “Decade,” 295–298.

166 Roland, “Decade,” 302.

167 *Thacker’s Indian Directory 1918* (Calcutta: Thacker’s Directories, 1918), 241. Issues of the *Bene Israel Annual and Yearbook*, edited and published in Bombay by Rebecca Reuben for the years 1917–1920 all identify Solomon as the headmaster there; see 1 (1917–1918): 86; 2 (1918–1919): 86; 3 (1919–1920): 136. This last volume makes clear the limited direct contact Solomon had with the Bene Israelite community during and after World War I. The volume puts Ezra Reuben, Rebecca Reuben, David Joseph Solomon, and his wife, Leah, all in Junagadh. The previous year, the Bene Israel community also included Simeon Isaac, who was the station master; before that, only the Solomons and Ezra Reuben are listed in the community directory in the *Yearbook*.

officer in Junagadh, both sent letters of support for the second conference but were unable to attend. Reuben likewise sent an unrestricted donation.<sup>168</sup> Solomon and Reuben had each married one of Abraham Nagawkar's daughters. Reuben (1864–1950) and his wife, Sarah (1865–1917), would go on to have six children, all of whom were educated and prominent, but their eldest daughter, Rebecca Reuben (1889–1957) is noteworthy here for the role she played as headmistress of the Israelite School in Bombay from 1922 until 1950.<sup>169</sup>

Ezra Reuben would become the president of the Third Bene Israel Conference, although, when he hesitated, Solomon was also considered.<sup>170</sup> As Solomon would later note of the situation, with Reuben at the helm, “No better man could do justice to the occasion and grace the chair.” In Solomon’s mind, the times required “the better of the two” men.<sup>171</sup> Solomon did not attend but did send a telegram wishing the conference success.<sup>172</sup> Solomon was asked again in 1920. He would explain: “I had most reluctantly to decline the offer on several grounds—the most prominent being my state of mind and the mood I was in. I should not have done any service to you nor justice to myself under those conditions.”<sup>173</sup> The specific conditions to which he referred are unclear. Finally, in 1923, the conference secured Solomon’s help.

168 *The 2nd Bene-Israel Conference. 1918* (Bombay: Solomon Moses, 1922), 5. Reuben was appointed in 1897; see *Bene Israelite* (Bombay), 7 January 1897, 1, and “India,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 18 February 1897, 7. He had been involved in efforts to improve the Jewish education of the Bene Israel as early as 1890 with his participation in the Bene Israel Balottjak Sabba (Society for the Encouragement and Training of Young Bene Israelites) in Bombay; see “India,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 3 July 1890, 5.

169 On Reuben, see Haeems, *Rebecca Reuben*. The book is an anthology of writings by, about, and related to Reuben’s life and work. Joan G. Roland, “‘She Taught from the Heart’: The Life and Legacy of a Bene Israel Educator,” *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 6 (2003): 96–102 does a substantial job of synthesizing the material.

170 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 34.

171 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 34.

172 The section is unpaginated. See the first page marked “Proceedings of the 3rd Bene Israel Conference. 1919” in *The 3rd and 4th Bene Israel Conference, 1919 and 1920: Report* (Bombay: Solomon Moses, 1922).

173 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 34.

The honorary secretary of the reception committee described Solomon as follows:

Having been a keenly interested spectator for the past six years, and having a wide diversity of experiences in social work both in India and abroad, he is pre-eminently qualified to throw light on such problems as pinch us most. I have not a shadow of doubt that he has made the Conference a subject of his study and in consequence is in a position to throw new light on old problems, and present facts to us at their proper angle of vision.<sup>174</sup>

Solomon's eventual leadership role demonstrates how his Cincinnati education, despite initial setbacks, ultimately positioned him to bridge different worlds of experience. This was particularly valuable as India navigated the tensions between tradition and modernity, imperial loyalty and emerging nationalism. Many of the themes and ideas he articulated in his articles for the *H.U.C. Journal* in the late 1890s were, sadly, still pressing. In a lengthy speech, he lamented that the financial situation of the community had deteriorated after World War I.<sup>175</sup> He continued to push for temperance and an end to polygamy. In the religious realm, he pushed for continued reforms, making Hebrew prayer less tedious, and he wondered whether the Bene Israel community "[h]ad really benefitted spiritually, morally or intellectually by the average synagogues among them."<sup>176</sup> Solomon lauded the success of educational efforts but wanted his coreligionists to excel. Communal improvement relied on giving up

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174 *Report of the Seventh Bene-Israel Conference Held in December 1923 at Bombay* (Bombay, 1924).

175 The address also highlights the continued influence of Christian missionaries on him and the community. The presidential address is rich with references to the Bible and other Jewish sources. However, he concluded his talk with prayer. Uttering the statement "I therefore pray to God," he then recited, without noting source or author, John Henry Newman's 1833 hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light, Amid the Encircling Gloom." By the end of the nineteenth century, it had become among the best-known hymns and crossed denominational boundaries. It also penetrated deeply into popular Indian culture; see William Emilsen, "Gandhi and 'Lead, Kindly Light,'" *Pacifica* 10 no. 1 (1997): 84–92.

176 "The Bene Israel Conference," *Israelite* 8, nos. 1–2 (Bombay), January–February 1924, 17–19, here 18.

“the profession of clerks and unskilled labor and to become professional men and skilled artisans.”<sup>177</sup> All this would also improve the standards for women in the community who currently had to deal with husbands who were drunkards or were willing to replace them with a second wife.<sup>178</sup> Investments in the education of men and women, he argued, were necessary for the elevation of the community. Solomon’s efforts as president have been noted as aiming at practical actions for implementation. The earlier conferences had yielded little more than resolutions. This time the conference put in place committees to investigate cooperative housing to help bring affordable homes to the population. It took strides forward until a spike in the housing market made the project impossible.<sup>179</sup> Solomon encouraged study of Bene Israel history, particularly those who engaged in military service, as they provided role models for the young. He saw in American and Anglo-Jewry models of liberal Jewish practice that should be imitated, and he also encouraged the adoption of English. What he had seen at HUC permanently transformed his religious sensibilities:

To me the Library, the School and the College are a source of greater admiration and awe than all the sacred places I have seen built for the worship of the Gods. They are the most holy of all holy places and yet have you ever heard of the building of a library for the purpose of the worship of the Divine Being? The school and the library which form the conspicuous landmark in American life have left a deeper mark upon my life than all the places I have visited in the United States of America. I appeal to you to build a great library for the people instead of a Central Hall or magnificent edifices like synagogues. Let us allow light to come in to dispel darkness in the religious life of our people.<sup>180</sup>

The view that a library was needed found support, but his views on religious reform and the adoption of English put him at odds with the

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177 “The Bene Israel Conference,” *Israelite* 8, nos. 1–2 (Bombay), January–February 1924, 17–19, here 18.

178 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 66.

179 Roland, “Decade,” 325–326.

180 “Report from the Conference,” cited in Roland, “Decade,” 327.

religious traditionalists. Likewise, his sympathy for British ideals put him at odds with Indian nationalists in the Bene Israel camp, and his desire for the adoption of English put him at odds with those who felt greater fluency in Marathi would improve the standing of the Bene Israel among fellow Indians.<sup>181</sup> These concerns were pressing as the rising Indian nationalist movements created concern for Indian Jews about their future in India. Baghdadi Jews, for example, saw their future in allying themselves with the British.<sup>182</sup> As an aside, already in 1917, calls for a Jewish library appeared in the Bene Israel press. Among the examples to prove its possibility, the idea of building a library from scratch, was the Hebrew Union College collection.<sup>183</sup> The dream of a library went back to the early efforts in which HUC participated, sending books to Solomon Samson nearly three decades earlier. Sadly, the author notes, “owing mainly to the lack of funds these movements were not long lived.”<sup>184</sup>

Given that he was a school headmaster, it is not surprising that Solomon’s primary focus was on educational initiatives, but he directed genuine scorn at the Israelite School and its management.

When a Bene-Israel talks or thinks of education he naturally turns his eyes towards the school which has for over forty years dragged on its existence and is not extinct. For nearly thirty years it was a special preserve of one man who devoted his time and life to its cause. As a school it has never attracted a better class of pupils among us; and I am afraid, as long as it remains what it is, there is no chance of it doing so. The results of this school have at no time attained a double figure and from what I read in the report it is not likely to do so in the near future. In connection with this school I must say that we must either mend it or end it. I say with all the force that a schoolmaster has a right to presume

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181 Roland, “Decade,” 327–328.

182 Elizabeth E. Imber, “Jewish Political Lives in the British Empire: Zionism, Nationalism, and Imperialism in Palestine, India, and South Africa, 1917–1939” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2018), 192–193.

183 Benjamin David Shahapurkar, “A Jewish Library among the Bene-Israels of Bombay,” *Israelite* 1, no. 4 (Bombay), April 1917, 70–72.

184 Shahapurkar, “Jewish Library,” 72.

to say, that in the case of this school we do not want evolution to take its slow course but a revolution to begin a new career. In my estimation it is this school that leaves an impression on the mind of the visitors that the Bene-Israel community is a miserable community.... Let those who are generously inclined to build synagogues ponder over the problem of building a decent school to represent our advance in the scale of civilization. It is, I repeat, vanity that makes us build synagogues and not virtue, for I believe very strongly that virtue would not go so far if vanity did not keep her company.<sup>185</sup>

As Isenberg noted, Solomon never had the opportunity to participate in the life of the Israelite school, and it is possible that some of his commentary came from anger. From its founding until 1908, the school was run by Kehimkar. In the midst of managerial and financial difficulties, the Anglo-Jewish Association stepped in to reorganize the school under the supervision of a committee, and the synagogues provided additional financial support. However, the budget was inadequate for the hiring of professional teachers, and the school was primarily run as a charitable organization to support poor children rather than as a school with the goal of advancing education.<sup>186</sup> By the early 1920s, critics of the school argued that investment in the school building and in the quality of the teachers could happen only if the school redirected its mission.<sup>187</sup> Clearly Solomon aligned with this camp, but his critique was also in service of his family. In 1922, his niece, Rebecca Reuben, after receiving advanced education in England and serving in Indian educational institutions, recommitted herself to service in the Bene Israel community and was appointed principal of the Israelite School. Her own assessment of the school can be heard in her uncle's address: "Altogether the whole atmosphere of the school was extremely depressing. The grounds, the garden, the playground, the building inside and out, the gloomy rooms, the bare walls, the senseless furniture, the spiritless staff, the spiritless

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185 Solomon, "Presidential Address," 64.

186 Roland, "Decade," 319–321.

187 Roland, "Decade," 321.

children, everything in fact was depressing.”<sup>188</sup> Solomon’s presidential address should then be seen as an effort to rally support for the school. Concluding with a list of communal needs, he offered that “[t]he most important of these is the Israelite School. The School Committee’s report for 1922 is out and the aim and objects are well expressed in the report. The Committee appeals to the people for subscription.”<sup>189</sup> The conference also resolved to better support its educational fund, to which Solomon was also a contributor.<sup>190</sup> Over the next decades, Reuben’s efforts paid off and the school attained support from alumni and friends, grew the student body and achieved educational success, and built a new building with the support of Hong Kong financier Eleazer Kadoorie.<sup>191</sup>

Precisely how Solomon went about implementing his vision and the resolutions of the conference is unclear. As the year unfolded, his wife died, and he was left as a single parent to his teenage son.<sup>192</sup> By the following year, one of his desires was fulfilled when Rachel Reuben and her cousin, Jerusha Jhirad (1891–1984), established a branch of the Jewish Liberal Union in Bombay, eventually joining with the World Union for Progressive Judaism.<sup>193</sup> Jhirad was also Solomon’s niece, the daughter of his wife’s sister Abigail Nagawker (1868–1922). Although the Bombay union branch drew the attention of no more than a few

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188 Rebecca Reuben, “Israelite School: First Impressions? Or Depressions!,” reprinted in Haeems, *Rebecca Reuben*, 99–102, here 102.

189 Solomon, “Presidential Address,” 72.

190 “Appendix B” in *Report of the Seventh Bene-Israel Conference Held in December 1923 at Bombay* (Bombay, 1924).

191 Roland, “Decade,” 321.

192 See Resolution No. IV in *Report of the 8th Bene-Israel Conference 1924* (Bombay: Jacob Ezekiel, 1924).

193 Roland, “Decade,” 330. For a contemporary account, see “Liberal Judaism Gains Foothold in India,” *Jewish Daily Bulletin* 4, no. 874, 8 July 1928, 1, 4. Jhirad’s sister, Leah, was active in bringing the group into the World Union for Progressive Judaism; see “Romantic Tale of India: The Story of a Most Ancient Jewish Community, and How a Woman Brought Liberal Judaism to Bombay,” *American Hebrew*, 10 September 1926, 503, 545, 557. I thank my colleague and friend Michael A. Meyer for bringing this connection to my attention and for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this work.

dozen people and initially met in Reuben's home, it was a challenge to the Orthodox synagogues, which made little effort to try to attract young members of the Bene Israel community. By 1927, the women were attacked for leading a "revolution." The approach of the Bombay Jewish Liberal Union was still rather conservative, but its liberalism was highlighted by attacks from the outside, which show evidence of the difficulties faced by Solomon through his years after his return home. Various parties tried to reassure the critics that the union was very much traditional, "that the branch established in Bombay was not backed by the mother union in London, and that only one Bene-Israel (D. J. Solomon) had graduated from the Hebrew Union College and he was connected with the education department of an Indian State."<sup>194</sup> In other words, he was far away and could do little damage.

### **Conclusion: A Life Between Worlds**

Sadly, neither personal records nor press coverage as yet allows any picture of the last decades of Solomon's life. His impact on Jewish and non-Jewish classmates, colleagues, and teachers in Cincinnati is clear, as is his impact on his extended family. His story illustrates how one individual's aspirations, imperial networks, religious reform movements, and educational institutions combined to create unprecedented opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, even as they exposed the limitations and contradictions of both colonial hierarchies and American democratic ideals. In navigating between multiple worlds—Indian and American, traditional and modern, colonial subject and global citizen—David Joseph Solomon embodied the challenges and possibilities of an interconnected yet unequal world. An assessment of his impact on the development of the Bene Israel community awaits the discovery of new records and further research.

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194 Roland, "Decade," 331.

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