



Between Faith and Reason Waldemar Haffkine (1860–1930) in India¹

MARINA SOROKINA



FIGURE 1: Indian Medical Service Congress, Calcutta 1894. Haffkine is number 63. Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins.

¹ This article is based on the Haffkine Collection in the Manuscript Division of the Jewish National and University Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem. All quotes by Haffkine are from the collection, unless otherwise specified. I am grateful to Mitya Perchenok in Jerusalem for his great assistance in collecting documents.



FIGURE 2: Waldemar Haffkine.

In his notebook, the eminent bacteriologist Waldemar Haffkine, who vaccinated hundreds of thousands of Indians against cholera and plague, wrote down these words of Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism: “Religion keeps us together, science makes us free”². They reflected two facets of him, his inner world and practical activities. His scientific work was open to the world and is well known; but his religious life was more hidden from both the general public and historians.

Haffkine was Jewish by ethnicity and religion, Russian by birth, and a European scientist by education and views. He was a zoologist turned bacteriologist. Haffkine came to India in 1893, with the support of the British colonial administration, to test the efficacy of a cholera vaccine he had produced while working at Louis Pasteur’s laboratory. He ended up spending more than twenty years in India, treating patients, advising officials, and reflecting on urgent social and religious problems.



FIGURE 3: First day cover for Israeli stamp in honor of Haffkine’s work against the plague in India. Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins.

²Herzl 1920, S. 80.

Early Years

Haffkine was born to a merchant Aron Haffkine and his wife Rosalia in 1860, in the prosperous Black Sea port of Odessa, then in Russia. The synagogue registered his name as Mordko-Wolf though he was later called Marcus-Wulf, Waldemar, and Vladimir. The roots of the contradictions between Haffkine's outward persona and his personal beliefs possibly lay in the views of his parents. Dr Hillel Joffe, his childhood friend, recalled that Haffkine's father was never a religious person. He identified himself with his Russian countrymen and refused to give a religious education to his son. Haffkine's mother, on the other hand, was a devout Jew, but she died when Waldemar was only eight years old.

Waldemar received most of his early education in Berdyansk, a port in what is now the southeast part of Ukraine. He enrolled in the Department of Natural Sciences in the Malorossiisky University in Odessa. There he came under the influence of microbiologist Elie Metchnikoff (1845–1916), a future Nobel Prize winner. After earning a doctorate, he joined the staff of the Odessa Natural History Museum where he worked until 1888, publishing five papers on the hereditary characteristics of unicellular organisms.

The diaries and notebooks of the young Haffkine show him to have been a romantic and revolutionary. Replying to a questionnaire on his priorities in life, he stressed that his first was the readiness to defend somebody. Young Haffkine dreamed about social revolution in Russia; he wanted to be a revolutionary leader and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–82) was his hero. During his student years, Haffkine became a member of the Jewish League for Self-Defense and a member of Narodnaya Volya (Will of the People), the terrorist revolutionary group responsible for the assassination of Emperor Alexander II in 1881. Haffkine was not directly involved in this act, but during his stay in Odessa he was arrested three times by the Russian authorities, twice expelled from the university, and lived under police control.

Budding Bacteriologist

In 1888, Haffkine was allowed to leave Russia for Switzerland where he joined the University of Geneva and taught physiology. In 1890, he followed Metchnikoff who had been invited by Louis Pasteur to head a laboratory at the newly-opened Pasteur Institute. Haffkine held a lowly position of assistant librarian, but also worked in Metchnikoff's laboratory on bacteria that attack paramecium and the adaptation of microorganisms to adverse conditions of growth. Later, Haffkine began to study *Vibrio cholerae*, the microorganism that, in 1883, Robert Koch had isolated and shown to be the causative agent of Asiatic cholera.

At that time, one of the five great nineteenth-century cholera pandemics was ravaging Asia and Europe. Following Pasteur, Haffkine believed in prevention rather than cure and focused his research on developing a cholera vaccine and producing a cholera inoculation. In November 1891, Pasteur introduced Haffkine to the visiting prince of Siam as "the person who is now very near, nearest of all, to this [cholera vaccine] discovery". The prince told Haffkine that if he did find a remedy against cholera, Siam would erect a statue for him. To this Pasteur added, "a golden statue"³

Haffkine finally succeeded in fixing the cholera virus in a well-defined strength, and could decrease or increase its virulence with certainty. In 1892, he reported to the weekly meeting of the Society of Biology in Paris that an inoculation of attenuated cholera vibrios immunized guinea pigs against a lethal attack of Asiatic cholera. The next week a second note recorded that rabbits and pigeons were also immunized successfully. And very soon Haffkine performed the first human tests on himself and on a Russian-Jewish

³ Löwy 1992, p. 279.



FIGURE 4: Visit to Daman (Portuguese India) in 1897 of Haffkine and Nobel Prize winner Robert Koch. Collection of the Jewish National and University Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.



FIGURE 5: Haffkine with an Indian patient: mural *Jewish Contributions to Medicine* by Terry Schoonhoven at Cedars-Sinai Hospital, Los Angeles.

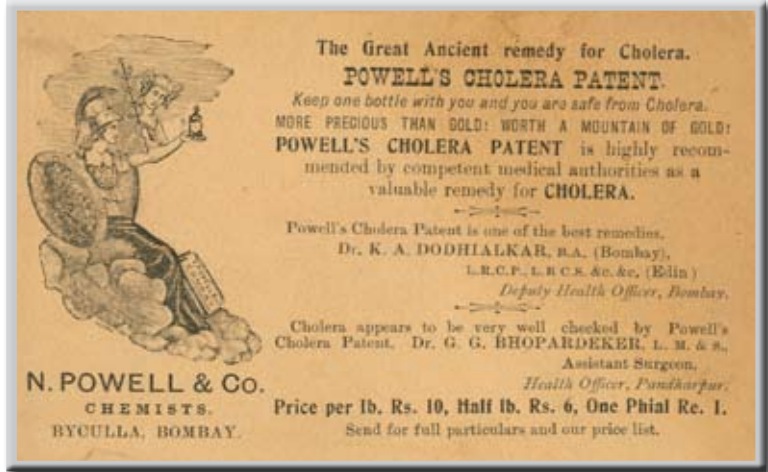
network of volunteers, his friends who were political immigrants in Paris. Later he vaccinated other volunteers, one of whom was Ernest Hanbury Hankin (1865–1939), who had been appointed as chemical examiner, analyst and bacteriologist to the Northwest Provinces of India. Hankin, who studied malaria, cholera, and other diseases, was a strong supporter of Haffkine, publishing observations on Haffkine's method in the *British Medical Journal*,⁴ and giving a detailed account of the vaccine preparation and of his own experience of being inoculated.

Anxious to test the value of his anti-cholera vaccine in the field, Haffkine applied to the Russian and other embassies to give him an opportunity. A positive response again came from the British. Lord Frederick Dufferin, British Ambassador to Paris and a former Viceroy of India (1884–8), suggested the testing of the new vaccine in Bengal, and arranged for Haffkine to meet Lord John

⁴Hankin 1892.

Kimberley, Secretary of State for India, in London. British officials thus made possible Haffkine's trip to India. Haffkine arrived in Calcutta, in March 1893, joining Presidency Hospital as a bacteriologist. For decades after that, he was to remain deeply connected with India and its people.

FIGURE 6: Advertisement for a patent medicine used to treat cholera. Postcard sent in 1900 from Bombay to Bahawalpur. Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins.



A.
Bengal 1896. Collection of the Jewish National and University Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.



B.
Soldiers of the Third Gurkhas.
Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins.

FIGURE 7: Haffkine inoculating Indians against cholera.

Early Years in India

Haffkine hoped to start inoculations in Calcutta, but cholera was then not epidemic there and he met local opposition to his plans. Many doctors believed it was impossible to obtain immunity by giving a subcutaneous injection of virulent microbes. Many Indians were also deeply suspicious of his motives, and Haffkine survived an assassination attempt by Islamic extremists. However, Hankin, now in charge of a newly-established bacteriological laboratory, invited Haffkine to Agra to inoculate both military and civilian volunteers. From April 1893 to the end of July 1895, with the assistance of officers of the Indian and Army Medical Staff in India, Haffkine had inoculated over 42,000 persons, including over 37,000 Indians.⁵

The Government of India was impressed by the efficacy of the anti-cholera vaccine. When in late September 1896, the bubonic plague epidemic reached Bombay, Haffkine was sent there to devise a similar vaccine to combat that disease. In October 1896, Haffkine entered the Indian Civil Service and focused on developing a preventive vaccine using dead bacteria (later to be called the Haffkine lymph). A form useful enough for human trials was ready by January 1897. As always, Haffkine tested the new vaccine on himself and after receiving positive results, suggested the inoculation of other volunteers. The practical results were amazing: inoculated persons fell ill seven times less and died ten times less. Use of the vaccine in the field started immediately.

Haffkine soon obtained a new and very powerful patron and good friend, Sir Sultan Mohammed Shah (1877–1957), the third Aga Khan and the 48th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims. Having been educated in Great Britain, the young Aga Khan supported scientific innovations especially in the field of medicine. He suggested that Haffkine give prophylactic inoculations to his community in Bombay. About half of the community (10,000–12,000 persons) received the Haffkine lymph and the results were spectacular.⁶

In 1897 the Aga Khan provided a building, Kushroo Lodge, near his own residence on Malabar Hill, to house Haffkine's Plague Research Laboratory. Haffkine suggested that the Aga Khan establish a new bacteriological institute in India based on the model of the Pasteur Institute. Haffkine believed that such an institution should be independent of the Indian sanitary and medical authorities: "This freedom is essential for any original effort, either in science or in art".⁷ Such an institute was not established then.

"Jewish" Activities

In his *Memoirs* (1954) the Aga Khan wrote that he approached Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1898, urging him to settle Jews in Palestine, then an Ottoman province. According to the Aga Khan, the whole plan of establishing such a Jewish settlement was based upon Haffkine's proposal to have "wealthier members of the Jewish community" purchase land. Haffkine's plan grew from his close contacts with Jewish national activists and Zionist leaders, such as the famous French philanthropist Baron Edmond James de Rothschild (1845–1934). Rothschild was known for his support of scientific research institutions and sponsoring archeological excavations in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. He also actively supported the Zionist movement and from 1882, began to redeem lands in Palestine with the goal of the establishment of a Jewish homeland. The correspondence between Haffkine and Baron Rothschild shows that they had rather close contact and discussed the problems of the Jewish communities in Asian countries. The Aga Khan's scheme was turned down by the Sultan Abdul Hamid II. The disappointed

⁵ Haffkine 1895.

⁶ Hagwood 2007. She refers to Haffkine 1899.

⁷ The correspondence between Haffkine and the Aga Khan is in the Manuscript Division of the Upsala University, Sweden and accessible on the internet at <http://waller.uu.se/>.

The Bene Israelite

בני ישראל

बेने इस्राएल.

पृ. ५. Vol. 5] BOMBAY, Monday, 28th February 1898, 6th Adar 5658. [No. 3 अं. ३.]

THE Bene Israel Plague Hospital is opened and its Committee is to be congratulated on the grand work it has done for the community. The hospital is meant for all the Israelites, and Jews—Bagdadi, Cochin, Arabic, European and Bene Israel—will be admitted and treated *free of charge*. For the present there is accommodation for 20 beds for acute cases and 8 beds for convalescent patients. An observation ward consisting of 8 beds is also ready for emergent use. A contact ward for six families is also erected and there are, for the present, 10 segregation rooms. There is ample ground available still, and in cases of emergency more segregation rooms will be built. The day on which it was resolved to open a special plague hospital for the Jews in Bombay was certainly a red-letter day in the annals of the Bene Israel community. When plague broke out last year in our city, no efforts were made to open any hospital for our community in Bombay. In Rewdanda, a village near Bombay, a house was hired for the accommodation of plague-stricken Jews and there was accommodation for 8 beds in the same, but the medical man was from the Government. In Panwell, the same arrangement was made. In Poona a special shed was built with the voluntary subscriptions collected amongst the community and special arrangements were made with the Hindoo hospital authorities for the treatment of patients by the medical person. Bombay is the first to make its own arrangements with contact and observation wards and a segregation camp. We know that there are many Jews in Bombay, but there are many differences, and hence the drawback in the amelioration of the condition of the Jews; still it is a

matter of great rejoicing to see and hear persons belonging to all the congregations in Bombay hailing the hospital movement with perfect joy and helping the same with their mite.

There was some delay in securing the site for the Bene Israel Hospital. On the 24th January 1898, a deputation of some of the leading members of the Bene Israel community waited upon Mr. C. C. James, of the Bombay Plague Committee, and requested him to grant a site for the Bene Israel Plague Hospital and Segregation Camp. The deputation requested him to select a site for the purpose on the Port Trust ground, in the neighbourhood of which many members of the Bene Israel community reside. The matter was referred by Mr. James to the Port Trust authorities, who were, however, unable to find a suitable site. On the 1st of February they recommended two sites, one of which was objected to on sanitary grounds, and the other as being too far from the locality. Mr. David Solomon, the Secretary of the Bene Israel Plague Hospital, was informed by the Traffic Superintendent of the Port Trust that a nearer site could not be granted for the hospital as it would entail heavy pecuniary loss to the Port Trust in consequence of the neighbouring tenants taking fright. Sirdar Khan Bahadur Abdul Ali, of the Criminal Investigation Department, though not a Jew himself, on hearing this, at once recommended a site to Mr. Solomon near the Victoria Gardens. Permission for the same was applied for, and it was given on the 8th February and the work of erecting a hospital commenced. On Sunday, the 13th instant, a prayer meeting of the

एप्रिल १८९८.

बेने इस्राएल.

२३

and are very reluctantly refused admission. Happy, indeed, that moment will be when Jews in Bombay will have a permanent hospital of their own.

THE Baroness De Hirsch of Paris has sent £300 (Rs. 4,624-8-4) for the Bene Israel Plague Hospital, and Mons. Rothschild has, at the kind intercession of Grand Rabbin Zodac Khan, sent 1,000 francs (Rs. 598-4) through the Alliance Israelite Universelle of Paris. These two munificent gifts will certainly help the hospital authorities to carry on the hospital work, assisted as they are so meagrely by their community members.

ON Sunday, the 17th April, Professor Haffkine, accompanied by Mr. Silas E. Sassoon, paid a visit to the Bene Israel Plague Hospital, where they were received by the President, Treasurer, Honorary Secretary, and other managers of the hospital. Dr. Nariman, M.D., B.Sc., Medical Officer of the Umarecarry District, where many a Bene Israel lives, and Lady-Doctor Miss Bronan, M.D., were present among several others. All the visitors were conducted through the different wards and shown over the hospital by the Honorary Secretary, with whom Professor Haffkine had a long conversation on the hospital and its management. The visitors were perfectly pleased with the excellent arrangements made for the comfort of the patients and the general cleanliness of the hospital. Professor Haffkine inspected all the rooms of the different sheds erected. Mr. Solomon, the Secretary, explained to those present how necessary it was for the Bene Israel as a community to have a hospital of their own, and how the community had voluntarily subscribed to its funds. Professor Haffkine examined each patient minutely and carefully, inquiring of everything relating to his case, and was much pleased with the way in which they were being treated. In conclusion, Mr. Solomon thanked the visitors for the honor they had done by their visits and observed that the Bene Israel community would long remember Dr. Haffkine's kind and valuable visit.

ON Thursday, the 21st April 1898, Dr. Dimmock, member of the Plague Committee, paid a visit to the Bene Israel Plague Hospital, where he was received by the Treasurer, Honorary Secretary, and other managers of the hospital. Dr. Dimmock was conducted through the different wards and shown over the hospital. He was much pleased with the arrangements for the treatment and comfort of the patients and the general cleanliness of the hospital, and expressed his opinion that had

it not been for the communal hospitals the mortality of the city would have increased and the poor would have suffered a great deal. He was much pleased that the Bene Israel community had a hospital of their own, and congratulated the Hospital Committee on the success they had attained. Mr. Solomon explained how the people appreciated their hospital after the ravages the plague had wrought in the community before the opening of the hospital. In conclusion, Mr. Solomon thanked Dr. Dimmock and all present for their visit.

THE *Champion*, in its issue of 3rd April 1898, says:—

"The other day the writer visited—and he mentions it here to show what self-help can do—the hospital organised by the Bene Israel community. This community is a small one; its members are very poor; yet, not wishing to be a burden on other communities, and not desiring the stigma of seeking aid in a public hospital, its members have erected a hospital for themselves, and they are looking after their own plague-stricken ones. And the work to which they have put their hands is being done exceedingly well. Their hospital is scrupulously clean, it is well ventilated, and its inmates are nursed by their own kith and kin. Moreover, the percentage of recoveries is good, and, if such an institution can be cheerful, the Bene Israel Hospital is by no means a melancholy place."

बेने इस्राएल.

वर्गणीचे दर.—मुंबईतील व बाहेरगांवच्या वर्गणीदारांस टपालसह १ रु. ३ आणे. फुटकळ अंकास दोन आणे. जन्म, लग्न व मृत्यु छापणावळ ६ आणे अगळ दिले पाहिजेत.

ज्या कोणास पत्रव्यवहार करणे असल किंवा वर्गणी पाठविणे असले त्याने कृपा करून मि. ए. सालोमन '५' इस्राएल मोहल्ल्या, मांडवी पोस्ट, मुंबई, या पत्त्यावर पाठवावी. सर्व पत्रव्यवहार त्याच पत्त्यावर करावा. पोस्टाची तिफिट्टे पाठविणे असल्यास वर्तल्यासह पाठवावीत.

मुंबई, शुक्रवार ता० ७ इयार ५६५८.

हेपबुद्धि वाळगणाच्या लोकांस लोकांच्या झालेला योग्य मान खपत नसतो याचे तर्जे उदाहरण पाहणे झाल्यास आपणांस फारसे लांब जावयास नको. आमच्या कनिष्ठ बंधूचे लेख जरा बारकाईने वाचले म्हणजे तेव्हांच ते कळून येण्यासारखे आहे. जाहिरसभा भरविणाऱ्या गृहस्थांना अनेक अडथळे आले असतां आपले काम नेटाने जेवढास नेले

आक्टोबर १८९९.

बेने इस्राएल.

३

200 persons receive rice each time; Rs. 414 are only spent in rice distribution, which means each man only gets rice worth about Rs. 2-1 in seventeen months; that means that each man barely gets even two annas' worth rice per month. We leave it to our readers to consider the beautiful advantages from this great charity. Let us next consider what great help each plague-stricken received. It is said or claimed that "regular aid to the destitute families of plague victims" was given and Rs. 308 were spent on that account. There are about 20 families whose names are given who were so supported; and the highest sum received by one widow and her children is Rs. 35 during these seventeen months. Now, considering that this widow has only two children (she may even have more as the number is not specified; but we take into consideration only two as the word "children" is used), these three persons get Rs. 35 during these seventeen months; each person gets about Rs. 12 in seventeen months, which means each one gets about 12 annas per month. This is again the most liberal charity each man rather a destitute of a plague victim gets. When the bread-winner is gone, then only such great help is given to his wife and children as we see from the report that all widows are supported.

In Bombay if any one hires a small room, he can only get a small dark room for Rupees three. When Rs. 3 are not even contributed by this fund to each destitute family, how is that destitute family to pay Rs. 3 rent for a small room and to maintain itself? We have only brought these facts to the notice of our people because there is ample money and no charity is being made. In the Oriental countries when there used to be famines of yore, people dying of starvation would even blame moon as she appeared; because she being circular reminded them of bread; but in the present circumstances we have sufficient money and people are dying of starvation. Persons get no good food, and hence they catch plague; they have no good houses to live in and they fall victims to the plague and still we are boasting of having a sufficiently large sum with us. We have occasionally brought to the notice of some of the committee members some of the abovementioned worthy actions of theirs, but they wash their hands clean out of this great responsibility saying the President and his son, the Secretary, are reigning supreme. We have nothing more to say; we are helpless in the matter; we only bring to the notice of our readers the greatest advantages conferred on our poor by this fund. We have suffi-

ciently large sum before our eyes and yet our people are dying of starvation and plague who is responsible for these deaths when we have sufficient money for them in our pockets to prevent them from dying of starvation and in consequence also of the plague?

UNDER the kind auspices and patronage of Khan Sahib David Solomon a religious drama of 'King Joseph' was performed in Marathi in the 'Novelty Theatre' by the 'Bene Israel Penkar Singing Club' on the night of the 27th of September last. There was a very large attendance of both the Bene Israel and the Bagdad Jews, numbering about 1,000 souls. Mr. Benjamin Sampson, in addressing the audience from the stage, referred in the most fitting terms to the great zeal, courage and ability with which Khan Sahib David Solomon had been working in connection with plague with our benign Government ever since the year 1896, for the general good and the good of his community in particular. The Khan Sahib, he said, had taken upon himself for some time past to work in all the plague wards of Bombay and had done his work too, as they are all aware to the entire satisfaction of our Government; he had been very highly spoken of by Plague authorities in Bombay as they every reason to be satisfied with the manner in which he had been working, rendering aid in detecting plague cases, inducing the relatives of the plague-stricken to remove their sick to the Plague Hospitals and getting their houses evacuated in due time to enable the Plague authorities to cleanse and whitewash them; his winning manners, kind disposition and cool head had won for him universal respect as well as the hearts of his people. In selecting him for honours last year for his excellent services, the Government had rewarded the best and the most deserving man in the community by conferring upon him the title of Khan Sahib. The community further hoped and trusted that for the able and splendid manner in which he had continued to work with the Government in connection with plague, there were higher honours in store for him yet.

The Khan Sahib in response to the above speech, stated that he did not think he deserved so much praise and glorification for what little he had been doing for the general good and the good of his community particularly. In doing what little he had done, he was sure he had done nothing more than his duty towards his brethren. He also acknowledged with due deference and thankfulness the good wishes and hopes

FIGURE 8A-C: Plague and the Bene Israel of Bombay and the Konkan (1898-9) as documented in *The Bene Israelite*, a publication of the Bene Israel community. Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins.

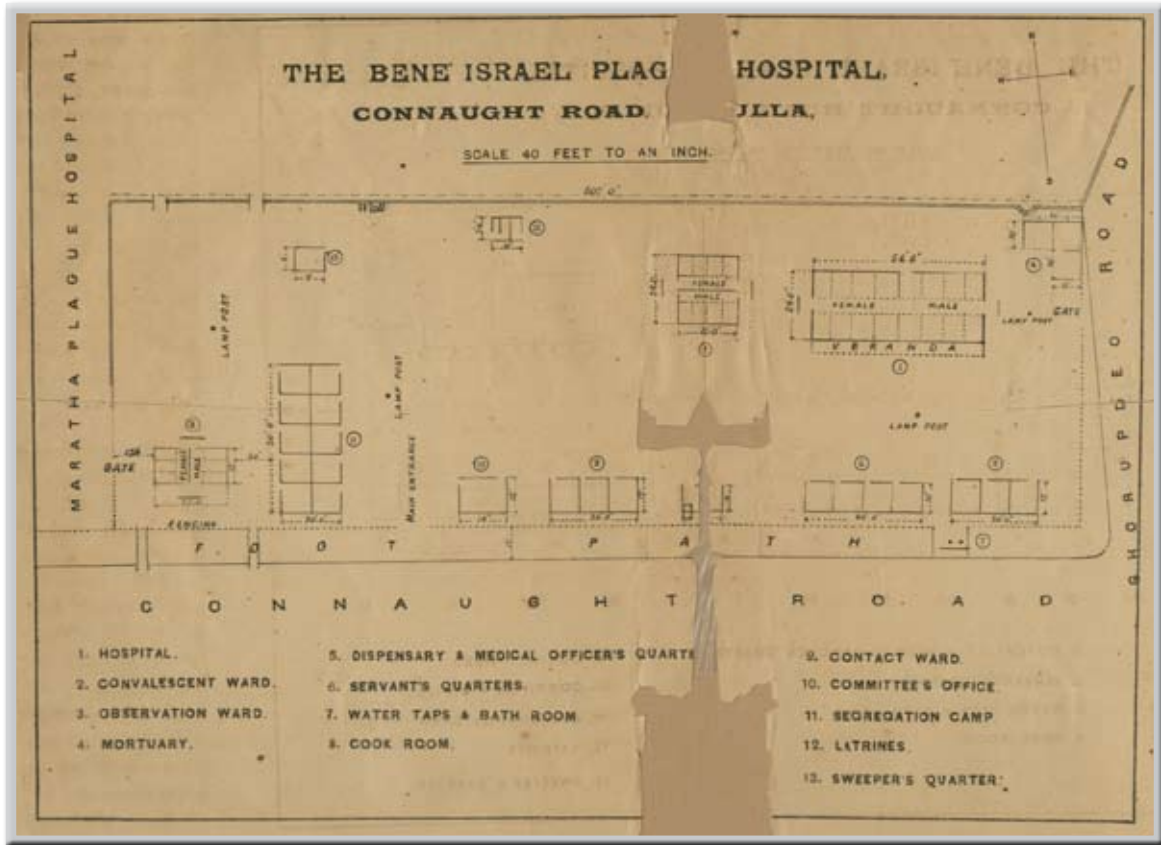


FIGURE 9: Floor plan of the Bene Israel Plague Hospital. Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins.



FIGURE 10: The Aga Khan's Diamond Jubilee poster stamp, Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins.

Aga Khan wrote: “I must say its rejection has always seemed to me one of Abdul Hamid’s greatest blunders.”⁸

This correspondence opens up a new and little known side of Haffkine’s life: his permanent devotion to the idea of Jewish worldwide solidarity and his early involvement in the Zionist movement. In Paris in 1891–3 he was one of the founders of the Society for the Revival of the Hebrew Language. In 1898 he supported the appeal of the Bene Israel Plague and Famine Relief Fund to open a Jewish Plague Hospital for Jews of all denominations in Bombay,⁹ and similarly the Jewish Free School in Calcutta in 1908. In 1907–9 Haffkine intensively discussed the status of the Sephardi Jews in India with French Jews. In 1907 he helped Jewish refugees migrating to the USA, and corresponded with the English Zionist Federation in 1909 about the foundation of a microbiological institute in Palestine. In July 1910 he took part in the general meeting to discuss the future of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue in Calcutta.¹⁰

Bouquets and Brickbats

Haffkine’s professional life, however, was focused on public health, irrespective of community, religion, or social origin. The revolutionary ideology of this former Russian-Jewish “terrorist” was transformed



FIGURE 11: Plague Research Laboratory, Parel, Bombay 1902–3. Photographs by Dr Gibson. Collection of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.

⁸ Aga Khan 1954, p. 185.

⁹ *Umerkhadi Post*, Bombay, 1 June 1897.

¹⁰ *Musleah* 1975, p. 172.

into the bacteriological revolution of a reformer who sought to improve society by means of science and education. His Indian vaccination programs were highly appreciated both in Great Britain and India. The President of the Royal Society, Lord Joseph Lister (1827–1912), saluted him as a “savior of Humanity”. Queen Victoria made Haffkine a Companion of the Indian Empire. In August 1899, the Governor of Bombay, Lord William Mansfield Sandhurst (1855–1921), gave Haffkine the former residence of the Governor, and Haffkine’s laboratory made a final move to the Old Government House at Parel. Haffkine had been appointed a state bacteriologist of the Indian government in 1893, and became, in 1901, the Director-in-Chief of the Plague Laboratory in Bombay with a staff of 53.



FIGURE 11A: Staff at the Plague Research Laboratory, Bombay.

Haffkine’s successes in fighting the ongoing epidemics were undisputable, but he had many enemies and detractors. Some British officials suspected him of being a Russian spy. Indian dissidents launched rumors that his vaccine was a poison prepared by the government. Another report asserted that the vaccine had been produced with the flesh of pigs and cattle,¹¹ the same explosive rumors that had ignited the 1857 rebellion by evoking the disgust of both Muslims and Hindus.

¹¹ Hays 1998, p. 199.



FIGURE 11B: Dispatching Department, A.L. Martin in charge.

The staff of Haffkine's Plague Laboratory, which consisted mostly of British military officers, was also not happy with a Russian Jew at the head of the enterprise. An officer-in-charge of the Laboratory, Major William Barney Bannerman, who had spent about 20 years serving the Indian Medical Service, intrigued against Haffkine with the support of some of the staff.¹² In his diaries, Haffkine wrote bitterly of Bannerman: "There is nothing for him to do. . . . We do not let him do anything else."

It is not surprising, then, that an anti-Haffkine campaign was launched, when, in the middle of the massive inoculation of about half a million Punjabis in 1901–02, nineteen people died of tetanus. This was dubbed the Mulkowal Case. In April 1903 an Inquiry Commission appointed by the Government of India indicted Haffkine for changing the vaccine production procedures approved by the Plague Commission of 1898–9.

Relieved of the position of Director of the laboratory in 1904, Haffkine returned to Europe. Unofficially, the report of the Inquiry Commission was called the "Little Dreyfus Affair", a pointer to Haffkine's Jewish background and religion. Though the research of Eli Chernin has proved there was no evidence that Haffkine was "overtly victimized by anti-Semitism",¹³ his origin and independent scientific, civil, and religious views did not find acceptance with the British colonial bureaucracy.

¹² In 1899 Bannerman was nominated a managing director, later superintendent, and finally, in 1904, a director of the Laboratory.

¹³ Chernin 1991.

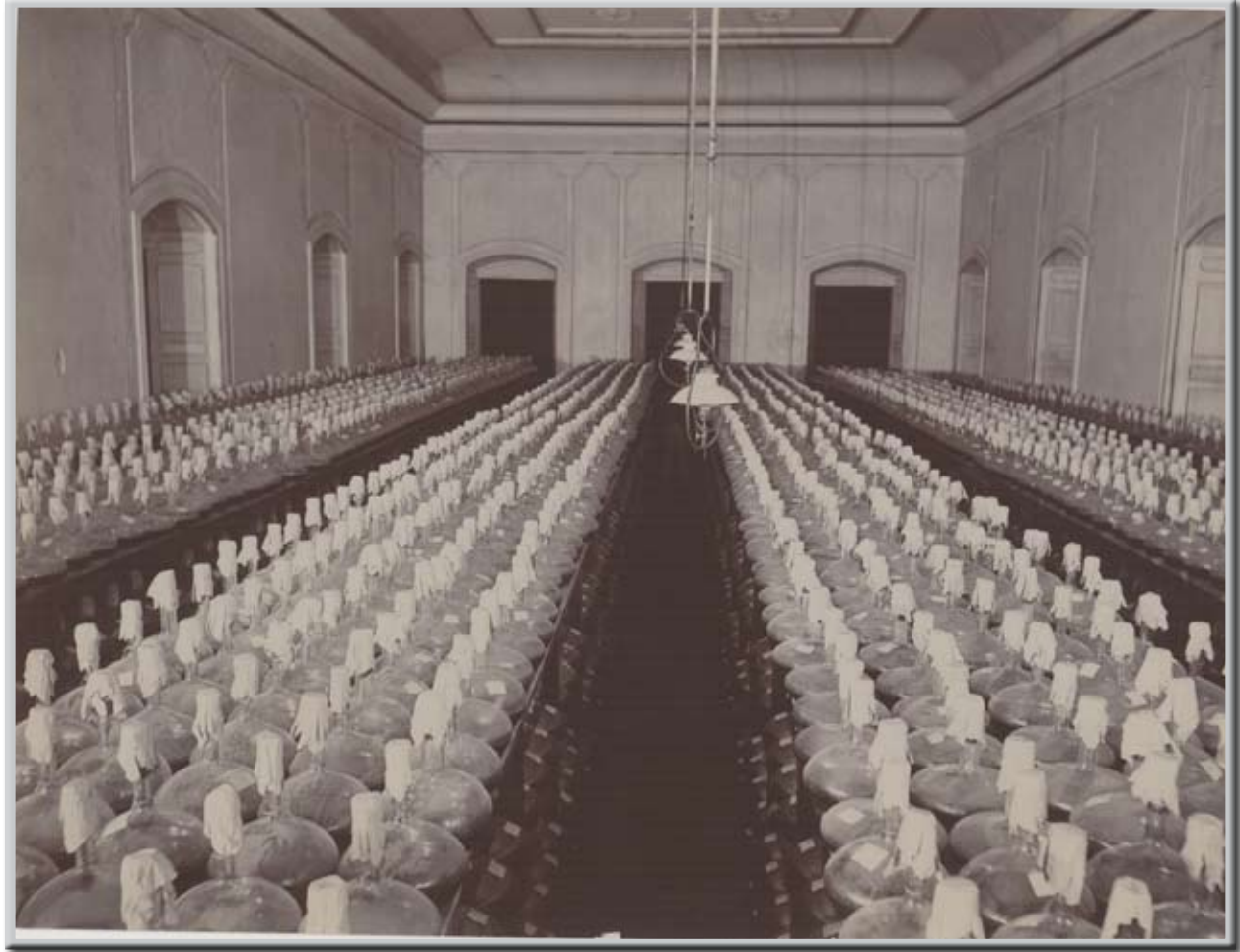


FIGURE 12: Incubation Hall, Plague Research Laboratory 1902–3.
Collection of the Jewish National and University Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

For Haffkine, who was so passionate about his experiments, it was a tragedy to be separated from the Laboratory and patients. His personal life was also at a low ebb as he was rejected by the woman he loved about the same time. Haffkine stayed unmarried. In one of his unpublished novels he wrote: “I don’t like persons demonstrating their feelings to everybody. I prefer individuals with quiet, equal or even cold face while a huge internal work of intellect and heart is raging within him”. Perhaps these words were a self-portrait. A very introspective person by nature, he preferred to express his social and political views, moral priorities, and religious convictions by intense everyday work rather than talking about them.

Haffkine defended his Laboratory and his reputation in letters to different agencies and institutes. In 1907, a Commission of the Lister Institute in England reinvestigated the claim, overturned the decision of the Inquiry Commission, and exonerated Haffkine. Many respectable colleagues including the Nobel Prize-winning malaria researcher Ronald Ross, William R. Smith the President of the Council of the Royal Institute of Public Health and Simon Flexner the Director of Laboratories at New York Rockefeller Institute signed a letter of support published in *The Times* (29 July 1907). They asserted that Haffkine had done nothing wrong in the Mulkowal Case.

The support of these eminent colleagues helped Haffkine restore his scientific reputation and paved the way for his return to India in 1908. One of the first welcoming letters he received came from his



Mr. W. M. Haffkine inoculating a native of India against plague, in a "chawl" at Bombay, 1898.

On the extreme right of the picture: Colonel West, F. R. S., Health officer of Bombay.

On the extreme left: Captain Charles Robertson Milne, assistant to Mr. Haffkine.

Behind him, under the umbrella: Miss Carthorn, on Plague duty in India.

The 3rd man from the right: Mr. Dharmaya Narain (a Maharashtra Bramhin), of the Bombay Municipal office, Clerk to Mr. Haffkine.

FIGURE 13: Haffkine inoculating Indians. Collection of the Jewish National and University Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

friend the Aga Khan.¹⁴ In Calcutta, Haffkine took up the post of Director-in-Chief of the Biological Laboratory. But this new laboratory had no facilities for vaccine production. Also, the terms of Haffkine's employment restricted his activities to research. These were hardly ideal conditions for a person whose aim was to improve the world. The stigma of the Mulkowal disaster still hung over Haffkine.¹⁵ On reaching the minimum retirement age of 55 years in March 1915, he left the Indian Civil Service for good.

Focus on Jewish Causes and Orthodox Practices

From Calcutta Haffkine went to France where he lived mostly in Boulogne-sur-Mer and Boulogne-sur-Seine from 1915 until 1928. He traveled around the world, spent much time supporting the Jewish emancipation movement, and thought about scientific, cultural, and theological aspects of the Jewish religion.

Historians agree that Haffkine's return to Judaism and Orthodox Jewish practice occurred about 1915 and usually connect it with "A Plea for Orthodoxy", his brilliant essay which appeared in 1916 in *The Menorah Journal*. Here Haffkine presented himself as a strict advocate of traditional religious observance. Haffkine had always valued the Jewish religion but while working for multi-national and multi-religious India, he had preferred to be identified with his professional medical mission rather than with any religion. After retirement, he felt free to express his personal views and priorities.

Haffkine focused on the welfare of Jews and migration as well as the health and education of the Jewish people. In 1909 he corresponded with the English Zionist Federation's Honorary President, Sir Francis A. Montefiore, and its President, Dr Charles Dreyfus, about the establishment of a microbiological institute in Palestine. In 1916, he visited Jewish settlements in the United States. In 1923, Haffkine worked for the establishment of the Faculty of Jewish Studies as a branch of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. As a member of the Committee de Patronage of the Faculty, Haffkine prepared a paper called "Concerning the scheme of a School of High Jewish Learning to be established in Jerusalem" and sent it to the Chief Rabbi of France, the head of the Committee, but received no positive response.

The following year, Haffkine tried to launch an independent school in Palestine with a Board of Directors from different countries. It was to be dedicated to reinterpreting the Torah in terms of modern philosophy and science. It is absolutely necessary to apply the "new" Torah to the needs of the complex life among nations, he wrote in the proposal to a Pittsburgh banker Sol Rosenbloom, and to bridge the gap between faith and reason. The plan, as in the case of most of Haffkine's earlier such initiatives, was rejected. In his diary Haffkine sadly confessed to himself: "The main feature of my life is solitude".

In 1926, forty years after leaving the Russian Empire, Haffkine and the Jewish writer Reuben Brainin revisited Odessa and other cities in the Soviet Union. It was a comprehensive trip in which he toured the entire country of his birth from Ukraine to Siberia looking at Jewish life and religious education under the new socialist regime.

In April 1928 he moved to Lausanne, Switzerland, where he remained for the last two years of his life. Here he made a deposit to the Lausanne bank of 1,568,852 Swiss francs (about \$500,000) which, according to his testament, was to be used to foster religious, scientific, and vocational education in Eastern European *yeshivas* through grants. The Haffkine Foundation for the Benefit of Yeshivoth was created in 1929 and became the last endowment of this philanthropist to the Jewish people and humanity.

¹⁴ http://waller.uu.uu.se/images/Waller_Ms_Haff/00029/f_001a.jpg.

¹⁵ Hagwood 2007, p. 16.

Legacy

Waldemar Haffkine passed away in 1930 in Lausanne and was buried at the small Jewish cemetery in the western suburb of the city. A few obituaries appeared in scientific journals. Professor Sir William John Ritchie Simpson remembered:

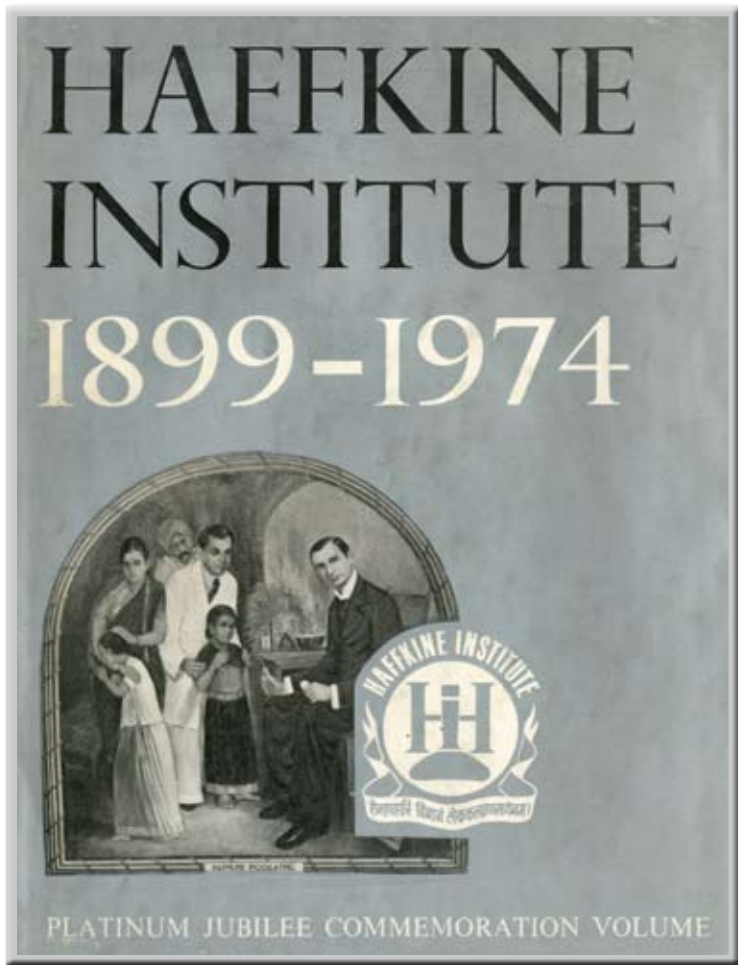


FIGURE 14A-C: Haffkine Institute, Mumbai. Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins.

He stayed with us several times when in Calcutta . . . he was very likeable and always the same: a courteous and amiable gentleman, even towards those who opposed him and attacked his views and work; very determined, remarkable for his powers of work, full of enthusiasm, and with a dauntless courage which was not to be damped by disappointments.¹⁶



FIGURE 15: Indian stamp depicting Haffkine.

Haffkine's name was then largely forgotten though, in 1925, the Bombay government renamed the Plague Research Laboratory as the Haffkine Institute. The rebirth of interest in Haffkine occurred only after the Holocaust and the deaths of millions during World War II. Many realized that only the joint efforts of nations, elites, and individuals can save mankind from extermination by fanatics and dictators. The changed world demanded new heroes: upright humanitarians from amongst the state and religious elites who were also independent and influential professionals like Waldemar Haffkine, who always followed his own precepts and believed that the individual could change a world.

Historians began to study his fate and works anew. In 1959, Mark Popovskii's *The Story of Doctor Haffkine* was published in Moscow. In 1964, the Nobel Prize winning microbiologist Selman A. Waksman wrote *The Brilliant and Tragic Life of W.M.W. Haffkine, Bacteriologist in the USA*. More recently, there have been other scholarly studies of his work.¹⁷

The governments of India and Israel have issued stamps in honor of him. During the 1960s, thousands of trees were planted in the famous Kennedy Forest in Jerusalem in memory of this eminent bacteriologist and Jewish philanthropist. Today, the Haffkine Institute for Training, Research and Testing in Mumbai continues to be an important center for public health in Asia.

¹⁶ *The British Medical Journal*, 8 November 1930.

¹⁷ Löwy 1992; Kumar 1999; Hagwood 2007.