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From the Editors

Issue number 12 of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* contains six articles, four by new authors. One of the goals of this journal is to present new work by new scholars, so we are especially gratified that we continue to be a forum to introducing fresh perspectives from multiple academic disciplines and from scholars who may not know of one another.

Accordingly, this issue commences with "A Call for Jewish-Buddhist Studies" by Vanessa R. Sasson. Her essay is a prolegomena of sorts for work that focuses on a particularly timely theme, a compelling issue within the Jewish community.

A work in the field of comparative literature by Helena Ramon explores themes from Abraham Mapu, a Russian Yiddish novelist, alongside Bengali writer Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Another scholar of comparative literature, Neela Bhattacharya Saxena, looks at the theologies of "the Feminine" in Jewish mysticism and Hinduism.

We then turn to Indian Jewish communities, and Myer Samra explores the unlikely choice of the Benei Menashe in North East India to reclaim and assert Jewish identity. Joseph Hodes then looks at the difficult absorption of the Bene Israel during the first decade or so after their immigration to Israel. Along a very similar line, Joan G. Roland extensively reviews Maina Chawla Singh's important study of Indian Jews in contemporary Israel.

The issue concludes with a book review by Nathan Katz of Yael Moses Reuben's *The Jews of Pakistan* and a controversy over an article from our last issue.

With this issue, we welcome two associate editors to our journal: Aaron Gross of the University of San Diego and Luke Whitmore of the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point. We continue to seek another associate editor, one who is in a position to expand our academic circle in India and in the Indian Diaspora.

A Call for Jewish-Buddhist Studies

By Vanessa R. Sasson

Despite many strong voices urging otherwise, comparative study continues to struggle for its survival in the academic discipline of religion. Specialization retains its hold on scholarship, at times to its own detriment. A case in point may be Judaism and Buddhism—two traditions often assumed to have been strangers in their formative periods and for centuries thereafter. Comparing these two traditions is invariably rendered an enterprise condemned to the margins, if for no other reason than the fact that without evidence of contiguity, the yield is believed to be minimal at best.

Many have argued that contiguity should *not* be considered a requirement for comparative study to be deemed fruitful, but their voices are not often heeded.[1] The grandfather of contemporary Comparative Studies, Jonathan Z. Smith, argues that comparison is nothing less than "a fundamental characteristic of human intelligence...the omnipresent substructure of human thought. Without it, we could not speak, perceive, learn or reason."[2] In one of his most famous essays, Smith calls upon the ancient Greek play, the *Bacchae,* to help untangle the Jonestown massacre.[3] To require evidence of contiguity before scholarship can advance places an unnecessary ceiling over education's head.

One of the outcomes of the globalization process we are currently undergoing has been of new encounters and dialogues. Communities that barely knew of each other previously are suddenly catapulted into mutual relationships in almost every corner of the globe. The Jewish-Buddhist exchange is an extraordinary example of this phenomenon, as Jews and Buddhists presently interact with each other on a scale that is historically unprecedented. This interaction begs the question of what studying these two religious traditions alongside each other might yield. This article focuses on the current state of the field of Jewish-Buddhist Studies and begins by exploring some of the obstacles currently preventing Jewish-Buddhist research from developing—including the persistent (and surprisingly exciting!) question of contiguity. While direct references to Jews in Buddhist texts or Buddhists in Jewish texts do not emerge, this article nevertheless argues for the reasonable possibility that Buddhists and Jews knew of each other as some of their scriptures were underway or nearing completion. Their shared history is not the only sheet of bedrock upon which the field rests, but it presents us with the possibility of a more expansive and interconnected view of the history of these two groups. This article hopefully serves as a "call" to other scholars to participate in the work.

Obstacle 1: The Newness

A Religious Studies approach comparing Judaism and Buddhism barely exists. With the notable exceptions of Duncan Derrett, Nathan Katz, Ellen Posman, and a few others, comparative efforts have rarely been made in the case of Judaism and Buddhism. A number of reasons might explain this dearth of interest and support, the first being that the Jewish-Buddhist phenomenon as we know it today is relatively new. Although Judaism and Buddhism have had contact throughout their histories (as this article will argue), the present situation of numerous Buddhist teachers emerging from Jewish backgrounds is unprecedented. As "everyone knows," Buddhist community centers across North America and Europe are filled with Jewish names. Some of today's most eminent Buddhist teachers come from Jewish origins, such as Roshi Bernie Glassman, Sylvia Boorstein, Norman Fisher, Blanche Hartman, Lama Surya Das, Bhikkhu Bodhi, the late Nyanaponika Thera, and the late Bhikkhunī Ayya Khema. Buddhist scholarship is similarly replete with Jewish names, and India overflows with Israeli travelers to the point that many Indian shop and hotel owners have mounted signs in Hebrew to cater to them. The biggest Passover seder I ever attended was at the Israeli embassy in Kathmandu in 1996: I shared a table with 700 fellow

travelers who fiercely pounded the tables singing *dayyenu* while shoveling down buckets full of *matzoh* ball soup.[4] One hundred and fifty thousand Israelis reportedly travel through South and Southeast Asia every year, mostly in Nepal, India, and Thailand, resulting in a number of Jewish "recruiting" houses (Chabad) peppered throughout the region hoping to reclaim the souls they fear to have lost to eastern traditions.[5] This interaction between Judaism and Buddhism even extends to the first prime minister of Israel, David ben-Gurion, whose correspondence with Nyanaponika Thera reveals a deep interest in Buddhism.[6] Jews have been engaging with Buddhism with increasing curiosity—something "everyone knows"—but the relationship has yet to be granted serious scholarly consideration.

The little bit of academic work that has been produced has largely focused on the question of why modern Jews feel so drawn to Buddhism,[7] but why this is not reciprocated with as much enthusiasm (the Tibetan Government-in-Exile being the primary exception[8]), what the two religions might learn from each other, or what they may or may not have in common, has been left almost entirely for popular culture to determine.[9] Consider the ever-popular books *The Jew in the Lotus*, *That's Funny: You Don't Look Buddhist*, or more recently, *Beside Still Waters*,[10] in which Jewish and Christian Buddhists speak about their experiences living between the two traditions. These books and many others[11] testify to a growing phenomenon that warrants academic attention. It is time scholars of religion examine what the two have to say to each other, what can be learned by their interaction, and what positing the two alongside each other might reveal about each religion on its own.

Obstacle 2: The Requirements

Another deterrent to broaching this new phenomenon is the massive corpus of materials one would be expected to master if it is to be done in the current academic climate of hyperspecialization. Depending on the focus of the research, one would have to become familiar with multiple languages, such as biblical, rabbinic, and Modern Hebrew, Ugaritic, Aramaic, Ancient Greek, Latin, and Arabic, Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese. One would have to become familiar with multiple fields of research, such as the many variant Buddhist scriptural canons, Buddhist ritual and monastic codes, Buddhist history and exchange in various countries such as India, Nepal, China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, and Tibet. One would have to engage with the tremendous corpus of biblical studies and interpretation, Ancient Near Eastern literature, ritual, *halachah*, and Jewish history throughout the Middle-East, Europe, and Asia. One would have to investigate archaeological records, consider ancient bodies of texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the ever-expanding Ghāndārī collection, along with art history, a study of aesthetics, philosophy, mysticism, hagiography, and literature. One would have to gain familiarity with neighboring religions, such as Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity, never mind ancient religions such as Greco-Roman and Egyptian religions and Manichaeism. And as though this were not enough, one would also have to explore the history of comparative studies—the many examples and attempts made over the past few centuries not only in the field of Religious Studies, but also in linguistics, sociology, and anthropology. One would have to carefully examine the various methodologies proposed, the postmodern challenges to the enterprise and the various solutions suggested.

In other words, if comparative research is to be performed with the standard proposed by the specialists of the field, the comparative enterprise of even only two religious traditions seems impossible.

This intimidation factor is essential in keeping us honest. It dissuades us from jumping into the comparative pool recklessly. It curtails our potential for falling prey to "parallelomania" as characterized and defined by Samuel Sandmel in his Presidential Address for the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature over forty years ago. Sandmel defined the phenomenon as "that *extravagance* among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and

derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction."[12] Sandmel was voicing a concern that had to do with a very particular form of comparative scholarship that began in the 19th century and continued well into the 20th century. His point was important to his context and continues to be relevant today, for any such extravagance is best avoided in a serious academic enterprise, rendering the inevitable intimidation factor warranted. It protects scholars from producing grandiose and unsubstantiated claims that are not the result of careful, scrupulous, and painstaking contextualized analysis.

But somewhere between hyperspecialization and exuberant generalization lies a middle ground that many are already attempting to tread. The old saying, that "the more we know, the more we realize how little we know," has never been truer. As the Academy broadens its repertoire, scholars are inevitably faced with the humbling reality that the surface is barely being scratched. We stand on each other's shoulders and attempt the daunting task of formulating one infinitesimally small piece of a gargantuan puzzle that we will never see completed. Every academic field and academic subfield touches on every other, making it impossible to sustain the outdated ideal of studying one phenomenon at a time and in isolation. Vacuums do not exist and probably never have, and thus we are all inescapably involved in some form of comparative study as a result. In the words of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, history has placed us in a pattern of intertwining strands and "we cannot but be aware of it, dimly or vividly."[13] Scholars inevitably face a monumental and ever-expanding corpus of materials. Just because it might intimidate us and because we know that we will never master all of it does not mean that we should not attempt to master some of it. Few will be capable of reading Hebrew, Ugaritic, Aramaic, Latin, Arabic, Chinese, Sanskrit, Pāli, and Tibetan at once and with proficiency, and thus of perhaps contributing to what I imagine would be a fascinating philological inquiry into possible borrowings, translations, and interpretations, but we can do the best we can by raising imaginative and creative questions in the context of serious scholarly research.

Obstacle 3: Contiguity

As mentioned above, the most significant obstacle hindering the field of comparative study from developing—particularly in the case of Judaism and Buddhism—is the prevailing notion that whatever comparative study is to be undertaken must be done only in cases where contiguity can be established. It is expected, for instance, that the cross-cultural and intellectual exchange between Jainism and Buddhism be investigated, but the combined study of Buddhism and Judaism is deemed largely irrelevant. The "so what?" question looms ominously over such comparative projects, leading to the charge that one is comparing apples and oranges, while the Academy encourages comparing various kinds of apples instead. While such a perspective certainly tunnels vision, the issue of contiguity in the case of Judaism and Buddhism leads to some surprising results, most of which have yet to be appreciated either by the public or by much of the academic world. The issue of contiguity therefore persists as a stumbling block in a paradoxical way: On the one hand, many are convinced that it is required for study (which places unnecessary limits on the pursuit of knowledge), and on the other hand, few imagine that the seeds of an exchange between early Jewish and Buddhist communities can even be found. Both of these views seriously hamper the development of Jewish-Buddhist studies. It is therefore to the issue of historical connections that we now turn.

While it is surely the case that Buddhists and Jews have never had as much contact in as many different forums as they do presently, this should not be translated as a lack of historical and spatial contiguity. On the contrary, investigation necessarily reveals a connecting thread between India and the Mediterranean that can be traced far back into history. Commerce knows no boundaries, nor do expanding empires. Maps were drawn and redrawn throughout antiquity and forever thereafter, repeatedly bridging communities and

tearing them apart. The very idea that the world can be divided into the dichotomous notions of "East" and "West" is a fabrication of the modern imagination. We are trained to make concrete distinctions between one part of the world and another, but the closer we look, the less such divisions seem realistic. Indeed, this is at the heart of why so many new interdisciplinary fields are developing today. Area studies serve obvious purposes, but as Nathan Katz argues, "area studies may be *confined* by the very boundaries that define them. The very creative interactions across boundaries fall through the interstices of traditionally defined area studies" [emphasis mine].[14] The Buddhist concept of *paṭicca-samuppāda* is here quite appropriate: Potentially translated as codependent origination, the concept propounds that all phenomena are bound in a web of interconnections, revealing the fact of contiguity anywhere and everywhere. Some roads are obviously less traveled than others, but a perusal of the inventory collected by a variety of scholars today suggests that the road connecting India and the Mediterranean was far more frequently traveled than popularly imagined.

This investigation might begin with the primary sources of both religions. The Pāli Canon[15] makes regular reference to the *yonas*, who in most cases are the Greeks, but in some instances refer to foreigners more generally, and in the later literature refers to those of Arabian origin.[16] In one passage in particular—the Assalāyana Sutta of the *Majjhima Nikāya*—the Buddha speaks of the *yonas* (Ionians) by describing the Greek dual-caste system of master and slave, thereby demonstrating that the authors of the literature had some sense of who the Greeks were and did not simply lump them into the faceless category of the "other."[17] A few monks bear the title "Yona" before their name in the Sri Lankan canon, such as Yona Dhammarakkhita Thera[18] and Yona Mahādhammarakkhita Thera,[19] suggesting that at least a few Greeks (or foreigners) converted to Buddhism and took the robes. Even more intriguing is the reference to Babylon (*Bāveru*)[20] in the Bāveru Jātaka[21] in which a group of sailors venture from Bāranāsī to Bāveru and sell a bird to the inhabitants there, revealing at least the imagination of trade if not a reference to the very fact of it. We likewise find two references to India (הדו) in the biblical book of Esther,[22] along with one reference in the Apocryphal book of first Maccabees.[23] There are, moreover, a number of passages that some have argued are suggestive of India, such as the land of Havilah in Genesis 2,[24] the mysterious city of Tarshish,[25] or the port of Ophir.[26] Evidence of trade between India and the Land of Israel emerges in early postbiblical and rabbinic documents, with reference in particular to a variety of spices that find their origins in India—some of which, according to one study, were eventually incorporated into the recipe for incense used in the Temple.[27] Both R. Chakravarti[28] and Brian Weinstein,[29] in separate studies, provide ample evidence of trade contacts between the two civilizations from a few centuries before the Common Era onward.

The evidence often emerges in disjointed fragments, but taken as a whole provides sufficient material to warrant the conclusion that India and the Mediterranean benefited from numerous contacts as Jewish and Buddhist scriptures were in formation. Merchants, Charkravarti reminds us, were not simply "carriers of commodities but were purveyors of cultural traits and ideas across long distances."[30] The impact of their presence on each other's shores, and their interaction with each other, should not be underestimated.

Moreover, countless examples present themselves of Indian-Greek intellectual exchange that must have borne some influence—however indirect—on their respective formations. This is, of course, an obvious point for those scholars involved in the field of Indo-European Studies. Linguistics, epigraphy, and archaeology have produced significant evidence demonstrating such a relationship. The philosopher Pyrrho of Elis, for example, accompanied Alexander during his invasion of India between the years 327 and 325 BCE. Pyrrho returned to Greece and (arguably) founded the famous school of Greek Skepticism. According to Seldeslachts, this innovative philosophy is strikingly "in agreement with the sceptical schools of thought in India,"[31] Buddhism potentially having been one of them. This may be our first instance of *recorded* intellectual exchange.

One might also consider the famous Buddhist text, the *Milindapañha,*[32] in which the historical Greek King Menander (Milinda—ca. 155-130 BCE) debates the fine points of Buddhism with the Buddhist monk Nāgasena. Although the historicity of this debate cannot be confirmed, the description of Menander's funeral in Greek sources is unusually reminiscent of how the Buddha himself was disposed of by his disciples.[33] Since the Buddha's hagiography has functioned as a model for Buddhists to emulate from the very beginnings of the tradition, it is likely that Menander's funeral identified him as a Buddhist to his Greek historians.[34] Unfortunately, a Jewish equivalent to the *Milindapañha* has yet to emerge.

Archaeology provides even more evidence, beginning with the numerous Aśokan edicts scattered across India. Having ruled between the years 268 and 233 BCE, Aśoka thrills the Buddhist imagination as one of the greatest kings of ancient India. Among other things, he is credited with having unified the country under the Buddhist banner. For both political and religious reasons, Aśoka made great efforts to propagate Buddhism throughout his empire, to which his edicts testify. These are mostly produced on stone pillars erected throughout India and as far north as Gandhāra. The edicts are striking for a number of reasons, the first having to do with the Brahmī script with which they are carved. Although vigorous debate continues concerning the origins of this script, many scholars today are convinced that it is a Semitic prototype—either Phoenician, Aramaic, or South Semitic.[35] Many Indian scholars, however, strongly counter this view by suggesting an indigenous origin.[36] If the former scholars are correct (which remains to be seen), then it posits evidence of significant Semitic infiltration into India, and thus eventually into the development of Buddhism.

Not all of Aśoka's edicts are in Brahmī, however. Also discovered are edicts using Kharoṣṭhī, Aramaic, and Greek scripts. And although the majority of the inscriptions are in a local Prākrit dialect,[37] one of the edicts located near Kandahar is bilingual in Greek and Aramaic, and another near Jalalabad is entirely in Aramaic.[38]

The content of these inscriptions is likewise revealing for our purposes. The thirteenth edict, for example, claims that Aśoka sent Buddhist missionaries to Syria, Egypt, Libya, Macedonia, and Greece, with the kings of these countries mentioned by name.[39] In his second edict, "Aśoka notifies that he has established in the land of Antiochus (I or II) of Syria and his neighbours medical facilities for both animals and men. Again, in his fifth edict he mentions the functionaries called *dhammamahāmātas* who supervised and promoted religious communities, especially among western peoples like the Greeks."[40] Although these missions presumably failed since virtually nothing survived of Aśoka's ambitious expansionist efforts, they nonetheless confirm that a number of Mediterranean countries had encountered Buddhism in some form as far back as the 3rd century BCE.

Gandhāran Buddhism provides another pivotal example of Western-Buddhist exchange. Located primarily in northwestern Pakistan, with greater Gandhāra extending into Afghanistan, Gandhāra could boast of a thriving Buddhist community between the 3rd century BCE and the 5th or 6th century CE.[41] Archaeologists have unearthed an abundance of Buddhist remains, including dozens of extraordinary engravings and statues. These are important not only because they provide us with the first examples of anthropomorphic Buddhist images (prior to these, symbols such as a footprint, a parasol, or a tree were used to signify the Buddha's presence), but also because these first anthropomorphized Buddhas are sculpted with clear Hellenistic reference, recalling Zeus more than an Indian sage. Siglinde Dietz describes Gandhāran art as a virtual "Graeco-Buddhist synthesis."[42]

Amid the hundreds of archaeological remains uncovered in the Gandhāran region are dozens of scroll fragments, some as old as the 1st century BCE—the earliest Buddhist manuscripts to date. The fragments are written on the very brittle medium of birch bark in Gandhārī language and are inscribed with the Kharoṣṭhī script. Although these scrolls are fascinating for many reasons, it is the prevalence of the Kharoṣṭhī script that has rendered them remarkable outside Buddhist circles. While Brahmī is *arguably* a Semitic prototype,

there is no question concerning Kharoṣṭhī: Scholars across the board agree that it is an Aramaic-based script. Unfortunately, the provenance of the majority of these scrolls remains unknown (leading to a number of obvious problems), but at least one group of fragments is confirmed to have been sealed in a series of jars very much like the Dead Sea Scrolls. The reasoning behind such a deposit is still debated, but one theory advanced by Richard G. Solomon—a leading figure in the field—is the possibility that they were being discarded as a kind of Buddhist Genizah.[43] Although Solomon does not suggest that this is the result of Western influence, the fact that such a practice is unusual in the Buddhist context (although not completely unheard of) renders the similarity with Mediterranean Genizahs interesting at the very least.

The evidence does not end here. The long history of Jews in India, some of whom claim to have planted roots in India more than two thousand years ago, provides some of our most direct evidence of Jewish-Indian exchange. The now famous Cochin Jews, for example, place themselves on Indian shores in the 1st century CE. Although archaeology has yet to corroborate their oral tradition, physical evidence places them in India at least from the 9th century CE, if not much earlier[44]—a period, incidentally, of great Buddhist intellectual prosperity on the subcontinent. The Bene Israel of India likewise trace their origins to antiquity—this time as one of the lost tribes of Israel. Their folk history connects them to a shipwreck on Konkan shores in India. The ship is believed to have carried members of one of the lost tribes of Israel, with seven men and seven women surviving the ordeal and eventually integrating themselves into the Indian landscape all the while retaining a strong Jewish identity. A Bene Israel historian has traced this shipwreck to 175 BCE.[45] Some scholars have challenged this oral tradition of theirs, but as Shalva Weil argues, to do so is to "negate the Bene Israel's consistent reiteration that they came direct to India from the Holy Land—a claim which is of great importance to the Bene Israel themselves who perceive themselves as a separate community of world Jewry descended from one of the Israelite tribes."[46]

Putting Out the "Call"

The above survey (which is by no means exhaustive) should sufficiently demonstrate that the Mediterranean and India were bridged from a variety of directions more than two thousand years ago. What has yet to surface, however, are direct references to Judaism in Buddhist sources or to Buddhism in Jewish sources. Jews knew of India—of this we can be certain. But did they know of Buddhism in particular? And did Buddhists know of Jews? These questions cannot yet be answered; clearly, more research is required, but I would like to posit a possible explanation for this dearth of direct referencing in the absence of an alternative.

Jews and Buddhists were minorities in their respective locations. When Mediterranean merchants reached Indian shores, how reasonable would it be to expect the Jews to have been distinguishable from their fellow travelers? Likewise for the Buddhists: Can we expect Jewish travelers in India to have been able to distinguish Buddhist communities from the countless other *śrāmaṇa* sects of northern India in the first centuries? One might recall the story of King Bimbisāra who, himself a Buddhist and famous for his exceptional devotion toward the Buddha, could not make such distinctions. He is said to have once mistaken a competing group of *śrāmaṇas* for Buddhists and made public obeisance to them. Thoroughly embarrassed by his blunder, he asked the Buddha to develop a distinctive dress for his monastic community, thereby bringing Buddhist robes into existence.[47] If a local Buddhist king had difficulty telling the difference, is it not too much to expect that foreigners be capable of doing so?

In his study of Alexander's encounter with the sages of India, Richard Stoneman argues for the impossibility of discerning the sages' affiliation given the fluidity of ascetic identity at the time. Although the literature describes them as Brahmins, the philosophers

Alexander is said to have engaged with in the histories and in the *Alexander Romance* could have just as easily been Jain or Buddhist. He therefore concludes that

> Greeks would not readily have distinguished different grades or types of Indian ascetic. For Greek purposes any of these could be called philosophers, or Brahmans. The fact that there could also be philosophers or ascetics who were not Brahmans... was surely beyond them.[48]

Al-Bīrūnī, the famous 11th-century Islamic scholar, may be cited as an interesting exception here, as he did distinguish Buddhists from Hindus in his study. But Al-Bīrūnī was not an ordinary man: He was an unparalleled scholar who invested many years of his life to the study of India and the religions that fascinated him. It would be strange indeed had Al-Bīrūnī *not* made the distinction. And yet, it must also be noted that Al-Bīrūnī's knowledge of Buddhism was limited, with only a few references to Buddhism scattered throughout his work. Perhaps then, even Al-Bīrūnī had some difficulty with Buddhism as a distinct entity.[49]

For the nonspecialist, however, these distinctions continue to challenge the observer. To this very day, a Buddhist monk is not always easily recognizable from afar. The difference, for example, between a Theravāda monk and a Ramkrishna monk is barely discernible. A Śvetāmbara Jain white-clad monk (*sadhu*) may be virtually indistinguishable from a devout Buddhist layman (*upāsika*), and equally difficult to differentiate from a Hindu mourner. Similarly, how reasonable is it to expect that Buddhists be capable of distinguishing Jews from the collection of foreign merchants appearing on their shores? Would a Jewish merchant seem particularly distinct from his Greek and Roman companions? Perhaps direct reference to either of these two small communities is too much to expect, but the survey of material provided above certainly suggests that, with or without such direct referencing, knowledge of the other was most likely a reality. As their respective scriptures were nearing completion, the possibility of intellectual cross-fertilization is difficult to ignore.

For those scholars who continue to insist on the requirement of historical and spatial contiguity for scholarship to have a purpose, this brief overview of some of the evidence collected thus far surely fulfills it. More important, however, it serves as a good reminder of how unnatural the concept of "isolated study" is to the Humanities. Contiguity is prevalent in all aspects of the Humanities, including between Judaism and Buddhism from antiquity to present times. It is imperative that this field continues to develop as it will likely uncover further evidence of early Jewish-Buddhist exchange and consequently expand our understanding of the influences behind the formation of the scriptures of both communities. It will, moreover, generate the tools we need to contribute more actively to the growing conversation taking place between Jews and Buddhists today.

Even without all of this evidence of contiguity, however, it bears remembering that learning emerges when a variety of methodologies are attempted, matched, bridged, and explored. By providing hyperspecialization with supreme and at times even exclusive authority, the intellectual pursuit is unnecessarily restrained. There is much to be gained by studying one tradition in isolation, and as much to be gained by studying multiple traditions alongside each other—be they contiguous or not. In an ideal Academy, all of these practices would share the table equally, exchanging with each other actively and with intellectual pleasure.

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the material during various stages of this research, as well as Daniel McNamara and Vincent Cornell. An extended abstract of the lecture was published in the online journal of the *SBL Forum* in November 2008, and I thank them for their cooperation and permission to reuse part of the material here. I would also like to thank Nathan Katz and the anonymous reviewers of this article.

Notes

[1] A strong voice in this regard is Barbra A. Holdrege. See her *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) along with her article, "Beyond Hegemony: Hinduisms, Judaisms, and the Politics of Comparison," *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: A View from the Margin*, ed. N. Katz (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 77-92.

[2] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 51.

[3] Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Devil in Mr. Jones," *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 102-120.

[4] Chabad claims that this annual ritual in the Israeli embassy in Nepal is the largest seder in the world. In 2006, 1,500 people attended—more than double the number of the seder I witnessed ten years earlier.

[5] D. Moaz and Z. Bekerman, "Chabad Tracks the Trekkers: Jewish Education in India," *Journal of Jewish Education* 75 (2009): 175. Chabad is not limited to this particular function, as they also care for, nurture, and support Israeli and Jewish travelers in more general ways, but their recruitment practices are certainly among their most significant.

[6] For a discussion of this correspondence, see A. Federman, "His Excellency and the Monk: A Correspondence Between Nyanaponika Thera and David Ben-Gurion," *Contemporary Buddhism* 10.2 (2009): 197-219.

[7] See, for example, Judith Linzer, *Torah and Dharma: Jewish Seekers in Eastern Religions* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996).

[8] The meeting between the Dalai Lama and Jewish representatives on the theme of surviving diaspora was made famous by Roger Kamenetz's book, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (New York: Harper, 1994).

[9] An exception to this rule worthy of note is Nathan Katz, who opened the door to the academic discussion of Jewish-Buddhist relations through a variety of means, including multiple publications and launching a journal dedicated to the field more broadly entitled *The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*. More recently, Jonathan Silk published an article in which he compared biblical literature with early Buddhist writings on the theme of incestuous genealogies. See his article, "Incestuous Ancestries: The Family Origins of Gautama Siddhārtha, Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 20:12, and The Status of Scripture in Buddhism," *History of Religions* 47.4 (2008): 253-281.

[10] Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus*; Sylvia Boorstein, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist: On Being a Faithful Jew and a Passionate Buddhist* (San Francisco: Harper 1997); Harold Kasimov, John P. Keenan, and Linda Klepinger Keenan, eds., *Beside Still Waters: Jews, Christians, and the Way of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom, 2003).

[11] Consider, for example, Harold Haifetz, ed., *Zen and Hasidism* (Wheaten, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1978); Norman Fisher, *Jerusalem Moonlight: An American Zen Teacher Walks the Path of his Ancestors* (San Francisco: Clear Glass Publications, 1995); or Akiva Tatz and David Gottlieb, *Letters to a Buddhist Jew* (Southfield, MI: Targum Press, 2004).

[12] Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81.1 (1962): 1.

[13] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 2.

[14] Nathan Katz, "Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: A Perspective from the Margin," *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. N. Katz (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 3.
[15] Here, I do not mean to imply that the Pāli Canon is the exclusive primary source of the Buddhist tradition. Buddhism is marked by a number of competing early canons, the Pāli Canon being only one of them.
[16] G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, vol. III (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1997), 699.
[17] Majjhima Nikāya ii 149. For a translation, see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom, 1995), 764-765.
[18] Mahāvaṃsa XII: 4; for a translation, see *The Mahāvaṃsa, or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, trans. W. Geiger (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2002).
[19] Mahāvaṃsa XXIX: 39; for a discussion, see Demetrios Th. Vassiliades, "Greeks and Buddhism: Historical Contacts in the Development of a Universal Religion," *Eastern Buddhist* 36.1 & 2 (2004): 145-146. Also, see Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1994), 3-15.
[20] See Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, vol. II, 281.
[21] Jātaka #339; for a translation, see E. B. Cowell, *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births,* vol. III (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), 83-84.
[22] Esther 1:1 and 8:9.
[23] I Maccabees 8:8.
[24] Genesis 2:11; for a proponent of this reading, see Meir Bar-Ilan, "India and the Land of Israel: Between Jews and Indians in Ancient Times," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 4 (2001): 39-42.
[25] See, for example, Nathan Katz, "Contacts between Jewish and Indo-Tibetan Civilizations through the Ages," *Judaism* 43.1 (1994): 46-47.
[26] See Zacharias P. Thundy, *Buddha and Christ: Nativity Stories and Indian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 213. Genesis 25:6 is also popularly associated with India, although the interpretation is a modern one and highly problematic. See Richard Marks, "Abraham, the Easterners and India: A Jewish Interpretation of Genesis 25:6," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 3 (2000): 49-70.
[27] Brian Weinstein, "Biblical Evidence of Spice Trade Between India and the Land of Israel: A Historical Analysis," *The Indian Historical Review* XXVII.1 (January 2000): 18-21.
[28] R. Charkravarti, "Reaching out to Distant Shores: Indo-Judaic Trade Contacts (Up to CE 1300)," *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: A View from the Margin*, ed. N. Katz (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 19-43.
[29] Brian Weinstein, "Biblical Evidence of Spice Trade Between India and the Land of Israel."
[30] Charkravarti, "Reaching out to Distant Shores," 38.
[31] E. Seldeslachts, "Greece, the Final Frontier? The Westward Spread of Buddhism," *The Spread of Buddhism*, ed. A. Heirman and S. P. Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 132.
[32] The date of this text is uncertain. It is certainly as old as Menander and younger than Buddhaghosa (since Buddhaghosa makes reference to it in his work). According to Norman, the text was most likely composed at different times, with some of the earliest material probably dating to the beginning of the Christian era. See K. R. Norman, *Pāli Literature: Including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of all the Hīnayāna Schools of Buddhism* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 111.
[33] In his *Moralia*, Plutarch describes different cities fighting over his bodily remains. For a discussion, see Seldeslachts, "Greece, The Final Frontier," 140.
[34] Vassiliades argues that this might not be significant since the Buddha was disposed of in the manner of a great king, in which case such a funeral would not be representative of his

faith. I am, however, more inclined to agree with Seldeslachts. See Vassiliades, "Greeks and Buddhism," 147-149.

[35] Both Richard Solomon and Peter T. Daniels are of the opinion that it is derived from Semitic origins. See Richard G. Solomon, "Brahmi and Kharoshthi," *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. P. T. Daniels and W. Bright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 378-379; and Peter T. Daniels, "Contacts Between Semitic and Indic Scripts," *Contacts Between Cultures: West Asia and North Africa*, vol. I, ed. A. Harrak (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 146-148.

[36] See for example, S. P. Gupta and K. S. Ramachandran, eds., *The Origin of Brahmi Script* (Delhi: D. K. Publications, 1979). Harmut Scharfe joins his Indian colleagues in this debate, likewise arguing against a Semitic connection to this script. See H. Scharfe, *Education in Ancient India* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 9-12. The debate surrounding this script is particularly heated given that it is the source for most other Indian scripts. It ultimately determines the course taken by Indian writing systems.

[37] For a discussion of the term *Prakrit* see S. Kant, *The Hāthīgumphā Inscription of Khāravela and the Bhabru Edict of Aśoka: A Critical Study*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2000), 95-103.

[38] Ibid., 110. For a description of the majority of the Aśokan pillars, see D. C. Ahir, *Asoka the Great* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1995), 153-180.

[39] Seldeslachts "Greece, the final Frontier," 136.

[40] Ibid., 136-137.

[41] It remains difficult to determine when precisely Buddhism declined in the region. John M. Rosenfeld suggests that it might have continued well into the 6th century, but thereafter successively declined so that, by the 12th century, it disappeared altogether. See his article, "Debating Points on Gandhāran Buddhism and Kusāna Histor," *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, Texts*, ed. P. Brancaccio and K. Behrendt (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 11. See also S. Kuwayama, "Pilgrimage Route Changes and the Decline of Gandhāra," *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, Texts*, ed. P. Brancaccio and K. Behrendt (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 107-134.

[42] Siglinde Dietz, "Buddhism in Gandhāra," *The Spread of Buddhism*, ed. A. Heirman and S. P. Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 58.

[43] Richard G. Solomon, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra: The British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 81-84. In a more recent article, Solomon acknowledges that the "Genizah-theory" does not fit every manuscript collection found—recent findings suggest that other explanations may be in play too—but he maintains the possibility of a "Buddhist Genizah" for some of the uncovered fragments. See R. G. Solomon, "Why did Gandhāran Buddhists Bury their Manuscripts?" *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwits, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown (London: Routledge, 2009), 19-34.

[44] Nathan Katz, *Who Are the Jews of India?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 33.

[45] Haeem S. Kehimkar, *The History of the Bene Israel of India* (Tel-Aviv: The Dayag Press, 1937), 10-13.

[46] Shalva Weil, "Contacts Between the Bene Israel and the Holy Land from the 8th Century BCE Until 1948: An Ethno-Historical Perspective," *The Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage*, ed. I. Ben-Ami (Jerusalem: The Magness Press, 1982), 170.

[47] This story appears in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*. It is translated and discussed by Gregory Schopen in his chapter, "Cross-Dressing with the Dead: Asceticism, Ambivalence, and Institutional Values in an Indian Monastic Code," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, ed. B. J. Cuevas and J. I. Stone (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 68-69.

[48] Richard Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* CXV (1995): 110.
[49] For a discussion of Al-Bīrūnī's analysis of the religions of India, see the now classic article by A. Jeffrey, "Al-Bīrūnī's Contribution to Comparative Religion," *Al-Bīrūnī Commomeration Volume* (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1951), 125-160.

The Adventure Genre's Adventures: Abraham Mapu and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

By Helena Rimon

The present article is devoted to a comparative study of two texts that share no mutual link to bind them together.

In 1853 in Vilno, on the North-West of the Russian Imperia, the first Hebrew novel *Ahavat Tziyon*, or *Love of Zion*, written by Abraham Mapu (1808-1867) was published. In 1865 in Calcutta was published another novel, *Durgeshnandini*, or *The Daughter of the Lord of the Fort*, authored by a key figure in Bengal's literary renaissance, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), or Bankim Chatterjee, as his name was spelled by the British. *Durgeshnandini* is considered one of the first novels in Bengali.

The writers of these two novels knew nothing of each other and never read the third text to which we will resort for the purpose of comparison—*The Captain's Daughter* (published in 1836), a novel by the Russian writer Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837).

However, the likeness of the three novels is striking. The similarities among these three works are all the more astounding, considering that Mapu and Bankim Chatterjee lived at opposite ends of the globe, far away from the metropolises of the enormous European empires; they had never heard of each other and knew nothing of the existence of literatures written in each other's exotic tongues. They also never mentioned having come into any contact whatsoever with information about Pushkin's novel *The Captain's Daughter*.

How justified is the comparison of literatures that have never been in contact with each other? The methodology for juxtapositions of this kind was developed in Russian comparative research works of the 20th century, for instance, by Victor Zhirmunsky. Zhirmunsky proposed distinguishing between the immediate influence exerted by one literature upon another ("typological analogies or convergences") and literary currents, genres, and individual texts that may appear in different locales perfectly independently of each other under mutually comparable historico-cultural conditions. Clearly enough, a connection obtains between influence and analogy: Influences become possible when, in the course of its own development, a culture develops a need for them.

There are also cases of astounding literary similarities independent of any immediate contact. Researchers working in mythology, folklore, and ancient and medieval literatures often refer to such cases. But there are also instances of typological parallels in literatures of the modern period. "They can be encountered much more frequently in literature than is normally believed; moreover, they constitute the precondition for interaction among literatures."[1]

In addition to Russian researchers, Zhirmunsky's ideas are often cited by Spanish and Portuguese writers, most probably following Claudio Guillen.[2] By contrast, Zhirmunsky's ideas have attracted little attention in English-language comparative literary studies. But even here there are parallels in evidence, independently of mutual contact: Zhirmunsky's concept of "convergences" presaged Gerard Genette's concept of architextuality.[3] The notion of independent parallels, in particular, is pertinent to the genre history of "belated" literatures.

When Harold Bloom spoke of "belatedness,"[4] meaning a tardiness of sorts, he meant the predicament of a poet dealing with a predecessor poet in the context of a national tradition common to both. But the term *belatedness* is used in a more general sense, as well. Uzi Shavit has projected Bloom's theory onto all of Hebrew literature, which developed tardily, when the European literary canon had already taken shape, making Hebrew literature particularly sensitive to European influences.[5]

Being aware of the fact of belatedness generated a peculiar complex of cultural inferiority in Jewish self-consciousness, a complex that is remarkably reminiscent of the

"newcomer" and "latecomer" complexes described in different ways by Frantz Fanon and Hannah Arendt.[6] In this case, the matter at stake was a crisis not of a particular individual, but rather of an entire culture.

Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon both resort to the concept of "newcomer" in describing the colonial situation in which the colonial intellectual searches for a new space in order to imprint his identity on the dominant European cultural milieu.[7] In Homi Bhabha's formulation, people suffering from colonial discrimination attribute decisive significance to their cultural tradition, and to the construction of their history, which has been suppressed and repressed. This phenomenon is also prominent among Jewish intellectuals in the Diaspora. And so Homi Bhabha's ideas have provided a foundation for researching the composite Jewish identity in the Diaspora and the tangled relationship between Jews and the hegemonic cultures of their surroundings.[8]

Comparing the Bengali and the Hebrew literature of the 19th century, we see that the historical adventure novel genre surfaces in young national literatures; this takes place in each independently of the others. As Nathan Tamarchenko has shown,[9] this genre can be traced to the genre model of the ancient Greek love novel, something that Mikhail Bakhtin considered an ancestor of the European novel as such.[10]

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So, Mapu and Bankim knew nothing of each other, but they had an important trait that they shared between them. They were contemporaries. They lived on the outskirts of enormous European empires and belonged to national communities that were regarded by the majority culture in ways that varied from polite self-distancing to racist and religious discrimination. Both were born to Orthodox observant families and both were from a young age taken with European literature; and for both, coupling their "own" with the European was a problematic issue. And most important: Both are considered the founders of the genre of the novel in their national languages. *Love of Zion* and *The Daughter of the Lord of the Fort* were ecstatically greeted by the reading public, went through a multitude of editions, and remain popular to this day. The two novels resemble each other in their structure, as well as in the role that they played in the national liberation movements of their peoples. The centers of these genre innovations in the Bengali and Hebrew literatures were the multicultural cities of Calcutta and Kovno, epicenters of intensive westernization and development of Enlightenment trends.

Mapu was born in 1808 in the town of Slobodka, a suburb of the city of Kovno; this is where he spent almost all his life. He taught in the imperial Jewish gymnasium (or, as these institutions of learning were known, the state Jewish school) created in the 1830s as based on the initiative of S. S. Uvarov, the czarist Minister of Popular Education. Gymnasia of this type had also been founded in Vilno and Zhitomir. Unlike traditional Jewish institutions of learning, such as the Talmud Torahs and the yeshivahs, which had existed in Jewish communities beginning in the early Middle Ages, the newly established "state-operated schools" were supposed to offer instruction in secular subjects. Ideally, approximately half of the time spent in school was supposed to be devoted to the study of Jewish texts, including the Siddur (or collection of ancient and medieval prayers), Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible), Mishnah, and the foundations of Jewish law. However, in practice, the hours allotted for Jewish studies were constantly cut shorter and shorter. The imperial administration also took upon itself the responsibility for preparing special teachers for these schools. The early 1840s saw the establishment of a rabbinical seminary in Vilno. Mapu was unable to obtain a position here, but he maintained close ties with the seminary's students and teachers.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was born in 1838 in the small Bengali town of Kanthalpara to a Brahmin family. He went to school and attended the newly opened university in Calcutta, later proceeding to a career as a clerk in the colonial administration.

However, all his life he continued to remember his student years as a very significant period in his life, and he wrote abundantly on questions pertaining to popular education. Schools and institutions of learning where he had studied were, in their program structure, reminiscent of the gymnasium in Kovno and the Vilno seminary: Instruction was offered primarily in the secular ("European") subjects in the English language, and only a few hours per week were set aside for the study of the Bengali language and religious texts in Sanskrit. The similarity in program structure derived from a similarity in the goals that the schools set before themselves: The imperial administration had a need for educated and loyal aboriginal functionaries. In India this enlightenment project led to somewhat unexpected outcomes: India's young intellectuals, once having received a European education, also quickly absorbed the Romantic notions of European nationalism and began to foster them on local soil. They went about formulating and putting forth ideas of national culture, and later still, of state independence. In Russia, many Jewish Maskilim—the followers of the Jewish Enlightenment movement Haskalah (e.g., Moshe Leib Lilienblum and Reuven Asher Braudes)—after going through a severe crisis in the early 1880s, arrived at what was, in one form or another, the basic notions of Zionism.

Bankim derived the plot for his novel *The Daughter of the Lord of the Fort* from 16th-century history, from the period when the creation of the Mogul Empire was still in progress, and fragmentation still persisted along the Empire's periphery, where the war of everybody against everybody continued. A Patan nobleman treacherously attacks a Bengali citadel, executes the man in charge, and takes his daughter Tilottama captive. The Rajput prince Jagat Singh is in love with the daughter; he is wounded in battle and is also taken captive by the Patan attackers. While in captivity, he is tended by a local princess, who, naturally, falls in love with the noble warrior. The prince, however, heroically remains faithful to his love, who also remains a virgin, despite all the dangers and temptations. Bimola, the concubine of the executed master of the fortress, who has been taken captive together with his daughter, kills the Patan prince. In the ensuing turmoil and uproar Jagat Singh manages to flee. Once free, he takes the peacemaker's mission upon himself, achieves a general coming to terms of everybody with each other, and the story ends with a wedding.[11]

Pushkin's novel *The Captain's Daughter* resembles Bankim's work in more than just the name.[12] The plots are strikingly similar: Here we have rebels in an uprising against the state government, a fortress under siege, the death of the man in charge, his daughter taken captive, a fearless young warrior, who frees the young woman and marries her, but not before the rebellion subsides and order is once again restored in the land.

The first Hebrew novel, *Ahavat Tziyon*, is constructed following the same plot lines: Young, faithful, and staunch lovers are separated by fate. During the time of their separation, they withstand various temptations and trials, including wars and rebellions, which lead to the protagonists' finding themselves temporarily in enemy camps against their will. In the end, they happily reunite. I would like at this point to remind the reader of the outline of the plot in the novel by Mapu.

During the times of the First Temple, a wealthy notable by the name of Yoram lives in Jerusalem. He is married to two women, Chagit and Naamah. Chagit has a small son Azrikam, while Naamah is pregnant at the time when war with the Philistines breaks out. Yoram departs to fight for his country, but before leaving, concerned for Naamah, he requests his friend Yedidyah to take care of her in case he does not return. Yedidyah's wife Tirtzah is also expecting, and the two friends agree that if one of the two women gives birth to a son, and the other to a daughter, the children would become husband and wife when they grow up. But the judge Matan, who hates Yoram, instigates a servant to commit an act of arson, burning down Yoram's estate so that everyone should believe a slanderous rumor to the effect that Naamah, led to the point of despair by the taunting of the jealous Chagit, has set the house on fire and absconded. Once all this takes place, the servant should be able to pass his own child by the name of Naval for Azrikam, pretend as if this child had been saved from the flames, and then the substitute Azrikam would become Yoram's sole

heir. The evildoers' malicious scheme comes true: Yedidyah takes the substitute infant into his home, while the slandered Naamah is forced to flee from Jerusalem. She hides on Mt. Carmel, where she gives birth to twins, the girl Peninah and the boy Amnon. When Amnon becomes somewhat older, Naamah sends him off to relatives in Bet Lechem,[13] where he becomes a simple shepherd. Meanwhile, the son of the servant Akhan, the ugly, malicious, and ignorant Naval, grows up in the home of Yedidyah where he is known as Azrikam, provoking the well-deserved enmity of Teiman and Tamar, Yedidyah's son and daughter.

Upon reaching marriageable age, Tamar, sick of the groom being foisted upon her, takes off for her parents' estate outside city limits, in the settlement of Tekoa near Bethlehem. Here, against the backdrop of luxurious exotic nature, she accidentally makes the acquaintance of the shepherd Amnon. A lion makes its entry suddenly out of the thicket, the courageous shepherd shoots with precision from his bow, the beast falls dead, Tamar swoons and faints, Amnon revives her, and, to express her gratitude, Tamar invites him to visit the Jerusalem home of her parents. Next, Amnon goes off to fight against the Assyrians, going as far as Nineveh, rescues Hananel, the grandfather of his beloved, from captivity, and brings him back to Jerusalem in triumph. Next twist of the adventurous plot: Amnon is taken captive by pirates, who sell him into slavery on Crete. A certain noble elder turns out to be among the slaves, who befriends Amnon and helps him escape. Meanwhile, the Assyrian army leaves the walls of Jerusalem, the siege is lifted, and the exiles return to Zion, Amnon among them. He finally recognizes his own father Yoram in his fellow wayfarer. Yoram is reunited with Naamah, Amnon with Tamar, Teiman with Peninah, all while the evildoers are shamed and punished.[14]

Without any colluding with each other, Hebrew and Bengali critics have always classified the novels by Mapu and Bankim as belonging to the same genre, which in the Anglo-American tradition is usually referred to as *romance.*[15] But just as nobody has ever paid any attention to the similarity between the novels by Mapu and Bankim, to the best of my knowledge, no one has tried to study the first novels in Hebrew and Bengali against the backdrop of a different academic tradition—that of Mikhail Bakhtin's genre typology. This is precisely what I would like to undertake here.

Bakhtin believed that the first and oldest type of European novel was the ancient Greek love story. Its typical plotline is as follows: A young man and young woman of noble descent and unearthly beauty are meant for each other by Destiny itself, but circumstances are such as to separate them, and they are forced to undergo many adventures and trials before they meet again. Such is the plot of the novels *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by Chariton of Aphrodisias, *Aethiopica* (the *Ethiopioan Story*) by Heliodorus of Emesa, *The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius of Alexandria, and a number of others. This tallies precisely with the basis of the plot in the novels by Mapu and Bankim, as well as in *The Captain's Daughter* by Pushkin. In all three texts we can trace the plot motifs of the ancient Greek novel: veridical dreams, fate-presaging objects (a seal, a ring, or a key), a fortress besieged, fires, imaginary deaths, treason, sale into slavery, wild beasts, unexpected encounters, captivity, threats to the dignity and honor of a virgin, feats of military heroism and triumphant return from the battlefield, and ultimate judgment that justifies the innocent and condemns the wicked. All these adventures leave the key protagonists unchanged: Virtuous beauties and handsome young men, as well as immoral ugly and deformed creatures all remain true to themselves. The only positive content of the adventures involves confirming the identity of the protagonists. In Bakhtin's words, "adventure time does not leave any marks."[16] Another famous Bakhtinian specification of the chronotope of the ancient Greek novel, "an alien world in adventure time,"[17] is also applicable to the novels by Bankim and Mapu, as well as, importantly enough, to Pushkin: The protagonists go through their adventures and perform heroic feats of fidelity outside their home—that is, outside the world with which they themselves are familiar. In Bankim, the Rajput Singh reaches Bengal, later to be taken captive by the Patan attackers. In Mapu, Amnon wanders through Assyria and the Mediterranean Basin. In Pushkin, Grinev takes off

for a "land unknown," a reference to the steppes of Orenburg. In all three novels, the alienation from home begins with the man: He is a wayfarer who finds shelter in the home of the young woman and her parents. However, it soon turns out that this home is not secure: Fortresses are destroyed, and homes are inundated with spies.

Mapu and Bankim had not, of course, begun from scratch: The experience of all of European literature was at their disposal. However, neither of them had read Pushkin. Bankim's European language was English, while Mapu, in addition to Hebrew, Yiddish, and Aramaic, read only German and French.

Bankim and Pushkin had read novels by Sir Walter Scott. In principle, Mapu should also have been able to read these novels (the first French edition of Sir Walter Scott's collected works was published in 1827). But there is no mention of Sir Walter Scott in Mapu's complete collected letters (even though Mapu, like other Jewish intellectuals of his circle, took pride in the books he had read in different European languages, which were none too easily available in Kovno. He also liked to share his impressions with friends.) Mentioned instead are Eugène Sue and Alexandre Dumas.[18]

We may assume that Sir Walter Scott could not have served as the common source for all three novelists. Most probably, the three did not have any one common source.

But interest in pasts of the "national" kind roved about in the air, so to speak, in European literature of the first half of the 19th century. In addition to the novels by Sir Walter Scott, we may also mention *Yuri Miloslavsky* and *Roslavlev* by Mikhail Zagoskin; *La chronique du temps de Charles IX* by Prosper Mérimée, *Cinq mars* by Alfred de Vigny; and *I Promessi Sposi* by Alessandro Manzoni, as well as the later novels by Dumas, Stevenson, and De Coster. As Nathan Tamarchenko has shown,[19] their plots can be traced back to the ancient Greek model: beautiful and faithful lovers, besieged towns (alternatively: chateaux or fortresses), storms and fires, robbers and pirates, captivity, trial, occasionally even execution miraculously not completed, and so on.

The difference between the adventure-historical European novel of the 19th century and its ancient Greek prototype consists in that, in the historical novel, fictional characters, while remaining private individuals, against their own will find themselves drawn into historical cataclysms, and sometimes into games involving significant political stakes. Along with the fictional literary protagonists, well- known historical figures appear or are mentioned along the periphery of the plot (in Pushkin these are the Empress Catherine and Pugachev; in Mapu this is King Hezekiah, and in Bankim it is Aurangzeb). But it is precisely the private individuals who, thanks to their integrity and fidelity, as well as thanks to fortunate accidents through which Providence manifests itself—make the advance of history come true.

Another important element: In the 19th-century adventure-historical novel, which has internalized the experience of the Enlightenment, there is always a contrast between the chronotopes of nature and of civilization: The first encounter between the protagonists who belong to different social strata, and occasionally, as in Bankim, even to different nationalities (but still to the same religion and caste)—always takes place in the bosom of nature, to which artificial barriers between people are alien. Such barriers can only be erected by culture.

And finally, the last and the most important: Unlike the ancient Greek novels, the world of the novels by Mapu and Bankim is exotic, but not entirely foreign to the reader. Mapu and Bankim set their adventures not simply against an intriguing historical background, but situate them specifically during the periods when their nations enjoyed cultural and political independence. Even then life was far from ideal, the war against external enemies and the struggle against schemers within one's own house never let Mapu's and Bankim's protagonists lead quiet lives. And yet, their personalities have about them a vividness, wholeness, and nobility that were apparently in short supply for the contemporaries of Mapu and Bankim. In this respect the novels by Mapu and Bankim doubtless had not only entertainment in view, but also performing a pedagogic and political

function as their goal. Abundant testimony has been preserved about the way in which Mapu's compatriots and younger contemporaries, the Jews of the Russian Empire, responded to his novel. Here is one of them:

> It is hard to convey the impression created upon us by the first Jewish novel, *Ahavat Tziyon* (*Love of Zion*) by A. Mapu. From a uniformly dusty, penny counting and mercantile, tormentingly oppressive [...] atmosphere we were suddenly transferred by a wizard's hand into an indescribably beautiful land—into Palestine of the time of the luxurious flowering of her culture and poetry, into the Golden Age of Hezekiah and the Prophet Isaiah. Awe-inspiring views opened before our eyes. Fields with tall stalks of wheat and rye, alternating with mountains covered with grapevines [...] While in Jerusalem, [...] the royal residence with its gold gilded Temple upon the Mount of Moriah and its fortress on Zion, with its tall walls and towers, royal palaces and princely chambers, there, too, life is seething, beating like a fountain, even though it is more refined [...] What is this: a dreamer's delirium, the fruit of idle fantasizing? Where did these wonderful views come from, these vivid colors, these people mighty in body and spirit who love life, drawing full handfuls from it? But no! This is no fantasy, no delirium. These are all real images, familiar landscapes, and our own people, taken whole and live from the Bible itself! These are authentic Jews! But if *they* are Jews, then who are *we*?... (From the memoirs of Abraham Paperna)[20]

This is the same situation that the British sociologist Ronald Dore dubbed "the indigenization of the second generation."[21] Such, according to Dore's data, is a universal phenomenon occurring in non-Western cultures under strong European influence: The first generation of national intellectuals (the "fathers") undergo a process of modernization through westernization, while the second generation (the "children") paradoxically carry on the modernization process at the same time as their return to national tradition (language, clothing, history, cuisine, religion, and so on). Martin Albrow argues that indigenization is one of the forms of resistance of the national elite to the spread of Western colonialism and to the attempts to foist Western cultural products upon the local culture.[22] This phenomenon is apparently common and typical of cultures subject to dominant Western influences. In intercultural contact, a mutual activity takes place, one of westernization and indigenization. As a result, a fragile composite combination appears of local traditions and objectives with ideas and tools borrowed from the West.[23] These processes are not accomplished just once in time; they are rather reminiscent of waves or cycles. They can trade places and repeat.

National intellectuals in other, prima facie considerably more comfortable cultures also turned to history and folklore for this purpose. Pondering issues of nationalism and national pride, the young Pushkin wrote: "We have a language of our own; take heart! Customs, history, songs, fairy tales, and more."[24] What did Pushkin mean when he appealed to courage? I think he meant the same thing as Mapu and Bankim: "we" are not second-class citizens; "we" have nothing to be ashamed of before Europe. On the contrary, we have reason to be proud. In the history of "belated" literatures, historical adventure novels were something resembling a collective national psychotherapy. This is exactly how they were perceived by their contemporaries.

Here the notion of "imaginary communities," a term from Benedict Anderson, must necessarily come to mind.[25] Nation is an "imaginary community," a construct, a projection, while the tools for its construction, according to Anderson, are schools, the mass media, and historical novels. National identity is not an objective given, but rather a narrative and pedagogical projection, as Homi Bhabha emphasized.[26] The existence of a people is inseparable from its construction, and one of the most important elements of this existence-which-is-also-construction are the nostalgic narratives about events that took place in a different time (as well as, occasionally, in a different place). It is often far from clear or

certain whether this nostalgic feeling has any reality corresponding to it, or whether this virtual past, this "supposed historical beginning" ever existed in fact. And this is really not important (for a novel, even a historical one, this is in principle unimportant). That's why Mapu and Bankim both relied on the progeny of Western civilization, the genre of the adventure novel, in order to shape and fortify the national self-consciousness of their "belated" peoples.

Notes

[1] Viktor Zhirmunsky, "On the Study of Comparative Literature," *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 13 (1967), p. 1.
[2] Cf. Claudio Guillen, Challenge of Comparative Literature, trans. Cola Franzen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); first Spanish edition 1985. For the use of V. Zhirmunsky's typological ideas, see Beata Cieszynska, "Work-in-Progress: Iberia-Slavonic Comparative Research in Portugal and in the World," *Iberian and Slavonic Cultures: Contact and Comparison*, ed. Beata Cieszynska (Lisbon: CompaRes, 2007).
[3] Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: La literature au second degre* (Paris: Seuil, 1992). Genette suggested distinguishing between "intertextuality" (connotations, allusions, and quotes) and "architextuality" or the similarity between texts independently of any contact.
[4] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
[5] Uzi Shavit, *Ba-alot Ha-shahar: Shirat Ha-haskalah: Mifgash im Moderniut* (At Dawn: The Poetry of the Haskalah: An Encounter with Modernity) (in Hebrew: Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1966), p. 10. Here, as elsewhere throughout this article, unless otherwise noted, translation of primary sources into English is mine—H.R.
[6] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977).
[7] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
[8] See Harriet Murav, *Identity Theft: The Jew in Imperial Russia and the Case of Avraam Uri Kovner* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and John Stratton, *Coming out Jewish: Constructing Ambivalent Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
[9] Nathan Tamarchenko, "'Kapitanskaya dochka' Pushkina i Zhanr Avanutyurno-Istoricheskogo romana" (The Captain's Daughter by Pushkin and the Genre of the Adventure-Historical Novel, in Russian), *Russian Literature Journal* 53 (1999).
[10] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981).
[11] See the novel's English translation in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Durgeshnandini*. Trans. Arunava Sinha (Noida: Random House India, 2010).
[12] See Sergei Serebryany, *Roman v Idijskoy Kul'ture Novogo Vremeni* (The Novel in the Indian Culture of the Modern Period, in Russian) (Moscow: Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvenny Universitet, 2003), p. 139.
[13] The Hebrew location normally rendered as "Bethlehem" in English versions of the biblical text, where this place name first appears. In the present article we want to convey as close a sense as possible to the original sounds and rhythms of the various names, both geographic and personal, that the first novel ever written in Hebrew uses; this is why we deviate from the familiar English rendition, aiming for a transliteration of the Hebrew instead.
[14] Abraham Mapu, *Kol Kitvei Avraham Mapu* (Abraham Mapu's Collected Writings, in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1953).

[15] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); Dan Miron, *Ben chazon ve-emet* (Between Vision and Truth, in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1979), pp. 112-118; Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Discourse in India* (Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[16] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," p. 103.
[17] Ibid., p. 101.
[18] Benzion Dinur, ed., *Michtavei Mapu* (Mapu's Letters, in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1970), p. 24.
[19] Tamarchenko, "'Kapitanskaya dochka' Pushkina i Zhanr Avanutyurno-Istoricheskogo romana."
[20] Avraam Paperna, "Iz Nikolayevskoy Epohi," *Yevrey v Rossii: 19 Vek* (From the Nicholaevan Era, The Jew in Russia: The 19th Century, in Russian) (Moscow: Novoje Literaturnoje Obozrenije, 2000), p. 145.
[21] Ronald Dore, "Unity and Diversity in Contemporary World Culture," *Expansion of International Society*, ed. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 420-421.
[22] Martin Albrow, Foreword to *Globalization, Knowledge, and Society: Readings from International Sociology,* ed. Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King (London: Sages, 1990), p. 2.
[23] Robert Robertson and David Inglis, *Globalization, Social Theory, and Global Culture: Redefining Social Science* (London: The Open University Press, 2009).
[24] Alexander Pushkin, "O Franzuzskoy Slovesnosti," *Sobranije Sochinenij v Des'ati Tomach* (Notes on French literature), *Collected Works in Ten Volumes*, Vol. 6, in Russian) (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Hudozhestvennoy Literatury, 1962), p. 213.
[25] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991, 1st ed. 1983).
[26] Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," *Nation and Narration,* ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

Shekhinah on the "Plane of Immanence": An Intimation of the Indic Great Mother in the Hebraic Wholly Other

By Neela Bhattacharya Saxena

Introduction

There was a spectacular spruce in our lush green yard in Bangalore, India, where we lived for a couple of years, which in its sublime sapientiality and rooted splendor of arboreal tactility could very well represent the Tree of Life imagined in Kabbalah, the timeless "received" wisdom of the Jewish people; moreover, in the Indic non-dual soil and from a Devi worshipper's perspective, a composite metaphor for the Divine Feminine that envelopes the universe. A close look at this real and touchable green spruce reveals small saplings arising out of the branches in every direction filling the treescape with multiplicity and plural grandeur, its branches looking like wings of a massive bird, and in the mind's eye an image of the Tree of Life, a yantra so to speak of the Divine Mother. Our garden was replete with a serpent and made me often imagine it as a kind of Eden with a twist. In India the serpent has not been the villain as it remains sacred as a symbol of the Mother God in a land where, what I have described as Gynocentric[1] traditions could not be suppressed and serpentine adventures in consciousness are a staple of spiritual practices.

Playing with Gilles Deleuze's ideas, I would like in this article to map my image of the spruce as Shekhinah onto his "plane of immanence" and visualize the ten Sephirot of the Kabbalistic tree emanating from its upside down mystical shape in order to reveal, with a generous dose of ideas from Gershom Scholem and Rafael Patai,[2] my intimations of the Great Mother hidden deeply within the otherwise supremely patriarchal Judaic Father God. Situating Shekhinah on Deleuze's "Plane of Immanence," I am making an argument about the meaning of the Kabbalistic tree that has been commented on by myriad scholars, and according to both Elliot Wolfson and Moshe Idel the tradition is fundamentally "multivocal" and "polychromatic."[3] Wolfson characterizes Kabbalah as having both continuity and a certain kind of "essence,"[4] an idea that lends itself to my understanding of the Great Mother having a fluid essence beyond thought (I use the word essence as liquid flavor[5] or "rasa" in Sanskrit that hints at synesthesia) that manifests in multiple aesthetic forms taking shape in the human imagination. I also take my cue from a more recent work of Daniel Matt, who clearly writes in his introduction to *The Essential Kabbalah*: *The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* that, "The rabbinic concept of Shekhinah, divine immanence, blossoms into the feminine half of God, balancing the patriarchal conception that dominates the Bible and the Talmud" (1).

I argue that perhaps there remained in the broader consciousness of the Hebrew people hints of a double-edged Godhead after all, both masculine and feminine, albeit within the *Nistar* or hidden dimensions. Following my intimations I can say that this deity's feminine face marks the mystery of interiority that can be a source of wholeness in a (post)feminist and hopefully, postnihilist Western world where theologians speak of *After God* and the *Weakness of God*, where "interfaith" dialogue via hidden dimensions of religions maybe a crucial component in the reduction of religious absolutism and violence.

In the Indic milieu, the immanent divinity was not necessarily opposed in a binary struggle against a transcendental Wholly Other; in fact, opposition between transcendence and immanence has been nullified by the very concrete presence of the Great Mother. The cosmic vision of the tantric path recognizes Shakti as the permeating presence of the Divine Feminine with no borders between body and spirit, here and hereafter as it is evident in a hymn like *Saundarya Lahari* that the tradition ascribes to Shamkara, the *Advaita* philosopher. In an article, "Seeing Devi in the *Saundarya Lahari,*" Francis Clooney writes that it is "part of a tradition that prizes the material and the bodily as well as the spiritual and intellectual external beauty..." (34).[6]

The tree too remains a sacred entity in the interconnected realm where the Mother, who presides over a philosophical non-dual unity of everything that is, still reigns supreme. In contrast, Western metaphysics and theology have historically operated under the shadow of the Name of the Father, as the Lord of creation, often distant from his created universe. However, more recently, on the wings of Nietzschean critique, what I may call the Name of the Woman has been appearing in disguises such as the return of pre-Socratic metaphysical flux,[7] emergence of difference and exploration of immanence or "chaosmology" in many thinkers including Gilles Deleuze as the overturning of metaphysics got under way, putting hypermasculine extreme rationalities under erasure via Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida.

Also, Jewish and Christian feminist theologians have been relentlessly questioning an undoubtedly masculine and Wholly Other Lord of creation who remains utterly separate from his created universe. For intriguing historical or cosmic reasons, philosophers of the last century took "the corporeal turn" and that has been continuing with Gilles Deleuze's last proclamation in "Immanence: A Life" that "Pure immanence is A LIFE, and nothing else" (171). Life for once can call itself life without resorting to anything beyond. So now we have the Deleuzian "Plane of immanence," which does not stand in a binary opposition to transcendence but is immanent to itself.

Here we have an approximation of an Indic non-dual world-view that I have described elsewhere within Indic philosophic tradition as the Samkhya, Yoga, Tantra continuum, which is a sort of divine "materialism," a Gynocentric matrix, so to speak. In this view duality has to be posited so that multiplicity has a distinct place within a non-dual non-theist "divinity" where male and female are symbolically and inextricably intermingled with each other in sexual embrace. I ought to declare that this is a personal, spiritual, as well as a scholarly foray into the feminine divine in unsuspected places. It is from the perspective of my Gynocentric, or Mother God centered traditions that I have been searching for the *Absent Mother God of the West*, title of my current book project.

As I began to look at the story of the lost goddess and its implications for both women and men, I was convinced that the Name of the Woman was quite convincingly erased from the space of the divine in the Western world. The controversies surrounding Raphael Patai's book about *The Hebrew Goddess* seem to attest to the implicit idea that monotheism(s) is "monochroamtic" and from the mainstream perspective definitely about a single Father God.[8] Around this time I stumbled upon the figure of Shekhinah and became curious about her, but one can imagine my utter amazement when Frederique Apffel-Marglin, a scholar friend who also is a practitioner of Kabbalah told me that Gershom Scholem, the most famous scholar of Jewish mysticism, has compared Jewish Shekhinah to Hindu Shakti.

Here I quote from Scholem's book *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*; when describing the two Shekhinahs, Scholem writes: "One might almost say, to use the terms of Indian religion, that the upper Shekhinah is the Shakti of the latent God; it is entirely active energy, in which what is concealed within God is externalized" (174). Although Scholem was quite clear about the profound differences, the admission of similarities itself can be a profound "affront" to patriarchal traditions as Braj Sinha argues in a sustained development of this idea in "Feminization of the Divine: Sakti and Shekhinah in Tantra and Kabbalah." I am interested in looking at this comparison to explore broader mythopoeic and philosophical implications and to reveal this hidden dimension for my own understanding of the feminine divine in world religions.

"In the beginning was the myth," says Hermann Hesse in the first lines of his first novel *Peter Camenzind*, but it is not just the Hindus, Greeks, and Germans whose souls according to him were "invested with poetic shapes"; rather, all people express their deepest intimations of the divine through mythic shapes although sometime they are hidden deep within religions that outwardly mistrust them. In spite of the Jewish tradition's ambivalent attitude, which is deeply diverse in itself, toward a decidedly feminine divine

figure, Shekhinah, whether she is truly divine or separate or merely a linguistic error, I experientially recognize in this figure intimations of the feminine divine.

From that imaginal perspective the shape of our Indian spruce as an upward pointing triangle could be seen as the masculine principle in both Kabbalah and Indic paths. I imaginatively turn this tree into a downward pointing triangle, and it then signifies the feminine in the Hindu tantra and, as it seems equally so in mystical Judaism. Together they make the interpenetrating double triangles, both the Star of David/Seal of Solomon and a basic Hindu yantra, symbolically signifying the divine unity of the feminine and the masculine principles.

Philosophical Immanence, the Divine Feminine, and Judaic Convergences

Bringing philosophy down to earth/Gaia requires many returns and re-imaginings. I might have just stumbled upon the figure of Shekhinah in Judaism, but as I searched deeper I discovered many cracks within that patriarchal narrative. In his ground-breaking book *The Hebrew Goddess*, Raphael Patai had proposed that the Mother Goddess/es was/were present from the very beginning in the Holy of the Holies. While the internal debate within Judaism about his claims are beyond the pale of this article, I am using Patai's work in conjunction with other arguments that hint at the feminine element within Jewish monotheism. In Jewish thought though the feminine must remain hidden as the story of Rabbi Akiba attests; only the most advanced of mystics can see her and live; others die, go mad, or become apostates. Such is the power of the sacred Shekhinah but what is this "She" doing in a resolutely patriarchal Judaism? To claim that there is a double-edged God in Judaism whose feminine face has always been there for the seekers to seek may construct heresy in the exoteric circles; however, as this seeker discovered mystical traditions bring you face to face with the feminine in inexplicable ways.

While I do recognize that talking about the feminine dimension of the Hebraic God is pretty close to anathema,[9] in this article I bring mythos and logos together to argue that Shekhinah can be mapped on the "Plane of Immanence" to claim that the feminine immanence remains hidden within the transcendental Name of the Father. Although the erasure of the Mother God was quite complete in the exoteric traditions of Judaism, the rich diversity of the tradition curiously retained the feminine dimension in the figure of Shekhinah, which remained seed-like until medieval Kabbalah began to flourish with the mysterious appearance of the Book of Zohar. It is not until the 13th century when Jewish Kabbalah will posit an elaborate Tree of Life, a diagram of the divine, replete with male and female sexual symbolism, quite reminiscent of Hindu/Buddhist tantric yantras/mandalas that will radically re-imagine the divine. Perhaps that feminine dimension is now reemerging as the new axial period is beginning to unfold in our collective consciousness. Although Indic tantric paths have developed the central role of the Divine Mother with more sophistication and nuance, Shekhinah retains the trace of the Great Mother, and Jewish Kabbalah looks strikingly similar to some aspects of the tantric paths that we will elaborate a little later.

Traditionally speaking, the opposition between transcendence and immanence has been the hallmark of both philosophy and religions of the West. There is a direct relationship between the obsession of Western metaphysics with the One over the many, the transcendental over the immanent and the Wholly Other, the Name of the Father of the Hebraic tradition that was often interpreted through the dominant lens of Hellenic Christianity. Philosophy in its Hellenic fear of the flesh created an abstract principle that can be accommodated in religious realms as the unmoved mover away from the reality of flux that pre-Socratics visualized as the prime reality of existence.

The Greek philosophical world itself was constructed to suit the needs of an idealist and imperialist Christian position that privileged a transcendental and universalized but decidedly masculine Other, even as the mythopoeic Greek religions and their goddesses

were erased under Christian homogeneity. In *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies,* Thomas McEvilley reorients the history of Greek thought as much more complex and fascinatingly "fractal" than the One obsessed readings of the same might suggest.

But in many of these philosophical dialogues the gender implications are missed because erasing the deeply ingrained suspicion of the woman's alterity may be the hardest problem to solve. Bodies are the most troubling to philosophy; actually most philosophy constructs its identity against bodies especially imaged in the female body. Feminist philosophers like Luce Irigaray have shown how without acknowledging the radical alterity of the woman and recognizing the erased divine feminine, the tradition remains hopelessly and dangerously patriarchal. Into this debate, Deleuze and Guattari have brought in their complex, "materialist," but in some ways deeply non-dual perspectives. Although they have made the tree a metaphor for that self-centered metaphysics that is being deconstructed and have introduced the rhizome as the image of multiplicity, we may be able to observe the Tree of Life of Kabbalah from their rhizomatic perspective to deconstruct the transcendental Other of Judaism. A tree does not need to be opposed to the rhizome if the tree is experienced in its fullness in the interconnected realm of human and arboreal interdependence.

Following Bergson, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, Deleuzian immanence is a plane where concepts are woven together in relation to each other without reverting to a transcendent authority or meaning giving prior structure. The Western exoteric traditions have had their sublime deity couched in their philosophical Logos, supremely rational with the fleshy and "material" feminine discarded on the wayside as an obstacle to the masculine path of salvation. Given the hierarchically organized dualities of mind and matter, spirit and flesh, that have always been gendered either graphically through the language of sinful flesh epitomized in women or simply taken for granted convergence of spirituality and masculinity since the biblical God's masculinity was unquestioned, immanence too has generally been suspect.

However, Spinoza had inaugurated the path of immanence within Western thought through his idea of a single substance that is not opposed to transcendence because there is nothing that is beyond. Spinoza, the "prince of philosophers" as Deleuze and Guattari described him, was cursed for apostasy with the *cherem* in a rare example of Jewish highhandedness, for daring to question the absolute transcendence of his God, in his imagining God and Nature as one. Spinoza who opposed Cartesian mind/body dualism was marked as a hated pantheist and in his idea of a divine substance, he might have had touched a raw nerve.

Since then via Nietzsche's pronouncement of the Death of God, immanence has returned to Western philosophy even while feminists have been protesting their fleshy characterization in the dualistic world of pure spirit of masculinity attempting to escape the fleshy claws of femininity. Nature that is generally feminized is immanent to itself according to Spinoza, and in his philosophy he rejects Cartesian dualism as well as the idealist philosophy's prime reliance on the existence of a separate realm of the mind. In Deleuze's thought all dualistic distinctions collapse, and a plane of immanence shines forth in its own light.

In "Immanence: A Life," Deleuze writes:

> Without consciousness the transcendental field would be defined as a pure plane of immanence since it escapes every transcendence of the subject as well as of the object. Absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, not *to* something; it does not depend on an object and does not belong to a subject. In Spinoza immanence is not immanence *to* substance, but substance and modes are in immanence....Pure immanence is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but immanence which is in nothing is itself a life. (170-171)

Deleuze gives examples of very young children: "They are traversed by an immanent life that is pure power and even beatitude through the sufferings and weaknesses" (172). And he insists on their singularity and describes "A life as an index of a multiplicity: art, event, a singularity, a life" and concludes, "Transcendence is always a product of consciousness" (172).

For me the figure of Shekhinah and the notion of this immanence converge. Immanence is indwelling and Shekhinah in her earliest manifestation is the indwelling presence of God. Scholem insists that she is not separate from God at this stage. Although this presence can be interpreted in an abstract sense, the images such as the cloud point to its embodiment. Now as an opening to the flowing and dynamic Shekhinah, I will quickly refer to Georgio Agamben's commentary on Deleuze who makes the Neoplatonic connection with emanation by making immanence flow in his essay "Absolute Immanence." Referring to "Spinoza's idea of an immanent cause in which agent and patient coincide," Agamben argues that

> Spinoza's immanent cause produces by remaining in itself, just like the emanational cause of the Neoplatonists. But the effects of Spinoza's immanent cause do not leave it, unlike those of the emanational cause. With a striking etymological figure that displaces the origin of the term "immanence" from manere ("to remain") to manare ("to flow out"), Deleuze returns mobility and life to immanence: "A cause is immanent when its effect is "immanate" in the cause, rather emanating from it. (157)

Kabbalah and an "Immanating" Shekhinah

Can we then play with the idea of an "immanating" Shekhinah? Before I look at all those fascinating appearances of the feminine in both essentialized and de-essentialized forms, let me talk about the Kabbalah where she appears supreme. In Kabbalah the most hidden and unknowable aspect of the divine is called En-sof or *Ain* that is nothingness, but at the same time this divine also permeates the universe through its attributes, which are symbolized in the ten Sephiroth. Scholem makes quite clear the crucial point that in *The Zohar*, the Sephiroth are "regarded not as the steps of a ladder between God and the world, but as various phases in the manifestation of the Divinity which proceed from and succeed each other," and he recognizes the problem with the traditional Hebraic Wholly Other and this Zoharic presentation: "The difficulty lies precisely in the fact that the emanations of the Sephiroth is conceived as a process which takes place *in* God and which at the same time enables man to perceive God" (Scholem, *Major,* 209). One can also see the resemblance here with Whitehead's process philosophy that according to Carol Christ, who uses it for feminist "thealogy" purposes, was influenced by Buddhism.[10]

Now to think of the Kabbalistic Tree, my imagined spruce above, in mythopoeic anthropomorphic terms that connects the human and non-human worlds in a cosmic giant, we will then see the body of Adam Kadmon, which is as if "a cosmic tree growing downward from its roots above" (*Zohar*, 33). Estelle Frankel the author of *Sacred Therapy* discusses the tradition of soul healing when the tzaddik is able to identify a particular human soul within Adam Kadmon and she refers to the Jewish legend: "Adam Kadmon was a being of light whose essence stretched from one end of the earth to the other, and whose soul contained all the particular souls, both male and female, who were destined to emerge from the primordial oneness" (132).

Adam Kadmon is also reminiscent of the idea of macranthropy or "the universe as a huge anthropomorphic being" that appears in the idea of Purusha in the Rigveda; Thomas McEvilley who connects Indic and Greek philosophies in *The Shape of Ancient Thought* traces its origin in Mesopotamian sources: "In terms of Mesopotamian cultural history,

macranthropy is an aspect of the idea of a correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm" (26). The appearance of such a corresponding idea in Jewish thought points not so much to diffusion or influences as the human imagination's capacity to map its own existence onto the cosmic plane. Here is a mythic image of embodiment that can be planted on the Deleuzian plane.

Daniel Matt, the translator of the Zohar, argues that it has been influenced by the philosophies of Jewish Neoplatonic and Aristotelian teachings as well as by the thoughts of Avicenna and Maimonides for whom the ultimate reality of God is Ein Sof, which is inaccessible to thought. But the Zohar focuses on the attributes where "God thinks, feels, responds and is affected by the human realm. He and She comprise the Divine androgyne; their romantic and sexual relationship is one of the most striking features of the Zohar" (22). Also, Eitan Fishbane elaborates Moshe Idel's contention that, "The Kabbalists did not consider the divine life of the *sefirot* to be unknowable...they claimed to have detailed knowledge and understanding of the inner depths of the divine realm, and they treated the sefirotic system as a map of the divine domain with which they were intimately familiar" (Fishbane, "Jewish Mystical Hermeneutics," 98).

The Zoharic tree is organized in three triads. Along with Hokhmah/wisdom, the male aspect and Binah/understanding, the female aspect, that are the first two arising out of Keter, the triad, are the highest sefirot. It is interesting that Moses Cordovero, a 16th-century Kabbalist comments: "the Crown itself is comprised of Male and Female, for one part of it is Male, the other Female" (qtd. in Patai, *Hebrew Goddess,* 125), but Scholem explains it more philosophically:

> In the Zohar, as well as in the Hebrew writings of Moses de Leon, the transformation of nothing into Being is frequently explained by the use of one particular, symbol, that of the primordial point.... The primordial point from Nothing is the mystical center around which the theogonical processes crystallize. Itself without dimension and as it were placed between Nothing and Being, the point serves, to illustrate what the Kabbalists of the thirteenth century call "the Origin of Being", that "Beginning" of which the first word of the Bible speaks. (Scholem, *Major,* 218)

This point is called the bindu or the dot within many Indic tantric systems.

From this point then the tree moves toward its inevitable plurality and creates the multiplicity of the universe in splendid metaphors all the way down to "the 'great sea' of Shekhinah, in which God unfolds His totality" (Scholem, *Major,* 220). Ann Williams-Heller who explicates the divine mystery of the Kabbalistic Tree in relation to other mystical traditions of the world in her book *Kabbalah: Your Path to Inner Freedom*, points out the idea of change and movement inherent in the diagram: "As the Tree branches emanate along the Path of Lightening Flash, the first and fundamental Law of Life—the Law of Change or progression—is evident. Simply stated, this law decrees that each manifest thing moves along its own pattern and changes as it moves" (24).

At once then philosophically we are in the pre-Socratic world of a Heraclitus and Empedocles where flux is not yet seen as merely the material nature of the universe diametrically opposed to the stasis of the One. McEvielly points out, "Mediating between the One and the many along lines suggested by Anaximenes' hints of process-monism, Heraclitus developed the position that the permanent element in nature is change; the unity of things is the unity of an ongoing process, not the unity of a static Other" (36). We can see how the Hebrew mystics are making the transcendent Other move from his unmoved space into the universe of dynamic change.

Its complex interpretations are an effort to reconcile the unity of the Divine with the multiplicity of this representation. It is interesting to notice that the direct line in the middle row connects the crown Keter with Malkhut, the last sephirah and the translator writes that

"the last sefirah, Shekhinah, the Divine Presence, includes them all" and he cites this cryptic passage, denoting a clearly feminine image, from *the Zohar* (1:32b):

> Three emerge from one; one stands in three;
> Enters between two; two suckle one;
> One suckles many sides.
> Thus all is one (Matt, 21).

Before the lower Shekhinah who is the opening to the divine from below, Binah must be understood whom Scholem describes as the active upper Shekhinah. But Binah is also called "Who" as she is beyond thought and in most Kabbalists forbid reaching that far into the top. "Deuteronomy 22.7 is cited as the proof text: 'Let the mother go; the children you may take.' The Divine Mother is a cosmic question; Her children, the seven lower sefirot, would seem more attainable" (Matt, 38). Scholem explains that this "who" or "Mi" is a question that cannot be answered and for humans "this knowledge can be no more than an occasional and intuitive flash which illuminates the human heart..." (Scholem, *Major*, 221). Perhaps the Divine Feminine had to be kept secret because her power destabilizes the delusions of grandeur that patriarchy likes to uphold for its men.

The sexual imagery employed to unfold the divine creativity and mystery is quite vivid. Scholem writes, "the ray which emerges from Nothing is, as it were, sown into the 'celestial mother', i.e. into the divine Intellect, out of whose womb the Sefiroth spring forth, as King and Queen, son and daughter." Scholem is quite aware of the problem of such mythic imagination vis-à-vis Jewish exoteric tradition as he says next: "Dimly we perceive behind this mystical images the male and female gods of antiquity, anathema as they were to the pious Kabbalist" (Scholem, *Major*, 227). Scholem's unease with mythic Kabbalah was noted by Patai who unlike Scholem does not consider myth making as a primitive aspect of human creativity, but describes mythopoesis as a supreme activity of the human imagination.[11]

Now the lower Shekhinah is conceived in dual terms in mythic Kabbalah. Although as we will see Shekhinah as the presence of God existed from the very beginning as Scholem explains, "Nowhere is there a dualism, with the Shekhinah, as the feminine, opposed to the 'Holy one, praise be to Him,' as the masculine element in God. The introduction of this idea was one of the most important and lasting innovations of Kabbalism" (Scholem, *Major*, 229). In his later book *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, Scholem devotes an entire chapter of more than 50 pages titled "Shekhinah: The Feminine Element in Divinity" where he traces the trajectory of feminine dimension in meticulous detail.

While Scholem acknowledges Wisdom or Sophia of the Book of Proverbs and Job, is the first of created beings, he dismisses her femininity as simply a function of the Hebrew language: "The feminine names for Wisdom, which can be quite simply explained as resulting from the feminine gender of the corresponding nouns in Hebrew and Greek, cannot ultimately be cited as proof of the female character of the figure itself" (Scholem, *Mystical*, 143). But he shows from the time of Philo of Alexandria that Wisdom takes on a decidedly female character. Philo describes Shekhinah as the wife of God!

On the other hand in *The Hebrew Goddess* Raphael Patai establishes the history of the tangible presence of a feminine divine figure as a concrete albeit transformed presence. Although controversial, he points to the continuity of the Canaanite goddesses among the Hebrews and their struggle to abolish them; he demonstrates how from the very beginning the Wholly Other had a split personality and the "presence" or the dwelling of God among his people was indicated in feminine terms. Not only that, Hokhma, later Sophia, as a feminine hypostasis is present at the moment of creation; either as the first created daughter who helps God with the creation or as his female aspect sometime separate,

sometime simply his other self is present in the biblical account. Patai shows her transformation:

> Following the death of the "spirit of idolatry" in the days of Nehemiah, the Hebrew goddess succeeded in surviving. She underwent, to be sure, an astounding metamorphosis, but then that, too, is the mark of a living deity. In one of her manifestations she penetrated—in what period we can only conjecture—the rebuilt sanctuary as a female Cherub, poised in marital embrace with her male partner in the dark cell of the Holy of Holies. In another, she became the manifestation of God's presence, the Shekhinah—a feminine name just as God's is masculine—the loving, rejoicing, motherly, suffering, mourning, and, in general, emotion-charged aspect of the deity. (Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 32)

The history of her reemergence as a separate and powerful female deity in the 13th century onwards with a shrunken masculine deity is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Jewish religious history. In this new incarnation Shekhinah/Matronit goes into exile with her children, and until she is reunited with her beloved neither humanity nor the male aspect of the divine pair can be at peace. Quite characteristically though, the male God in the meantime had embraced Lilith, the evil female personification, as according to Kabbalah, he was unable to exist without female connection![12]

Scholem thinks this feminine divine satisfies a "fundamental and primal need, uncovering one of the perennial religious images latent in Judaism" and describes it as "an eruption of the feminine into the sphere of the Godhead" (Scholem, *Mystical*, 160-161). Shekhinah becomes a midway space between transcendence and immanence, but above all she symbolizes the dynamic movement within the Godhead. Scholem finds "the internal dynamics within the world of the Sephiroth, where the lowest Sephirah can rise up to the highest. Within the godhead, there takes place a secret movement upward no less than downward, and it is the Shekhinah in particular that is the instrument of that motion" (Scholem, *Mystical*, 170).

Once again we have the dynamic aspect of the feminine, which belies the idea that feminine is always passive in the Kabbalah and therefore essentialized and in some ways can be used against feminist arguments. There is no doubt that she does appear as a receptive element in many Kabbalist texts, but unless we mark receptivity as something negative, there is no reason to fight such symbolic representations of female existence in the world of the divine as well as human. We do need to remember unlike Indic Shakti, as Wolfson notices that in this system the female does remain derivative of the male!

One can see that in the upper (Binah) and lower Shekhinah (Malkhut) both active and passive aspects of the divine feminine are concentrated as potencies. It is in this context that Scholem makes the comparison with Indic Shakti mentioned briefly above:

> What is the meaning of this double Shekhinah within the framework of the dynamic unity of divine manifestations and emanations? Two conceptions of the principle of femininity are realized and expressed in these images. As the upper Shekhinah of the Sefirah of Binah, femininity is the full expression of ceaseless creative power—it is receptive, to be sure, but is spontaneously and incessantly transformed into an element that gives birth, as the stream of eternally flowing divine life enters into it. One might almost say, to use the terms of Indian religion, that the upper Shekhinah is the Shakti of the latent God; it is entirely active energy, in which what is concealed within God is externalized. (Scholem, *Mystical,* 174)

It is also important to recognize that Shekhinah is not simply a nurturing mother or an adoring beloved but also a dark and destructive force. While her connection with the Other Side (Sitra Ahra) may appear strange and unacceptable to the exoteric ear, it is entirely

consistent with the mystic and ultimately non-dual concept of the Divine in whose totality the so-called evil also has a clear place. Estelle Frankel shows in her book how "nonmystical Judaism's concern with separating good from evil is turned on its face in the mystical tradition's nondual view of the divine" (160) and she cites Isaiah 45:6-7, "There is nothing outside of me. I am YHVH and there is nothing else. Forming light and creating darkness; making shalom [peace] and creating the evil. I am YHVH (the infinite one) who does all these" (224).

However, Frankel points out how this absolute non-dual pronouncement was "sanitized by the rabbis, who, when editing this verse for the liturgy, replaced the phrase "creating the evil" with the euphemism "creating all things'" (238). Kabbalah's Shekhinah at once belongs to the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, which is also called the Tree of Death. Scholem explains: "Insofar as the Shekhinah is identified with the Tree of Death, one may speak of it as having a trace of the chthonian element (i.e., pertaining to the underworld) so often displayed by the Great Mother in mythology, and also appropriate to the Shekhinah, seen as a symbol of the esoteric interior of the 'earth'" (Scholem, *Mystical*, 190).

Scholem also points out what for him is an "extremely daring notion" that demonic figures of Lilith and Naamah are born from her.[13] He cites a passage from the Zohar (I, 223b), that reminds him of Indian mythology, where Shekhinah is called the "wisdom of Solomon":

> A thousand mountain loom before her, and all are like a puff of wind to her. A thousand mighty streams rush past her, and she swallows them in one swallow. Her nails reach out to a thousand and seventy sides; her hands grasp on to twenty-five thousand sides; nothing eludes her rule on this side or the other [i.e., the *Sitra Ahra*]. How many thousands of potencies of judgment are grasped in her hair.... (Scholem, *Mystical,* 191-192)

Intimations of Tantric Shakti/Indic Great Goddess

As a Kali lover I can sense in the above image a thousand-handed Mahadevi; therefore the affinity of Shekhinah with the Great Mother is clear to me except perhaps vigorous protests from traditional Judaism denying this semblance. Patriarchy does not like such intrusion into its rock solid realms and as Braj Sinha argues, as he traces the development of both Shakti and Shekhinah[14] that they feminize the transcendent within their respective traditions. I would add with Deleuze that they are markers of the "plane of immanence" or non-duality that point to the Divine Feminine beyond the duality of transcendence and immanence.

Also, these are only intimations, and we cannot make clear connections with complex figures like Kali, the fiercest and highly developed form of the Indic Great Goddess. Before we go deeper into these esoteric connections we must acknowledge that bringing India into the dialogue is a risky business, and we ought to remember the history of imperial adventures in India where racism and sexism constructed a totally devalued Other, especially through the figure of Kali.[15] Immanence within a dualistic world was associated with religions that are primitive that remain enmeshed with nature and are unable to recognize or unaware of the transcendental and therefore higher dimensions of consciousness and the divine. India's goddesses along with what were named folk animisms were seen as grotesque remnants of a degenerate religion by both Christian missionaries and rationalists alike, even as glorification of its more abstract advaita illusionism and from my perspective androcentric spiritualism continued in other quarters.

Colonizing Europe's Enlightenment projects had to devalue all that is associated with the feminine to project the superior nature of Western religion and philosophy as the hallmark of masculinist instrumental rationality imposed on ancient spaces like India.

However, for reasons that are yet to be explored fully, that effort did not fully succeed in India as the culture resisted assimilation, perhaps under the auspices of the Great Mother. Incidentally, how can we forget Judaism's treatment under the proselytizing gaze of the Christian and imperial West that saw in its internal other the most dangerous enemy, but that story has been told in many other places. Once we remove the racist and sexist marks off the face of the Other, supremacist ideas begin to crumble revealing a more spectacular humanity and its diverse engagement with the mystery of life. With this caveat, we now turn to more specific Indic paths.

Although diverse tantric paths in India were and remain difficult and esoteric, perhaps precisely because of the centrality and supremacy of the feminine, they attempt to solve the Samkhya duality of Prakriti and Purusha on the one hand and remove the "illusion" element of *Advaita Vedanta* on the other, marking from my perspective a "realized" non-duality.[16] We ought not to forget though that in India neither the esoteric and exoteric nor the "religious" and the philosophic were terribly separated and scholars have spoken of all kinds of "permeable membranes." Myriad presence of the Mahadevi remains visible as the magic of mythic imagination that created hundreds of forms celebrating divine "rupa, rasa, gandha" (form, fluidity, fragrance) effortlessly coexisted with abstract Upanishadic philosophic non-dual darshanas.

In Indic "polytheistic" imagination[17] divine triads and tetrads are constantly generated and given hundreds of manifestations depending on the time and region of the country since the Divine Mother presides over diversity. The divine duality of masculine and feminine quintessentially capture the manifold of the universe as it is eternally created, preserved, and withdrawn within the Godhead in a cyclical and timeless moment. Tantric or not, Indic paths rarely visualize a single male deity, and Shiva and Shakti remain incomplete without the other. Patai too refers to Hindu traditions in connection with his discussion of various mythic tetrads Shiva and Parvati and their loving unity. When lower Shekhinah/daughter/Matronit is separated from the King/son, he loses his power. Patai writes:

> Invisible, but no less painfully felt, was the consequent impairment of the King's power, an idea reminiscent of the notion of Hindu mythology that the male god (Shiva) is powerful only when united with the goddess (Shakti), but is unable even to stir without her. As expressed repeatedly in Kabbalistic theosophy: "The King [i.e., God] without the Matronit is not a king, is not great, and is not praised...." Therefore, the separation of the King and the Matronit was a calamity for both the people of Israel and the godhead itself (Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 129).

He further develops the "analogies between the Kabbala" and Hinduism "which it resembles more than any other" according to his *The Jewish Mind* (136) and refers to scholars who connect Song of Songs with the tantric traditions (*The Hebrew Goddess*, 150).

We can also see other non-iconic and non-mythic similarities between the two traditions. To anyone familiar with yantras/mandalas of Hindu/Buddhist tradition the entire Kabbalist Tree will appear extraordinarily similar. Scholem too notices the similarity:

> Both the Sephirotic tree and the Shriyantra—which make similar use of primal, ancient symbols of the triadic form—can be taken above all as depictions of the self-unfolding of the transcendent and unknowable...just as in Kabbalah *Hokhmah* emanates nine *Sephiroth* from within itself, so in the Indian doctrine the transcendent and unknowable in the invisible primal point are represented in the Shriyantra diagram by nine interpenetrating triangles, representing male and female potencies of the god and of his Shakti" (Scholem, *Mystical,* 195).

Not only that, contemplating the line between Keter to Malkhut, I see that the line can be the central channel of the tantric Chakra system. Suddenly the tree looks like a map of consciousness with ida and pingala on the two sides, and breathing up and down via another Jewish mystic Abulafia whose system resembled the breathing exercises of Yoga according to Scholem,[18] one can connect Shekhinah the Kundalini with keter through deep breathing exercises.

I was also struck by the similarity of linguistic mysticism within the two traditions and the notion of the *alef* as feminine; this destabilizes the idea of Logos as masculine and has Indic counterparts in the idea of sacred speech as goddess Vac[19] or Saraswati. In "The speech of Being, the Voice of God: the Phonetic Mysticism in the Kabbalah of Asher ben David and his Contemporaries" Eitan Fishbane writes:

> In contrast to the classical rabbinic model of Creation, wherein divine speech creates something outside of itself, this early kabbalistic model presents the cosmic unfolding as *a speech act in itself*. The auto-emanation of the divine Being is thus the vocalization of a silent cosmic reality. God does not just speak the word of Creation. God *is* the word of Creation. (491-492)

But what is most curious is that "metaphysical alef," the first *Sefirah*, which is the source of this alphabetic creation is most emphatically described as feminine. According to Fishbane, Rabbi Asher emphasizes:

> It would seem that the *alef* should have been placed last in the order of the [Hebrew] alphabet, insofar as she is more inward and hidden than all the other letters. [She was placed first, however,] so as to reveal her supreme stature, as well as to make known that all who come after her suckle (*yoneket*) [energy] from her. From her all become blessed (*mitbarkhot*) and all are sustained, and through her every letter can be formed. If you flip her in all directions, you shall be able to build each and every letter from her. (496)

Anticipating the objection to this feminine presence, Fishbane first gives the usual explanation of Hebrew pronouns in the footnote but is compelled to explain:

> Though it perhaps goes without saying, the female terminology here associated with the *alef* is primarily a reflection of the fact that Hebrew lacks a neuter form. That said, however, the usage of the term *yoneket* (suckles/nurses from) has clear gendered implications, and one could certainly argue that the cosmic *alef* assumes a feminine posture vis-à-vis the lower *sefirot*. (498)

We learn that this supernal *alef* takes on the shape of Shekhinah who completes the Tetragrammaton and makes the human ear hear the cosmic sound as Fishbane explains:

> In the human encounter with the *Shekhinah*, cosmic Being has lifted the masks of its layered concealment and has entered fully into the revealed domain of perception. In the closure of the four-letter Name, the mysterious inwardness of primordiality rises to the surface of mystical consciousness, and the Word of God is made, at long last, audible to human ears. (514)

It must be understood that like other mystical traditions, Jewish people too consider this a dangerous force and hearing or "seeing" the Shekhinah could kill the unprepared; however, paradoxically again, not unlike Hindu or Islamic mysticism, this symbolic or real death will result in the ecstatic communion with the divine: "The death that will theoretically ensue from an auditory experience of the divine voice is characterized by Nahmanides as one of

devekut, a technical kabbalistic term for ecstatic union of the human being with the Deity" (Fishbane, 520).

But the similarities do end at some point although as Sinha concludes both Indic tantra and Jewish Kabbalah offer "a unique conceptual framework designed to affirm the bisexuality of the Godhead without discernment of either a metaphysical or ontological duality" (38). However, in India the sophisticated development of the idea of the divine feminine continued while patriarchal monotheisms effectively erased the feminine from the space of the divine from visible spaces. In Indic religions myriad forms of the divine give each individual human being her or his *ishta devata* or preferred "form" that fits their karmic make up, and from one to two to many have been given both mythic and philosophic vestments. Whether one chooses Shaiva, Vaishnava, Ganapatya, or any other path to focus, divine mother is always present in some form; also, given the active nature of the very idea of Shakti, Indic ways make the feminine principle the active force in the universe.

However, Kali and her forms as mahavidyas in the Shakta path is probably unique within even Indic ways because she is the most complex development within the tantric traditions where she takes the center stage as the naked splendor of ultimate reality, as Brahman herself. In the Shakta tradition Mahakali[20] is the ultimate reality and in her manifest form is the active manifestation and creates Shiva as her playmate who remains eternally quiescent and can be described as a passive witness. Scholem very clearly points out the differences between the two traditions including this most important one: "The notion of the masculine as purely inactive and passive, an idea that seems intrinsic to the doctrine of Shakti, is totally alien to Kabbalah, in which the male is perceived as active and flowing" (Scholem, *Mystical,* 196). This idea of ideal masculinity as a profound quiescence/Shiva is utterly unique in the usual militaristic and aggressive formation of the male in world cultures and can have profound implications that I cannot develop here.

Since no reference to tantra can ignore its popular conjunction with sexuality[21] that Sinha also discusses, I will briefly refer to two articles published in a volume, dedicated to many other similarities, titled *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism* that look at tantric and Kabbalistic sexuality that are themselves deeply diverse, controversial, and fundamentally esoteric, but they reveal the ambivalence of patriarchal Judaism toward the feminine. In "Union and Unity in Hindu Tantrism," Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam explores Kashmir Shaiva tantra and writes that "ritualized sexual union is systematically sanctified within a nondualistic perspective, precisely as a means to individual liberation. For here unity is understood rather as the absence of oppositions between *moksa* and *samsara*, an ineffable state including both transcendence and immanence that the Trika philosophical system...designates by the term *anuttara"* (196).

In "Union and Unity in the Kabbalah," Charles Mopsik also discusses "copulation as a mystical experience" but points out the radical differences due to different world-views and from my perspective still reveals androcentric biases in his reference to the feminine/woman[22] as "inferior," "for the kabbalist the essential consists in best assuring the descent of the superior light and its implantation in an inferior place such that the latter is only the receptacle necessary for the flow, within which the holy union is realized. This feminine receptacle is a vase of light, the power of reception which was never absolutely separated from the power of emission" (239). Such characterization of the "female" as mere receptacle is sometimes present in Indic paths as well but the notion of Shakti manages to destabilize such constructions.

Conclusion

Whether it is a return of mythology to satisfy people's deep-seated need for a feminine divine, there is no doubt that the figure of Shekhinah took on in the popular medieval

imagination as important a role as Madonna did in the Christian context who had to be expunged via Protestant rationality as a corollary to modernist Enlightenment. But both intimate the divine feminine in their respective traditions that is deeply developed and is writ large in the Indic dharmas. Vital to understand in this comparative scholarly game though that the Divine Feminine as a mystery of interiority and in her deep essence is generally not a punitive and external divinity; she does not produce guilt or demand absolute obedience because her external forms are simply pointers toward deep liberation within.

In the contemporary philosophical debates in the Western world relentless feminist questioning and the resistance of the Jewish "others" have led to a remarkable revolution in the intellectual landscape. Jewish thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida have revealed the Hebraic Face of the Other in a different sense, challenging the metaphysical assumptions of a Hellenic world-view that has historically privileged the imperial (Christian) self over the (racialized/feminized) other. As we all know, once that metaphysical tradition has been questioned by Western thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger themselves, the Pandora's Box was reopened to discover that the box contains many treasures hidden from the monomaniacal orientation of androcentric philosophy. Much has been written about that history and in recent times, in the face of severe environmental disasters, eco-philosophies and ecological movements have been trying desperately to halt that march by turning the debate toward immanence.

Besides the "Plane of Immanence" discussed here, Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophy adds another dimension to that discussion.[23] Also, in another book titled *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict between Word and Image*, the author Leonard Shlain, a brain surgeon, has traced the history of the erasure of the feminine to the detriment of our collective health and psyche.[24] Search for the feminine then has taken on many forms: philosophical, religious, psychological, and environmental, to name a few. While Western feminist thinkers have been heroically making that effort, searching for the lost feminine of the Western world has had a different meaning for this writer because India's collective psyche never experienced the erasure of the Divine Feminine. With a sensibility that is suffused with the Divine Feminine, I have ventured into these complex realms.

The Indic non-dual Great Mother makes humans aware of our interconnectedness with Nature that was utterly degraded under patriarchal rationalities, religious or otherwise. In addition, Eros under her protective bosom is not an appetitive gratificatory urge to usurp the other's body but a sublime gift of creative vitality whose fluid reaching out to the other marks the Goddess's Lila or play. This mystery is utterly forgotten by cultures under the delusions of severe patriarchal myths that construct female sexuality in abysmal pathological terms on the one hand and as mere objects of desire on the other. Neither Shekhinah nor Shakti can be understood fully unless her divine autonomy is fully accessed through a deep diving into one's depth consciousness that is the Great Mother and supernal Shekhinah.

Returning to the vision of the mystic spruce in our Bangalore garden, I can conclude that perhaps in the deep recesses of the human body,[25] a sort of "feminine" wisdom resides. Riding the wave of philosophical corporeal turn via Deleuzian "plane of immanence" I discovered in my enchanted journey into medieval Kabbalah how the earlier speculations of God's dwelling, presence, and God's Shekhinah is transformed into a powerful and quite fully embodied female divinity who is a part of a divine tetrad. Whether because philosophy takes a corporeal turn or feminist revolt has been creating a new wave of goddess worship, or the environmental disaster is forcing us to re-examine our notions of transcendence and immanence, interest in female divinities shows a deep reversal of traditional androcentric notions of divinity as disembodied masculine reason/spirit as opposed to mere feminine matter. Finally, the presence of the embodied, flowing, and

"immanating" Shekhinah at the heart of Judaism does show the persistence of the feminine presence in spite of all protestations to the contrary.

Notes

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Luke Whitmore for his help in revising this article.

[1] In my book *In the Beginning IS Desire: Tracing Kali's Footprints in Indian Literature* I argued that there a Gynocentric matrix that is the basis of Indian culture that informs its spiritual identity due to the presence of a supreme Mother God, in spite of patriarchy's hold over its sociopolitical and economic spheres.

[2] Scholem and Patai's works are much older and many recent scholars have taken on the mantle of conversing with them in order to develop arguments regarding Jewish mysticism in general and Kabbalah in particular; for me they do represent an opening for such comparative works as mine. Hence I focus on the details of their work while acknowledging more recent works by scholars such as Elliot Wolfson, Eitane Fishbane, Moshe Idel, and Daniel Matt.

[3] See Wolfson's essay, "Structure, Innovation and Diremptive Temporality: The Use of Models to Study Continuity and Discontinuity in Kabbalistic Tradition." Here Wolfson responds to Moshe Idel's criticism of his claim that Kabbalah privileges the masculine "viewing the female as ontologically derivative from the male" arguing that Kabbalah as a cultural and literary phenomena is an open system and his use of diremptive reiteration cancels Idel's claim that Wolfson is being "anachronistic" and imposing his postmodern gender scholarship onto a medieval system. Both Idel and Wolfson move away from Scholem and his school's "monochromatic orientation" opting for "multiple explanatory models" that offers "polychromatic" orientation. Although I am not qualified to comment on the complex internal disagreements within the scholars in the field, as I said above this "open system" is conducive to my "intimations."

[4] Wolfson argues that, "We can posit the continuity of an idea or of a symbol, but this does not bespeak uniformity of an essentializing nature" (145).

[5] It is interesting that in *The Essential Kabbalah*, Daniel Matt writes about "The *Aroma* of Infinity" (my emphasis) that can be inhaled (54) and describes in the notes that mystical nothingness of Keter is beyond thought (176). It seems this notion of the divinity is closer to the senses than to the mind.

[6] See Clooney's essay "Female Beauty, Female Power" in the volume *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism*. My essay in this volume describes Mahavidya Chinnamasta as a goddess who reveals "the nonduality of life and death where women's bodies, sexuality, and nurturing potentials can be honored as mysterious sources of ultimate liberation" (62).

[7] Frances Oppel explores this different Nietzsche and writes in *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005): "the Nietzschean polemics directed against the God of the Jews and the Christians revalue positively the multiple, dynamic physical, with its feminine connotations, as against the singular transcendental, with its masculine ones. Nietzsche's use of poetic figures.....disrupts the discourse of philosophy and opens it to its 'other,' in a specifically gendered sense. Symbols and images in his writing suggest the feminine psychoanalytically: the abyss, the sea, the gateway, the dance, the ring" (5).

[8] See reviews of Patai's book (Fontenrose [1980], Seger [1968], and Dan Ben-Amos [1969] in Works Cited below) and Patai's 1970 rebuttal to Seger's review in *American Anthropologist*.

[9] Notice the word *anathema* itself is connected to the feminine; in the Greek world anathema meant the votive offering to the goddess. In the desperate effort to erase the divinity of the woman, all goddesses were turned into devils and manifestations of evil.
[10] See Christ, *She Who Changes*, 3.
[11] Patai refers to scholars including Scholem who are apologetic about mythic elements in Judaism because they "saw in mythological polytheism a lower, and in a supposedly amythological Jewish monotheism a higher manifestation of human religious spirit" (*Hebrew Goddess*, 157).
[12] See Patai's chapter on Lilith (*Hebrew Goddess*) who describes many Liliths including as the consort of Samael and her convergences with Shekhinah in Kabbalah. Also, Joseph Fontenrose in his review of Patai's book refers to Lilith and says, "Only in kabbalistic writings does she become allegorically a mate of the Lord" ("Review of *The Hebrew Goddess*," 347).
[13] Sinha finds in Vedic singular goddess Aditi, who is the mother of gods, and foreshadows Prakriti, an "undeniably dialectic character" as she is paired with Diti, the mother of the demonic elements (27).
[14] Sinha points out that the Spanish Kabbalah refers to "*Shekhinah* in her cosmogonic creative role, almost giving her the status of creator by using the masculine term Yatser Bereshith ("Creator" or "Demiurge") in referring to one of her two aspects" (33).
[15] Cynthia Ann Humes describes British official Captain Henry Sleeman's solution to the "Thugee Goddess" Kali in her essay "Wrestling with Kali: South Asian and British Constructions of the Dark Goddess"; to save Indians from this problem Sleeman "advocated the benevolent extension of the rule of the Father: the rational, just, controlled, and male God as a substitute for the irrational, amoral, wild, and female Goddess" (159). She also reminds us that later "the Thugee Goddess and her minions had been reimagined as direct threats to the British themselves, and the tone was suffused with sexual and ethnic overtones" (161).

Also, Hugh Urban in his essay "'India's Darkest Heart': Kali in the Colonial Imagination" writes in detail about the horror and fascination with Kali that most British people felt; Urban argues that "Objectified under the 'colonial gaze,' she formed a part of the broader project of 'imagining India' as an Other of the West. Indeed, Kali might be said to embody the extreme Orient, the most Other, that inherently passionate, irrational tendency of the 'Indian Mind' opposed to the rational, progressive, modern West" (170). Urban cites many British accounts such as Baptist missionary William Ward who concluded that "the Hindoo system" is "the most puerile, impure, and bloody of any system of idolatry that was ever established on earth" (174). Katherine Mayo, the most benighted of the women writers that abhorred India's "effeminate" culture wrote in her infamous *Mother India* that "the lowest and most ignorant of Indians are Kali worshippers" (177).
[16] See my "Gynocentric Theology of Tantric Hinduism: A Mediation upon the Devi," *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* and "Mystery, Wonder, and Knowledge in the Triadic Figure of Mahavidya Chinnamasta: A Shakta Woman's Reading," *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism: Reinterpretations and Re-envisionings*.
[17] See James Hillman's work on polytheistic psychology that reveals what he calls the soul's code and its diverse manifestations.
[18] The word *Yoga* has multiple meaning within the Indic systems; *pranayama* or breath control within Hathayoga is only one aspect of this multifaceted system while more esoteric Kundalini Yoga attempts to awaken the feminine Shakti within. Referring to Abulafia who "lays down certain rules of body posture," Scholem describes them as "a Judaized version of that ancient spiritual technique which has found its classical expression in the practices of the Indian mystics who follow the system known as *Yoga*...an important part in Abulafia's system is played by the technique of breathing....The similarity even extends to some

aspects of the doctrine of ecstatic vision, as preceded and brought about by these practices" (Scholem, *Major*, 139).

[19]See my discussion of Vac in my book *In the Beginning IS Desire* as "a mantric expression of her all-pervading presence" (110). Sinha too traces the root of Shakti in Vedic Vac and shows her paradoxical character where she is both omnipotent and a "goddess of immense power and import" in X.125 and a more subordinated daughter of Prajapati in a different verse. I would argue this reveals the patriarchal ambivalence and the power struggle between matricentered and more androcentric visions.

[20] See Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother* where he describes the transcendent, universal, and individual Shakti and in four manifest forms of Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati (27-55).

[21] As the title of my book denotes *In the Beginning IS Desire*, I discuss in detail the role of Kali as Kamakhya, one whose name is Desire.

[22] Human sexuality is also culturally constructed even though ambivalence toward female sexuality has been the hallmark of all androcentric religions. Spink makes an interesting comparison in the *Axis of Eros* between Indic and monotheistic ways as he asks: "Why is Western man faced, in Mircea Eliade's words, with the terror of time, while the Indian, at the deepest subconscious levels, is not thus afflicted? Why is the cruel world of India ultimately to be recognized as the rich and protecting world of Eden, while rich world of the West is ultimately to be recognized as the cruel world outside? Why did it never occur to man in India that he might suffer separation from the tree of life and be denied its fruits, just as it never occurred to Western man that he might somehow of his own volition share its ripe and satiating gifts?" (13).

Spink then posits: "But if the phallic image of India is the axis mundi, the immortal tree of life, which all men can and indeed cannot but attain, the phallic image of the West, the image of man, the image of Christ Crucified, is caught within the tree of time—the tree with its poison apples or its gigs—the tree of death. And upon this tree must the Son of Man be lifted up" (95).

[23] Dianne Chisholm writes in "Rhizome, Ecology, Geophilosophy": If geophilosophy escapes instrumental science, it also brings philosophy down to earth. Geophilosophy would revitalize philosophy that has been morally and politically exhausted by the nationalist trajectories of Europe—as best seen in the case of German philosophy and its inextricable involvement with Nazism. From geophilosophy's perspective, Greek philosophy—Europe's 'first and founding' philosophy—did not originate in the mental state of Athens so much as it coalesced within the fractal geography of the Attic peninsula" (3).

[24] Another controversial work in which Shlain makes the startling claim that alphabet literacy subliminally fosters a patriarchal and more left brain centered culture; hence he associates image with the goddess and the word with patriarchal monotheism. Although he claims that the dualities of image and word only represent opposite perceptual modes, and every individual is generously endowed with all the features of both, he remains within the binary oppositional mode when he argues "a holistic, simultaneous, synthetic, and concrete view of the world are the essential characteristic of a feminine outlook; linear, sequential, reductionist, and abstract thinking defines the masculine....They coexist as two closely overlapping bell-shaped curves with no feature superior to its reciprocal" (1). He argues with ample though provocative evidence that, "First writing, and then alphabet, upset this balance. Affected cultures, especially in the West, acquired a strong yang thrust" (2). Perhaps more research into neurobiology will reveal the truth of our complex brains while a return to the goddess/image via television and other media as well as typing with both hands, according to Shlain is a collective effort to restore that lost balance.

[25] I use the body in the sense of the idea of *panchakoshas* (five sheaths) in Hinduism enumerated in *Taittiriya Upanishad* (see Chapter 2 of the Upanishad in *The Principle*

Upanisads by S. Radhakrishnan who explains them on p. 542) that imagines layers of our being such as the food body, breath body, mind body, wisdom body, and the bliss body; ultimately like an onion, there is nothing at the core that I call Kali as Pregnant-nothingness. The process of Yoga meditation helps to progressively calm each layer of the mind body continuum to reach the deeper aspects. I argue that the Divine Feminine resides in the *Anandamaya Kosha* (bliss sheath) who takes one to her deepest core where the profound wisdom of *Shunyata* inaugurates radical freedom.

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The Benei Menashe: Choosing Judaism in North East India

By Myer Samra

The Benei Menashe is a small community observing Judaism that has evolved within the constellation of Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes, known collectively as the "Zo."[1] These tribes are located in North East India and neighboring areas of Myanmar and Bangladesh—particularly within the Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram, and the Chin State of Myanmar. Adherence to Judaism in the region is accompanied by a belief that these tribes are in fact descendants of the lost biblical tribe of Manasseh, the term *Benei Menashe* used to distinguish this group being Hebrew for "Children of Manasseh."[2] The Benei Menashe constitute a small but distinctive segment of the Zo. Out of a total Zo population of perhaps 3,000,000 spread across these territories, in 2005 Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar estimated 6,000 were following Judaism.[3]

Familiarity with the Bible that presaged this development came about through the activities of Protestant missionaries who began to work in these territories in the 1890s, soon after Manipur, Mizoram, and the Chin Hills had come under British colonial domination. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the Zo peoples had been shifting cultivators who were unfamiliar with the written word; today they can boast a level of literacy higher than that in most Indian states and territories. The missionaries have been so successful among the tribal populations in these areas, and indeed throughout North East India, that most today are passionate Christians. Many Zo have accepted a calling to become missionaries themselves within the region, across India, Korea, and in South East Asia. Mizoram has even sent missionaries to Wales in Great Britain—where the missionaries to Mizoram had originated—in an effort to rekindle the faith in the rapidly secularizing West.

The Evolution of Judaism in Myanmar and North East India

Some individuals from this fervently religious people had come to perceive similarities between their own customs and traditions and those of the ancient Israelites as early as the 1920s, sacrifices being a particularly notable area of convergence, although no longer practiced by Jews today.[4] A conviction that in fact the Zo were descendants of the Israelites took hold in the early 1950s, inspired by the visions of one man, a Pentecostal Deacon named Challianthanga ("Pu Chala") from the village of Buallawn in Mizoram, who declared that God had revealed this truth to him. According to Pu Chala, if the Zo were to survive in the forthcoming war of Armageddon, they had to restore the religious practices ordained in the Bible and to return to settle in their Promised Land.[5]

Such beliefs spread throughout the territories inhabited by the Zo thanks to itinerant preachers, who criss-crossed the group's territorial range. Pu Chala's Israelites in fact practiced a Christian faith, coupled with observance of Saturday as the Sabbath and the biblically ordained pilgrim festivals, and refrained from eating pork, the meat most savoured in the region. Members of groups with similar views sought out contact with the Jewish communities and Israeli diplomatic representatives in Bombay, Calcutta, and Rangoon, from whom they learnt by the mid-1970s that Jews did not recognize the messianic claims of Jesus Christ. This led to a split between "Israelite" groups who retained their faith in Jesus, and those who sought to follow the religion of the Jewish people.[6]

The practices of the Benei Menashe have gradually become more consonant with those of Orthodox Judaism, as the group continued its pursuit of Jewish knowledge and the links it forged with Amishav, a small group from Israel run by Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail of Jerusalem, which sought to locate the remnants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. From 1979 until around 2003, Rabbi Avichail was the undisputed religious authority for the Benei Menashe and was instrumental in taking around 850 of them to settle in Israel, where they underwent formal conversion to Judaism and received Israeli citizenship. In turn, these

Israeli members of the Benei Menashe have helped to educate their fellows back home, through such efforts as the translation and transliteration of the Bible, Jewish blessings, and various other religious texts, and visits back to Manipur and Mizoram to pass on their religious knowledge.

From 2004, a new group calling itself *Shavei Israel,* run by Michael Freund, himself an American Jewish immigrant to Israel, has succeeded Amishav in its work with the Benei Menashe, developing centers in Manipur and Mizoram that teach Judaism and the Hebrew language and seek to prepare people for life in Israel. That year, at the urging of Michael Freund and prominent members of his group, a number of Israeli rabbis traveled to Manipur and Mizoram as emissaries of the Israeli Chief Rabbi to investigate the claims of the Benei Menashe. The rabbis were very impressed with what they saw, and in March the following year, the Chief Rabbi called for urgent action to rescue the Benei Menashe by formally converting them to Judaism and bringing them to Israel.[7] Today, more than 2,000 member of this community have made Israel their home.

As we shall see, the claims of the Benei Menashe, their religious practices, and the involvement of Israelis in their conversion and emigration have sparked controversy and hostility from various Zo leaders, both church and secular, and among Indian nationalists concerned with these developments. There are significant differences in the political, ethnic, and religious environments of the Benei Menashe across the range of their territorial distribution. Consequently, before focusing on the relationships between the Benei Menashe and other Zo groups, we shall briefly consider their social context in Manipur, Mizoram, and Chin State.

Relationships with Non-Zo Communities

The Zo comprise a group of tribes who speak around 45 closely related but distinct dialects, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family.[8] In Manipur and Chin State, people tend to cling to their particular forms of speech, whereas in Mizoram one dialect, the Dulien, spoken by the historically dominant Lusei tribe, has become the official, unifying language of the state. People in Mizoram tend not to speak or even to learn the tribal dialects of their ancestors and at least in public, seek to play down tribal differences, stressing the unity of all the Zo people as "Mizos," a term formally adopted in 1952.[9]

While in Mizoram the majority of the population belong to the "Mizo" community, in Manipur, the Zo groups constitute around 12% of the state's 2 million inhabitants. A number of Naga tribes make up a similar proportion of the state's population. Like the Zo, most of the Nagas were converted to Christianity through the efforts of Baptist missionaries. By contrast, the majority population of the state are the Meiteis, who have lived and farmed in Manipur's fertile valley for over a thousand years, during which time Manipur has been a centralized kingdom, organized along military lines.[10]

Like the tribals, the Meiteis have Mongoloid features and speak a language that belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. The Meiteis embraced Hinduism in the 18th century, whereas the tribals followed their traditional animistic practices until the arrival of Christianity. Despite their agricultural occupation and their racial features, the Meiteis regard themselves as having a noble Aryan pedigree.[11] They have assumed Kshatriya status and wear the gold thread, the preserve of the higher or "twice-born" Hindu castes. Most use the surname "Singh," signifying Kshatriya or warrior caste status.

Historically, the Meitei regarded all of the hill peoples as untouchables and treated them as inferior human beings.[12] However, educational opportunities that have been available to the Christianized tribals, reservation of a proportion of university placements and significant administrative posts for members of backward castes and tribes under schedules to the post-independence constitution of India, and the fact that the votes of people of all backgrounds have the same value in the parliamentary democracy that India has become, have all contributed to a leveling of the status of the different communities,

and the often better-educated tribals have learnt to look down upon what they regard as the heathen Meitei.

Members of the Naga, Zo and "Pangal" groups have been elected to ministerial posts and even to the position of Chief Minister in Manipur. The Benei Menashe have shared in the opportunities made possible by their access to education. Several have held prominent positions in the state administration. Some have sought election to the legislative assembly. Others have had close kinsmen in ministerial posts.

> The "Pangals" or Manipuri Muslims number around 150,000 souls. They have lived in the state since the 17th century and speak the dominant Meitei language.[13] The term *Pangal* is a local adaptation of the word "Bengal" and suggests the provenance of this community. The Benei Menashe in their first few years of history looked upon the Pangals fraternally as they shared many religious ideals in common, such as circumcision, abstinence from pork, and belief in the absolute unity of God.

Before they became more conversant with the strictures of *kashruth,* the body of Jewish dietary laws, Benei Menashe would purchase meat slaughtered by the Muslims. Notwithstanding the suspicion and enmity between Jews and Muslims that has taken hold in many parts of the world, relations between the Pangals and the Benei Menashe have thus far remained positive and friendly.

> During the 1990s, the Naga tribes waged communal warfare against some of the "Kuki" or Zo groups, asserting that the latter were interlopers who had recently settled in Manipur and taken lands that rightly belonged to the Nagas. Kukis were given an ultimatum to leave the state or suffer the consequences if they did not. Members of the Benei Menashe were dislocated during this period, and some lost their lives, not because of their religious choices, but because of their ethnic background. In 1998, the family of Neihmang ("Peniel") Haokip, the president of the Benei Menashe in Imphal, grieved over the slaying of their daughter, who had been married to a Naga. The family had been sent photographs of her mutilated body. The fact that her husband was a Naga did not shield her from the fate of a Kuki in a Naga area. The body of another elderly member of the community from the Churachandpur district, a Ngaite who had children and grandchildren settled in Israel, was found floating in the river.

Relationships with Zo Christians

Generally, members of the other ethnic groups in Manipur seem indifferent to the Jewish leanings of the Benei Menashe, whose Zo status is a more salient consideration. Religious affiliation, however, is far more relevant among the Zo. This is particularly noticeable in Mizoram and the Chin State, where the majority of the population are themselves Zo.

The Benei Menashe community has remained rather small in Myanmar, possibly because of the repressive nature of the government, which has sought to spread Burmese culture among the minority ethnic groups in the country. In 1996, a Benei Menashe prayer hall near the border town of Tamu was bulldozed, seemingly because it was not considered to belong to a recognized religious denomination. Christian village chiefs in the Chin State had previously expelled villagers who adopted Sabbatarian practices, because of their disruptive impact on the unity of the community. Nowadays, the prerogatives of chiefs have been circumscribed by the placement of individuals who serve as the eyes and ears of the regime, watching out for deviations from the accepted norms.

Historically, chiefs owned the land within their domains and allocated plots to their followers to cultivate or to build their dwellings. The plots allocated to a villager were often not contiguous, so one might need to pass across the homes and fields of other villagers to get from one's home to one's farmlands. In Mizoram, following a vigorous political

campaign, chieftainship was abolished in 1954.[14] In Manipur, the chief, usually the founder of a village or one of his descendants, has retained the right to control the residence of his subjects and his territory.

Individuals hailing from different parts of Manipur have mournfully related to me how they were expelled from their homes by the chiefs of their villages because of their beliefs. The chief might give a variety of explanations for his decision. The Sabbatarians might be considered to be disturbing the peace and harmony of the community on account of the fact that they observed the Sabbath on a different day from the rest of the village or because they would have to cross over the land held by other villagers to work their plots on a Sunday, when the rest of the community were trying to rest. Furthermore, the example of the waywardness of the Benei Menashe could "corrupt" other villagers, leading them to waver from accepted Christian practices. Such experiences, ironically, recall the history of the early Christian converts among the Zo, many of whom were expelled by chiefs, because their newly acquired religion conflicted with their traditional, ritual obligations to the service of the chief.[15]

I recall the bitterness of an elderly member of the Haokip clan, recounting his expulsion from his village when he began to observe Saturday as a day of rest. He now dreamed and hoped that he might one day be selected to settle in Israel; then he would return to laugh in the face of the village chief. With a daughter who had in fact already gone to live in Israel, it was only a matter of time before his opportunity to fulfill this dream might eventuate.

The twists of fate are often more surprising than fantasy. My informant did fulfill his dream to make *Aliyah*, that is to settle in Israel, but so too in due course did the chief who had opposed his religion. My informant's daughter married the son of the chief, who followed his son to Israel, and therefore into the Jewish fold.

This story highlights the ambiguous nature of the relationship between the Benei Menashe and Zo Christians. Although the number of Zo who have adopted Judaism is small, many others willingly entertain the possibility that they might be descendants of Israelites, without wishing to venture into the Jewish religious community.

Such a view of their origins has been fostered by numerous small publications, in English, Thado, Mizo, Paite, and other dialects, which have sought to trace the history of the Zo as Israelites, banished to the far corners of the empire after the Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century B.C.E. From the lands of the Medes and Persians, these booklets recount the eastward progress of the ancestors of the Zo, through Afghanistan, across the Khyber Pass, through the Hindu Kush, Tibet, and eventually to China, then through South East Asia and Myanmar before finally settling in their current territories.

Pi Zaithanchhungi, a popular writer from Mizoram, has expounded similar ideas, along with an extensive catalogue of parallels that she sees between Mizo tradition and Jewish practices found in the Bible, in her popular booklet, *Israel-Mizo Identity*, which has appeared in several editions in both English and Mizo.[16] On the strength of these parallels, Zaithanchhungi concludes that the Israelites and Mizos must either have had the same ancestors or had lived as "neighbours close enough to copy each other's customs, traditions and social life."[17]

While in Manipur there have been some prominent individuals who have joined the Benei Menashe, in Mizoram Judaism has tended to be associated with poverty: the humble circumstances of Benei Menashe places of worship contrast strikingly with the grand churches found in the state.

Notwithstanding the difference in status between the two religions, various Christian leaders have felt a need to vigorously attack the "heresy" that Judaism represents. In 1992, I attended an International Seminar on the Mizos in Aizawl, Mizoram, where I delivered a paper with the title "Judaism in Manipur and Mizoram: By-Product of Christian Mission." Whereas I was elucidating how Judaism in the region had essentially developed out of

Christianity, these defenders of Christianity saw a need to attend the seminar for the purpose of denouncing the heresy discussed in my paper, the belief expressed by some that the Zo were descendants of Israelites, and to challenge the suggestion that there might be some positive value in this belief. My paper had suggested that seeing their ancestors as Israelites might "display a positive, creative potential," bringing pride and confidence to a people who had been led by missionaries and colonial administrators to regard their ancestors as "head-hunting savages."[18]

The notion of the Israelite origins of the Zo peoples has also been energetically promoted by the late Lalchhanhima Sailo, whose Chhinlung Israel People's Convention has campaigned for an independent nation in the Zo territories, for this people who claim descent from the ancient Israelites, while retaining a strong Christian faith. Rather than advocating migration to Israel, Sailo in effect sought the creation of a second Israelite state in territories currently ruled by India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. More of a politician than a theologian, Sailo's views were attractive to a large number of people. His organization claimed a membership of around 250,000,[19] especially among the poorer and less educated groups in Mizoram. This popularity stemmed perhaps less from the Israelite claims than from Sailo's campaign for the debts of Mizos to be wiped out in 1994, the Mizos' "jubilee" year, being the centenary of Christianity in the state.

The fact that not all people who identify as Israelites want to be regarded as Jews was brought home to me during my first visit to Manipur in 1990, when a person with such beliefs stressed that he was not a "Jew," as he was not one of those people who had "condemned Jesus to the cross ... (and) refused to accept Jesus as Messiah."[20] The punishments that the Jews warranted for this, including the Holocaust, apparently did not apply to the descendants of the other Israelite tribes.

As we have noted, in March 2005, Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar recognized the claims of the Benei Menashe's Israelite origins and called for their reintegration into the Jewish people through formal conversion to Judaism and settlement in Israel.[21] This led to widespread disputation between supporters and opponents of the concept, with Sailo and P. C. Biaksiama, a staunch supporter of mainstream Christianity debating the issue on local television in Mizoram. Members and supporters of the Benei Menashe have also been involved in polemics with conventional Christians over many years. While Sailo's disputes with the church center on the reputed ethnic origins of the Zo, the Benei Menashe have also argued over whether Judaism or Christianity is the true religion. Buatisaihtu's "Quo Vadis Aw Mizo?" and Lemuel Henkhogin Haokip's article on the origins of Judaism in North East India are critical of Christian deviation from practices commanded by the Bible.[22]

Whereas in disputes with conventional Christians the Benei Menashe may sometimes find themselves aligned with groups such as Sailo's who believe the Zo are descendants of Israelites while they choose to practice Christianity, and with "Messianic Jews" who observe Saturday as their Sabbath though they retain their faith in Jesus, the doctrinal differences between them are also significant, leading to conflict between the Benei Menashe and these others. Many of the Benei Menashe had belonged to "Messianic Jewish" groups prior to their adoption of Judaism. One prominent individual recounted how he came to join the Benei Menashe after his expulsion from a Messianic group for having undergone circumcision. That act, of seeking out physical circumcision, apparently marked him out as someone of insufficient faith in Jesus, for Jesus had made it possible to enter God's covenant without the need to mutilate the body; "circumcision of the heart" had obviated the need to perform the physical ritual.

Rabbi Avichail's first visit to Manipur and Mizoram in 1991 had a dramatic impact on the fortunes of the Benei Menashe and Messianic communities in both states. The Messianic groups were largely working on their own to try to develop appropriate prayers and rituals, while the Benei Menashe had the benefit of following a defined liturgy and practices recognized by Jews across the world. Furthermore, the fact that Rabbi Avichail had succeeded in arranging for the settlement of a small number of Benei Menashe in Israel

strengthened the apparent validity of Judaism. Over the next few years, a number of erstwhile Messianic congregations across Manipur voted overwhelmingly to go over to Judaism. Soon after such a vote in the congregation at Kangpokpi in Manipur, the former "Messianic," now "Jewish," prayer hall was vandalized, apparently as revenge on the part of some who opposed the move.

While Rabbi Avichail's visits mainly affected "Messianic" groups, Rabbi Amar's pronouncement and the subsequent visit in September 2005 of a delegation of Israeli rabbis to carry out conversions in Mizoram and Manipur drew an outraged reaction from mainstream Christian leaders in the region, apparently concerned at the prospect that more people might abandon Christianity for Judaism. After they had converted 218 people in Mizoram, the rabbis' visit was terminated abruptly, before they had a chance to enter Manipur.[23] For many in Mizoram, identification with Jesus has become a fundamental element of Mizo identity, such that they find it impossible to conceive of a Mizo who does not love and follow Jesus. A leading political figure from the state expressed his indignation with the conversions by suggesting that Israelis would also be offended if Mizo missionaries were to go to Israel and attempt to convert their children.

Attitudes of Indians to the Judaism of the Benei Menashe

Whereas the non-Zo communities in the region inhabited by the Zo are indifferent to the religious affiliation of the Benei Menashe, sections of the broader Indian society, including the central government, have reacted with concern over their conversion to Judaism and the connections that they might have with Israel.

When India achieved independence, the tribal areas of the North East were administered as part of the state of Assam. In the interest of forging a cohesive national identity, efforts were made to promote the use of the Assamese language and to assimilate the tribals into mainstream Indian culture.[24] The Christianized tribal populations strongly resisted these efforts, leading to revolts by the Nagas, Mizos, and other groups in the region. Christianity, seen by many Indians as "a hand maiden of colonialism,"[25] was blamed for the failure of normative Indian culture to take hold in the region, and foreign missionaries were accused of encouraging rebellion. Michael Scott, a missionary working among the Nagas was arrested and deported in 1966, and all foreign missionaries in India's North East were expelled in 1969.[26]

Similarly, some Indian nationalist groups have looked upon the judaizing movement in Manipur and Mizoram with suspicion. Already in 1980 the *Blitz*, a communist newspaper, was expressing alarmist concern that Israeli agents had planted the notion that Mizos were members of one of the lost tribes, as a means of subverting the integrity of India. At a time when Mizos had been involved in a bloody campaign seeking to establish an independent Zo nation, the paper alleged that "some of those actively connected with the Underground Mizo National Front movement have been identified as having been trained in America and Israel."[27] This was at a time when relations between Israel and India were strained. In Cold War terms, India supported Russia against the United States and the Palestinians against Israel.

At the time, Israel had no interest in the Benei Menashe, was wary of their claims, and banned their members from traveling to Israel. As reported by the *Telegraph* newspaper in Calcutta, Israel was not prepared to grant any visas to the self proclaimed "Mizo Jews," or indeed to anyone from either Manipur or Mizoram.[28] To get around this ban, Rabbi Avichail was offering advice to any who wished to travel to Israel: they should link up with an Indian Christian tour group to the Holy Land.

While the relationship between Israel and India warmed considerably in the 1990s when the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in India, Rabbi Amar's proclamation came when the Congress Party was back in power, with the support of the Indian Communist Party. The Communist leader Farkish Kret condemned the rabbi's declaration, asserting, "It

is forbidden to export a community," and called for the cessation of security cooperation with Israel.[29]

The conversions of 2005 caused a diplomatic incident between Israel and India. While the rabbis had traveled to India following Rabbi Amar's proclamation, they were employees of the Israeli Prime Minister's office. They had not paid the courtesy of visiting the Indian Prime Minister or explaining their mission before visiting the North East. Although in fact the people whom the rabbis had come to formally induct into Judaism had already been practicing the religion for as much as 30 years, to many observers, including the Indian government, it appeared that the Israeli government was "trying to aggressively convert Indian citizens."[30] In response to this pressure, Israel halted the conversions.[31] Thereafter, any Benei Menashe who sought to be recognized as a Jew has had to travel abroad to go before a *Beth Din,* a Jewish rabbinical court that can conduct conversions.

The Indian government's reaction was in part a response to the agitation of Christian leaders in Mizoram who portrayed conversion to Judaism as virtually an act of treason, since under Israel's Law of Return, every Jew has a right to settle in the country. Thus, P. C. Biaksiama of the Christian Research Centre in Aizawl argued that "the mass conversion by foreign priests will pose a threat not only to social stability in the region, but also to national security. A large number of people will forsake loyalty to the Union of India, as they will become eligible for a foreign citizenship."[32] Curiously, I have not seen any claim along these lines in regard to the many Indian nationals who each year immigrate to other parts of the world and take up citizenship in different countries.

A number of Indian commentators have recognized the irony of this position, in the light of the history of Christian missionary activity in the region.[33] Indian nationalists who were concerned that Christian missionaries had created a barrier between themselves and the tribal population were now supporting the Christianized tribals against another religion, which appeared to be threatening the hold of Christianity on a segment of that tribal population.

Case Study: A Nepali Member of the Benei Menashe

The following vignette may help in understanding the attachment of the Benei Menashe to Judaism, the attitudes of Christians in Mizoram to Jesus, and the attitudes of both to people of Indian racial stock.

During a visit to Kolasib in Mizoram in the year 2000, members of the local Benei Menashe community took me to visit the home of a Nepalese man, born and raised as a Hindu in Mizoram, who spoke the Mizo language like a native. This man had been impressed with the religious teachings of Judaism as practiced by the Benei Menashe community and wished to join them. The congregation in Kolasib were unsure as to how they should respond to this request. They themselves had adopted Judaism on the strength of a belief that this was the religion of their ancestors. Was it permissible, I was asked, for someone not of the blood to enter the religious community?[34]

Unsure as to whether they could induct this racial stranger into the fold, they had eventually decided to do so, requiring him to undergo circumcision, giving him a Hebrew personal name, and appending "Benei-Israel Benei-Menashe" to his name. In this way, they were ritually symbolizing not only the man's incorporation into the religious community, but also his adoption into the tribe of Manasseh of the Israelite nation.

While the Nepalese man was happy in his new religious community, some members continued to look down upon him. One lady hurriedly came to visit me as soon as she learned of my presence in Kolasib, before I left the town. She was indignant that my hosts had taken me to visit the home of "a mere Nepali" and not to hers, she of course being a true Mizo and long a member of the Jewish congregation.

I was interested in the experiences of the Nepali Benei-Menashe individual following his embrace of Judaism. He recounted how on the night of Purim, a Jewish festival when

people celebrate the biblical story of Queen Esther and the rescue of the Jews of Persia from a decree to annihilate them, he was walking home from the synagogue, alone in the dark, in an enthusiastic and merry state. He was stopped by some Mizo youths who questioned him along the lines "Nepali, why are you out so late?" He responded happily that he had been celebrating a Jewish festival with his friends. His answer offended his inquisitors who took it upon themselves to beat him up for having rejected the saviour, Jesus.

It is significant that the thugs had not attacked the Mizo Jews, but only the Nepalese man—even though this man had never been a Christian, whereas the Mizo Jews had been.

This story illustrates the fact that for the Benei Menashe, their acceptance of Judaism is not a superficial matter, a means to the end of improving their living standards by acquiring the opportunity to leave India and settle in Israel, as many skeptical Israeli officials and commentators have asserted over the years:[35] these people genuinely believe they are returning to the traditions of their forefathers by following Judaism.

The hesitation of the Benei Menashe in accepting the Nepalese man into their fellowship also suggests a sense of superiority over the Nepalese: clearly they see it as a signal honor for this man to join them, to elevate him from his Hindu origins. The attitudes displayed by the lady and the men who accosted him in the dark again highlight the superiority that these people, as Mizos of whatever religious faction, feel in their encounter with the Hindu *vai*, people of what one would see as "Indian" appearance, regarded with suspicion and disdain by the Mizos.[36] We also see the offense that the Mizo Christians felt that this man should choose to follow Judaism rather than Jesus, to whom most Mizos now have a close, emotional attachment.

Summing-up

As we have seen in this article, the Benei Menashe interact with people of many different backgrounds within the region they inhabit and, as citizens of India and Myanmar, within the wider circle of these national polities. Their religious practices are of only limited interest to the non-Zo communities within their region. In this sphere, the Benei Menashe's identity as persons of Zo ethnicity is more significant and affects the way that they are seen.

However, in the wider national context, the Benei Menashe's adoption of Judaism draws them into the political arena. Given the connection between Judaism and the state of Israel, and the fact that many Benei Menashe contemplate migration to Israel where they can practice their religion most fully, attitudes to the Jewish state affect how the members of the Benei Menashe are seen by their fellow citizens. Those who disapprove or are suspicious of Israel are inclined to be hostile to the expression of Judaism in the area as an Israeli plot to gain supporters.

Furthermore, Indian nationalists who have been wary of the impact of foreign missionaries on the tribal populations of the north east region have equated the activities of the rabbis who came from Israel in 2005 with those of the missionaries who were held responsible for creating a chasm between the tribal population and the broader Indian populace. These rabbis had come to carry out the formal conversion of people who were already practicing Judaism, not to persuade others to join them. By proscribing the activities of the rabbis, such nationalists have thwarted the dreams and aspirations of many Benei Menashe to become fully recognized as Jews—as members of the religious community whose practices they follow.

Religious affiliations and beliefs have been far more significant in the relations between members of the Benei Menashe and fellow members of the Zo community. Many other Zo accept the view that they might have Israeli ancestry and look upon Israel sympathetically, while like the Benei Menashe, "Messianic" congregations attempt to follow biblical precepts such as observing Saturday as the Sabbath and refraining from unclean foods. However, for these groups, such beliefs and practices tend to be associated with an equally strong attachment to, indeed a love for Jesus as the Saviour.

Christianity has become such an integral part of Zo identity that for many it is unthinkable for a person to be a Zo without a strong bond with Christ.[37] One can therefore only admire the will power that members of the Benei Menashe need to exhibit to hold to their Jewish beliefs while living in the society of their *volk*.

A prominent young member of the community now living in Israel related to me how difficult he found it, growing up in Mizoram at a time when the numbers of the Benei Menashe were small. He felt cut off from his peers and resented his father for having adopted and stubbornly maintained what seemed like peculiar religious rituals and beliefs in the Mizo Christian context. Over time, my friend has come to admire his father's tenacity and has himself become a strong advocate for Judaism, translating many Hebrew religious texts into Mizo and returning to teach the religion to the members of his community living in Mizoram.

Although the people now known as the "Benei Menashe" have only begun to practice Judaism in the past 35 years, they have done so in the face of considerable pressure, from within the cohorts of their ethnic groups, and the suspicion and hostility of elements within the broader Indian society. How long a community can survive in such a state of tension, only time can tell.

One means of resolving that tension is through immigration to Israel, where Judaism is the normative religious tradition. In turn, the interaction of members of the Benei Menashe in India and Myanmar with their friends and kinsmen who have settled in Israel might help to bolster the practice of Judaism in North East India and the Chin State in Myanmar.

As for those Benei Menashe who choose to settle in Israel, how long they will be able to retain a separate ethnic identity is also open to conjecture. The challenges that lie ahead for them herald another chapter in the history of this remarkable religious community.

Notes

[1] Although the members of these tribes generally recognize that they have common backgrounds, similar customs, shared folklore, and closely related dialects, there has never been a widely accepted name embracing the whole collectivity. The British called the groups on the Indian side of the border "Kuki," and those in Myanmar "Chin," while the Meitei of Manipur referred to them as "Khonjah" or "Khongsai." The population in the erstwhile Lushai Hills took upon themselves the name "Mizo" a term meaning "Zo People," a poetic inversion of the grammatically correct "Zomi," which has been adopted by members of the Paite tribe. Following Vumson, *Zo History, With an introduction to Zo culture, economy, religion and their status as an ethnic minority in India, Burma, and Bangladesh* (Aizawl, Mizoram, published by the author, no date), I shall use the name "Zo" to refer to this constellation of tribes. In referring specifically to members of the group living in Mizoram, I shall use the term "Mizo."

[2] Shalva Weil, "Lost Israelites from the Indo-Burmese Borderlands: Re-Traditionalisation and Conversion among the Shinlung or Bene Menasseh," *The Anthropologist* 6, no. 3 (2004): 228 records that Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail suggested the appellation "Children of Menasseh" to the group.

[3] BBC News "Rabbi backs India's 'lost Jews'," BBC News South Asia, April 1, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4400957.stm

[4] Myer Samra, "Judaism in Manipur and Mizoram: By-Product of Christian Mission," *The Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 6, no. 1 (1992): 7-22.

[5] Myer Samra, "Buallawn Israel: The Emergence of a Judaising Movement in Mizoram, Northeast India," *Religious Change, Conversion and Culture,* ed. Lynnette Olson (Sydney, Australia: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1996), p. 112.

[6] Myer Samra, "The Tribe of Manasseh: 'Judaism' in the Hills of Manipur and Mizoram," *Man in India* 71, no. 1 (1991): 191.
[7] Ian MacKinnon, "Lost tribe dreams of return to Israel after 2,700 years in exile," *The Times Online*, April 2, 2005, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-1550821_1,00.html
[8] Frank K. Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society: A Tribal People of Burma Adapted to a Non-western Civilization,* 2nd ed. (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1980), p.14.
[9] Binod Behari Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest—A Study in Politicisation of Culture* (Jaipur: Aalekh Publishers, 1979), p. 105.
[10] Gangmumei Kabui, *History of Manipur, Vol. 1 Pre-colonial Period* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1991), pp. 90-92 attempts to unravel the historicity of the Meitei chronicles concerning Pakhangba, acknowledged as the founder of the kingdom. Dates for his accession range from 33 to 980 C.E.
[11] Ibid., p. 15.
[12]Thomas Challan Hodson, *The Meitheis,* 2nd ed. (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1975), p. 4.
[13] Kabui, *History of Manipur*, p. 24.
[14] Binod Behari Goswami and D. P. Mukherjee, "The Mizo Political Movement," *Tribal Movements in India, Vol. 1*, ed. K. S. Singh (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982), p. 136.
[15] Lal Dena, *Christian Mission and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in Northeast India, with Particular Reference to Manipur and Lushai Hills 1894-1947* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1988), p. 101; Ferdaus A. Quarishi, *Christianity in the North Eastern Hills of South Asia: Social Impact and Political Implications* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1987), p. 37.
[16] Pi Zaithanchhungi, *Israel-Mizo Identity* (Aizawl: St Joseph's Press, 1990; English edition Aizawl: S. T. Press, 1992, First Mizo edition).
[17] Ibid., p. 79.
[18] Dena, *Christian Mission and Colonialism*, p. 110.
[19] Tathagata Bhattacharya, "Descendants of Lost Tribe of Israel Found in India" (posted September 9, 2004), *Farshores Ancient Dimensions News*, http://farshores.org/a04mizo.htm
[20] Samra, "The Tribe of Manasseh," p. 196.
[21] Yair Sheleg, "Amar: Bnei Menashe are descendants of ancient Israelites," *Haaretz,* April 1, 2005.
[22] Buatsailhtu (Ben-Aryeh Pachuau), *Quo Vadis Aw Mizo* (Aizawl: H V Publication, 1995); Lemuel Henkhogin Haokip, "The Origins and Development of Judaism in North East India Up to the Present Day," *Judaism 25th Anniversary Souvenir*, ed. L. H. Haokip (Manipur: The Benei Menashe Council, 2001), pp. 20-21.
[23] Matthew Wagner, "Bnei Menashe conversions halted," *Jerusalem Post,* November 9, 2005, online edition.
[24] Quarishi, *Christianity in the North Eastern Hills of South Asia*, p. 8.
[25] Prafulla Dutta Goswami, quoted in Quarishi, *Christianity in the North Eastern Hills of South Asia,* p. 55.
[26] Quarishi, *Christianity in the North Eastern Hills of South Asia,* pp. 60-64; Robbins Burling, "Tribesmen and Lowlanders of Assam," *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations, Vol. 1,* ed. Peter Kunstadter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 215-229.
[27] S. Berindranath, "Mythology of Zionist propaganda: Mizos are the 14th lost tribe of Israel!" *Blitz,* March 29, 1980.
[28] *The Telegraph,* "No Israeli visas for Mizo Jews," February 27, 1987.

[29] *Arutz Sheva'* [Channel Seven, the name of a radio station in Israel], "India Leftists Fight Bnei Menashe Aliyah," April 8, 2005, http://www.israelnationalnews.com/news.php3?id=79840

[30] Wagner, "Bnei Menashe conversions halted."

[31] Hilary Leila Krieger, "Bnei Menashe aliya, conversions halted pending government review," *The Jerusalem Post*, July 2, 2006, http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid+1150885896057&pagename=Jpost%2FJP

[32] *Deccan Herald*, "Taste of their own medicine: Judaism threatens Church in Mizoram, Manipur," April 22, 2005, http://www.christianaggression.com/item_display.php?type=NEWS&id=1114231973

[33] Ibid.

[34] For a previous discussion of this case, see Myer Samra, "Searching for the Ratu Hospital: Dreams and Judaism in the Imagining of Mizo Nationalism," *The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 9 (2008): 63.

[35] See discussion of such attitudes in Yossi Klein Halevi, "The Unwanted Immigrants," *The Jerusalem Report*, November 17, 1994, pp. 26-27, and in the *Jerusalem Post*, "Poraz mulls Benei Menashe policy," June 18, 2003.

[36] Binod Behari Goswami, "Outgroup from the Point of View of Ingroup," *Man in India* 55, no. 4 (1975): 326-330.

[37] See Samra, "Searching for the Ratu Hospital," p. 75, n.154, for an example of the pressure to follow Jesus, which the Benei Menashe face within Mizo society.

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Bene Israel Aliyah and Absorption in Israel, 1948-1960

By Joseph Hodes

Between May 1948 and May 1960, approximately 8,000 of 20,000 Bene Israel left India and moved to Israel. This article examines some of the challenges the community was forced to over come upon arrival including culture shock, housing, education, discrimination, and employment problems. These challenges drove some to return to India, although many of those who left eventually returned to Israel.

Zionist ideology deeply penetrated the Bene Israel community in India, leading to the creation of Indian Zionist organizations, which promoted it further. Visits by emissaries and the arrival of refugees from Europe further ignited the community. As early as 1936 there was keen interest in immigrating to Palestine, and with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, large portions of the community were interested in packing up to leave the place that had been their ancestral home for centuries. Representation of the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in pre-State Israel) as a place of equal opportunity may have fostered their enthusiasm, as the harsh realities of British Mandate Palestine were not made clear to them. The articles in Indian Jewish journals such as *Friend of Israel*, *Zion's Messenger*, and *The Jewish Advocate* were overwhelmingly supportive of the ideology, and emissaries painted a rosy picture of the future and the situation on the ground.

Upon the establishment of the State of Israel, the immigration of families and adults of the Bene Israel community was organized in India by H. Cynowitz, the chairman and J. S. Ezra, the vice president of the Bombay Zionist Association. While some wealthy community members were among the first immigrants, the majority of the first to move to Israel were children who went as part of the Youth Aliyah movement. From May 1948 to December 1950, Indian immigration was slow and steady. Then, due to the extreme conditions in Israel, immigration from India and many other places stopped altogether.[1] On the brink of collapse from more immigrants than it could support, Israel sent this letter to the Jewish Agency in Bombay on December 10, 1950, stating:

> Since the arrangements for the transport of immigrants as well as most of the financial and technical burden of absorbing, housing, and settling the new immigrants fall on the shoulders of the Jewish Agency, certain temporary restrictions which the Jewish Agency feels compelled to impose on the flow of immigrants, owing to a shortage of housing and other difficulties of absorption, have to be borne with patience and dignity.[2]

When immigration resumed in late 1951, the Jewish Agency established an immigration center in Bombay, with F. W. Pollack, previously Israel's South East Asia trade commissioner, as immigration officer.[3] The Bene Israel soon began to immigrate in larger numbers, and by 1952 there were approximately 3,000 Indian Jews in Israel.[4]

Youth Aliyah

The idea of bringing Jewish youth to Palestine began in Germany shortly after Hitler's rise to power and preoccupied the Zionist movement for many years.[5] For Jewish young people in Germany, their only hope of survival was to immigrate to Palestine where segments of the Jewish community were ready and willing to absorb them.[6] The first group of 45 adolescents arrived in Mandate Palestine at the beginning of 1934 and were sent to Kibbutz Ein Harod in the valley of Jezreel. By 1954, 60,000 children and adolescents from over 30 countries had been absorbed into 152 kibbutzim (Socialist collective living communities), 19 moshavim (semiprivate socialist living communities), and 77 educational facilities.[7]

Youth Aliyah began in India in July 1949 as an outgrowth of the Habonim, a socialist Zionist youth organization started on the subcontinent in 1935 by the Baghdadi Jewish community through the Calcutta Zionist Organization. The Habonim program in India as described in its constitution was:

> an educational Zionist youth movement which aims at awakening Jewish youth to the realization of their heritage as Jews; encouraging them in the study of the Hebrew language, Jewish history and tradition, providing them with a cultural environment in which they can live a fuller Jewish life, and in particular, encouraging them to take an active part in the upbuilding of Eretz Israel as a Jewish homeland.... Habonim educates towards Labour Zionism which means we support the establishment of a Socialist Commonwealth in Eretz Israel, and for worldwide achievement of the aims of the Labour movement. We regard the Hisadruth [general Federation of Jewish Labour in Palestine] as the nucleus of the future commonwealth and as the worker's chief goal for attaining this end.[8]

The Habonim movement in India began to focus on Youth Aliyah in 1949 at the suggestion of Bennie Porath, a Jewish Agency emissary (*shaliach*) in Bombay and a member of the HaShomer HaTza'ir Zionist youth group. The group he formed quickly dissolved, however, as Indian parents did not trust Porath, the foreigner. In October of that year, members of the Baghdadi community (including Mrs. Menassah, Mr. G. Sopher, and Mr. V. Moses) restarted the project and established a group of 40 youths to prepare for immigration to Israel. Their six-month preparation included Jewish education, Hebrew language training, and living in a kibbutz-like environment that had been established near Bombay by Habonim. The group received financial support from the Sassoon family, who raised substantial funds in Calcutta.[9] The fundraising generated enough money to create a center for Jewish children from the "Orient" on Kibbutz Lavi, a religious kibbutz overlooking the Yavneel Valley in the lower Galilee.[10] The first group left Bombay in May 1950, followed shortly by other groups from Jewish communities throughout India. Approximately 150 young people were sent to Israel through this organization, including some Bene Israel youth. But the Bene Israel quickly formed their own organization to send Bene Israel groups to Israel. The first such group formed in late 1950, comprised 38 children, 10 of whom were girls.[11] After the provisional halt in immigration imposed by Israel, when both the Bene Israel and Baghdadi groups had to cease immigration, Youth Aliyah started up again at the end of 1952.

By 1953, immigration involved much more red tape, as both Israel and India had learned from past mistakes. Having absorbed as many as 3,000 immigrants with tuberculosis and 1,500 mental patients,[12] Israel now imposed health standards before accepting immigrants. For the Bene Israel this was less of a problem than for the Cochin Jews, some of whom suffered from elephantiasis, a mosquito borne disease causing severe swelling of the legs. For some time, Israeli officials mistakenly thought the disease to be contagious, which made it difficult for many Cochin Jews to make Aliyah.

From India, there were, as well, new standards that needed to be met including a letter of consent from the Central Youth Aliyah Department in Israel declaring that there was space for the newcomers, so that they did not spend long periods in reception camps or have families scattered among different kibbutzim. Written confirmation was also required from the Immigration Department that the group would travel at the expense of the Jewish Agency and be sent within three months of acceptance. In the past, many groups of young immigrants had to cancel at the last-minute because of payment complications or endless departure delays, causing terrible uncertainty leading to many of the groups being dissolved.[13]

Because of all the new requirements, Mr. Shlomo Shmit of the Bombay Zionist office, working closely with the Jewish Agency, informed all the youth planning to make aliyah that

they would be sent to Israel individually, not as part of the Youth Aliyah organization. As a result, the Youth Aliyah movement in the hands of the Calcutta Zionist Organization was dissolved.[14] It appeared that the Bombay Jewish Agency immigration office wanted to control Youth Aliyah matters directly, not through the Calcutta Zionist Organization. The process was therefore taken over by the Jewish Agency Aliyah Office and controlled by foreigners working in India, rather than by Indians themselves.

Israel's objective was to turn its immigrants into Israelis and to have them break away from their Diaspora communities. The Diaspora was generally viewed with disdain by the Yishuv, and immigrants were to take on the new (Western) Israeli identity.[15] Whether they were placed in a kibbutz, moshav, or educational facility, the educational aspect of the immigration process was virtually the same for all who came on Youth Aliyah, and in many ways it marked the start of a unified community in Israel. It was this educational process that cut the immigrant's ties with their enormously diverse cultures, languages, and histories. The process has been referred to as a disintegration process (although it was also an integration process),[16] as it dissolved ties not only with geographical backgrounds but also with social relations—relatives, friends, and acquaintances—and emotional, cultural, spiritual, and linguistic values and norms.[17] This process meant abandoning old ways and beginning to integrate—establishing new connections, accepting new values, and acquiring new images and concepts. Numerous *olim* (immigrants) even took new names. Many of the children who came from Europe were orphaned Holocaust survivors, and a new "family" community had to be created for these youngsters.

Members of the Youth Aliyah were especially susceptible to this process, as the younger they were on arrival, the less attached they were to their place of origin. The Youth Aliyah educational process was divided into seven parts: a change of environment; an organized social life (familiarizing them with the demands and prohibitions of their new society); a special and separate educational framework (in accordance with the new society's needs); integration of study, work, and social life within a single setting; adaptation of the study plan to the child's intellectual capabilities; placement in a village or rural setting; and physical labor.[18] The new norms represented a dramatic change for almost all newcomers. The new climate, food, manner of dress, language, and expectations were difficult for everyone. In the case of Indian olim, the change was particularly dramatic, as the new norms were often the antithesis of those of their original culture.

One girl who was sent to Israel at the age of eight through the Youth Aliyah program reflected how in India, one important cultural norm was that one was never be fully nude—not even while bathing (while she only spoke for herself, this norm is practiced in most places throughout India). Bathing in India, involved an intricate process of scrubbing and cleaning while never fully exposing oneself—she had never even seen herself fully nude. She recalled that upon arrival in Israel she was immediately sent to the large reception camp of Ramat Hadassah, where she had to share the public shower where all the women, young and old, were showering together completely naked. "We couldn't even think of anything more disrespectful and disgraceful than to undress in the presence of someone else or to look at someone else's unclothed body, especially when it was an older woman."[19] This was just one example of the enormous cultural differences between her rural home in India and her new setting in Israel.

She recalled how silence had been the norm in her village in India, where people spoke quietly. To raise one's voice, especially in anger, was shocking. She recalled how her father would not beat her or yell when she did something unacceptable, but merely give her a look of reproach, which hurt as much as a whipping or scolding.[20] When she arrived in Israel, she was so quiet that her counselors thought something was wrong; they kept encouraging her to speak more and participate in discussions. She shared a room with two North African girls, whom she found loud and unruly. In Israel, she explained, the youth from India came "to see ourselves in a different light...we'd begun to feel that our shyness, our exaggerated deference to the wishes of others and the way in which we suppressed our

own personal likes and dislikes—virtues we used to prize so highly—were distinct handicaps to us in our new lives here in Israel."[21] This statement indicates the degree to which the Youth Aliyah program was succeeding in its goal of separating immigrants from their backgrounds. They began to view their past as a handicap and rushed to embrace the new values and norms.

Another Indian, Ruby Daniels from the Cochin community, who has written a book about her life in India and Israel, although she was not part of the Youth Aliyah, noted a similar experience in coming to Israel and having to adjust to the new environment. Clearly many of these cultural norms were not unique to the Bene Israel but were shared by many throughout India. A letter of Daniels sheds light on some of her experiences. She writes:

> My upbringing by a good Indian mother was very different from that of a young girl in Israel. I was forbidden to talk to a man, to laugh too much, and could never say that I wanted to learn to dance. I went to school and in the evenings helped mother. In Israel a young girl takes a partner and dances merrily without fear. Although an Indian woman may be thought of by her husband as a goddess, she does not play a very important role. In Israel I have seen that the woman plays a part equal to that of a man, and is entitled to the same freedom that he is.[22]

This again refers to the impropriety in India of being too outspoken or loud. By contrast, the Israeli culture they encountered is very outspoken: life is to be shouted about, laughed at, and disagreed with, often very volubly. To many outsiders, not only Indians, Israeli culture can seem loud, pushy, and even rude. This is not to say that there are no loud Indians or quiet Israelis; only that the cultural norms of the two nations are quite different. Many of the Bene Israel who came to Israel, either as part of the Youth Aliyah movement or on their own, recounted similar stories of culture shock when interviewed in 2008.[23] Some noted that when their parents arrived a year or so after they did, they were often shocked and dismayed to see how their children had taken on norms they found strange and disagreeable.

Cultural Challenges and Cultural Intolerance

The adults who arrived in the first years of Israel's existence found many of their preconceptions immediately destroyed. It is important to understand that immigrants at that time would have had little understanding of the struggles the country was facing—the mass immigration, the shortages, the security threats, and the legal confusion. So when they arrived at the reception camps, the Bene Israel, like most newcomers, were shocked. Writing of his arrival, one Bene Israel wrote:

> Sha'ar Ha-Aliyah is the first bitter blow at a man's pride and self respect. He is a refugee, nonentity, herded and prodded like cattle—is this the welcome for a long lost son come home? Nothing is explained to him, no hand extended to help him find his way.[24]

Another Bene Israel *oleh* (immigrant), Menchem Sogavker, wrote of his arrival and referred indirectly to the need to strip naked in front of strangers.

> During my month's stay at Sha'ar Ha- Aliyah, I found the place to be like an improved concentration camp with Jews guarding the Jews. I do not wish to write in detail about that place, but one thing I would like to mention: the fact that no information regarding the medical examinations, etc. in Sha'ar Ha-Aliyah was given to our people in India who wished to migrate, has sometimes resulted in much trouble and aroused ill feeling in the heart of some of our people.[25]

This mention of the medical examination refers to the fact that, during the initial bathing and delousing, the immigrants had to strip naked in front of strangers. This very alarming act was demanded of them immediately upon arrival, creating negative feelings in the Bene Israel.

Many Bene Israel spent long periods in the reception camps. Some communities were kept in the reception camps for longer periods than other communities. A selection policy was practiced in terms of housing which worked against the Sephardic and Mizrahi community. (Sephardic Jews trace themselves or their religious customs back to the Iberian Peninsula. Mizrahi are "eastern" Jews who either follow their own customs or have adopted Sephardic traditions. Today the term *Mizrahi* is more commonly used, but both terms are used loosely in Israel in the popular discourse, often falsely labeling any Jew of color as Mizrahi.) Here's what Yehudah Berginski, head of the Absorption Department, told the Jewish Agency Executive:

> I have to present you with a tough problem, and one the public is concerned with: Discrimination against *edot haMizrah*.... We took four hundred apartments that were slated for earlier immigrants from North Africa, who were scheduled to move into housing, and gave them on credit to more recent immigrants.... We did not make this public...I want us all to be aware that we have sinned in this way because we had no choice. I do not need to tell the board why we did it. It was done for political reasons and out of a human concern for the Poles.[26]

Berginski reported on immigration statistics up to 1956 in a special executive meeting saying that Europeans and especially Polish immigrants were receiving better housing than the Jews from North Africa and Asia.[27]

The compassion shown to the Polish community was most likely due to the hardship the community faced during the Holocaust. As housing was limited, there were many who felt the Polish community should be afforded whatever limited comforts the state was able to provide. Nonetheless, the Mizrahi community by Berginski's own admission was often denied the better living conditions.

Not all Bene Israel were sent to settlement towns or to the *ma'abarot* (transitional housing communities made up of shacks of sheet metal, sometimes wood, and often a combination of aluminum and canvas). Some found their way to kibbutzim where they also faced difficult challenges. Menchem Sogavker's letter spells this out:

> If he finds his way to a kibbutz, too often chaverim are too busy with their own lives, tired and disillusioned by newcomers who came and left and faced with a difficult language barrier. No real effort to surround him with warmth and understanding is provided with his necessities. The basic order of life is explained to him, and he is left to face a new social order, difficult work, different food and climate as best he can without understanding the why and wherefore. His children are separated from him, his wife faced with a completely new set of standards, and if the adjustment is slow and difficult he is given little patience or help. He is a stranger, a misfit living in a society of equals and yet not equal.[28]

This letter touches on one of the most difficult cultural changes—the separation of the traditional family. The socialist ideal of the kibbutz movement, especially in the early years of the state, focused on communal ownership of everything, including clothing and children. It was firmly believed that individual desires were evoked by the traditional family unit and that raising children communally would diminish bourgeois desires and free both parents to work. Therefore, children on the kibbutzim were all brought up together in a children's house. There they slept, were educated, and often ate. Children would spend a

few hours each evening with their parents, and then return to the children's house to sleep. (While the kibbutzim felt they were doing what was best for the children, today most kibbutzim no longer follow this practice to the same extent. This change is primarily the demand of those who grew up in such children's houses, who insist that their own children stay with them at night.)

This transition was difficult for many immigrants who came to the kibbutzim. For Indians, who sometimes lived with up to four generations in one home and were used to being surrounded by family, it was shocking and even bordered on psychological abuse. The separation of children from their mothers also meant that women were forced to relinquish their traditional motherhood role and take on entirely new roles. To give up their children would have been terrifying for many immigrants, and we can be certain that many tears were shed. This practice serves as a perfect example of the Zionist educational system that created Israelis out of Diaspora Jews by destroying old norms and replacing them with new norms.

The reference, in Sogavker's letter, to a new set of standards for wives alludes to the social equality of women in Israel. While Israeli women have struggled to receive equal treatment, and while no law that stipulates equality can actually bring it about, the position of women in Israel was far more liberated than in India, where before independence they had few civil rights. For the Bene Israel, who knew of Israel's attitude toward women and may even have been attracted by it, it would still have been shocking and challenging to have to assume such new roles immediately. Some Bene Israel were not even aware of what was happening on the kibbutzim before they left India, and they arrived with no time to prepare psychologically for the separation from their children, making their situation even more difficult.

Another shock was the racism to which the Bene Israel, and many other groups, were subjected directly to upon arrival. Sophie Benjamin, interviewed in 2008, recalled that as her family reached kibbutz Kfar Blum in 1950, the children of the kibbutz jeered at her three-year-old daughter: "*Kushi, lechi mi-can*" (go away, black).[29] This incident encapsulated the harsh reality of arrival in the new country and the social challenges the newcomers faced. For the Bene Israel, who had never been racially differentiated from their fellow Indians, this was a terrible new experience. In this case, the children of the kibbutz all became friends and the child adjusted over time, but the Bene Israel of all age groups experienced this entrenched ignorance and bigotry, as recalled in almost all of the interviews conducted for this study. One particularly religious Bene Israel oleh who asked to remain anonymous recounted how he was brought to a nonreligious kibbutz on arrival in Israel. No religious settings were available except at one small table in the cafeteria, where several very observant Jews from Eastern Europe would *bentsh* (recite the Birkat Hamazon) after the meal. When he asked if could join the table, he was told he could not. It was made clear that he was unwelcome because of his ethnicity.[30]

Sometimes ignorance was due to lack of knowledge about India, in general, and the existence of Indian Jews. One interviewee, Asher Raymond, recounted how upon arrival in Israel from Bombay he met a young girl from New York and that they fell in love (they have been married for over 30 years and have two grandchildren and another on the way). When the girl from New York told her father that she was going to marry a boy from India, the father-in-law to be was amazed to hear of an Indian Jew. He wanted to find out if Asher was really Jewish and asked him, "Do you speak Yiddish?" to which Asher replied that he did not. Upon hearing that he did not speak Yiddish, the girl's father erupted, saying, "How can you not speak Yiddish? EVERY Jew I know speaks Yiddish!" to which the cunning young man replied, "Do you speak Marathi?" When the girl's father admitted he did not speak Marathi, Raymond shot back with, "Well EVERY Jew *I know* speaks Marathi!"[31]

As well, many among the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities viewed the Bene Israel as from the "Far East" and therefore the "jungle," which connoted all things primitive. This stereotyped view was encapsulated in a conversation between a Bene Israel oleh—an

articulate, educated, and worldly engineer from the cosmopolitan city of Bombay and his Polish neighbor in Israel. The Pole retorted to something he said with, "What do *you* know, you are from the jungle?!"[32] In her autobiography, Ruby Daniels recounted a similar story indicating how synonymous India or Indian Jewry was with the jungle in the eyes of non-Indians. She wrote of her experience at the kibbutz:

> Before coming here I knew all about the conditions in Israel. I did not expect anything much different, but what I did not expect was the behavior of the people. Most of the members were from Europe. There were a few boys and girls from Cochin here, so I thought we could get on. But we did not get a good treatment. They thought we have come from the jungle. Everywhere we felt discrimination and still do. No one came forward to help and talk to me.[33]

While almost every other community that entered Israel in the early years was a persecuted minority, discrimination was unknown to the Bene Israel. Conditions in Israel would have been difficult for all newcomers, but Israel would still have been a place of refuge. In the first years of the state, few immigrants came to Israel from countries where Jews thrived, such as Canada and the United States. Instead, Israel drew those who had lived in Hitler's Europe or in the increasingly violent anti-Jewish sentiment of the Middle East and North Africa. The Iraqi community had seen riots in June 1941, which led to the death of 180 Jews, and many more were injured. In Libya, in November 1945, 140 Jews were killed in Tripoli, and all the synagogues in the city were looted. In Egypt in the same year, a synagogue, a Jewish old-age home, and a Jewish hospital were burned to the ground. In India, however, there had been no similar persecution, and being "othered" in Israel would have been a completely new experience for the Bene Israel. The community as a whole, however, was to suffer much greater challenges than race and notions of the "East" by a society struggling with overwhelming diversity.

Education

By 1951, like many other communities in Israel, the Bene Israel felt that the key to securing their children's future was education, and they gave this priority over housing and jobs.[34] Between 1951 and 1960, however, educational opportunities for Bene Israel children were problematic. As Israel grew during the first decade, networks of schools expanded, new academies were established, and opportunities for attending school were extended to and even required of all its citizens. Public elementary schools, colleges, and universities developed to accommodate the needs of the increasing population. The value placed on education, as well as the emphasis placed on learning in Israeli culture, were expressed in the development and location of educational institutions and in the provision of resources for educational development. The ethnic origins of families and the ethnic composition of communities played a role in the location of educational institutions, the quality of teachers, and the curriculum. In examining the educational system of Israel in the first 12 years, it becomes apparent that the Ashkenazi Jews were receiving better education, and according to the 1961 census of Israel, Ashkenazi students spent on average one and a half more years in school then the Mizrahi students, and four times as many Ashkenazi students had a university education.[35]

To combat this, the ministry of education expanded vocational training at the secondary level, extended the number of years of compulsory education, and introduced compensatory education at the primary level. Even with these changes however, and the positive results that ensued, including the decrease in the gap between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi educational levels, ethnic origin remained a powerful force dictating the location and qualities of schools.

Having been well educated under British colonial rule, the Bene Israel community had for decades prized education. As early as 1917, a substantial Bene Israel education fund was established by Dr. Joseph Benjamin Bamnolker, the president of the first Bene Israel conference in India, to provide academic scholarships and encourage achievement.[36] One of the first things they noticed in Israel was the difference in educational level between them and the Mizrahi groups with which they were categorized. In 1960, a letter by Ezekiel Ashtamkar articulated what the community had been saying during their 12 years in Israel: "The position of our community is not on par with the other Oriental communities. Ours is an advanced community, therefore special efforts must be made to keep our educational level in Israel."[37] Shalva Weil has written that "the higher average number of years of schooling which the Bene Israel have received in India is particularly striking when it is considered that in Israeli society in general Indians are thought to be uneducated."[38] She also noted:

> Certain social characteristics of the Bene Israel, however, distinguish them from other Afro-Asian immigrants [in Israel]. The most striking is the Bene Israel's educational attainment in [their] country of origin which exceeds that of other Afro-Asian immigrants either in Lod or nationally. Allied to this, is their favourable attitude to working women, particularly in certain professions, which aligns them with the Western immigrants. An analysis of the social characteristics of the Bene Israel demonstrates the anomalous situation of the Bene Israel as Sephardim who have Western aspirations.[39]

Because of the unequal educational opportunities for Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities in Israel, by 1960 a gap had emerged between the economic opportunities of these two groups, creating bitterness, a sense of discrimination, and an obstacle to integration.

The letter from Ashtamkar in 1960 continued: "If the present state of affairs continues, the Oriental Jews will be relegated as a lower class reserved for inferior types of jobs. We must arise from our complacency and steer our ship of destiny away from a misguided and misleading course."[40] This letter was based on 12 years experience of education in Israel, and its views are confirmed by the Falk Center Report of 1959/1960:

> The major factors causing income differentiations were apparently differences in education and vocational training. Even cases where persons from different communities working in the same jobs and having the same educational qualifications received different pay may well have been the result of differences in the quality of their education and training and smaller opportunities for personal advancement for the earners from Oriental communities.[41]

By the time this report was issued in 1959/1960, severe damage to the Bene Israel community had already resulted from its inclusion by the Ashkenazim in the Sephardic/Mizrahi camp.[42] Often when the Mizrahi attended the same schools as the Ashkenazim, they were placed in separate classrooms, creating a form of segregated education within the country. Thus in 1951/1952, 86 percent of Mizrahi children were in exclusively Mizrahi classrooms with poorer education, inappropriate facilities, a high proportion of unqualified teachers, and a watered-down curriculum. Considering the country's struggle to feed and house the population at that time, it is no surprise that there were severe problems in education, but these problems had long-lasting consequences. By 1956 a full 25 percent of Mizrahi first graders failed to pass to the second grade.[43] Alarmed at these numbers, the Ministry of Education attempted reform, but for the Bene Israel educated in India under British rule, the high failure rate came as a surprise.

As with education, the Bene Israel also felt the gap in economic norms between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim. The same letter from 1960 states:

> The problem of education is a cause of worry to many [Bene Israel] parents in Israel who find it difficult even to pay for books and other services for their children in the elementary schools. The economic condition of an average worker is not so encouraging and the children after finishing their elementary education have to start working to supplement the parent's income. Education in Israel is so costly that even well placed parents have difficulty footing the bills of their children's education. Higher education has become virtually a monopoly of the rich.[44]

By 1959/1960, the Ministry of Education introduced drastic measures to try to level the playing field. By this time, however, almost an entire generation of Bene Israel children had passed through the educational system, and concerns had been prevalent among the Bene Israel for years. By the mid-1950s, the community already felt neglected and frustrated. Very soon after arrival, the Bene Israel, like many other communities, struggled to find jobs in their professions and were forced to take other employment, often far from their families at extra expense, creating additional stress and imposing on friends and relatives for board and lodging.[45]

Strikes, Protests, and Repatriation

From 1951 to 1959, protests and demonstrations were staged in Israel by many communities, mostly North African or Asian, including the Bene Israel. Many in their community wrote letters of protest to the Indian press, the Indian government, the Israeli government, and to Olsvanger (the Zionist emissary who had influenced and exposed the Bene Israel to the idea of immigrating to Israel), complaining of a lack of jobs, good housing, education, and food (as the rationing until 1952 made both food and clothing scarce). Many even accused the Jewish Agency of spreading false propaganda to convince the Bene Israel to immigrate. Some of the letters clamored for a return to India. A letter to Olsvanger complained, that "we were informed [in India] that there was no shortage of work and that all were profitably employed on land and other projects. Now with errors of back pay, up to two to three months pay are overdue."[46] The letter claims that their employer directed them to the *lishkat avodah* (a labor exchange) where they were informed that the government had not allotted sufficient funds to pay them. The letter also addressed the heavy taxes for irrigation water for their uncultivated land, poor medical services despite paying taxes to cover such costs, inadequate rations, and that "most of the community are not given work according to their trades" although this "was promised them before leaving India."[47] Letters such as these reveal the low morale of the Bene Israel community by 1951. Indeed, engineers, clerks, carpenters, and civil servants from many cultures often found themselves doing manual labor. But the Zionist socialist ideals attached to manual labor and cultivation of land as honorable work were perhaps lost on many of the Bene Israel. The letter does not specify who in India made promises about employment, but if any such promises were made, they were made in bad faith, as no one could have guaranteed employment, especially after the waves of immigration began in 1948.

Other letters shed light on the Bombay Zionist Association (BZA) in India. One letter of complaint written on April 21, 1951 typed out but signed by a Bene Israel in illegible handwriting, indicates that the BZA was in distress and hints at who may have made false promises:

> When I began to piece certain facts together I came to the conclusion that my earlier confidence was misplaced. At the same I thought it would be better to appeal to the good sense of those responsible, and together with a few friends I spoke personally to Mr. Ezra, Mr. Cynowitz, and Mr. Gourgey, appealing to them to lie low for a while

> and to give an opportunity to others to pull the BZA out of the mess to which they [had] consigned it.[48]

This letter is interesting, because it brings to the forefront the important question of how one convinces a community that has prospered without persecution to uproot themselves and move as a community to another country. One possibility is that the community was indeed told lies about jobs, housing, and education being readily available. If such falsehoods were uttered, the men named above may well have been responsible. The assertion that the community was told lies is substantiated by dozens of other letters found in the Central Zionist Archives, including one written in 1954:

> At the time we were in India, the Jewish Agency in Bombay was making very sweet propaganda, and moreover they were promising very good jobs, according to our profession, good education for our children and decent places to stay. To our surprise when we arrived in Israel, we found ourselves in Shaar Aliyah Camp. Can you tell us sir, why did the Jewish Agency in Bombay bring us to this country? Why did your agents deceive us? Why did the Jewish Agency make false promises?[49]

It is impossible to ignore so many letters claiming false promises. Interestingly, this letter clearly identifies the Jewish Agency in Bombay as the source of these promises, yet the Bombay Zionist Organization was responsible for the initial organization of Bene Israel immigrants. Could the writer have confused the BZA with the Jewish Agency? Were their offices working so closely together that they seemed to be a single organization?

It was not only the Bene Israel who seemed to be receiving false promises. Ruby Daniels commented in her autobiography, that

> Representatives of the Jewish Agency...made false promises that they [would] take all of the Cochin Jews to Israel by Rosh Hashana. One of the men took money from the synagogues for their passage, and people were getting ready to leave. They resigned from work, sold houses and property they had, and waited....Two years passed and there was still no reply from him. They ate away the money they had, leaving them with no food to eat and no house to live in.... When I came to Bombay in 1951 on my way to Israel, I went to the office to see this man... "Where is the ship"? I asked him, and he said to me, "It's in the air." I felt like spitting in his face."[50]

While no written evidence of promises such as those mentioned in these letters and autobiography has been uncovered, the writings that emerged from the BZA do use language that suggests a false reality. The rhetoric invokes a land of milk and honey as opposed to a wartorn country struggling for survival. A letter to the Jewish Agency in Israel by J. S. Ezra, the president of the BZA and a Bene Israel himself, paints a most unlikely image. While this letter was written some years later, in 1956, the rhetoric provides important insight into imagery that may have been presented to the Bene Israel in India:

> Far out on the horizon, Israel beckons. Israel to the Jew in India presents a spiritual reawakening. His longing to be in Israel is the climax of years of hopes and dreaming that there in the land of his forefathers his physical inconveniences will be amply rewarded in his spiritual satisfaction. It is this thought which sustains the Jew of India and keeps him alive. There is an ever present yearning, a consuming ardourwhich is keeping him hopeful and alert for the future. He is happy because very soon he will be in Israel and his burdens will be lightened, because there the dream of centuries will come true.[51]

It is disconcerting that the president of the BZA should use such hyperbole to describe their desire to go to Israel as "a consuming ardour" or a "thought which sustains the Jew of India and keeps him alive." It is also strange that Israel, governed by those who did not necessarily have high regard for religion and sought a secular Jewish state, would receive a letter phrased in such mystical language. Perhaps, with such ignorance of India by many in the Yishuv, the letter intended to portray the Indian Jews as similar to the Yemenites, who had indeed gone to Israel out of religious fervor. Regardless of Mr. Ezra's intent, it is clear that many Bene Israel expected jobs, housing, and good education to be awaiting them in Israel, and that the situation they encountered lacked these necessities of life.

By 1951, many Bene Israel children in Israel were in a wretched state, undernourished and with few winter clothes due to the rationing that lasted until early 1952. To rectify this, the community began to organize peaceful sit-ins on their kibbutzim and at the offices of the Jewish Agency, influenced by Gandhi's *satyagraha* movement in India. On November 21, 1951, 150 Bene Israel, including children, seven pregnant women, and a nine-day-old baby, held a hunger strike outside the Jewish Agency offices in Tel Aviv. A second protest on the same spot in March 1952 demanded repatriation to India. On May 11, 1952, 12 Bene Israel again protested outside the office, demanding repatriation.[52] Protests recurred in 1954, once again demanding either repatriation or an immediate solution to the problems of housing, employment, and education. While these protests by the Bene Israel were always peaceful, the police, who were dealing with many different protest groups in Israel, did not always react peacefully.

The physical violence during these protests came to a head in April 1956, at another peaceful sit-in outside the Jewish Agency office concerning unmet housing, work, and educational needs. Dr. M. Young of the Jewish Agency promised that their needs would be met and asked them to cease the protest. The group ceased and went to the offices of those who could make good on the assurance, where they were told that the Jewish Agency did not currently intend to meet Dr. Young's promises. After appealing to every available government agency for help, the community resumed its protest. The official complaint report issued by the community records that the police battered all those present, including the elderly, the children, and the infirm. A five-month-pregnant woman beaten by a police officer was taken to hospital where she miscarried.[53]

The strike continued, despite some members being taken to hospital. During the night more police arrived, assaulted the protesters more severely, forced them into police vans, and dumped them on a roadside far from the Jewish Agency office. One young man was arrested and sentenced by a magistrate to a month's imprisonment.[54] Some members of the community were now scared to protest for fear of violence.

This further trauma to the community, in addition to all their hardships and thwarted expectations, was shared by other immigrant communities. What was unique to the Bene Israel, however, was their status and position in their country of origin, as a community that had never experienced any violence from the state. For this reason, as early as 1951, many in the community urged the Israeli government to repatriate them to India.

Shalva Weil has written that the community's initial demand for repatriation marked "the first time in the short history of the country that a complete group of immigrants demanded to be returned."[55] This is not entirely accurate. Although some demanded repatriation to India, later work by Joan Roland suggests it was not the entire community. A Jewish Agency enquiry headed by Olsvanger found that "fewer than thirty-five families, mainly in Bersheba, were unhappy," and that they "had been stirred up by agitators—a few Bene Israel men."[56] While there are no exact figures of how many wanted to leave there were those who would never have left Israel, even with the opportunity to do so. And it was not only Bene Israel members who left. As previously noted, in the difficult first years of the state many Ashkenazim and Mizrahim who could leave for Canada, the United States, Australia, or England did so (there were more such opportunities among the Ashkenazim). Certainly, the Bene Israel who were dissatisfied and wanted to leave were not alone. It is

clear, however, from interviews among the community in 2008 that more than 35 families wanted to leave Israel. What is particularly interesting is that many of those who were repatriated to India then decided to return to Israel.

The government of Israel did pay their repatriation costs, and on April 2, 1952, an initial group of 115 flew back to India.[57] Shortly thereafter, more Bene Israel were returned to India by Israel. They discovered, however, that India was no longer the home they had left. Most had left jobs that were no longer available, had sold their homes and many of their belongings. Some communities had sold communal properties such as synagogues, so that when they returned they found no jobs or readily available housing, nor an intact community. While Israel certainly had problems with housing, education, and work, the challenges in India now appeared even more overwhelming. Within a year of the first repatriation, a letter from many of the returnees to the Israeli government requested their return to Israel.[58]

Between 1952 and 1953, due to the repatriation of the Bene Israel community, the Indian press contained articles accusing Israel of being a racist state. In the *Times of India* and the *Bombay Chronicle,* claims that "Indian Jews weren't up to the mark" painted a picture of a racist state that would not accept the Bene Israel due to their skin color. The Bene Israel now seeking to return to Israel fought these allegations, and by May 1953, these newspapers were retracting their accusations in articles such as "Indian Jews Back Israel— Discrimination Denied."[59] Reprinted in many newspapers across India, this article said: "Neither at work, nor socially, was there any trace of discrimination on account of color or origin. It is indeed contrary to the very spirit which inspired the creation of the state of Israel."[60]

The articles denying racism in Israel were a response to the declaration in India's parliament by Mrs. Lakshmi Menon, Deputy Minister of External Affairs in Nehru's cabinet, that "one of the reasons which prompted the Indian Jews to return from Israel to India was the colour bar."[61] A prompt response to the Indian government, signed by 58 Bene Israel returnees on May 17, 1953, denied any trace of discrimination in Israel on account of color or origin. It continued:

> We regret the controversy which attended our return to India—it was a confession of failure to come up to the high standards demanded by a pioneering country. As you are fully aware there are many of us today who would like to be given another chance to take part in the great work of reconstruction that is in place there. Had we the means, many of us would have already been in Israel today. If the Jewish Agency gives us another opportunity and pays for our passage again, we would today be all going to Israel with a greater determination to make good. In the interest of truth we would like you and hereby authorise you to convey this letter to all concerned. We feel that the good name of Israel should not be sullied by unjustified criticism of its government or people.[62]

The community was dependent on the Jewish Agency, as most could not afford to re-immigrate on their own. Because of the cost to the Israeli government, their repatriation was not a high priority for the Jewish Agency. Over the next several years, however, most of the repatriated Bene Israel who sought to return were brought back at the expense of Israel, along with additional Bene Israel olim. On their return to Israel, housing, education, and work remained problematic, even if they felt this was not due to racial discrimination.

By 1959, however, many Bene Israel felt the greatest hindrance to the prosperity of the community was its disunity. The community had arrived in Israel without official or recognized political or religious leadership, and by 1959 was just beginning to form unified bodies to meet the issues facing the entire community. Factions, dissension, and jealousies (Bene Israel who were from Bombay felt distinct from those from the villages of the Konkan coast, and those from Karachi felt they were distinct from the Bombay community) had

seriously obstructed progress and caused demoralization.[63] In the community organ, *Truth,* Daniel Talker of Rishon LeTzion wrote that "to raise our standard of living and to live in peace and plenty in spite of turmoil and discord, it is up to us alone to help one another by active co-operation."[64] This call marks the start of community organization. It had taken just over a decade for the Bene Israel to relinquish their expectation that they would all be integrated and looked after equally as Jews in the State of Israel.

The first step toward unity was the creation of a Bene Israel Conference, which sought to address the community's problems, including absorption, economic progress, provision of technical and professional education, encouragement of fine arts, sports, and guidance for new immigrants.[65] The Bene Israel were now spread across the country in towns such as Kiryat Shmone, Haifa, Ramle, Lod, Ashdod, Be'er Sheva, Kiryat Gat, and Dimona.[66] Communication between areas was often difficult, as most homes did not have telephones in the 1950s, but the effort to bring the community together from as many regions as possible was largely successful. Although the conference took place in 1959, it was not until 1961 that the community successfully established an Action Committee.

Conclusion

The initial challenges the Bene Israel faced on arrival were not unique to their community. All newcomers had to deal with culture shock, a lack of housing, and employment, and often unequal education. It was slightly different for the Bene Israel in that things like Indian spices were initially unavailable, which affected what they were used to eating, but this is not vastly different from other communities such as the Germans, who were not used to olives and who had to eat them frequently, as that was the food that was available. What was unique to the Bene Israel, however, was the contrast this presented to the situation in the country they had left behind.

Because the Bene Israel had not suffered in India but prospered there, their experience of the struggles and challenges in the first decade of the State of Israel was perhaps unique. The fact that they had a country to return to may also have made their hardships more difficult to bear. Those who can never "go home" are psychologically more prepared to face the challenges that confront them, for what choice do they have? But a sense of being able to return to a kinder, gentler place may produce resistance to an educational process aimed at renouncing the past and embracing a new reality. Most who did return to India seemed eager to return to Israel upon discovery that there were no longer jobs nor homes waiting for them. In fact, for the Bene Israel community, the first 12 years in Israel may be seen as a time of coming to terms with the notion that there was no going back. This assertion may be supported by the fact that only after 13 years did the Bene Israel create a unified representative body. There is no question that the community was always highly capable and strong enough to overcome whatever challenges they encountered in Israel.

Notes

[1] While it was officially stopped, according to Israel's Bureau of Statistics a very small number continued to immigrate.
[2] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6150.
[3] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6147.
[4] Joan Roland, *Jewish Communities of India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1998), 248.
[5] Martin Wolins and Meir Gottesman, eds., *Group Care: An Israeli Approach* (London: Gordon and Breach, 1971), 44.
[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.
[8] Habonim Constitution, Central Zionist Archives, S32/1293.
[9] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6392.
[10] http://hotel.lavi.co.il/HOTEL//2/84/755.aspx
[11] Central Zionist Archives, S25/10607.
[12] Dvora Hacohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 140.
[13] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6392.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Avi Picard, "Soft Religiosity: The Identity of North African Youths in Israel in the 1950s," *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry,* vol. 1 (March 2009): 18.
[16] Wolins and Gottesman, *Group Care: An Israeli Approach*, 29.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 34.
[19] Chasya Pincus, *Come From the Four Winds: The Story of Youth Aliya* (New York: Herzl Press, 1970), 322.
[20] Ibid., 319.
[21] Ibid., 322.
[22] Central Zionist Archives, S4/2227.
[23] Bene Israel community members, interview by author, Israel, June-August 2008, responded to the question, "What difficulties, if any did you encounter upon arrival?"
[24] Central Zionist Archives, S4/2227.
[25] Ibid.
[26] H. Malka, "The Selection: (Racial) Selection and Discrimination against Moroccan and North African Jews, during the Immigration and Absorption Processes in the Years 1948-1956," Master's thesis, University of Haifa, Kiryat Gat, Dani Sfarim, 1997. As quoted in Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 37.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Central Zionist Archives, S4/2227.
[29] Sara and Sophie Benjamin, interview with author, Lod, Israel, June 6, 2008.
[30] Bene Israel member who asked to remain anonymous, interview by author, Ramle, Israel, July 7, 2008.
[31] Asher Raymond, interview by author, Ashdod, Israel, June 19, 2008.
[32] David Reuben, interview by author, Lod, Israel, July 19, 2008.
[33] Ruby Daniels and Barbara Johnson, *Ruby of Cochin* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 105.
[34] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6149.
[35] Calvin Goldscheider, *Israel's Changing Society* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 133.
[36] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6149.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Shalva Weil, "Bene-Israel Indian Jews in Lod, Israel: A Study of the Persistence of Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity" (Unpublished dissertation, University of Sussex, 1977), 127.
[39] Ibid., 137.
[40] Ibid.
[41] The Falk Project for Economic Research in Israel (1959/1960).
[42] Dvora Hacohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 168.
[43] Shlomo Swirksi, *Israel: The Oriental Majority* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1989), 25.
[44] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6149.

[45] "The Federation of Indian Jews in Israel," Personal Archives of Samson J. Samson, Jerusalem, Israel.
[46] Central Zionist Archives, S4/2227.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6147.
[49] Central Zionist Archives, S4/2227.
[50] Daniels and Johnson, *Ruby of Cochin*, 96.
[51] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6391.
[52] Weil, *Jews in Lod, Israel*, 70.
[53] Central Zionist Archives, S4/2227.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Weil, *Jews in Lod, Israel,* 70.
[56] Roland, *British India*, 248.
[57]Weil, *Jews in Lod, Israel*, 70.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6327.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6149.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6149.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Central Zionist Archives, S6/6329.
[66] Weil, *Jews in Lod, Israel*, 85.

Feature Review Article

Maina Chawla Singh, Being Indian, Being Israeli: Migration, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Homeland
Reviewed by Joan Roland

Maina Chawla Singh, *Being Indian, Being Israeli: Migration, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Homeland* (Manohar: New Delhi, 2010).

"They're a quiet, non-problematic community." "70,000? I didn't realize there were that many." These are the comments frequently heard about Indian Jews in Israel. Unfortunately, there are no statistics, only estimates by municipalities, the embassy of India, and the community itself. Dr. Maina Chawla Singh resided in Israel for much of the three years (2005-2008) that her husband was the Indian ambassador to Israel. As a sociologist, she has written an interesting and informed book that has enough theoretical content to appeal to specialists, engaging in issues such as ethnicity, gender, and class as a context for her fieldwork data. And as it is a qualitative rather than a quantitative account, it will appeal to a general readership. The study is based on questionnaires and in-depth interviews with about 100 individuals, who varied widely across age, socioeconomic class, education, work, and family, and focus group discussions throughout Israel.

The author correctly draws a distinction (as do Indian Jews themselves) between the Indian communities and Mizrachis (immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East) pointing out that the South Asian culture, including language, from which they came is so different from the Arab culture of the Mizrachis. When Indians are lumped together with Israelis from Arab lands, she feels it has to do with color rather than heritage

Accepted and respected in India, Jews never experienced the anti-Semitism and discrimination that their coreligionists in other countries did, and therefore maintain a deep attachment to their "motherland" and appreciate its culture, with many returning home on frequent visits. Indian Israelis invite the Indian ambassador to cultural programs and other events across the country and attend in large numbers the celebration of Indian Independence day and Republic Day at his official residence, where local dance groups perform. Thus, Dr. Singh, who says that she straddled two worlds, that of the Israeli political, business, and military elite on one hand and that of the Jews of Indian origin on the other hand, realized that the latter, with a few exceptions, were not part of the elite in Israel, although they have shone in medicine, academics, or information technology in other parts of the world. Linkage between education, access to professional achievement, and consequent social status is explored in this book.

As the ambassador's wife, Singh had unusual access to this community. She was enthusiastically welcomed at all events and warmly received into their homes when she commenced her project and interviews. Although she did not know Hebrew, and occasionally used an Indian interpreter, she was able to conduct her interviews in English, Hindi, and Marathi (or a mix) according to the preference of her subjects. She frequently quotes comments in Hindi and Marathi. She focuses on the first generation of Indians who arrived primarily in the 1950s and 1960s. Many of her findings in terms of adjustment, especially concerning spatial location and job allocations, will be familiar to those acquainted with the experience of Mizrachi and some Ashkenazi (Jews of European descent) immigrants who arrived, as children, adolescents, or adults, during the same period. Some issues are specific to Indians. A main theme is the relationship between the locations in which they were placed and class stratification, opportunities for upward mobility, community identity, acculturation, and assimilation. Singh is asking how issues of ethnicity, from language access to problems dealing with stereotypes of India, created barriers to assimilation 50 years ago. What are the markers of "Indian-ness" that are retained today in private and in

public? She sees her study as lying on the cusp of history and ethnography as she reexamines concepts of home, homeland, diaspora, and exile.

Singh gives a good, brief background on the three Indian Jewish communities, explaining that each group had a different immigration story. She covers them all, although the book focuses more on the Bene Israel and the Malabari Jews of Kerala, with some reference to mainly Calcutta Baghdadis. In Chapter One, the author sets out her objectives in the context of migration scholarship and Indian diasporic studies. She reviews sociological research on Israeli immigration, explains the Ashkenazi/Mizrachi divide, and contends that Israeli scholarship has taken little notice of Indian Jews as a community. Singh is critical, almost dismissive, of Western historical and anthropological scholarship on the Jews of India, implying that the narrative is in an historical time-freeze, a preoccupation with Jewish identities as they existed in India. She argues that Western scholars treat Indian Jewish communities as "models of 'exotic' Jewish diasporas disconnected from each other." She wants to move from Indian-Jewish identity to Indian-Israeli identity, its formation and articulation, and claims that little research has been done on Indian Jews in Israel. Although she cites some older work by Joan Roland and Shava Weil, Singh apparently, as evidenced in the text and in omissions in citations and bibliography, is unaware of more recent work published by them and totally ignores the important work of Barbara Johnson on the Cochin Jews in Israel.[1]

The second chapter asks where the Indian Jews are today. To place them in a setting, the author's descriptions of Israeli cities and towns, discussion of the government's population dispersal strategy and the creation of moshavs (cooperative agricultural villages) and development towns in the early years is especially useful for those unfamiliar with Israel. She also explains the pre-migration context of acculturation reflected in the practices and community identities of Jews in India, but in contrast to what she says, some Bene Israel were anglicized, even by the 1940s, with English as the second language spoken at home, and many were still rural in that period. Singh argues that intracommunity dynamics is neglected in much of the existing scholarship. This is simply wrong. The relationship between Bene Israel and Baghdadis has been analyzed thoroughly, and some scholars have suggested that the poor relations between them may even have affected the marriage controversy in the 1960s. Although the author mentions the "marriage controversy" of the 1960s, when the Sephardic Chief Rabbi gave directives that Bene Israel would have to prove that their marriages were legitimate for ten generations back, or else undergo a ritual conversion, if they wished to marry outside their own community, this important event, which attracted worldwide attention, needs fuller coverage. Singh does not explain clearly that the issue was one of rabbinic law about Jewish marriage and divorce as there were no rabbis or beth dins (Jewish religious courts) in India; it was not just a question of "purity and devotedness" as she emphasizes. The stigmatization of the Bene Israel led to the Jews from Kerala preferring to be called "Cochinis" rather than "hodim" (Indians), so as not to be identified with the Bene Israel.

The third chapter is an excellent analysis of the process of emigration for those who came before 1970 and the disconnect between what the potential immigrants heard or imagined about Israeli and what they actually encountered. Here she documents the narrative of how the Indian Jewish community began to consider emigration as a serious option, what held them back, and what spurred them on. She argues that leaving strong social and cultural networks and emigrating to an unseen Jewish homeland was more difficult for a community like the Bene Israel, who were comfortable in their "Jewish-ness" within the multireligious culture of both British and postcolonial India. The author points out that the push factors for Indians were not necessarily those that applied for Jewish communities from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia, although she needs to stress here the lack of persecution and discrimination in India as compared to the anti-Semitism and violence elsewhere. In mentioning that the pull factor of Israel's independence in 1948 coming just after the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent, she gives a particularly

good account of the Jews of Karachi who moved, mostly first to India but then to Israel, after partition.

Singh's analysis of the major role of the Jewish Agency and the ORT schools in getting out the message about Israel and urging aliyah, even in the most remote areas, fills a gap. In this context she points out that most Indian Jews with only a vernacular education had little awareness of the Holocaust. Because Indians were not refugees, the Jewish Agency had to focus on attractive economic prospects in Israel. At first Indian families were reluctant to send their teen-aged children, especially the girls, as part of Youth Aliyah (a program to bring unaccompanied youth to Israel) to boarding schools or kibbutzim, as the Jewish Agency representatives tried to persuade the larger, lower-income families to do. Interestingly, she notes that in responding to "aggressive Zionist discourse of the Jewish Agency," most of her interviewees claimed that they moved for Zionist reasons, but she managed to ferret out socioeconomic circumstances: size and status of family, careers, economic futures, home ownership, marriage prospects, and so forth. Migration strongly appealed initially, she argues, to avid Zionists, religious Jews, or those on the lower socioeconomic levels. But Indian Jews were shocked at the consumer shortages and lack of infrastructure that they found in the transit camps and remote development towns of the young Israel compared with the bustling cities of Bombay and Calcutta. The narrations of the Indian Jewish immigrants add a fresh perspective to the body of scholarship on absorption and displacement that led to economic and emotional traumas. Because the Indian Jewish community was not at risk, skilled, professionally qualified, or young single people were given preference for immigration to the older parents. The treatment of Cochini immigration is very good, although Singh needs to distinguish between the Malabari and the Paradesi Jews in terms of who came when and where they went.

The author notes that what makes the experience of Indian aliyah different from that of Indian origin communities who have migrated to the United States, United Kingdom, or Canada was that the former encountered a state machinery that decided where they would live and work. It needs to be pointed out here that the State of Israel, in which every Jew has the right to settle and become a citizen, paid for their passage and helped absorb them by providing housing and other facilities, which was not true elsewhere. Large groups of new immigrants had to be accommodated. Singh gives a helpful account of how the Israeli government created "development towns," with few amenities and insufficient work, and moshavs in remote locations in northern and southern Israel. The goals were to disperse the population and secure the territory. Mostly Mizrachis, as well as Indians, were sent to these locations. Many of the first generation were unable to afford relocation to more prosperous areas.

A key aspect of the Indian experience was the discrimination they encountered, although this was true of many immigrants, especially the Mizrachis. Darker skin-toned Indians referred to the color bias which, along with the fact that their home country was at the time considered to be poor and backward, were taken as indicators of lack of ability and intellectual competence. Dark meant "Arab" and if you were from India you would have to be twice as good as an Ashkenazi to succeed. Indians were aware that to some extent they had internalized a racial inferiority from their colonial history, but they were unprepared for racism and marginalization for their Indian-ness in the Jewish homeland. Those who were light-skinned and had British accented English faced less prejudice.

The title of Chapter Four, "Accountants as Watchmen and Clerks Digging Roads," might have been equally applicable to the Russian immigration to Israel in the 1990s. Here, Singh explores the long-term implications of the politics of spatial location forty years earlier in terms of work allocation, family income levels, social class, and opportunities for upward mobility. Readers will enjoy her presentation of several personal stories, where she challenges the existing stereotypes of Indians in the workplace, showing that they occupied a wide range of professions with huge differences in class and levels of status attainment. She does acknowledge, however, that high achievers, such as medical practitioners,

successful businessmen, female accountants and marketing consultants—and one might add academicians and IT specialists—are few; they live in privileged areas with other upper-class Israelis, mainly Ashkenazi.

Because of their English-language skills, Indian Jews had a huge advantage compared to Mizrachis. If they had college degrees, they entered the job market in Israel easily. Nevertheless, some Indian degrees and professional certifications were not recognized, and many did not want to take additional training. Thus they were given subordinate positions and their standard of living dropped. Many Indians, especially the Bene Israel and Baghdadis, joined El-Al—a few as pilots and flight engineers—where Indians, living in Lod and Ramle, still have a large presence; others are part of the service industry in Eilat at hotels. Knowing English was important, but most had to learn Hebrew first, and highly skilled immigrants were offered an ulpan (an intensive Hebrew course) and then helped to find jobs. In the Indian aircraft industry, where the accounts and most of the correspondence were in English, and in shipping lines, Hebrew didn't matter. The few experienced shipping experts, such as engineers or commanders, were often approached while still in India and offered jobs with excellent salaries and benefits, often with Zim. But these were the exceptions. The majority of first-generation immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s were not on professional fast-tracks. Trained mechanics and electricians, as well as craftsmen and carpenters, found work easily and settled down well, as these skills were in great demand in Israel in this period of expanding infrastructure. Since in India, even in the 1970s, such skills ranked fairly low in the job market and lower-level technical work was poorly paid, these workers did much better in Israel. Even experienced mill workers fared well in Dimona, where they were offered housing, jobs, schooling, and higher salaries. The majority of Bene Israel, however, remained confined in these early days in development towns where they worked at middle-level and modestly paid jobs. But the development towns did not witness the economic growth that was expected, except for Ashdod, because of its location as a port. Even the second generation followed vocational tracks and became plumbers, electricians, mechanics, clerks, low-level government employees, and so forth. More recently, there has been massive out-migration to more prosperous, industrialized areas, in search of employment opportunities.

Although very few Bene Israel worked in rural areas, most of the Malabari immigrants from Cochin were placed in moshavs in the north and others in the Jerusalem corridor, despite their lack of agricultural experience. Some 600 Cochinis now live in Moshav Nevatim in the south, where they have been successful agriculturalists growing green house flowers for export.

Singh argues that the age at which an individual immigrated into Israeli society was an important factor that shaped his/her professional life. If they completed education in India, had skills to offer, and could be absorbed as productive members in the Israeli economy, or if they came as young children and grew up in Israel, it was easier. But even the latter grew up with severe economic pressure. If they migrated as teenagers they suffered emotional dislocation and it was very difficult to integrate into the new language and school curriculum. They did not get adequate attention from teachers. Many dropped out of high school in order to join the workforce to supplement family incomes. High school graduates rarely pursued higher education after the army. These young people wanted to become economically independent. (This reviewer discovered in the 1990s that they had lower university graduation rates in Israel than their parents had in India.) Many of the older immigrants experienced severe cultural displacement. If they came in their late 40s or older often leaving behind salaried jobs, they got stuck in manual or very low paid work with other Indians. This reviewer found that this often led to their retention of Marathi as opposed to acquiring fluent Hebrew, thus contributing to their limited social interaction with other groups.

Singh pays special attention to gender, highlighting the occupations that Indian women were able to find in the 1960s and 1970—some professionals with successful

careers, more relegated to low-paying semiskilled jobs. Women who had never worked outside the home now had to work for wages, often in menial jobs under exploitative conditions. Women with good, English-based high school education in India found it easy to get secretarial jobs in Israel. The author points out that Baghdadi women especially had a more Anglicized education and socialization and were hired by companies, banks, hospitality organizations, and at the airport. She accurately points out that many of the better-off, more educated Baghdadis who left India went to the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, or Australia.

An interesting section deals with the stereotypes of the Indian community that emerged, especially of individuals employed in the lower and middle-level white collar jobs: "good workers," "gentle," "polite," were all qualities that did not necessarily rank high in Israeli society, which valued assertive, aggressive personalities. Indians are very conscious of these negative perceptions, but they could not be pushy in social and professional behavior as culturally this was seen as a form of crudeness. Their inability to make demands, even for benefits they were entitled to, was seen as a "lack of ambition" by the wider society. This lack of fight, Singh contends, was responsible for Indian Jews being poorly represented in Israel even in those professions in which Indian origin communities have excelled in other diasporas in the Western world. Some Indians believed their values were superior and wanted to inculcate them in their children but felt their politeness and considerateness prevented them from getting what they deserved. Others wanted to inculcate an "Israeli" spirit in the children so they could push their way forward. "Our children are very much Israelis and not at all Indian," one claimed. (This reviewer found the second generation to be bicultural, Indian at home and with the community, and Israeli outside.)

If those who came in the 1950s and 1960s were peripheral geographically, economically, and socially to Israel's technical and economic growth since the 1980s, those who came in the 1970s found career opportunities more easily. Singh attributes this to the fact that the later immigrants were better educated, with higher qualifications, and were more confident about having their credentials recognized. They knew that if Israel did not work out for them they could return to Bombay or move on to other Western nations. They came to a fast-growing Israel and had a better understanding of what Israel was all about and how to get ahead by negotiating with employers. A future study of this group is warranted. Many never emigrated from Bombay because they were doing well economically and socially.

Chapter Five offers an interesting and important discussion of the gendered implications of displacement on women, home, and family. Singh especially reached out to first-generation Indian women, particularly those who came before the mid-1970s. In what ways did families cling to what is "Indian": family values, codes of behavior, modes of address in the family, responsibility toward elderly parents? Singh reviews conjugality and marriage practices that existed in India prior to migration in order to understand the changes. Men were breadwinners and women were homemakers and mothers. Women married in their late teens and husbands were 8-14 years older. Marriages could be arranged or could be marriages. The women led protected lives in extended family unless the husband's job took him to another city. Divorces were rare. A huge change occurred when the Jewish Agency offered independent homes to lower or middle-income couples who could not have afforded to buy them in India. Thus, nuclear families of young couples separated from the extended family networks they were used to. Young married women gained more autonomy from older women in the family, specially their mothers-in-law, but had to raise their infants themselves along with attending to housework and other children, without a grandparent generation to help, while their husbands worked. Often they had to join the labor force, even though they had never worked outside the home in India. They were challenged to become Israeli wives and raise Israeli children, changing parental expectations of children's behavior, and intergenerational family ties.

Many single women immigrated to Israel through the Jewish Agency; parents of all socioeconomic backgrounds let them go because they were anxious about intermarriage in India, due to the shrinking Jewish community. Upper-middle-class women from Bombay or Calcutta usually ended up in the central cities, where they enjoyed the freedom from protective parental supervision, especially regarding finances and marriage, but had to adjust to responsibilities to take their own decisions and to the lack of domestic help. They were directed to ulpans with other English-speaking immigrants from the United States, South Africa, Britain, or Australia and met future husbands. This was especially true of Baghdadi women who tended to marry Ashkenazi men. The ulpans became their entry points into a much higher social strata.

It was harder for women who started life in Israel in development towns and moshavs than for those who could secure footing in the center of Israel. The profiles of women in development towns, moshavs and cities are engaging. Here young Indian girls did not acquire the education or social skills for upward mobility and ended up in semiskilled jobs. They had little access to eligible young men in well-placed professional jobs and tended to marry within their own socioeconomic, usually Indian, circles. But some growing up on moshavs or in cities met and married across ethnic lines and integrated into the Israeli multiethnic society.

Singh found that since the Cochinis and Baghdadis from Calcutta and Bombay constituted smaller communities and had more intermarriages, some of their traditional family patterns had been diluted. Among Bene Israel, family life still retained many Indian cultural patterns. First-generation Bene Israel parents continued to peak Marathi or Hindi at home and their children grew up familiar with those languages. Family members watch Indian television programs in Hindi or Marathi.

Among the Bene Israel, life-cycle rituals, especially weddings, show a distinctiveness and cultural character that is a blend of Jewish and Indian customs. Singh describes the Mehndi (henna) ceremony (also held by North African and some other communities) as a catered affair sometimes managed by Indian family firms, held a day before the wedding with young Indian-Israeli girls dressed in Indian clothes dancing to Bollywood music, the Hindi words of which they barely understood. The wedding itself, however, is Western, reflecting the impact of contemporary Israeli culture. In Nevatim, weddings still maintain more of an ethnic flavor because of the small Cochini synagogue, a replica of one in Kerala, on the moshav and a strong presence of a large Cochini community. In India, Baghdadi Jews often had westernized weddings, in terms of hotels, dress, and music, so post-migration weddings did not undergo major transformations.

Singh found that among the Bene Israel, religious observances vary. Many first-generation immigrants became more observant and stricter about following dietary laws, now that it was easier as Kosher meat was readily available and religious holidays were observed nationally. In a family where a child became religious for some reason, other family members followed. The women would dress conservatively and take religious classes. A few men became deeply religious and joined yeshivas. Singh did not come across Indian Jews who were ultra Orthodox, but there are some. They tend to merge into an Ashkenazi Orthodox community and distance themselves from other Indian Jews. Those who had achieved high levels professionally and socially and lived away from concentrations of Indians or had married Ashkenazi Jews were less likely to be very observant. Singh also does not mention the interesting phenomenon of the participation of many Bene Israel in pilgrimages to the tombs of Baba Sali in Netivot, Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron, and to the Cave of Elijah near Haifa.

The Bene Israel have retained their distinctive ceremony, called Malida, or Eliahu ha-Navi, where participants give thanks to mark a special occasion, such as recovery from illness, moving into a new home, return from the army, and so forth. They praise the prophet Elijah and offer special foods that are then eaten. Bene Israel have also retained the practice of wearing white for mourning and also on Yom Kippur.

Singh's sociological perspective comes out strongly in Chapter Six, "Mediating Assimilation and Separation in Community Networks, National Politics and Indian-Israeli Identity," where she examines the relationship between the articulation of culture and a reshaping of the contours of ethnicity. To analyze when and how people come together to celebrate a shared culture and ethnicity defined as Indian, Singh looks at ethnicity–based Indian organizations in Israel: how they function, how effective they are, and why they are not more successful and politically visible. She does mention the early efforts of Bene Israel to organize themselves due to the marriage conflict, explaining that they were enraged that their maintenance of Indian cultural ethos were used to target their Jewishness as suspect. However, she needs to point out that the marriage controversy delayed their willingness to express their Indianness, lest they seem "un-Jewish," at a time when other communities, particularly Mizrachi ones, became more assertive in promoting their cultures. Indians felt it was better to maintain a low ethnic profile.

Bene Israel were at the forefront of community programs. Singh thinks the high rate of intercommunal marriages with non-Indians may dilute the Cochini urge for ethnic affiliation. Kerala Jews do not have prominent formal associations that promote cultural programs and communal visibility, except for Moshav Nevatim, with its synagogue (with a Torah from India), and museum, which are sources of pride. Since the flower export business is declining due to competition from East Africa, the Israeli government is encouraging ethnic-related tourism, urging Cochin families to open guest-houses and offer ethnic food. Thus Nevatim is a symbol of the Cochin community and an ethnic showpiece for the Israeli government.

Singh notes that in the last three or four years there has been a heightened visibility of the Indian community's cultural programs in Israel, which are also attracting media attention. The increase was related to the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the establishment of Indian/Israeli diplomatic relations in 2007 and in 2008, of the 60th anniversary of Israeli statehood. The Indian embassy sponsored activities for both and many communities throughout the country were able to organize Indian cultural programs with the support of the municipalities. She also attributes these developments to a surge in interest in Indian popular culture and Bollywood film music among second- and third-generation Indian youth (although one could see evidence of this twenty years ago). This enthusiasm for Hindi film and music is, of course, also found among Indian diasporic communities elsewhere.

Singh describes the Central Organization of Indian Jews in Israel, established in 1986. Familiarity with earlier work on Indians in Israel would have enabled her to mention a rival group, the Association of Indian Jews in Israel. With branches all over Israel, the COIJI draws most of its support from first-generation Indians in Ramla, Lod, Ashdod, and Dimona. Its major program is the annual winter Hodu-Yada in Eilat which, with its cultural performances, stalls selling India food and wares, and the chance to meet friends draws as many as 2,000 Indians Jews, primarily Bene Israel, from all across Israel. The Bollywood appeal of these programs, reflecting a definite shift away from regional Cochini and Marathi songs, is attributed to the availability of videos, CDs and DVDs in Israel. Singh does not mention the predecessors of this annual song and dance performance that were held for many years at the Convention Center in Jerusalem and later in other locales such as Rishon le Zion.

Women have their own organizations, the oldest being the one in Lod, founded to spread Indo-Israeli awareness and friendship and to counter negative stereotypes about India. It supports *Mai Boli* (My Mother Tongue), a Marathi periodical. A major conference is held each year to synchronize with May 1, celebrated as Maharasthra Day in India, with literary recitations and skits. Conducted entirely in Marathi, it mainly attracts the older generation, and so the number of attendees is declining. The author does not mention that members of the Bene Israel community are active in the World Marathi Union, attending the biennial conferences. Flora Samuel, a founder of the Lod's Women's Association, was

instrumental in having Israel selected as the host country for the conference in 1996. The author could also mention the Lod group's close cooperation with Israeli museums in order to present the Indian Jewish heritage.

Singh gives details of the population of Indian Jews in various cities and enumerates the synagogues, restaurants, sweets and spice shops, and video stores that serve the communities and the cultural programs that they sponsor. The largest concentration, perhaps 15,000 is in Ashdod, where Indian Jews settled in the early 1960s. Another important center is Beersheva, with about 10,000 Indians although she does not seem to have interviewed people there. In discussing the locales of the Kerala Jews, she is mainly talking about Malabari Jews. There is little mention of the Paradesi community.

In another section in this chapter Singh explores how Indians viewed Israeli politics and nationalism and how they defined or expressed their Zionism. In the south, some second-generation Bene Israel have been politically active. A few have been elected, on local Indian tickets or as members of national parties, to the municipal councils of Yerucham, Dimona, and Ashdod. Dimona has had deputy mayors of Indian origin, usually sabras (persons born in Israel), for several years, but never an Indian mayor. A large number of first-generation Indians stated they were not actively interested in politics and did not belong to a political party. They were not vociferous in expressing their views on Israeli politics or the Arab-Israeli conflict. (This reviewer notes that in India too they tended to be apolitical.) But in conversation about views on how the conflict can be resolved, the vast majority echoed what the author refers to as mainstream Israeli media discourse, that Israel has been making efforts to make peace but the Palestinians don't respond. "We can't trust the Arabs," they said, even though they had lived peacefully among Muslims in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Singh did not come across any Indian Jews in left-wing activist groups who questioned the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, although this reviewer found that in the 1990s the electoral preferences of the Bene Israel spanned the whole gamut, from extreme right to extreme left, including a handful of left-wing activists.

One wishes that Singh had explored the categorization of Indian Israelis as transnationals, which she takes up briefly at the end of the book, a little more fully. For some it took 10-15 years before they could afford to make their first trip back to India. It was also difficult to get a visa when diplomatic relations between India and Israel were not good or were nonexistent in the early years. After 1992, travel became easy, and it is now is very important to visit families, friends, and old places. The importance of these trips in renewing social and cultural ties and linguistic connections could be expanded upon.

The author makes the important point that as the positive global (and Israeli) perception of India has improved and media coverage of it increases, so does the perception of the Indian in Israel. Developments in bilateral trade and collaborations between India and Israel, which Singh summarizes, have "reshaped and given a significant boost to collective self-perceptions of the Indian Jewish community in Israel," and promote more expressed ethnicity and new levels of ethnic pride. Also the 40,000 or so Israelis who visit India each year come home with positive feelings and are interested in the culture.

As Singh recognizes, a follow-up book on the second generation, which has Hebrew as its first language and that are only tangentially involved in Indian organizations would be an important contribution. As she points out, some have visited India, the childhood home of their parents, but know little about it. They are conscious of the "peripheral" ocation of their community within local Israeli power structures. She asks how sabra Indians deal with ethnicity in their personal lives? Does their Indianess influence interethnic marriages? How about intergenerational cultural transmission? Do they relate to India in the ways that other second-generation Indians do in other diasporic communities around the world? Another avenue to explore would be the increasing number of second-generation Bene Israel who are writing about their community.

General readers who are interested in Indian Jews or in immigration and absorption in Israel will find this book, with its many life histories, fascinating and accessible. Although

more familiarity with previous scholarly work on Indian immigrants in Israel might have enhanced this study, it will also appeal to academics interested in Israeli ethnicity and pluralism as well as those who focus on South Asian, Jewish, and diasporic studies. The maps in the appendices are confusing. It is not clear on the map of India where the Jews were located. Nor is it clear on the map of Israel where the Indian Jews are concentrated. Appendix 4 gives a select list of interviewees who participated in the research. Not all wanted to be included. The bibliography, divided according to categories such as Israeli Society, Indian Jews, and Diaspora Studies, is very helpful. Good editing would have eliminated a great deal of repetition and numerous typographical errors.

Notes

[1] See: Ruby Daniel and Barbara C. Johnson, *Ruby of Cochin: An Indian Jewish Woman Remembers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Barbara C. Johnson, "For Any Good Occasion We Call Them: Community Parties and Cultural Continuity among the Cochin Paradesi Jews of Israel," in *Studies of Indian-Jewish Identity*, ed. Nathan Katz (New Delhi: Manoharlal, 1995), pp. 53-82; Joan Roland, "Religious Observance of the Bene Israel: Persistence and Refashioning of Tradition," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 8 (Spring 2000); Joan Roland, "Adaptation and Identity among Second-Generation Indian Jews in Israel," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 37, 1 (June 1995): 5-37; Joan Roland, "The Transformation of Indian Identity among Bene Israel in Israel," in *Israel in the Nineties*, ed. Frederick Lazin and Gregory Mahler (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 169-193; Shalva Weil, "India, Zionism In" and "Indian Jews in Israel," in *The New Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel*, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1994), pp. 651-653; Shalva Weil, "Motherland and Fatherland as Dichotomous Diasporas: The Case of the Bene Israel," in *Les Diasporas 2000 ans d'histoire,* ed. Lisa Anteby, William Berthomiere, and Gabriel Sheffer (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005), pp. 91-99; Shalva Weil, "The Influence of Caste Ideology in Israel," in *Cultural Transition: The Case of Immigrant Youth*, ed. Meir Gottesmann (Jerusalem: Magnes Press,1988), pp. 150-161.

Book Review

Yoel Moses Reuben, *The Jews of Pakistan: A Forgotten Heritage*
Reviewed by Nathan Katz

Yoel Moses Reuben, *The Jews of Pakistan: A Forgotten Heritage* (Mumbai: Bene Israel Heritage Museum and Genealogical Research Centre, 2010).

This book is a very welcome resource; it expands our knowledge of Jews in Pakistan exponentially, and the author and publisher (Ralphy Jhirad) are to be commended for bringing it out.

With no pretensions to being a work of scholarship, Reuben provides us not only with personal narratives, family histories, synagogue and court records, and a plethora of photographs, but also with reproductions of some extremely revealing primary documents.

Perhaps the most interesting is a 1953 report by Israeli Foreign Service officer, Itzhak Ben-Ami, detailing a series of pogroms and anti-Jewish government policies following upon the creation of Pakistan in 1947 and Israel in 1948. At the time the report was written, Karachi's Bene Israel Jewish community was already expiring, having dwindled from 2,500 to 500, most fleeing for security in India. Most poignant is the story of the last religious leader of the community, the chazzan, shochet, and mohel of the Magen Shalom Synagogue for thirty years, returning to safety in his old home in Cochin.

More than any other city, Lahore suffered turmoil in the wake of the partition of British India. Jews there, mostly Persian-speakers from Afghanistan, were caught in the crossfire between Muslims on the one hand, and Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Jews on the other. Their stories are a welcome feature of this book.

Even more Jewishly remote was the community in Peshawar in the North West Frontier Province, the gateway to the Khyber Pass and Afghanistan. According to Reuben, the mullahs of the north west were the most virulently anti-Jewish, an intriguing observation given that region's jihadist tendency today. Especially interesting is a brief note about how British Jewish soldiers stationed there spent their High Holidays in one of Peshawar's two synagogues. Mention is also made of the Bene Israel Jews in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan province. There is virtually nothing else written about either of these communities, so even this scant information is most welcome.

Pakistani anti-Semitism (or anti-Zionism or anti-Judaism) was not confined to mobs, Reuben contends, but was also official policy. He quotes Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto's speech at a 1974 Islamic Summit: "To Jews as Jews we bear no malice; to Jews as Zionists, intoxicated with their militarism and reeking with technological arrogance, we refuse to be hospitable." Reuben connects Bhutto's remarks with an edict by President Muhammad Zia al-Huqq in 1988 ordering the destruction of Pakistan's last standing synagogue despite global protests.

Nevertheless, the portrait of Pakistan's Jews that emerges from this work is one of a comfortable Jewish community, well integrated in the economic, military, and social life of British Karachi.

Unfortunately, the book is poorly produced. Some of the chapters and photographs are repeated, and it is all too obvious that a proofreader was not employed. This sloppiness detracts from the work, which nevertheless captures and documents the memory of an expired Jewish community.

The work includes a compact disc about the Karachi synagogue, but the disc jacket in my copy was empty.

Letter to the Editor and Response

Correction of the Record

Dear Editor,

An article by Linda Weinhouse published in the last issue of *JIIS* entitled *"Baumgartner's Bombay*: Postcolonialism and Postmemory"[1] analyzes Anita Desai's novel *Baumgartner's Bombay.*[2] Note 1 to the article (on p. 43) quotes what was supposedly a personal correspondence with me. It reads thus: *"Archives of the Bombay Jewish community show records of a Baumgartner who was interned in the Dehra Dun camp (e-mail communication from Shalva Weil, 6 August 2009)."*

I was perplexed to read this. While the note identified a specific date for an e-mail communication, I could not recall ever corresponding with Weinhouse. In fact I had not known of her existence at the time. Further, I do not recall seeing any record concerning a Baumgartner in the Bombay Jewish community records (which ones?), though this statement, attributed to me, appears to be the basis on which Professor Weinhouse discusses Baumgartner's Jewish identity in the article.

For the record, it should be noted that Desai's mother was a non-Jewish German, and that in an interview she has said that she was inspired to write the novel by an Austrian Jew.[3] It should also be borne in mind that not only German Jews, but many German non-Jews were interned by the British in India during the Second World War.[4] In fact, in a wonderful recent conversation between Anita Desai and her daughter Kirin Desai, Anita refers to her mother's friends during the war. She told Kirin: "In India, many of her German friends went into an internment camp near Dehradun. Those who weren't Indian citizens, they all went into camps. My mother had become an Indian citizen so she didn't have to go".[5]

I wrote to Professor Weinhouse to clarify the troubling Note, and she responded with the following email (March 6, 2011): *"Dear Shalva, I do not have an email from you. The information was conveyed to me by Efraim as having been told to him by you orally...."*

"Efraim" is Professor Efraim Sicher of Ben-Gurion University, coauthor of an article with Linda Weinhouse on some of the same material.[6] Note 1 of that article states: *"An earlier version of passages in this essay first appeared in Linda Weinhouse, "*Baumgartner's Bombay*": Postcolonialism and Postmemory,"* Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies 11 (2010): 37-46."

Efraim Sicher recalled that in August 2009 I had speculated on the idea that the "real" Baumgartner had been interned at Dehradun along with other German exiles. I had indeed written to Sicher in private correspondence: *"I haven't dealt with this material since 1995.*[7] *I think Desai's novel is brilliant. I interviewed a few people who were interned in India, but I can't pass judgment".*

Regrettably, Professor Weinhouse's note gives the mistaken impression that I had been corresponding with her when I had not, while at the same time it misrepresents the private communication I had with Professor Sicher in August 2009.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Shalva Weil,
Senior Researcher,
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Notes

[1] Linda Weinhouse, "*Baumgartner's Bombay*: Postcolonialism and Postmemory," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 11 (2010): 37-46.
[2] Anita Desai, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (London: Heinemann, 1988).
[3] Anita Desai is quoted as saying: "And it was when I saw this Austrian Jew in Bombay—I actually saw the man pottering...." Florence Libert, "An Interview with Anita Desai," *World Literature Written in English* 30, 1 (1990): 54.
[4] An example is Alfred Wuerfel, a former officer in the German Consulate, whom I met in India in 1995. He had been interned by the British and had met German Jews in the camps, as well as in Bombay. Shalva Weil, "From Persecution to Freedom: Central European Jewish Refugees and their Jewish Host communities in India," in Anil Bhatti and Johannes Voigt, eds., *Jewish Exiles in India 1933-1945* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 73, 83.
[5] "In conversation: Kirin Desai meets Anita Desai," *The Guardian,* November 11, 2011.
[6] Efraim Sicher and Linda Weinhouse, "The Jew's Passage to India: Desai, Rushdie and Globalised Culture," *European Review of History* 18, 1 (2011): 21-31.
[7] This was the year I attended a conference organized by the Max Mueller Bhavan on "Jewish Exiles in India." The outcome of that conference was Bhatti and Voigt, *Jewish Exiles in India 1933-1945.*

Apology

Dear Editor,

In her letter, Shalva Weil objects to information in Note 1 of my article "Baumgartner's Bombay: Postcolonialism and Postmemory," which you published in 2010.

That note refers to information in an email she sent to Professor Efraim Sicher on August 9th, 2009 in which she wrote: "Baumgartner was at Dehra Dun, if I'm not mistaken." Professor Sicher shared that email with me. I used it as a footnote regarding a possible internment of a real life person with the same name as the fictional Baumgartner. It was not the basis for any of the information that appears in the paper regarding the Austrian Jew whom Desai has stated in a number of interviews was the model for Baumgartner or any other information in the paper regarding the internment camps. However, I hereby apologize for using the email written by Dr. Weil to Professor Sicher in my paper without obtaining Prof. Weil's permission.

Sincerely,

Professor Linda Weinhouse

Notes on Contributors

Joseph Hodes was a visiting research fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2008 and is currently a visiting assistant professor of Judaic studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

Nathan Katz is Bhagwan Mahavir Professor of Jain Studies and Professor of Religious Studies at Florida International University. His most recent book is a memoir, *Spiritual Journey Home* (Ktav, 2009), and his next contribution is *An Annotated Bibliography about Indian Jewry, 1665-2005* (Manohar, 2012).

Helena Rimon is a Senior Lecturer in the Israel Heritage Department, Ariel University Center of Samaria. Sphere of her scientific interests is the comparative poetics of the Hebrew Literature. In the book *The Time and the Place of Mikhail Bakhtin* (in Hebrew: הזמן והמקום של מיכאיל בכטין",הוצ' כינרת, זמורה ביתן, דביר, באר שבע, 2007) she examined the genre theory of M. M. Bakhtin as applied to the history of Hebrew literature.

Joan G. Roland is the author of *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (University Press of New England, l989). A second edition was published under the title *The Jewish Communities of India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (Transaction, 1998). She has published numerous articles and book chapters on the Bene Israel and Baghdadis of India in India and Israel. She is currently researching the Indian Jewish community in the United States. She is Professor of Middle Eastern and Jewish History at Pace University in New York City.

Myer Samra is an anthropologist from the University of Sydney and edits the *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*. His principal academic work has been with Baghdadi Jews in Australia (many of whom had previously lived in India, Burma, and other former British and Dutch colonies in Asia) and with the Benei Menashe of North East India. He is also an Accredited Specialist in Children's Law and is employed as a lawyer in the New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services.

Vanessa R. Sasson is Professor of Religious Studies in the Liberal Arts Department of Marianopolis College, where she has been teaching since 1999. She is a Research Fellow for the International Institute for Studies in Race, Reconciliation, and Social Justice at the University of the Free State, as well as Adjunct Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University. She is the author of *The Birth of Moses and the Buddha: A Paradigm for the Comparative Study of Religions* (Sheffield University Press, 2007), is co-editor with Jane-Marie Law of *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2009), and editor of a new volume, *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

Neela Bhattacharya Saxena is an Associate Professor of English at Nassau Community College, Garden City, New York. Her book *In the Beginning IS Desire: Tracing Kali's Footprints in Indian Literature* was published in 2004. Some of her recent publications include "Mystery, Wonder, and Knowledge in the Triadic Figure of Mahavidya Chinnamasta: A Sakta Woman's Reading," *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism: Reinterpretations and Re-envisionings* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and "Gynocentric Thealogy of Tantric Hinduism: A Mediation upon the Devi," *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2011).