

# THE JOURNAL OF INDO-JUDAIC STUDIES

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## From the Editors

We are pleased to bring you issue number 9 of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*. It features five articles, all by first-time contributors to our journal, as well as three book reviews and news of a highly significant Hindu-Jewish dialogue held in India earlier this year.

Pius Malekandathil of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), an expert on the Portuguese period in India, establishes himself as a leading authority on the Jews under the Portuguese in India with his essay, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce, 800-1800 C.E." Before joining the JNU faculty, Professor Malekandathil held positions in Kerala and in Goa, and thus he is in a unique position to advance knowledge of Jewish life in these regions.

Ruth Fredman Cernea of Bethesda, Maryland, introduces our readers to the Jewish experience in Burma with her article, "Desperate Passage to India." A skilled anthropologist, Dr. Cernea relies primarily on interviews to reconstruct Jewish life in this troubled land.

Australian anthropologist Myer Samra explores the emergence of Judaism among tribal populations in northeastern India. His article, "Searching for the Ratu Hospital: Dreams and Judaism in the Imagining of Mizo Nationalism," is a pioneering study of a group that has been in the international news recently and has been gaining acceptance in Israel as the Bnei Menashe, purportedly offspring of a lost tribe.

Madhuri M. Yadlapati of Louisiana State University employs the methods of comparative literature in her essay "Sita and Sarah: Female Complementarity or Special Revelation." Dr. Yadlapati explores women's voices in the sacred literatures of Hinduism and Judaism.

"Competing Discourses: Nazis in Tibet and Jews in India" by Peter Levenda, author and graduate student at Florida International University, juxtaposes two contrasting popular images—the Aryan quest for imagined racial roots in Tibet, and images of Jews in India—in his provocative essay.

Not since Rodger Kamenetz's bestseller, *The Jew in the Lotus*, has a book about JuBus been so widely read in rabbinical circles as Akiva Tatz and David Gottlieb's *Letters to a Buddhist Jew*, reviewed by Richard G. Marks. Editorial board member Shlomo Deshen examines Shalva Weil's richly illustrated and edited book, *India's Jewish Heritage*, and Jonathan Goldstein evaluates Ruth F. Cernea's *Almost Englishmen*, from which the second article in this issue is taken.

In February 2007, a groundbreaking meeting between Hindu and Jewish leaders took place in New Delhi. (P.V.) Meylekh Viswanath was there, and his report—as well as the joint statement of principles—rounds out this issue of *JIS*.

## Modus Operandi

As we are asked with some frequency about our editorial policies and procedures, we are taking this opportunity to make them known to our readers.

The *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* is a refereed, academic publication. When a submission is received, it is first reviewed by one of our editors. Any identification of the author is removed, and it is sent to three external reviewers, most often members of our editorial board. Referees may recommend publication, publication with stipulated revisions, or rejection. If there is a clear consensus among the referees, the submission is accepted or rejected. If a consensus is lacking, then additional reviewers' opinions are solicited.

Based on these evaluations, authors undertake the needed revisions as appropriate, and then the article is published. At no time prior to publication is the identity of the author made known to the reviewers, and the identities of the referees is not divulged to the author. Thus, a double-blind process is followed. Approximately one-third of all submissions end up being published in *JIS*.

**Frequency**

The *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* is published as often as sufficient articles pass the review process. Our aim is an annual journal, but we view quality as talking precedence over frequency; therefore, our publication schedule is open-ended.

# **The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce, 800-1800 C.E.**

*By Pius Malekandathil*

The Jewish traders, who were involved in different degrees and at different levels in the circulation of commodities between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, formed an important mercantile group in most of the maritime exchange centers of medieval Kerala. Bolstering their economic positions by well-established family bonds and matrimonial links, these Jewish traders of Kerala got linked with the larger Semitic networks that were distributed all along the western space of the Indian Ocean, by being suppliers of spices in return for Mediterranean wares. Their resource-mobilizing ability was largely banked upon by the local rulers to meet their emergency situations and war expenses, which processes led to the evolution of a strong rapport between the local rulers and the Jewish mercantile groups of Kerala during the medieval period. Under insecure and dangerous politico-economic conditions, particularly when they were harassed by the Portuguese, the Jews of Kerala managed to survive and conduct their business by keeping themselves acceptable to the local rulers and power structures and by supplying domestic and foreign merchandise required for meeting the diverse needs of the state.

Though the Jewish community was distributed all along the coast of Kerala, their principal settlements were in Madai, Pantalayani Kollam, Palayur, Pulloot, Cranganore (Shingly), Mala, Chennamangalam, Parur, Cochin, and Quilon (Kurakkeni Kollam). With the mass flow of Jews from Kerala to Israel in the mid-twentieth century, the memories of their past started vanishing, and the empty Jewish synagogue structures of Chennamangalam, Mala, Parur, and Cochin, the *Juthakulam* (pond of the Jews) of Madai and a few oral accounts obtained from different maritime trade centers of Kerala have turned out to be the only outwardly visible and audible remnants of the past of the Jewish merchants who once had played a very decisive role in the economic and political life of Kerala.

The central purpose of this article is to see how far the formation of the Jewish community of Kerala was conditioned by the exchange mechanisms of the Indian Ocean. This is done, on the one hand, by locating them in the politico-economic conditions of Kerala within which they operated and, on the other hand, by analyzing the macrolevel long-term developments in the Indian Ocean that acted as medium for their trading activities.

## **Long Distance Trade and the Formation of a Jewish Merchant Group in Quilon**

Though the Jewish presence in Malabar is sometimes traced back to a remote past,<sup>1</sup> different Semitic mercantile settlements along its coast seem to have appeared only after the ninth century following the commencement of long-distance trade and the consequent entry of large number of Jews principally from Fatimid Egypt and in a less degree from Abbassid Persia.<sup>2</sup> The principal destination for the Jews involved in long-distance trade was Quilon, which was known differently as Kurakkeni Kollam in Malayalam,<sup>3</sup> Koulam Mali<sup>4</sup> in Geniza papers,<sup>5</sup> and in Arabic sources,<sup>6</sup> as well Gu-lin (in the Song Period), Ju-lan (in the Yuan period) in Chinese documents.<sup>7</sup> In fact the Jewish fascination for Quilon began with its evolution as a major port in the Indian Ocean following the opening of a new international trade-route linking Abbassid Persia (750-1258 C.E.) and T'ang China (618-907 C.E.). The long-distance trade emanating from al-Basrah or Muscat or Sohar in Oman in the Persian Gulf and

terminating in Canton in China had Koulam Mali (Quilon) as a halting center.<sup>8</sup> On the west coast of India, it was in Quilon that the Arab *dhow*s spent an average of two weeks exchanging commodities, as they waited for a favorable monsoon for their journey across the Bay of Bengal to China.<sup>9</sup> The increasing concentration of wares in Quilon from Abbassid Persia and T'ang China augmented its range of exchange activities. It was against this backdrop that the Jews from Fatimid Egypt began to visit Quilon, where they must have also had wider commercial interactions with the Jews coming from Abbassid Baghdad.

The network through which the Jews used to take commodities from Quilon to the Mediterranean ports ran through Aden, al-Qus, Fustat/Cairo, and Alexandria.<sup>10</sup> Through this route, a wide variety of commodities including pepper, ginger, brazil wood, and cardamom were taken by them from the ports of Kerala from as early as the ninth century onward, as is testified by the Jewish letters of Cairo Geniza.<sup>11</sup> Among them pepper formed the greatest single commodity exported from Kerala during this period.<sup>12</sup>

With the increasing involvement of the Jews in the trading activities of Quilon, they organized themselves into a merchant guild or organization called *Anjuvannam*<sup>13</sup> for the purpose of safeguarding their commercial interests and facilitating the processes of procurement and distribution of commodities. The first reference to *Anjuvannam* in Quilon is in the *Tharisapally* copper plate given to Mar Sapor in 849 C.E. by Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal, where it is mentioned that *Anjuvannam*, *Manigramam*, and *Arunnoottuvar* were entrusted with the right to protect and safeguard the church of Tharisa set up by Mar Sapor and the various privileges granted to it.<sup>14</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan holds the view that *Anjuvannam*, mentioned in this copper plate, was a Jewish merchant guild.<sup>15</sup> *Tharisapally* copper plate further states that *Anjuvannam*, along with *Manigramam*, was conferred with the power of *Karalar* (care-taker) of the city of Quilon.<sup>16</sup> The Jewish linkage with Quilon during this period is further attested to by the presence of a Hebrew signature by one of the witnesses in the *Tharisapally* copper plate. It is further suggestive of the fact that Jews were active in the commerce of Quilon as early as 849 so as to be invited as witness.<sup>17</sup>

Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal, a feudatory of the Chera ruler Sthanu Ravi Varma, favored the Jews as well as the immigrant Christian merchant groups by conferring commercial privileges on them (particularly the Christians) with a view to attracting more foreign merchants to Quilon and thereby more overseas commerce and trade surplus. This was with a view toward strengthening the hands of the Chera ruler and his feudatories by way of customs duties for the purpose of meeting the diverse challenges raised by the Pandyas and the Cholas in the south.<sup>18</sup> This was a period when the Chera-Pandya conflict was intense in the south, following which the Pandyas had invaded the Ay-Vel country and captured the ruler along with his relatives and treasures. Though the Chera army had moved into the south to recapture the lost territory, the Ay territory with its old headquarters in Vizhinjam, was retained within the Pandyan sphere of influence. The Cheras could regain only the Vel country with its headquarters at Quilon (Kurakkeni Kollam).<sup>19</sup> It was against the backdrop of this political development that the Chera ruler and his feudatory made conscious efforts to entice different foreign merchant groups including the Jews to Quilon.

Meanwhile, some of the Jewish traders operating from Fatimid Egypt, but in collaboration with the Jews of Kerala, had by this time developed extensive commercial networks linking the west coast of India and the eastern Mediterranean. We find Mahruz b. Jacob, who was a ship-owning Jewish merchant (*nakhoda*),



conducting trade with the ports of Konkan, Malabar, and Egypt.<sup>20</sup> In his letter of c.1145 C.E., Mahruz b. Jacob refers to Kanbayat (Cambay), Broach, Thana, Mangalore, Malibarath (Koulam Mali), Kayakannur (Lower Kannur) as the important centers of Jewish trade on the western seaboard.<sup>21</sup> Quilon (Koulam Mali) continued to be a principal destination for the Jewish merchants, traveling from Aden to Munaybar (Malabar or Kerala), via Sindabur (Chandrapura in Goa) and selling storax and coral collected from Mediterranean ports, as is mentioned by the Jewish merchant Allan b. Hassun (1116-1117 C.E.).<sup>22</sup> Benjamin of Tudela (c.1170 C.E.) in his *Itinerary* refers to the Jewish traders through whose medium the wheels of Quilon's commerce were made to turn toward the ports of Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Levant, from where commodities were further taken to Venice.<sup>23</sup>

Thus Quilon acting as a junctional point of different commodity streams served as the principal habitat for the Jews in the early centuries of the medieval period. The immense trading opportunities thrown open by the intersection of international trade routes at this port made Quilon to be the most coveted and frequented Jewish exchange center in the Indian Ocean. The Jewish presence and their trade in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Quilon is also attested to by Marco Polo<sup>24</sup> and John of Monte Corvino.<sup>25</sup> The al-Karimi merchants from Mamluk Egypt, who came to Kerala from the fourteenth century onward, preferred not to operate from Quilon but from the ports of northern Kerala (such as Calicut and Cannanore), because of the predominant presence of the Jewish and St. Thomas Christian traders in the port of Quilon in southern Kerala.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Cheras and Their Dependence on Jewish Merchant Capital**

The Cheras ruler had their headquarters at Mahodayapuram, which was also known as differently as Makotai or Shingly<sup>27</sup> or Muyirikode during the medieval period and corresponds to the present-day Cranganore. There was a significant Jewish colony in Cranganore, whose members were often known as the Jews of Shingly or Muyirikode. They played a significant role in the political and commercial developments of the Chera kingdom in its formative phase.

The early centuries of the medieval period witnessed incessant wars among the Chera, Chola, and Pandya rulers over the question of controlling areas yielding sizeable wealth, particularly maritime exchange centers that were capable of generating trade surplus. Jews scattered along the coast of Kerala formed an important mercantile element in the Chera kingdom, which was enthusiastically competing with the Cholas in controlling the maritime trade emanating from southern India. While the Cholas attempted to monopolize the trading activities of Southeast Asia by controlling the exchange centers of Ceylon, Coromandel coast, and the Sailendras, the Chera rulers and their feudatories made increasing use of the Jewish merchant guild of *Anjuvannam* and the Christian merchant guild of *Manigramam* for controlling the commercial affairs of the west coast of India, particularly of Kerala and for the movement of commodities to the ports of Persian Gulf and Red Sea.<sup>28</sup>

Against the background of incessant conflicts between the Cheras and the Cholas, the Jewish traders came forward to strengthen the hands of the Chera ruler by donating men and materials liberally to him, which in turn made them closer to the ruler and the various power-exercising institutions of the region. The help from the Jews came immediately after the defeat of Chera naval power at Vizhinjam and the loss of Quilon to the forces of Raja Raja Chola (985-1014). In the war council that was convened in 1000 C.E., Joseph Rabban the head of the Jewish merchant guild of *Anjuvannam* of Muyirikode (Cranganore) placed at the disposal of the Chera

ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varman his ships, men, and materials for the conduct of the war with the Cholas. An enormous amount of Jewish mercantile wealth seems to have been mobilized by Joseph Rabban for meeting the expenses incurred by the Chera ruler in the war.<sup>29</sup>

Besides supporting the Chera ruler who had been the patron of their trading activities in Kerala, the Jewish merchants seem to have had another reason to finance the wars against the Cholas. The Cholas, who were trying to control the trade of Southeast Asia, actually wanted to link the maritime trade of south India with the expanding markets of China through their Southeast Asian networks, while the Cheras by way of the political support and patronage extended to the merchant guilds of *Anjuvannam* and *Manigramam*, tried to link the maritime commerce of Kerala with the ports of west Asia, whose channels of commodity movement finally merged at different levels into the Jewish trade networks operating in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Against this background it was necessary for the Jewish traders that the Chera ruler should come out victorious in the war for the purpose of ensuring regular flow of commodities through their Diasporic channels in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.

The liberal donation of mercantile wealth by Joseph Rabban and his Jewish colleagues to the Cheras appears to have been highly decisive in determining the course of the war. Immediately after the war, we find the Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varma (962-1020) conferring seventy-two privileges and prerogatives of aristocracy on Joseph Rabban in about 1000 C.E.<sup>30</sup> The conferring of privileges upon the leading Semitic traders is to be seen as a strategy used by the ruler to ensure the mercantile support of the Jewish merchants operating from different parts of Kerala for the purpose of mobilizing resources for his future political ventures.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, it also turned out to be a mechanism and device that gave upward mobility in the social ladder for the Jewish traders scattered in the kingdom of the Cheras. The perception that these privileges were extended to the entire Jewish community ushered in a feeling of self-pride and social elevation among this mercantile group, which in fact helped to integrate the different Jewish traders who came to Kerala at different times and spread across a vast area. This copper plate containing the details of the privileges conferred upon them was in fact used by the Jews of several generations and centuries as a device to construct their elevated position in the changing social space and to maintain it intact.

Corresponding to these commercial developments and following the royal support of the Cheras, we find Jewish traders spreading along the coast of Kerala and getting linked with the Jewish settlements of Cambay, Broach, Thana, and Mangalore, where Abraham Yiju had a bronze factory.<sup>32</sup> Probably it must have been during this time that the Jews started expanding to Fandarayna (Pantalayani Kollam near Koyilandy) and Madai (in north Kerala) for the purpose of conducting commerce. In the Jewish letter of 1139 C.E. we find Jews conducting trade in Fandarayna (Pantalayani Kollam) with the cooperation of Sheikh Abu 'l-Hasan b. Ja'far and using the ship of Patanaswamikal. Khalaf b. Isaac b. Bundar, the writer of this letter, states he had taken in the vessel to Bab al-Mandeb about one and a quarter and an eight *bahar* of pepper from Pantalayani Kollam in Kerala.<sup>33</sup> The memories of Jewish contacts in Madai are still preserved in the form of an oral tradition woven around *juthakulam* (pond of the Jews), from where the Jews used to draw water.<sup>34</sup>

Through marriage bonds and commercial partnerships, the diverse Jewish mercantile settlements seem to have managed to mobilize greater resources and widen their networks enabling them to face the pressures as well as challenges of

*Svarupam*, who transferred his royal residence from the inland pocket of Nediyirappu in Ernadu (Malappuram District) to the maritime trade center of Calicut, which he captured from the ruler of Polanadu, evidently with an eye on the profit from trade.<sup>47</sup> This chief eventually came to be known as Zamorin (the Lord of the Ocean), whose shifting of headquarters to Calicut coincided with the intensification of its maritime trade, which had by this time been carried out principally by the Arab Al-Karimi merchants linked with the Mamluk Egypt. The Al-Karimi traders started increasingly coming to Kerala and particularly to the ports of Calicut, Cannanore and other minor exchange centers of north Kerala with a decisive change and twist in the international trade route caused by the Mongol attack of the Baghdad Caliphate in 1258. Consequent to the fall of Baghdad, the international trade emanating from the Persian Gulf and terminating in China got blocked; and Quilon, which depended heavily upon this trade route for sustaining its commerce and political activities, declined. Meanwhile, the Mamluks of Egypt who defeated the Mongols at Ain Jalut in 1260, used this crisis as an opportunity to develop another international trade route keeping Cairo as their basis and the Al-Karimi merchants as the commercial intermediaries.<sup>48</sup>

Following this development there was an increasing concentration of Al-Karimi merchants in Calicut and other ports of north Kerala, while the Jewish traders from the port of Quilon and from Cranganore started moving to the newly emerging nuclei of power structures and petty kingdoms that appeared in different parts of Kerala. Meanwhile, most of these Jewish merchants preferred to settle down near the royal residences of the local rulers interacting as commercial intermediaries between the spice producing centers in the hinterland and the chain of ports along the coast. The presence of the Jewish traders in Calicut in such a remote past is attested to by the vibrant oral traditions about the *juthakulam* (pond of the Jews) of the town of Calicut, where it seems to have appeared in the midst of the Jewish settlement during this period. Many of the Jews did settle down along the banks of the rivers through which goods were then carried from the production centers to the various maritime centers of exchange. Thus we find Jewish settlements emerging along the banks of the river Chalakudy and the river Periyar. The Jews involved in the movement of commodities through the river of Chalakudy were concentrated around Mala, where they later accumulated enough resources to erect a synagogue (1597). Meanwhile the Jewish traders engaged in the trade between the spice-producing hinterland and the maritime centers of exchange through the different channels of the river Periyar started settling down increasingly in Pulloot, Parur, and Chennamangalam located along this river-bed. Consequently, the size of the Jewish settlements in these places started swelling, which later provided a sufficient demographic base for the erection of the synagogues at Chennamangalam (1612) and Parur. The synagogues of Chennamangalam, Parur, and Mala (near Irinjalakuda) survive even today as reminders of the Jewish economic activities in the region.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, the chief of the Perumpadappu *svarupam*, who had his seat in the inland agrarian center of Vanneri also moved to the maritime exchange center of Cochin, which emerged in 1341 following the geographical changes caused by the great flood in Periyar.<sup>50</sup> While one branch of this river silted up the harbor of Cranganore with floodwaters, the other branch of it opened up a water passage from lagoon into the sea bringing into existence the harbor of Cochin (*Kochu Azhi* or small estuary).<sup>51</sup> There was a very strong tradition among the *Paradesi* Jews that in 1345 a synagogue, which later came to be called the Kochangadi synagogue, was built in

larger market systems and maintain a remarkable amount of continuity against the backdrop of adverse politico-economic conditions. However with the arrival of more Jewish traders from west Asia and Mediterranean world from the ninth century onward, there eventually appeared seeds of differentiation within this community into Black Jews (or the earliest Jewish settlers in Malabar) and White Jews (or the *Paradesi* Jews who reached Malabar following the Arab commercial expansion of the ninth century).<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless the Jews of Malabar (Black Jews) having deep roots in spice-growing hinterland and production centers as well as good political links with the native rulers of Malabar formed the principal suppliers of commodities for the west Asian Jews (White Jews) who were scattered along the west coast of India and engaged in the overseas trade.<sup>36</sup>

Making use of the political support that they enjoyed under the Cheras of Kerala, the Jews used to procure a great amount of commodities including pepper for further transshipment to the Mediterranean world through the Diasporic networks. Thus we find that in 1023 C.E. about 140 pounds of pepper were being taken through this route by one single merchant.<sup>37</sup> A Jewish trader conducting trade with Kerala, Fatimid Egypt, Broach, and Mangalore mentions in 1145 C.E. about 16 large *bahars* of pepper being collected for the purpose of trade to be carried out with the help of his commercial partners.<sup>38</sup> In fact pepper and ginger, which are the commodities typical of Kerala, formed the major items that circulated through the Jewish networks.<sup>39</sup> The price of pepper also fluctuated very much during this period, which in fact indicates the index of the profit of the Jewish trade. In the middle of the eleventh century the price of pepper (per sack) in Cairo was 135 *dinars*.<sup>40</sup> More or less during the same period the price of pepper in Maghreb was 130 *dinars*.<sup>41</sup> The price of pepper per 100 pounds in Almeria in 1138 was 27-25 *mithqals*.<sup>42</sup> However the price of pepper in Kerala was considerably cheap. Thus in 1097 C.E. Joseph Lebdi purchased fifty sacks of pepper from Kerala at a price of 5 *dinars* per sack.<sup>43</sup> It shows that the amount of profit accruing from the trade in pepper was enormously high, even after deducting the cost of risk factors and transportation expenses. However the profit from the spice trade did not remain the same; the unexpected dwindling in the prices at the final destinations took away a major chunk of the profit in many cases. Thus in 1198 C.E., a sack of pepper was sold at Aden only for 52 *dinars*, which later went down to 45 *dinars*.<sup>44</sup> Even in the early thirteenth century the sale price of pepper per load was 46 *dinars*.<sup>45</sup> In spite of the fluctuations in the price of pepper, it formed one of the major cargoes that the Jews procured from Kerala during this period.

### **Fragmentation of the Central Authority and the Distribution of the Jewish Mercantile Settlements in Kerala**

Following the fragmentation of the central authority of the Cheras (the Kulasekharas) of Mahodayapuram in 1206, there appeared a wide variety of political structures and power exercising units in various parts of Kerala with different organizational forms and nomenclatures like *svarūpams*, *nātuvājis*, *dēsavājis*, *kaimals*, *karthas*, etc.<sup>46</sup> Many of these small rulers and local chieftains competitively tried to keep the major maritime centers of exchange under their control, with a view to bagging a share from maritime trade for their political assertions. Some of these chieftains even started moving from inland agrarian regions to the centers of sea-borne trade located along the coast and began to attract traders to their ports for strengthening them politically with the gains from trade. The most important among them was the chief of the Nediyrappu

Cochin.<sup>52</sup> If there are elements of truth in this tradition, then it is suggestive of the fact that the *Paradesi* Jews must have migrated from Cranganore and other parts of Kerala to Cochin immediately after the emergence of Cochin in 1341. The king of Cochin is said to have helped these migrant Jews to set up a marketplace, which eventually came to be known as Kochangadi (small bazaar) because of its being small when compared to the extensive market of Cranganore and the synagogue that they built here eventually came to be referred as the Kochangadi synagogue.<sup>53</sup> By 1400 C.E., Cochin had become an important trade center in Malabar attracting merchants from China as well as west Asia and its commercial vibrancy invited the attention of Cheng Ho vessels (1405-1433) sent by the Ming ruler.<sup>54</sup> In 1409 Ma Huan noticed the active presence of Muhammedans (linked with west Asian trade), Chetties (associated with the coastal trade of Coromandel and Canara), and Kolings (Kelings or Klings linked with Southeast Asian commerce) in Cochin.<sup>55</sup> It is quite evident that a sizeable number of Jews also reached Cochin in the second half of the fifteenth century. Visscher says that the process of migration of white Jews from Cranganore to Cochin began in 1471. Initially these Jews settled down for a period of fifty years in a place called *Sinhora Savode* (*Senhora Soude*, a place-name later given by the Portuguese and presently known as Saudi) about half a league (almost two kilometers) away from Cochin. It was only by 1521-1523 that these white Jews finally shifted their residence completely from *Sinhora Savode* to Cochin.<sup>56</sup>

However, a considerable number of black Jews seem to have reached Cochin from Cranganore and other parts of Kerala by the latter part of the fifteenth century,<sup>57</sup> where the king of Cochin, who was eagerly looking for enterprising commercial partners to develop his port, took these Jewish merchants under his special patronage, a privilege that the Jews enjoyed all through the years to come. It seems that it was for the use of these Jews that the Thekkumbhagam synagogue was built in 1489 in Cochin.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Portuguese Commercial Expansion and the Initial Response of the Jews of Kerala**

When Vasco da Gama came to India in 1498 he happened to meet a Jew in Anjedive, linked with the Jewish settlement of Cochin. Vasco da Gama converted him to Christianity and gave him the name "Gaspar da Gama." It is to be especially remembered that Vasco da Gama played a very significant role in the initial phase of Portuguese expansion in the Indian Ocean. It was with the help of Gaspar da Gama that Pedro Alvarez Cabral reached Cochin in 1500, when Pedro Alvarez Cabral was chased by the forces of the Zamorin following the Portuguese bombardment of the city of Calicut. Later when Vasco da Gama came to India for the second time in 1502, Gaspar accompanied the captain as his trusted lieutenant. Eventually when attempts were made to localize the Portuguese power in Cochin during the viceroyalty of Dom Francisco de Almeida, the latter was assisted by Gaspar da Gama during the period between 1505 and 1509, when he acted as secretary to the viceroy looking after particularly matters related to commerce and translation.<sup>59</sup>

In fact, as early as 1496, anti-Jewish moves began in Portugal when all the Jews were asked either to leave the kingdom or convert to Christianity (and the Jews thus converted were called *Cristãos novos* or New Christians). The crown even took all the Jewish children below fourteen years of age to educate them in the Christian faith.<sup>60</sup> However, in Kerala, especially in the initial phase of Portuguese expansion, when the very existence of the Lusitanian rule depended very much upon indigenous cooperation, the native Jews were allowed to operate as intermediaries for the Portuguese commerce. This was mainly because of the realization of the Portuguese

that their Indo-European trade could be effectively and successfully conducted only with the support and help of the indigenous merchant groups, who were traditionally involved in intra-Asian trade. Initially the Jews of Cochin were regular suppliers of spices for the Lisbon-bound vessels of the Portuguese. Some of them even went to Cambay to buy textiles, which they exchanged in the spice-producing hinterland of Kerala in return for pepper.<sup>61</sup> The pepper thus collected was, in turn, sold to the Portuguese factory in Cochin from where it was taken to Portugal in the vessels of *Carreira da India*. With the discovery of the Cape route and intensification of commerce with the Atlantic ports, the Jews of Cochin got more commercial opportunities to engage in the trade of the region, which improved their financial position, as well.<sup>62</sup> The Jews, just like other indigenous merchants, had better and more extensive networks for procuring commodities from their sources and also for their distribution. Moreover they had better navigational expertise to travel through the different zones of the maritime space of the Indian Ocean carrying the goods and making them available for the Portuguese vessels but without incurring risks to the Portuguese themselves. In the first two decades of the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese were increasingly relying upon the indigenous traders for the purpose of procuring commodities of trade, the Jews seem to have enjoyed a great amount of freedom.

The relatively free atmosphere in Cochin attracted the Jews of Castile (Spain) to migrate to Kerala when there was a massive expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1512.<sup>63</sup> The immense opportunities thrown open for free commerce in this city made them choose Cochin. It is interesting to note that the arrival of these foreign merchant groups took place on the eve of a mass exodus of *Paradesi* Muslim merchants including the Al-Karimis from Calicut in 1513 following the Portuguese treaty with the new Zamorin.<sup>64</sup> We do not have historical evidence to show whether the Castilian Jews made use of the commercial vacuum created by the exodus of *Paradesi* Muslims from Kerala for developing their own commercial networks. However the famous Castiel family, which played vital role in the politico-economic history of Cochin during the period from 1570 to 1670 and which even raised serious threats to the Portuguese hegemony in Malabar, was one of the segments of these migrants from Spain, which seem to have made considerable gains in the changed situation.<sup>65</sup> The silent period of their family history from 1512 to 1570, which roughly coincides with the period when private trade networks were evolving in Portuguese India, seems to have been a formative phase for their commercial ventures when they accumulated sizeable wealth and social standing through their participation in the private trade of the Portuguese.

By the 1520s the Portuguese *casados*<sup>66</sup> increasingly began to resort to private trade, which was facilitated by their collaboration with the indigenous mercantile partners including Jews. However, the Muslim traders, who had been the allies of the Portuguese during the first two decades of the sixteenth century, were antagonized by the highhandedness of the Portuguese and their attack as well as confiscation of the vessels of the Marakkar Muslims under the pretext of checking the *cartaz*.<sup>67</sup> Eventually the estranged Marakkar Muslim traders shifted their base of operation from Cochin to Calicut and started fighting for the Zamorin, with whose help they started developing corsair activities as an alternative form of trade.<sup>68</sup> In the changed situation, in 1524 the Zamorin and his Muslim allies attacked the pro-Cochin and pro-Portuguese king of Cranganore. In this attack the principal target of the Muslim forces of Calicut were the Jews and the St. Thomas Christians of Cranganore,<sup>69</sup> probably in order to paralyze and frighten these mercantile communities for being commercial partners for the Portuguese. In the Muslim attack of Cranganore in 1524

However, the shops of the New Christians in the Portuguese city of Cochin were fed by the goods and commodities supplied by the Jews of Mattancherry. Isaac do Cairo, who was an important Jewish merchant of Mattancherry and who had commercial links with west Asia used to supply commodities to the New Christian traders of Portuguese Cochin.<sup>82</sup> By the 1540s, Luis Rodrigues, a New Christian trader is seen making frequent visits to the city of native Cochin "where lived the great merchants of the land." During these visits he used to sell there commodities that he had taken from Bengal, Ceylon, and Malacca and to collect wares for his next expedition.<sup>83</sup> He also used to take weapons and artillery to the Jewish traders of native Cochin, who in turn sold them to the native kings and chieftains of the adjacent lands.<sup>84</sup> Isaac the Red and other Jews residing in the native city began to frequent the shop of Jacome de Olivares in the Portuguese city of Cochin to take merchandise, which he had brought from Malacca. At the same time he had shops in Mattancherry and in Portuguese Cochin, which enabled him to conduct intercity trade effectively.<sup>85</sup> Leonor Caldeira, who started business establishments in Portuguese Cochin, had a warehouse in Mattancherry for storing rice. She used to go to the Jewish settlement frequently in connection with her business and to collect money for the goods she had sold.<sup>86</sup>

The memories of the common religious and ritualistic past cemented the commercial partnership between the New Christians and the Jews of Cochin. Some Jewish traders of the native city of Cochin, such as Isaac do Cairo, used to bring commodities from west Asia and supply them to the New Christian traders of Portuguese Cochin.<sup>87</sup> Along with the commercial partnership, the Jewish traders of the native city of Cochin created an atmosphere whereby the New Christians could easily plunge into the old Semitic faith without being noticed by the Portuguese authorities for a considerable period of time.<sup>88</sup> Indeed the revival of Judaism gave acceptability and legitimacy to the New Christians in the wider Jewish world with which the Jewish colony of Cochin was commercially linked. With the wealth accruing from Asian trade and the supportive links with the Jews of native Cochin, the New Christians started despising Christianity, which they had been forced to embrace in Portugal and returned to the practice of Jewish religious ritual practices. As later accused in the inquisitorial proceedings of Lisbon, the New Christian trader of Portuguese Cochin, Jacome de Olivares used to go to the house of the Jew Isaac do Cairo in Mattancherry to participate in the ceremonies of Purim. There he joined hands with other Jews in stoning the crucifix in a contemptuous manner. He also donated funds liberally for the construction of the Kaduvumbhagam synagogue, which was erected during the period between 1539 and 1550.<sup>89</sup>

Some other New Christians, such as Diogo Soares, maintained the food code of the Jews rigorously and refused to eat the flesh of the pig; he also observed Saturday Sabbath celebrations, for which he was later tried in the inquisitorial court for having deviated from the faith.<sup>90</sup> There were a few New Christians who were showing disrespect to the articles of Christian faith and pronouncing blasphemous words against the Christian celebration of the Eucharist in their attempts to return to their old Jewish religion.<sup>91</sup>

All these were in fact attempts to revive their traditional Jewish religion against the backdrop of the liberalism that they experienced in Cochin. However, these Judaizing practices of the New Christians and their attempts return to their traditional religion did not go unnoticed for a long time by the Portuguese. The matter came to the attention of the Lusitanians on April 30, 1557 (the feast day of *Corpus Christi* or Eucharist), when blasphemous and provocative words were scribbled on the stand on which the Blessed Sacrament was placed in the church of

many Jews and St. Thomas Christians were killed. However, a good many Jews fled from Cranganore under the leadership of Joseph Azar to Cochin,<sup>70</sup> where the Perumpadappu king wholeheartedly took the newcomers under his patronage.

The Jews established their settlement in the native part of the city of Cochin (Cochin *de cima*), which now is called Mattancherry. They had no access to the European part of the city of Cochin, which had the Portuguese settlement and was known as Cochin *de baixo* (currently known as Fort Cochin). In 1527, Dom John III of Portugal raised that part of Cochin, which had the Portuguese settlements, to the status of a city with privileges on par with those of Evora in Portugal. The new urban unit came also to be known as the city of Santa Cruz of Cochin.<sup>71</sup> The Jews living in the native city of Cochin were in an advantageous position: while keeping good rapport with the king of Cochin and other native rulers in the inland and thus ensuring easy access to the spice production centers of Kerala, they took sizeable profit out of the urban and commercial changes taking place in Portuguese town of Cochin. With their base in Mattancherry, these Jews were involved both in the official and clandestine trade of the Portuguese, following which the commercial condition of the Jews started prospering considerably in the initial three decades of the sixteenth century. With the help of *Paradesi* Jews from Spain, who had better mercantile capital and international trade links, the Jews of native Cochin and Cranganore developed alternative routes running parallel to the Portuguese trading channels and touching the Diasporas scattered all over the Euro-Asian space.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile the Manueline tolerance gave way to the rigorous socioreligious policies of Dom John III, as a result of which the Inquisition was established in Portugal to enforce anti-Semitic measures and to bring New Christians (*Cristãos novos* or the new converts from Judaism to Christianity) to the genuine and orthodox Christian faith. Concomitantly the recurring pestilence, famine, and economic crisis, which became acute in 1530-1531 and took away the lives of many, were interpreted as God's wrath on Portugal for tolerating the Jews. People in Lisbon entered into clashes and fights with the Jews accusing the latter for the cause of frequent pestilences.<sup>73</sup> Against this background many New Christians, who feared imminent danger in the mother country, started fleeing from 1533 onward to Cochin,<sup>74</sup> which was then considered to be a relatively liberal urban unit in Portuguese India

The diverse commercial opportunities offered by the city of Cochin enabled the Jews and the New Christians to come out as an important mercantile group of this city, as is evidenced by Dinis de Azevedo in 1540 in his letter to King Dom John III.<sup>75</sup> They developed an intra-Asian network to send commodities to the ports of Bengal, Ceylon, Malacca, and to the ports of west Asia and Ottoman Egypt.<sup>76</sup> Jacome de Olivares, a New Christian who came from Setubal (Portugal) put up commercial center in *Rua Direita* in Portuguese Cochin and began to sell pitch and porcelain as well as *pau-da China*.<sup>77</sup> Manuel Rodrigues, another New Christian of the city, established a business house near this street to sell silk, clothes, carpets, and other commodities.<sup>78</sup> Leonor Caldeira, a woman from this group, also developed her commercial establishments by this principal street of Cochin. She was assisted in her business by her daughter Clara and a black slave.<sup>79</sup> Simão Nunes, the son of Leonor Caldeira following the family tradition of trade established a commercial center near the same *Rua Direita* for trading in corals, camphor, and other items.<sup>80</sup> He testified before the inquisitorial court of Lisbon that a Jew of native Cochin called Moises Real, who was referred to as "the greatest known merchant of India," had two business centers in Portuguese Cochin: one in *Rua Direita* and the other in the *Casa do Vigario*.<sup>81</sup>



Santa Cruz in Cochin. This writing was signed by the words "the tribes of Israel."<sup>92</sup> It was followed by a similar writing found in the offertory box of the church of the Dominican monastery of Cochin.<sup>93</sup>

The matter was taken very seriously and the suspicion naturally fell on the New Christians, following which all the *Cristãos novos* of the city were imprisoned in 1557.<sup>94</sup> In the same year an inquisitorial court was set up in Cochin (almost three years before the establishment of the Inquisition in Goa in 1560), which was presided over by Pe. Pedro Gonçalves, the vicar of Cochin at the beginning and later by bishop Dom Jorge Temudo.<sup>95</sup> All the New Christians, about twenty in number, whose genuineness of faith and belief were questioned in one way or another, were arrested and tried in the inquisitorial court of Cochin. Among them figured Jacome de Olivares, Manuel and Maria Rodrigues, Luis Rodrigues, Leonor Caldeira, her son Simão Nunes and her daughter Clara Caldeira, etc.,<sup>96</sup> who were actively involved in the trade of Cochin. After having tried them in Cochin, they were taken to Goa for further interrogations, from where they were later taken to the Inquisition of Lisbon. There "auto-da-fé" was carried out in the *Praça da Ribeira* in Lisbon, and the accused were punished according to the gravity of their offenses. All of them, except one, were sent to prison and for various penitential obligations, which lasted in some cases for four years. The only one who was exempted from the punishment was Leonor Caldeira, the oldest among the group.<sup>97</sup> The economic result of this inquisitorial process was that all the New Christians lost their wealth (which was confiscated by the Portuguese at the beginning and what remained with them was spent for the cost of their trials), most of which up to this point had played a vital role in making the wheels of Cochin commerce turn smoothly. It seems that the commercial jealousy of the private Portuguese traders against the New Christian traders, who were thriving in the Asian trade, was instrumental in leveling accusations of heresy against them, which in turn intensified the inquisitorial proceedings against the New Christians. Its repercussions were immediately reflected in the city's economic life. Diogo Alvares Teles, the captain of Cochin, accused the inquisitors of trying to empty the city of its inhabitants under the pretext of inquiry against the New Christians.<sup>98</sup>

However, the Portuguese could not interfere in the economic and social life of the Jews of Mattancherry in the way they wished, as the king of Cochin took the latter under his patronage and protection. Because of the decisive roles that the Jews played in the political and commercial life of the kingdom of Cochin, the local ruler, Perumpadappu king, allowed them to settle down closer to his residence, facilitating the evolution of a multicultural native city (Mattancherry) as separate and distinct from the monocultural European city (Portuguese city of Cochin). This process gradually gave shape to a protective mechanism from which the Jewish traders received necessary immunities from being attacked by their European commercial competitors. As we have already seen, the king of Cochin had already taken under his patronage the Castilian Jews expelled from Spain in 1512<sup>99</sup> and the Jewish traders from Cranganore following the Muslim attacks in 1524.<sup>100</sup> During the period between 1565 and 1566 many Jews migrated from Cranganore to Mattancherry, where they were given land in 1566 by the king of Cochin adjacent to his royal palace.<sup>101</sup> On this land a synagogue (which later came to be called *Paradesi* synagogue) was erected in 1568 through the efforts of Samuel Castile, David Belila, Efraim Sala, and Joseph Levi.<sup>102</sup> This eventually became the nuclei for the principal Jewish settlement in Cochin. The protective interventions of the king of Cochin not only saved the Jews from the wrath of the Portuguese, but also provided space for their survival as a trading community.

### Liberalization of Indo-European Trade and Jewish Cooperation

The severe and rigorous anti-Semitic steps taken by the Portuguese by the middle of the sixteenth century did not last long, particularly against the backdrop of mounting economic pressure on the Portuguese crown with regard to the conduct of Indo-European commerce. With the intensification of economic pressure, King Sebastian of Portugal stepped down in 1570 from being the merchant monarch liberalizing Indo-European commerce and handing over the spice trade to private contractors (1570-1598). After the initial ventures by the Germans and the Italians, the New Christian merchants of Portugal came forward to take up the contract trade of pepper from 1592 to 1598.<sup>103</sup> The fact that this syndicate, which took up the contract to take spices from India to Lisbon, consisted mainly of the New Christians like Pero Rodrigues de Lisboa, Fernão Ximenes, João Monteiro, Henrique Dias, Andre Ximenes, Heitor Mendes de Brito, Luis Gomes Furtado, and Jorge Rodrigues Solis,<sup>104</sup> shows how accommodative and tolerant the Portuguese authorities had become on matters related to commerce. As per the terms and conditions of the contract, the syndicate had the right to send their own trade agents to Cochin and Goa, a clause that gave the New Christians of Portugal to send members of their community to India for the purpose of procuring cargo for this trade.<sup>105</sup>

This economic atmosphere enabled many Jews and New Christians to reach Portuguese India as collection agents or trade agents of the New Christian traders of Portugal. Duarte Solis (1561-1630) was one of these New Christians who came in this way to Cochin in 1586.<sup>106</sup> In 1596 when Chryztoph Pawlowski from Poland visited Cochin, he could see many New Christian merchants trading in the city of Santa Cruz.<sup>107</sup> Along with the New Christians many Jews were also involved actively in the commerce of Cochin. Jan Huyghen van Linschoten noticed by the middle of the 1580s that there were many rich Jewish merchants in Cochin, some of whom could even converse very well in the Spanish language. He also mentions that they had magnificent houses built of stones.<sup>108</sup> The Jewish mercantile community made use of the liberal trading atmosphere of Cochin, which was ushered in by the cessation of crown trade and also by the setting up of a parallel commercial network by the New Christians for resuming their commerce, which was earlier interrupted by the inquisitorial proceedings. Later, even after the cessation of Indo-European commerce by the New Christians following the resumption of crown trade in 1598, Jews continued to play a significant role in the economic activities of Cochin. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, François Pyrrard de Laval saw many rich Jewish merchants in Cochin.<sup>109</sup> The Castilian Jews, who came to Cochin in the second decade of the sixteenth century, made maximum use of the favorable commercial developments that appeared during this liberal phase of Indo-European trade. Concomitantly, the leadership of the Jewish community of Cochin was assigned to the highly resourceful Castiel family during the period commencing from the 1570s onward, after which Samuel Castiel eventually emerged as *mudaliar*.<sup>110</sup>

### Forging of New Economic Ties and Social Spacing

The beginning of the seventeenth century witnessed a phase in which the Jews of Cochin started diversifying their economic roles by forging ties with new partners and collaborators. In this process, the *Paradesi* or foreign Jews, because of their ability to mobilize greater resources and the political clout that they enjoyed, began to emerge as the leaders of the community following which they carved out a position in the social ladder corresponding to their economic position. The king of Cochin played a vital role in this transformation process, not only by providing

patronage and protection to the *Paradesi* Jews but also by assigning certain special politico-economic roles to the latter that eventually kept their position over and above that of the Black Jews in the social ladder. The commercial expertise of some of these *Paradesi* Jews was also made use of for carrying out the trading activities of the king of Cochin. Thus, for example, in the beginning of the seventeenth century with the increasing accumulation of wealth, the king of Cochin began to invest sizeable wealth and utilize the commercial expertise of the Jewish traders along with some Muslim merchants, to transship commodities to Mecca and other Ottoman ports in the Red Sea.<sup>111</sup> The king of Cochin had by this time emerged as a key personality in Malabar politics with huge wealth amassed by way of customs duty (about 60,000 to 80,000 *pardaos* per year).<sup>112</sup> In the process of his political assertions, the king of Cochin depended upon the advice of *Paradesi* Jews such as David Levi and Samuel Castiel, whom he appointed as his councilors at different time phases. Meanwhile, the *Paradesi* Jews, because of their closeness to the power center and with their representatives acting as *mudaliars*, carved out sizeable power and prestige positions in the Jewish community of Cochin, a development that intensified the process of social stratification within the Jewish community by keeping the White Jews at the top and the Black Jews on the bottom.

Meanwhile the presence of the Dutch in the Indian waters in the initial decades of the seventeenth century emboldened the Jews of Cochin to connect with the anti-Portuguese forces operating in the Indian Ocean region. From the end of the fifteenth century onward, when most of the expelled Iberian Jews moved to Antwerp and Low countries, where they played a vital role in the development of commercial capitalism, the Dutch were viewed as a philosemitic nation. It seems that the Dutch visited Cochin at the invitation of Perumpadappu king in 1618 and the consequent talks for an alliance between the Dutch and the king of Cochin was facilitated by the *Paradesi* Jews of Mattancherry, particularly under the leadership of the Levi family, which acted as an intermediary interacting with both the parties.<sup>113</sup> In 1619, the king of Cochin made David Levi, a member of the *Paradesi* Jewish family of Levi from Mattancherry *mudaliar* and his ambassador. It seems that this development took place as a sequel to a Dutch visit in 1618 probably to cement the newly forged ties with the Dutch.<sup>114</sup> Immediately after the occupation of Cochin in 1663, the Dutch preferred to have a member from the Levi family as *mudaliar* and the elevation of David Levi to the charge of *mudaliar*<sup>115</sup> is suggestive of their earlier links, which must have started in the second decade of the seventeenth century.

In the second half of the 1620s Samuel Castiel was made the principal councilor and interpreter to the king of Cochin, a political development that also accelerated the process of upward mobility of *Paradesi* Jews in the social ladder. Taking his advice, the king of Cochin started looking into the prospects of forging economic ties with new allies and partners. The king of Cochin entered into diplomatic contacts with the Sultan of Aceh, Iskandar Muda, whose ambassador was warmly received by the former in 1627.<sup>116</sup> Samuel Castiel's authority was also traceable in the capture of the island of Bendure (Venduruthi) in 1629 from the Portuguese. Though it had been previously granted to D. Gaspar de Azevedo by an earlier king of Cochin, the incumbent ruler of Cochin under the influence of Samuel Castiel captured the island from the Portuguese and added it to his kingdom.<sup>117</sup> Thus we find that while extending patronage, the very ruler of Cochin himself was, to a certain extent, being influenced with regard to the course of his commercial and political policies by the advice of the *Paradesi* Jewish traders.

During the period between 1642 and 1643 there was acute tension between the Portuguese and the *Paradesi* Jewish leader, Samuel Castiel, who was then acting

as councilor and interpreter for the king of Cochin. The destruction of many statues including those of St. Mary as well as St. Antony and the conversion of a cross into a ladder in Cochin by *Patara Regedor mor* (the chief officer of the king of Cochin) was linked by the Portuguese to the instigation of Samuel Castiel. In fact, these developments took place as retaliation for the murder of a royal officer (*regedor*) of the king of Cochin by the Portuguese in 1630.<sup>118</sup> However, in the midst of fierce tension, the Portuguese killed Samuel Castiel in 1643,<sup>119</sup> a fact that makes us think that the Portuguese suspected him of being the principal instigator of tensions and problems. He must have been selected as the main target of attack because of his role as interpreter and translator, which gave him many opportunities to manipulate things against the Portuguese and to instill anti-Portuguese feelings into the king of Cochin.

However, in the same decade we find many foreign Jews still migrating to the native city of Cochin, where the *Paradesi* Jews were increasingly favored by the local ruler, to take part in its trading activities. One of the most prominent among them was the Syrian Jewish family of Rahabi, which settled down in Mattancherry in 1646 and from which Ezechiel Rahabi, the great Jewish merchant of the mid-eighteenth century, emerged.<sup>120</sup>

### **The Company Trade of the Dutch and the Jewish Mercantile Collaboration**

Kerala was, in fact, on the periphery of Dutch commercial and political activities, distanced very much away from the core center of Batavia. This fact necessitated the Dutch to seek the collaboration of several local traders with substantial capital for the purpose of conducting their trade in Kerala.<sup>121</sup> Jews formed one of the most important merchant communities that took part in the trade of the Dutch East India Company, and whose multiple commercial outlets enabled the former to promote their private initiatives and entrepreneurial ingenuity. The Dutch, in fact, were looked upon as a philosemitic group. Various Cochin Jewish merchants showed great interest in collaborating with them. Ezechiel Rahabi, a descendant of the Syrian Jew who settled down in Cochin in 1646, was made the first merchant of the Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC) in the mid-eighteenth century. Isaac Surgun was the principal Jewish trader of Calicut in the eighteenth century.<sup>122</sup>

Adrian Moens writes in his memoir that Ezechiel Rahabi was the only merchant in Cochin with the title of Company's merchant. He is referred to as having an honest and upright character with great influence over the native princes and the notables of their kingdoms.<sup>123</sup> These Jewish traders had an enormous amount of wealth upon which the Company and the local rulers heavily banked in times of emergency. Ezechiel Rahabi had once lent the VOC Rs. 90,000 when the Dutch were in a dire situation, while Isaac Surgun was made to pay Rs. 40,000 to the Tipu sultan in 1788.<sup>124</sup> Samuel Abraham and the three sons of Ezechiel Rahabi—Elias, Moses, and David—were the other prominent Jewish merchants of Cochin.<sup>125</sup> In fact, these Jewish merchants rose to prominence because of their ability to participate in the greater commercial transactions facilitated by the increasing movement of commodities by the Dutch East India Company.

However, the developments after 1750 ushered in a phase of doldrums as far as the Jews and other various commercial collaborators of the Dutch trade were concerned. On the one hand most of the spice-producing territories like Quilon, Kayamkulam Thekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, and Porcad were conquered one after other and annexed to Travancore by Marthanda Varma during the period between 1742 and 1752, following which the flow of spices and other commodities from these

places to the port of Cochin were blocked—inflicting a severe blow on the commerce of the Dutch.<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, the trade in pepper was declared a state monopoly in Travancore in 1743, which not only severely reduced the amount of pepper available to the Dutch in Cochin, but also created serious difficulties for the local merchants for its purchase and sale.<sup>127</sup> The entire move was intended to get the spice trade of Cochin re-routed to international markets through a Travancorean door, for which a new port was established at Alleppey in 1763 by Raja Kesava Das and a network of land and water routes was set up to link the distant production centers with the newly established port. Spices that were flowing to Cochin until then were diverted to Alleppey from the newly conquered territories of Travancore. Consequently, the port of Cochin and the Jewish merchants that depended very much on this port for commercial activities began to feel the dearth of cargo, which eventually led to a commercial crisis in Cochin. Even Raja Rama Varma (1790-1805), alias Saktan Thampuran, who was the king of Cochin, took no interest in the trade conducted by the Dutch in Cochin. Due to his antipathy toward the Dutch, the king of Cochin preferred to rule from Trichur, located about 80 kilometers away from Cochin and the Dutch trading world; he developed several inland markets in and around Trichur particularly in Trichur, Koratty, Kunnamkulam, Chalakudy, and Irinjalakuda, where he made the enterprising merchant community of the St. Thomas Christians settle down with a view toward stimulating trade in the hinterland. The Commodity flow from these markets was made to merge into the streams of English commerce.<sup>128</sup> All these developments severely affected the trading activities of the Dutch in Cochin, on which the Jews immensely depended for sustaining their Indian Ocean trade. New international trade routes emanating from Alleppey and new merchant groups represented by Thachil Mathu Tharakan and related to the English began to emerge as part of the new economic forces that started appearing in Kerala by the third quarter of the eighteenth century,<sup>129</sup> which in turn gradually shattered the commercial edifice that the Jews had erected over centuries.

The end result of all these developments was the decline in Cochin trade, which adversely affected the commercial prospects of the Jews of Cochin. By the time of Ezechiel Rahabi's death (1771), commercial matters had become worse in Cochin. His son, David Rahabi, though involved in trade, could not attain the status of a first merchant of the VOC, which Ezechiel had done. Elias and Moses, Ezechiel's other sons, also could do no better and finally by the end of the eighteenth century the Rahabi family became bankrupt.<sup>130</sup> In the changed situation many Jews seem to have moved more and more to interior places such as Mala, located near Irinjalakuda, to take part in the newly emerging trading activities of the English carried out with the help of the rulers of Cochin and Travancore, which in turn augmented the size of the already existing Jewish settlements located on the banks of the rivers in the hinterland.

Thus, the Jews operating in the Indian Ocean played diverse economic roles that varied from peddling traders to merchant capitalists engaged in the long-distance movement of commodities. In the process of collecting cargo from the hinterland, a good many of them settled along the coast of Kerala and the banks of the principal rivers, which eventually turned out to be the nodal centers of Jewish trade. While the newly arrived foreign (*Paradesi*) Jews preferred to settle down in Cochin and other the principal ports of Kerala procuring cargo for their overseas trade, the black Jews and the early Jewish settlers moved more and more toward the inland trade centers located on the riverbanks (like Mala or Chennamangalam) and minor ports like Palayur in the process of collecting cargo for the *Paradesi* Jews

conducting business in large port towns. The trading networks of the *Paradesi* Jews ran through the Diasporas cutting across the various exchange systems of Europe and Asia; however the starting point of this network was to be seen in the Jewish peddlers who used to go into the spice-producing hinterland of Kerala procuring spices in return for Mediterranean wares. In fact, the type of economic activities carried out in the maritime space of the Indian Ocean decided the habitat pattern of different Jewish merchants in Kerala and their locus in the social ladder. Moreover, the amount of wealth accruing from their participation in the trade of the Indian Ocean regions defined their social standing, which went on changing with the increasing advent of new foreign Jewish groups, which had better material resources and larger mercantile networks.

The remarkable ability of the Jews to adapt to the changing politico-economic conditions is evident in their success in continuing their business in spite of the sweeping changes that shook the political and socioeconomic foundations of Kerala. By linking themselves with the trading networks of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean and by keeping themselves closer to the rulers and power structures that changed, the Jewish merchants made themselves contemporaneously relevant in Kerala's market system. However, under insecure and dangerous politico-economic condition—particularly when the Portuguese turned antipathetic—many of the Jewish merchants involved in the long-distance movement of commodities managed to continue their business by strengthening Jewish trading networks into which the socioeconomic webs of New Christians from Portugal were also incorporated. Supported by common religious feelings, the Jews of Mattancherry and the New Christians of the Portuguese city of Cochin operated on a partnership basis, making the wheels of Jewish trade move smoothly at a time when the Portuguese control systems tried to thwart the commercial ventures of the indigenous traders and the Jews in the Indian Ocean region. In fact, the Jews, particularly the *Paradesi* Jews, made significant economic progress by their participation in the trade of the Dutch East India Company in Cochin. However, the diversion of cargo to the new port of Allepey by the Travancoreans and the formation of a new trade network by Saktan Thampuran to divert the trade from the kingdom of Cochin to the British trading world made the trade of the Dutch in Cochin dwindle and consequently broke the commercial backbone of the Jews. Though many of the leading Jewish families, including the Rahabi family, became either bankrupt or incapable of mobilizing resources for further productive ventures in the changed situation and no giant Jewish figures ever reappeared in the economic scenario, the Jews did not disappear from the scene altogether. On the contrary, the vast water space of the Indian Ocean still continued to provide them channels for their business and avenues for ventilating their private initiatives, which they diversified eventually by participating in different levels and phases of English trade.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to S. S. Koder, the first Jews came immediately after the destruction of the second temple of Jerusalem (in A.D. 70). S. S. Koder, "Saga of the Jews of Cochin," in *Jews in India*, edited by Thomas A. Timberg (1986), 140; see also S. S. Koder, "Kerala and Her Jews." A paper presented before Kerala History Association, 1965, 1-2. Logan says that Jews fled to the Malabar Coast in their attempt to escape from the servitude under Cyrus in the sixth century B.C. William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. I (Trivandrum, 1981), 247. Scholars differ on the date of the first

Jewish settlement in India. Some trace it to the events following the Babylonian exile, while some others view that the Jews seem to have stepped into the Indian Ocean region from tenth century B.C.E. onward, when King David occupied Ezion-Geber in the Gulf of Aqaba on the shore of Red Sea. Henceforth, David, who had already carved out an empire from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River, began to give maritime dimensions to his enterprises by joining hands with Hiram, the Phoenician king of Tyre. During the time of his son Solomon (973- 933 B.C.E.), the extent of Jewish empire got widened by his policy of marrying the sisters and daughters of the kings from far and wide. Solomon and Hiram of Tyre jointly dispatched vessels to all parts of the known world including India from Ezion-Geber. "King Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-Geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of Red sea, Hiram sent in the navy his servants and shipmen, who had the knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir and fetched from there 420 *talents* of gold and brought it to king Solomon" (I Kings IX:26-28). I Kings X:11 adds: "The navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees and precious stones." The triennial fleet sent jointly by the Jews and the Phoenicians brought to Israel such items as ivory, apes, peacocks, almug trees, and precious stones from the port of Ophir, the result of which was that many Tamil words entered into the Hebrew text of the Bible. The word for peacock in the Hebrew text is *tuki* (in Kings and Chronicles), which was derived from the Tamil word *tokei*. Similarly, the Hebrew word *ahalim* or *ahaloth* for the wood called "aloes" was derived from the Tamil word *aghil*. These similarities make us infer that Ophir must have been somewhere on the coastal belt of south India, where Tamil was the medium of communication. Just like the Phoenicians, Solomon also planted Jewish colonies in far-flung areas to protect his commercial interests. These various trading posts eventually became the nuclei of the first great Jewish Diaspora. Later, with Assyrian conquest and Nebuchadnezzar's raid, the migration of Jews to these places seems to have increased considerably. For more details about the question of the first Jewish settlement, see Thomas A. Timberg (ed.), *Jews in India* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1986); J. B. Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1993); Shirley Berry Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel: A Comprehensive Inquiry and Source Book* (Berkeley, CA: J. L. Magnes Museum, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 1, *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 86-91.

<sup>3</sup> It was called Kurakkeni Kollam to distinguish it from Panatalayani Kollam located near Koyilandy in north Kerala.

<sup>4</sup> See S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 64.

<sup>5</sup> These are the wide variety of papers obtained from the Geniza of Cairo. A Geniza is a place where discarded writings on which the name of God was written and deposited in order to preserve them from desecration. Most of the papers of the Cairo Geniza were preserved in a room adjacent to the synagogue of Cairo. For detailed discussion on Geniza papers, see Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*; idem, *A Mediterranean Society*, 4 vols. (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-84); idem, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

<sup>6</sup> The earliest Arab source is Suleiman's account of A.D. 841 entitled *Salsalat-al-Taverika*. For other Arab sources on Quilon, see George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 70-74.

<sup>7</sup> See Haraprasad Ray, "Historical Contacts between Quilon and China," in Pius Malekandathil and Jamal Mohammed (eds.), *The Portuguese, Indian Ocean and the European Bridgeheads: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. K. S. Mathew* (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente/ Tellicherry: IRISH, 2001), 386-88.

<sup>8</sup> Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, 70-74.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-80.

<sup>10</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese (1498-1663)," in *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Aligarh: Indian History Congress Publications, 2002), 240-41. See also Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Vol. I, 86-91; Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 175-229.

<sup>11</sup> Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 70, 118, 190, 214-16, 262. For more details see 70, 118ff., 175-229.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 68, 70, 118, 190, 214, 262.

<sup>13</sup> For details on *Anjuvannam* see Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1988). Also see K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 181-82.

<sup>14</sup> For details on the *Tharisapally* copper plate see T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol. II, *Madras* (1916), 66-75.

<sup>15</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala* (Calicut: published by the author, 1996), 155.

<sup>16</sup> Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, 68, 71.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-80.

<sup>18</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "Christians and the Cultural Shaping of India in the First Millennium AD," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians*, no. 1 (January-March 2006): 10; see the *Tharisapally* Copper plate in Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, 68-71.

<sup>19</sup> Narayanan, *The Perumals of Kerala*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64. For the identification of these place names see also Pius Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1999), 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> S. D. Goitein, "Portrait of a Medieval India Trader: Three Letters from the Cairo Geniza," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XLVIII (1987): 457-60.

<sup>23</sup> M. N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (London, 1907), 63-64.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (eds.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, reprint, 1998), 375-76.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (eds.), *Cathay and Way Thither*, vol. 3 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, reprint, 1998), 63.

<sup>26</sup> Pius Malekandathil, "Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2 (2007): 266.

<sup>27</sup> Shingly is said to have been the abridged version of *Changala Azhi*, which happened to be the original name for the estuary of Cranganore. See for details P. M. Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala," in *St. Thomas Christians and Nambudiris, Jews and*



*Sangam Literature: A Historical Appraisal*, ed. by Bosco Puthur (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003), 129.

<sup>28</sup> See Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1988). Also see K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 181-82.

<sup>29</sup> Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History* (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970); M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala* (Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972), 82.

<sup>30</sup> For details on the privileges and the copper plate on which the privileges were inscribed see K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: AES, 1982), 507-14; see also Narayanan, *Cultural Symbioses in Kerala*, 29-30, 35-37; Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History* (Kottayam, 1970); Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, 82.

<sup>31</sup> The most prominent Jewish trading settlements were in Palayur, Pulloot, Maliankara, and Madai. For details see Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala," 128.

<sup>32</sup> For details on the Jewish contacts with Cambay, Broach, Thana, and Mangalore see also Goitein, "Portrait of a Medieval India Trader: Three Letters from the Cairo Geniza," 457-76.

<sup>33</sup> S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 188-89.

<sup>34</sup> For details on the bronze factory of Abraham Yiju see Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 192-94. The *juthakulam* is still preserved intact in Madai.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion on the Black and White Jews of Cochin, see "Visscher's Letters from Malabar," in K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol. 2, 52, 523-27. In Portuguese documents they were known as *Judeus broncos* (White Jews) and *Judeus pretos* (Black Jews). Some authors argue that this division among the Jews of Kerala must have been initially caused by the economic disparity that existed among them, which later got perpetuated on the basis of birth. Accordingly the community was divided into *Meyuhasim* (Jews of pure lineage) and *Meshuhararim* (those of mixed origin). Most of those belonging to the second group were viewed as slaves and children of the concubines of the pure Jews. See for details Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala," 133; Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin*, 24-30; see also J. B. Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin, The Story of a Controversy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, no. 2 (1983): 228-52. I wonder whether all those who were categorized as Black Jews were actually slaves or were born of concubines. It was a common practice in the medieval period among the newly migrant merchants to construct stories that would fetch for them higher social status over and above their co-religionists who had been the residents of the land over centuries. In the process of legitimizing their superior position in the social ladder, the newly migrant groups used to circulate information about the birth of the earliest co-religionists of the land, which very often was linked with concubinage. By circulating stories about the inferior birth of their earlier co-religionists, the migrants appropriated superior status and greater influence over the former. Thus, we come across several stories being circulated by the Southist Christians (the Knaanite Christians, tracing back their origin to Thomas of Cana who reached Cranganore in c.345 C.E., and numbering presently about 2 lakh members) claiming that they are the original descendants of Thomas while the rest of the St. Thomas Christians (numbering presently about 52 lakhs) as being the descendants of the concubine of Thomas, in their attempts to carve out a pre-eminent position in the Christian social ladder. For details, see Pius Malekandathil (ed.), *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes*;

*A Portuguese Account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar* (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003), 19-20. Stories related to purity of blood are often fabricated when foreigners appear on the stage contesting superior social position. In fact the very differentiating process emerged among the Jewish community of Kerala with the increasing entry of the *Paradesi* Jews in Kerala and with their attempts to situate their position in the existing social space. Denial of purity of blood to the already existing Jews of Kerala was one of the easiest ways that the newly immigrant Jews resorted to immediately after their arrival for the purpose of ensuring their superior social status within the community. Here I would also like to say that I stand by the medieval sense, with which the Jewish community was divided (as Black Jews and White Jews) in Kerala. The term Malabari Jews (instead of Black Jews) would not seem to stand historically, as the Jews were not originally of Kerala. I feel that the relative black or brown color that the so-called Black Jews got must have been because of the passage of time and the long exposure that the group had to the tropical climate.

<sup>36</sup> Malekandathil, "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese (1498-1663)," 240-41.

<sup>37</sup> Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 307-8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 262

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. M.G.S.Narayanan, *Foundations of South Indian Society and Culture* (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1994), 22.

<sup>47</sup> For details regarding the shifting of the royal residence of the Nediyrappu *svarupam* see K. V. Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut* (Calicut, 1938), 1-2. By the middle of the fourteenth century or by the time Ibn Batuta visited Calicut (1343), it had become the most important port of Kerala. Ibn Batuta, *Die Reise des Arabers Ibn Batuta durch Indien und China*, ed. by Hans von Mzik (Hamburg, 1911), 302. Hermann Gundert (ed.), *Keralolpathiyum Mattum* (Kottayam: DC Books, 1992), 190-200.

<sup>48</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade: 1740-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 5, 19; B. J. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, vol. 1 (The Hague, 1955), 7ff.; Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India*, 9. For details about the Al-Karimi merchants in India see Eliyahu Ashtor, "The Venetian Supremacy in Levantine Trade: Monopoly of Pre-colonialism," in *Journal of European Economic History*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1974), 27; Walter J. Fischel, "The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1958), 165; Pius Malekandathil, "From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs: The Role of Muslim Merchants in Portuguese Maritime Trade of the Portuguese," *Portuguese Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2004): 77-80.

<sup>49</sup> Pullot is located to the north of Cranganore and was earlier a ferry point. P. M. Jussay says that the Jews of Pullot were called Kadavumbhagam (ferry-side) Jews because of their habitation near the ferry. See Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala," 129. The synagogue of Mala was handed over by the Jews before their moving to Israel to the local Panchayat. The synagogue of Chennamangalam was in a dilapidated

condition for a long time. *Ibid.*, p. 135. Now all these synagogues are under a renovation process.

<sup>50</sup> W. W. Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 4 (London, 1885), 11; K. Rama Varma Raja, "The Cochin Harbour and the Puthu Vaippu Era," *The Bulletin of the Rama Varma Research Institute*, no. 2 (Cochin, 1933): 49-51

<sup>51</sup> K. P. Padmanabha Menon, "The Fort of Cochin," in *Fort Cochin Municipal Centenary Souvenir* (Cochin, 1966), 60; K. Rama Varma Raja, "The Cochin Harbour and the Puthu Vaipu Era," 49-51; Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> For details about this tradition, see Koder, "Saga of the Jews of Cochin," 138-40. The date of construction of this synagogue (1345) is said to have been engraved on a stone.

<sup>53</sup> This synagogue is said to have been in use until 1789. See for details Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala," 131. Later the Kochangadi synagogue was demolished because of its dilapidated condition.

<sup>54</sup> Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India: 1500-1663* (A Volume in the South Asian Study Series of Heidelberg University, Germany) (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), 44.

<sup>55</sup> Ma Huan, Ying Yai Sheng lan 12, "Kochih" as translated by W. W. Rockhill, "Notes on the Relations and Trade of China with Eastern Archipelago and the Coast of Indian Ocean during the Fourteenth Century," *T'oung Pao* 16 (1915): 450-51.

<sup>56</sup> See "Visscher's Letters from Malabar," 51, 517. Writing in 1723, Visscher says that the Jews had lived in *Senhora Soude* for fifty years and then moved over to Cochin where they remained for 202 years, a fact that enables historians to trace the date of Jewish migration from Cranganore to 1471.

<sup>57</sup> This is deduced from the fact that in the first decade of the sixteenth century, we find the Jews of Cochin getting themselves involved in the commerce of pepper. See Antonio Bulhão de Pato, *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque seguidas de documentos que as elucidam*, tom. I (Lisboa, 1884), 330.

<sup>58</sup> David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin," *Jewish Social Studies* 1, no. 4 (1939): 428, 441; Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Os Judeus e a Expansão Portuguesa na Índia durante o Seculo XVI. O Exemplo de Isaac do Cairo: Espião, Língua, e Judeu de Cochim de Cima," in *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian* 33 (Lisboa, 1994), 191. Later when the entire congregation left for Israel, the Thekkumbhagam synagogue of Cochin was demolished and the ground was sold. See Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala," 135.

<sup>59</sup> Franz Hümmerich, "Estudo crítico sobre a Roteiro Primeira Viagem de Vasco da Gama 1497-1499," Tradução do Comandanta Moura Bras, in *Diário da Viagem de Vasco da Gama*, vol. 2 (Porto, 1945), 242, 268; S. S. Pissurlencar, *Agentes da Diplomática Portuguesa na Índia* (Bastora, 1952), 552.

<sup>60</sup> See for details Damião Peres (ed.), *História de Portugal, Edição Monumental*, vol. 3 (Barcelos, 1941), 221; Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, *História de Portugal: O Seculo de Ouro (1495-1580)*, vol. 3 (Lisboa, 1978), 16-17.

<sup>61</sup> Antonio Bulhão de Pato, *Cartas*, tom. I, 330.

<sup>62</sup> It is interesting to note that most of the Jewish synagogues of Kerala were either built or rebuilt during the period of Portuguese rule, which evidently suggests that the Jews amassed sizeable wealth by participating in the trade boosted by Portuguese commercial ventures.

<sup>63</sup> Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, *Noticias dos Judeos de Cochim* (originally published from Amsterdam in 1687) (Lisboa, 1923), 8.

<sup>64</sup> Malekandathil, "From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs," 82-83.

<sup>65</sup> Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Uma Comunidade na Sombra: Judeus Sefarditas de Cochim, na Primeira metade do Seculo XVI," in Maria Helena C. dos Santos et al. (eds.), *Comunicações apresentadas no. I Coloquio Internacional O Património Judaico Português* (Lisboa: Associação Portuguesa de Estudos Judaicos, 1999), 138-54.

<sup>66</sup> The word *casados* refers to married Portuguese citizens residing in India. For details on the *casados* see Pius Malekandathil, "The Portuguese *Casados* and the Intra-Asian Trade: 1500-1663," in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Millenium (61<sup>st</sup>) Session* (Kolkata: Indian History Congress Publications, 2001), 380-90; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Cochin in Decline, 1600-1650: Myth and Manipulation in the Estado da India," in *Portuguese Asia: Aspects in History and Economic History (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)*, ed. by Roderich Ptak (Stuttgart, 1987), 59-85.

<sup>67</sup> *Cartaz* is a borrowed word from the Arabic *qirtas*, which means paper or document and it refers to the license being issued by the Portuguese to the native ships for the purpose of navigation in the Indian Ocean. Though *cartaz* system was introduced from 1502 onward, the traders who collaborated with the Portuguese initially were conceded greater amount of freedom in the movement of commodities within Asia, as a mechanism to ensure their cooperation. However, it was only after 1509, particularly against the background of the prevailing imperial designs of Afonso Albuquerque to control the lines of navigation in the Indian Ocean that the coastal patrolling and rigorous checking of *cartaz* seem to have become frequent. Consequently all the native ships had to take *cartazes*, which contained such details as the name of the vessel and of the captain, the nature of the cargo, its origin and destination as well as the name of the authority issuing the *cartaz*. For details see Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochim and the Maritime Trade of India*, 125-26, 220-21; Luis Filipe Thomaz, "Portuguese Control on the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal: A Comparative Study." A paper presented in the Conference on *Bay of Bengal*, held in Delhi, December 1994.

<sup>68</sup> Malekandathil, "Portuguese *Casados* and the Intra-Asian Trade: 1500-1663," 384-85.

<sup>69</sup> Diogo do Couto, *Da Asia, Dos feitos que os Portugueses fizeram no descobrimento e conquista dos mares e terras do Oriente, Decada VII* (Lisboa, 1778-1788), parte II, Livro viii, capitulo 14; livro ix, capitulo 10. In fact the St. Thomas Christians were by this time the main suppliers of spices, which they used to take to the Portuguese factory of Cochim under the leadership of their bishop Mar Jacob Abuna. For details note that the prelate himself delivered pepper many a time to a Portuguese factory in Cochim to persuade his subjects to sell the spices only to the Portuguese. For details see Antonio da Silva Rego, *Documentação para a Historia das Missões do Padroado Portugues do Orienre-India*, vol. 2 (Lisboa, 1991), 175; Pius Malekandathil, "The Portuguese and the St. Thomas Christians: 1500-1570," in *The Portuguese and the Socio-cultural Changes in India: 1500-1800*, ed. by K. S. Mathew, Teotonio R. de Souza, and Pius Malekandathil, Fundação Oriente (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente/Tellicherry: IRISH, 2001), 132; Malekandathil, *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes*, v-xx. One of the reasons for the Muslim attack on the Jewish settlement of Cranganore, as given by Shekh Zainuddin, was that the Jews of Cranganore killed a Muslim and the Jews started fleeing away from Cranganore following the vengeance

from the Muslims. See Mathias Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. 1 (Bangalore, 1984), 300.

<sup>70</sup> Koder, "Saga of the Jews of Cochin," 138; Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin*, 19.

<sup>71</sup> K. S. Mathew and Afzal Ahmad, *Emergence of Cochin in the Pre-Industrial Era: A Study of Portuguese Cochin* (Pondicherry, 1990), 1-3.

<sup>72</sup> Malekandathil, "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese," 240-50.

<sup>73</sup> Alexandre Herculano, *Historia da Origem e Estabelecimento da Inquisição em Portugal*, ed. by Jorge Borges de Macedo, vol. 1 (Lisboa, 1987), 171; Joaquim Verissimo Serrão, *Historia de Portugal*, vol. 3, 51, 292; Antonio Sergio, *Obras Completas de Antonio Sergi: Introdução Geografico-Sociologico a Historia de Portugal*, critical edition guided by Castelo Branco Chaves, Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, Rui Gracio, and Joel Serrão (Lisboa, 1976), 191-92.

<sup>74</sup> For details see Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India*, 166; Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Outras Gentes em Outras Rotas: Judeus e Cristãos Novos de Cochim- entre Santa Cruz de Cochin e Mattancherry, entre o Imperio Portugues e o Medio Oriente." A paper presented in VIII Seminario Internacional de Historia Indo-Portuguesa- Angra de Heroismo, June 7-11, 1996, 4-9.

<sup>75</sup> ANTT, Corpo Cronologico, I, Maço 66, doc.96.

<sup>76</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.12292, fols.17-22, 36-38, 42-43, 72, 77-79; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.12292, fols.17-22, 36-38, 42-43, 72, 77-79; see also Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Os Judeus e a Expansão Portuguesa na India durante o Seculo XVI," 167-87.

<sup>77</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5265, fols.45 & 55.

<sup>78</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.3836, fols.3-4, 16-17 & 29, Proc.7543, fols.28-29 and 39-40.

<sup>79</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.7296, fols.4, 29-33, 37-41.

<sup>80</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.4516, fols.3, 15: Proc.15411, fols.11, 34, and 36.

<sup>81</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.4516, fols.15 and 20.

<sup>82</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.7296, fol.77; see also Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Os Judeus e a Expansão Portuguesa na India durante o Seculo XVI," 167-87.

<sup>83</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.12292, fols.17-22, 36-38, 42-43, 72, 77-79.

<sup>84</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5265, fol.8.

<sup>85</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5265, fols.31, 37, 45-47, and 73.

<sup>86</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.7296, fols.4, 29-33, 37-41.

<sup>87</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.7296, fol.77; see also Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Os Judeus e a Expansão Portuguesa na India," 167-87.

<sup>88</sup> For details about the different Judaizing activities in Cochin see ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5808, fol.53; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5265, fol.83; Josef Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 4 (Rome, 1956), 10-11; see the letter of Belchior Carneiro sent to Cardinal D. Henrique, Goa dated 20-12-1559, in Josef Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 4, 5-13. The letter of D. Gonçalo da Silveira sent to Pe. Miguel de Torres, Goa dated 19-12-1599, in Josef Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1954), 758-78.

<sup>89</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5265, fol.83; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.7296, fol.77; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.12292, fols.50-85. Later when

the Jews left for Israel, the Kadavumbhagam synagogue was sold off and the buyer converted it into a warehouse for storing prawns. Now it is used for storing coir-products. See Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala," 135.

<sup>90</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.185, fols.116-42.

<sup>91</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5808, fol.53; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5265, fol.83; Josef Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 4, 10-11.

<sup>92</sup> See the letter of Belchior Carneiro sent to Cardinal D. Henrique, Goa dated 20-12-1559, in Josef Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 4 (1956), 5-13.

<sup>93</sup> See the letter of D. Gonçalo da Silveira sent to Pe. Miguel de Torres, Goa dated 19-12-1599, in Josef Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 3 (1954), 758-78.

<sup>94</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5265, fol.123; see also Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to the Sublime Porte: The Wanderings of Jacome de Olivares, New Christian and Merchant of Cochin, 1540-1571," in *Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies*, ed. by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Kenneth McPherson, vol. 2 (Santa Barbara, CA: Center for Portuguese Studies, 1995), 97-98.

<sup>95</sup> For details see Anna Cannas da Cunha, *A Inquisição no Estado da Índia: Origens (1539-1560)* (Lisboa, 1995); Josef Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 3 (1954), 758-75; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.7296, fol.11.

<sup>96</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.7296, fols.4, 29-33, 37-41; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.3836, fols.3-4; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.12292, fols.3-5, 17-22, 33-38, 77-79; ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc.5265, fol.123.

<sup>97</sup> ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc. 7246, fols.12, 138-39.

<sup>98</sup> Josef Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 3 (1954), 638-42; see also Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to the Sublime Porte," 98.

<sup>99</sup> Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, *Noticias dos Judeos de Cochim* (Lisboa, 1923), 8.

<sup>100</sup> Koder, "Saga of the Jews of Cochin," 138; Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol. 2, 519.

<sup>102</sup> Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life," 430, 433, 435; Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Uma Comunidade na sombra," 17.

<sup>103</sup> Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochim and the Maritime Trade of India*, 411-21.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 421; James C. Boyajian, *Portuguese Bankers at the Court of Spain 1626-1650* (New Brunswick, NJ: 1983), 6-8.

<sup>105</sup> Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochim and the Maritime Trade of India*, 421.

<sup>106</sup> See Jose Calvert de Magalhães, "Duarte Gomes Solis," in *Studia* 19 (1966): 119-71.

<sup>107</sup> See "Relação de Chryztoph Pawlowski," in Stephan Stasiak, "Les Indes Portugaises s la fin du XVI siecle d'apres la Relation du voyage fait a Goa en 1596 par Christophe Pawlowski, gentil homme polonaise," in *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, vol. 3 (1926), 45.

<sup>108</sup> Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *Histoire de la Navigation de Jan Hvgves de Linscot Hollandais et de son voyage es Indes Orientales* (Amsterdam, 1610), chapter XLIII, 119; Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Os Judeus e a Expansão Portuguesa na Índia," 204-5.

<sup>109</sup> Francois Pyrard Laval, *The Voyages of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, trans. by Albert Gray (London, 1887), 429-35.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Uma Comunidade na Sombra," 12; Joseph Levi was the first *mudaliar* in 1530. Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin*, 49.

<sup>111</sup> HAG, *Livro das Monções*, No. 6 A (1604-1605), fols.71, 77, 79; ANTT, MSS S.Vicente, 14, fol.161. Letter of Philip II of Portugal sent to D.Alexis de Meneses dated 15-5-1605.

<sup>112</sup> Antonio da Silva Rego, *Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa*, vol. 3 (Lisboa, 1963), 315; BNL, Cod.No.11410, *Orçamento de 1612*, fol.116v,

<sup>113</sup> For details about the invitation sent by the king of Cochin to the Dutch, see T. I. Poonen, *A Survey of the Rise of the Dutch Power in Malabar (1603-1670)* (Trichinopoly, 1949), 52.

<sup>114</sup> HAG, Livro das Pazes, No.1, fol.34; J. H. da Cunha Rivara (ed.), *O Chronista de Tissuary* 4, no. 39 (1869), 47.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin*, 49-50; Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva, "Uma Comunidade na Sombra," 12.

<sup>116</sup> Boletim da Filмотeca Ultramarina Portuguesa, no. 8, 99. When Antonio Bocarro visited Cochin, Samuel Castiel was an interpreter and translator of the king of Cochin. See ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, 'Cadernos do Promotor', Livro 20, Caderno 9, fols.437-438; Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to Sublime Porte," 120; ANTT, *Livros das Monções*, No.24, fols.69-70; No.27, fol.156.

<sup>117</sup> HAG, *Livros das Monções*, no.14 (1630-1631), fols.184-185; *Boletim da Filмотeca Ultramarina Portuguesa*, no.8, 99-100.

<sup>118</sup> S. S. Pissurlencar, *Assentos do Conselho do Estado*, vol. 2 (1634-1643) (Bastora, 1953), 379, 435-436.

<sup>119</sup> ANTT, *Documentação Remetidos*, Livro 50, fol.110, Livro 56, fols.27, 212; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Cochin in Decline, 1600-1650," 82; AHU, *Caixas da Índia*, Caixa 15, doc.27; Caixa 15, doc.52; Caixa 23, doc.10.

<sup>120</sup> Maria Antoinette Petronella Meilink-Roelofs, *Der Vestiging der Nederlanders ter Kuste Malabar* ('s Gravenhage, 1943), 104-5, 111-13, 115, 122; Hugo s' Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala, 1663-1701* ('s Gravenhage, 1976), xxx.

<sup>121</sup> For a detailed study on the Dutch in Kerala, see Meilink-Roelofs, *Der Vestiging der Nederlanders ter Kuste Malabar*.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 104-5, 111-13, 115, 122; Hugo s' Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala, 1663-1701* ('s Gravenhage, 1976), xxx.

<sup>123</sup> A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar* (Madras), 222-23.

<sup>124</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, 106-7.

<sup>125</sup> Walter Fischel, "From Cochin to New York: Samuel Abraham, the Jewish Merchant of the Eighteenth Century," in the *Jubilee Volume of Prof. Harry Wolfson* (New York, 1963); Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, 118.

<sup>126</sup> V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol. 1 (Trivandrum, 1906), 343-51; Shangoonny Menon, *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times* (New Delhi, 1878), 135-55. A. Sreedhara Menon (ed.), *District Gazetteer of Trivandrum* (Trivandrum, 1962), 11.

<sup>127</sup> Aswathi Thirunal, *Thulasigarland* (Trivandrum, 1998), 93.

<sup>128</sup> C. Achyuta Menon, *The Cochin State Manual* (Trivandrum, 1996), 174-78;

Malekandathil, "Winds of Change and Links of Continuity," 290ff.

<sup>129</sup> For details on the Travancorean trade of this period see B. Sobhanan, "Trade Monopoly of Travancore," in *Journal of Kerala Studies*, vol. 8, part IV (1981): 30-31; P. Shangoonny Menon, *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*, 166.

<sup>130</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, 107, 127.





## DESPERATE PASSAGE TO INDIA

*By Ruth Fredman Cernea*

For a century, from 1840 until 1942, Burma was a beautiful, hospitable home for a thriving Jewish community.<sup>1</sup> Most were Baghdadis, who came to the region for the commercial promise and religious freedom offered by British rule; in the gentle Buddhist context and lush land of Burma they also found the refuge they sought after years of persecution. Others were Bene Israel or Cochins from India. They remember Burma fondly, as a place of peace and friendship with many other minority populations among whom they lived on the crowded streets of downtown Rangoon or in smaller towns scattered throughout the country: Mandalay, Maymyo, Yenengyaung, Toungoo, Bassein, Moulmein, Akyab, Pegu. The spiritual and social center for the approximately 2000 Jews<sup>2</sup> in Burma was the elegant Musmeah Yeshua Synagogue on 26<sup>th</sup> Street in the heart of Rangoon, close to the Jewish commercial center on Dalhousie Street, just down from the golden Sule Pagoda. Memories of life in Burma are full of images of large family celebrations, Shabbat walks on the jetties, tropical foliage and tropical fruit, and traditional religious life, as well as intracommunity arguments. Above all, for most, it was a lovely, warm, and very happy period.

This "golden age" of Jewish life in the "golden" land that is Burma came to an abrupt end with the advent of World War II. Events occurring thousands of miles away intruded into the comfortable cocoon of daily life for Jews throughout Southeast Asia, whether in Rangoon, Surabaya, Singapore, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Calcutta, Bombay, or the many other large and small settlements throughout the region. For many of the communities, it was the beginning of the end of a glorious existence. India, while deeply affected by the war, was never invaded; Burma, including its Jewish community, was devastated.

Like their relatives abroad, the Jews of Burma lived in a British universe, adopting the British world-view, social style, and aspirations while remaining true to Jewish religious tradition. They were in Burma but not "of" Burma: even if born in Burma, they lived in a world alien to their surroundings, among equally "foreign" populations. It is not surprising, then, that along with the physical and emotional upheaval brought by the war, the Jews suffered a shock and an awakening to the reality that had defined their existence for generations. Their escape from Burma during the tragic early months of 1942 is part of, and illustrates, the general cataclysm that enveloped their beloved home, and can only be told in that context.

Even as bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, life in Rangoon was continuing as usual. The British were, in fact, comforted by America's entry into the war, which certainly would help the Allied position in Europe. But the war in Europe seemed so far away, and they were confident that hostilities would never reach Burma. This "surfeit of optimism,"<sup>3</sup> this head-in-the-sand thinking, rested on another disastrously false premise: that the military equipment and training of the 2,000 British troops in Burma were sufficient for the task, should that improbable day ever come.

Burma's struggle for independence from the British in the years prior to the war added another consideration for the frightened foreign populations in Burma. During the 1930s, anticolonial movements had been gaining momentum in Burma as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, with demonstrations, strikes, riots, and dissident organizations. Young Burmese argued that their own economic and social

development was arrested by the control of the British and the pervasive presence of foreign populations in Burma, especially the masses of Indian workers who were competing with them for jobs. Jews, like the Chinese, occupied a different, noncompetitive economic niche, and therefore were not the direct targets of the rioters' wrath. Nevertheless, antiforeign sentiment was nourished by the Japanese, whose businesses, tourists, and scientific surveys throughout Southeast Asia became progressively more suspect as fronts for surveillance and espionage.

In 1940, the Japanese contacted Aung San, the leader of the Burmese opposition, to offer assistance in raising a military force, the Burma Independence Army, that would work with the Japanese in their subsequent invasion of Burma.<sup>4</sup> Although wary of Japan's own colonialist activities in China, the rebels saw Japan's assistance as the only feasible way to remove the British and took hope in the Japanese slogans, "Asia for the Asiatics" and "We Buddhists." Thus two startlingly different views of the Japanese existed in Burma at the time. While to the British, Indians, Chinese, Jews, and other non-native populations, the Japanese were dangerous aggressors, to the Burmese they were potential liberators. The foundation of security in Burma for the foreign populations rested, therefore, on very soft sand. Such was the British focus of these populations that the reality of the political world around them throughout the 1930s seems not to have penetrated their comfortable life, or was it that the fallibility of the British could not be envisioned?

Comforting illusions no longer sufficed with the bombing and strafing of Rangoon, which began on December 24, 1941, was repeated Christmas Day, and continued throughout the following weeks, until the ultimate fall of Rangoon on March 9, 1942. Rangoon was totally unprepared for the strikes, lacking shelters,<sup>5</sup> an air defense system, enough fire fighters, or even a warning system. The city's wooden buildings burned easily, explosive bombs demolished stone buildings, the hospital was hit, as were the commercial and residential areas. Casualties were in the thousands.<sup>6</sup> Chaos reigned; looting was rampant, and gang fights broke out on the waterfront. While the general population panicked, British calm and assurance stayed steady, and Christmas dinners and New Year's celebrations were held as scheduled. Bank holidays were also observed as usual at this time of year—a considerable inconvenience for the terrified people who were trying to withdraw funds to take with them as they fled north or by ship to Calcutta.

British calm and apparent military might fed hopes that the British would stop the Japanese ground advance in the north and south, and that "fortress" Singapore would hold. A systematic evacuation plan was never announced by the British nor was it until February 20 that an announcement was made that civilians should leave Burma.

Even so, the continual bombing and news of Japanese ground advances announced what the British didn't, and starting in December 1941, the panicked population began to flee the city—the Burmese to the countryside, the foreign populations to India. At the time, it was the largest migration in history. By fall 1942, approximately 600,000 people had fled to India by land and sea, some 80,000 dying along the way.<sup>7</sup> In their panic and haste, they locked the doors of their homes as though going away for a weekend, not knowing that, for most, it would be forever. The docks were scenes of desperation. Boats crowded with British, Americans, Anglo-Indians, Jews, and similar "European" groups—Burmese natives were not allowed—made the 750-mile trip to Calcutta or the alternate 1,000-mile journey to Madras in ships that hugged the coast in darkness amidst bombs and Japanese submarines. The frightened people were allowed to bring only four days of cooked food and 50 lbs of baggage.<sup>8</sup> Among the precious possessions left behind in Jewish

homes were testimonies of family and community history—photographs, documents, and material objects that connected the panicked refugees of 1941-42 to those other Baghdadi migrants a century earlier. But others, reluctant to leave the only homes they had ever known, and accustomed to seeing the British as powerful militarily, took hope in British confidence that the Japanese successes would not be repeated in Singapore and Rangoon. As Solly Saul, of Albuquerque, recalls, "My father, of blessed memory, who had long been in the employ of British companies, was convinced that the Japanese would never get as far as Burma....My father was not at all anxious to evacuate to India. Nor is he to be blamed for this feeling. It was not easy, to say the least, for people to padlock their apartments, leave their life's possessions behind and set sail for Calcutta. Forthcoming events would prove that evacuating Burma when we could have by sea would have been the right thing to do."<sup>9</sup>

All hope ended with the fall of Singapore on February 15, 1942. The fifty or sixty Jews remaining in Rangoon throughout February took refuge from the continual bombing in the Jewish School, which was some three miles from the center of Rangoon, huddling under improvised shelters made of concrete gutters, and from there they went directly to the boats. Joe Abraham, who was still in Rangoon as a volunteer for Air Raid Precaution, was on the last chartered boat from Calcutta, the *SS Chilka*, along with his eight brothers and sisters, at the end of February 1942. They were among the 3,000 deck passengers crowded aboard the ship, sleeping next to one another, cooking what they could on camp stoves or in galvanized buckets, thankful to be eluding the submarines that were tracking the ships in the Bay of Bengal. For six days instead of the usual three, the *SS Chilka* sailed on, keeping close to the coast and traveling at night in total darkness, until the ship was piloted up the Hooghly River and docked at the Outram Ghat in Calcutta. Boatmen, reaching up from their small vessels offered free food to the hungry, weary passengers—*chapatis*, *kachowrees*, *bhaji*. On the dock, crowds of people searched the faces of the passengers as they disembarked, looking anxiously for a relative, a friend, and pressing fruit, pastry, and other foods into their hands.

Those who stayed behind in Rangoon until the last moment witnessed the conflagration that accompanied the final retreat of the British. As they departed, the British destroyed or set fire to anything that might aid the Japanese: the docks, the telegraph and telephone offices, and especially the oil storage tanks. The scorched earth policy meant that the oil fields in the north also went up in flames.

### **Over the Taungup Pass**

Thousands of refugees escaped to India through the Taungup Pass to Akyab on the Bay of Bengal. Chaos reigned in the city as British officials fled and hospitals were left without staff even as refugees poured into Akyab and other cities on the coast. Between February 9 and March 25, approximately 74,000 people left Akyab for India, but at least 5,000 others died of cholera or exhaustion crossing the high mountain pass. Abraham Shalom Judah, now of Germany, made this trek, first taking a train from Rangoon to Prome. "Our home with all its contents was left standing as it was. All that I took with me were a couple of shirts, an additional pair of trousers, some underwear and a few tins of sardines, cheddar cheese, etc. At Prome I was told that many thousands were fleeing over the Arakan Yomas to India...." Food along the way was a sometime matter: a bit of rice bought from villagers along the route, perhaps some saltfish.

Corpses were littered all along the wayside...I remember on one occasion standing on a peak, and looking at the unending chain of humanity winding its way along the sides of the mountain, and thinking what an epic Cecil B. DeMille could have created from this scene. One just walked and followed those in front of you. No one had a map and no one knew if we were on the right track. Before sunrise it would be bitterly cold and our clothing would be drenched with dew. It was heavenly to feel the warmth of the sun. From Taungup we got a ferry which took us on to Akyab and from there yet another ferry to Chittagong. From there, I traveled by train to Calcutta where I joined my sisters and their children, who had left Rangoon earlier by boat.<sup>10</sup>

### **Mandalay**

"If Maymyo was Burma's Shangri-la, then Mandalay was its Hades."<sup>11</sup> Even before the fall of Rangoon on March 8, the disheveled second city of Burma became the destination of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the south who were trying to outpace the Japanese in their rapid advance upcountry.<sup>12</sup> Having abandoned hope of escaping by boat to India, they now looked to the airfields near Mandalay as their salvation. In desperation, the refugees convened on the city, traveling by foot, boat and, rarely, by car, and quickly overwhelmed Mandalay's faltering resources. They found themselves in a nightmare of filth and cholera, with diminishing supplies of food and water. There was neither an early warning system nor antiaircraft guns to counter the repeated bombings. Corpses lay in the streets. By January 1942, most of the small Mandalay Jewish community had fled to India; only a very few remained in the futile hope of saving their businesses. Ramah Agasee, now of London, recalls a terrifying time in Mandalay when "the Japanese lobbed incendiaries almost all night in a ring around us. That ring of fire seemed to be closing in on us and we stayed up all night watching it coming closer. In the morning, the authorities blasted a way out and we were all taken by transport to a tiny Burmese village where we camped in a forest opening completely sheltered by trees. We were eventually evacuated by an American volunteer group from Myitkyina (an airfield in the far north) to Assam."<sup>13</sup>

Rescue by plane soon turned into an idle fantasy for most. Airplanes were overwhelmed with wounded as well as by the thousands of people clamoring for space on the precious flights. Once the southern Taungup Pass was blocked by the advancing Japanese, and securing flights became all-but-impossible, the Tamu Pass on the border between Burma and Assam, 400 miles north of Mandalay, seemed the only remaining route to safety.

### **The Trek**

There was no way to anticipate what an arduous month-long trek across the poorly mapped Indo-Burmese frontier would entail, but there appeared to be no other option for those trapped in Mandalay. By the second week in March, thousands prepared to walk through the forbidding terrain. "The overland retreat to India through the jungle-covered mountains of Burma was the longest and most humiliating defeat in the annals of British military history....The screams of starving children, the groans of the sick, wounded and old; the pleas of hundreds of wounded soldiers we had to leave behind on jungle roads haunt me in my dreams," recalls Gurkha Manahadur Rai.<sup>14</sup>

Those setting out in March walked through the worst weeks of the trek, during the early monsoon of 1942, exhausted and depleted of energy and resources. Albert Judah of London, who started the trek in March, has given one of the clearest accounts of this terrible journey.<sup>15</sup> As the war approached, he left Bassein, where he

was a clerk in the store of Raphael and Sons, and arrived in Rangoon on February 15 to find the city half deserted, shops locked, and people hastily burying their valuables in the hope that they would retrieve them after a brief stay abroad. As the Japanese army advanced, and the ports closed, the railway was the only way to move north. Along with thousands of other panicked residents of Rangoon, Mr. Judah, his sister Lulu Saul and her children Seemah, Solly, and twins Charlie and Simon, and an elderly aunt, fled to temporary safety with relatives in Mandalay. On March 8, as monsoon season approached, they joined the frightened, sorry procession of British, Anglo-Indian, Chinese, Jewish, and Indian evacuees who trekked by foot, boat, sampan, mule, and elephant, through mud, monsoon, and intense heat, across high mountains and through jungle and swamp. The "route" started by boat or by foot along the Chindwin River, but the river soon grew shallow for boats and everyone had to walk.

Feeding stations were organized by the British, and drinking water was a rare commodity: A British officer, armed with a gun, guarded the tank; the ration was a cup of the highly chlorinated, foul tasting precious liquid a day. Food was a bowl of rice with lentils mixed with chilies and might include small stones, mud, and grit. Health care was nonexistent; the refugees were afflicted by malaria, dysentery, diarrhea, cholera, *kala azar*,<sup>16</sup> and voracious leeches, which incessantly crept into mouths, ears, nostrils, and other body orifices. Some of infirm, sick, or aged were carried in a *dhoolie* (a wooden cart hung from bamboo poles carried by two or four men) or rode on elephants, but everyone else—young and old, pregnant, malarial, feverish—walked six to eight miles each day, starting early in the morning and stopping by noon because of the heat. Camps had been quickly improvised; beds were simply bamboo slats, toilet facilities were usually absent, and washing was possible only if near the river.

After Tamu the way was even more arduous, following footpaths or mule tracks over the steep divide to Palel. Those unable to continue were simply left behind. The roads were lined with dead bodies, including those of the family of Ernest Ezekiel and Hannah Sassoon; the parents and seven children began the journey but only two children survived. Some groups were set upon by bandits. Bitten by mosquitoes and sand flies, stepping on swollen feet, subsisting on little more than rice, lentils, and salt, some 200,000<sup>17</sup> struggled across the Tamu Pass and then on to Imphal and Assam. "Of all the memories of the trek, the most harrowing are of the dead bodies, which were collected every day at the camps and of the dead bodies floating in the Chindwin," recalls Albert Judah.<sup>18</sup> It was four weeks, on April 5, before he and his family reached Palel in Assam, after trekking for five days over the steep mountains. There they were given some medical attention, able to wash with hot water, and served at tables with clean linen. With little more than wormy rice to eat during the last days of the trek, "We fell upon them like savages, like animals," recalls Seemah Saul Betz, now of Denver, "grabbing food, shoving it into our mouths."<sup>19</sup>

Alfred Draper describes the scene as the once-proud British troops, and the refugees, struggled to India:

The long columns of troops that writhed along the dusty track like a snake with a broken spine had lost all sense of time. Days and nights merged into one nightmarish blur; one foot followed another, propelled by a burning determination to survive. Bearded, emaciated, wide-eyed with fever and covered with festering sores, they were totally oblivious of the terrain. Many were only kept upright by improvised crutches or bamboo poles and those

fortunate enough to have clothes were infested with lice....But for the fact that so many carried weapons they were barely distinguishable from the thousands of refugees who walked with them.<sup>20</sup>

At Imphal, the desperate refugees were met by the Burma Refugee Organization set up by the government of Bengal. They were served a cooked breakfast and offered clothing, shoes, and various other items to make them more comfortable before they boarded the train for Calcutta, holding bread and eggs for the journey.

Arrival in Calcutta for many, including Albert Judah, meant immediate transfer to hospitals for treatment of malaria and other illnesses. Seemah Saul Betz spent a year in a Calcutta hospital recovering from typhoid. A Burmese government report (from 1945) estimated that 10,000 people died on the trek.<sup>21</sup> "Details of the trip have almost faded from my memory, but the names of the towns along the route have not—Kaleva, Tamu, Kohina and Imphal—these names are forever embedded in my memory," recalls Seemah's brother, Solly Saul.<sup>22</sup>

Youthful memories are often humorous ones also. Within this terrible time, Albert Judah remembers one thing positive: He tasted elephant's milk ("It's sweet!").<sup>23</sup> And his nephew, Solly Saul, recalls how his twin brothers Simon and Charlie confused those in charge of food, thinking they had already given the precious allotment to the boy before them.<sup>24</sup> More sobering is the tale of a Jewish child who fell behind on the trek and was rescued and adopted by a tribal family; reclaimed after the war by a surviving relative, she came with them in great despair, in pain at losing yet another family.

The depth of piety and tradition binding the Jews of Southeast Asia is reflected in the simple statement by exhausted, malarial Albert Judah, who notes, "We reached Calcutta on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, 1942, where we could then really observe the religion. The 8<sup>th</sup> of April happened to be the seventh day of Passover, and that is when I recited my Seder night."<sup>25</sup> An even more dramatic expression of the meaning of Jewish tradition to the Baghdadis is in the following recollection, as explained by Mavis Hyman in *Jews of the Raj*:

Azeeza Cohen was the head of a family of eight on the trek, with a baby one month old and two small children...While they were walking in the mountains, less than a week before the journey's end, they 'saw Indian soldiers making *chappatis* and tea, which they very kindly gave to us. However, as it was Passover, my mother refused to eat *chappatis*.' It was very rare to find food on the trek, and when it was available the cost was high. To refuse an offer, when hunger and thirst had been endured for three weeks of trekking was remarkable in itself. But bread had not been part of their diet since they left Mandalay, so it was a special treat. To refuse bread when the aroma was actually rising from the cooking required nothing less than deep faith and an iron will. So great was the faith of the people of this generation, and so important the values they attached to religious beliefs, that even in extremity they did not let their standards fall.<sup>26</sup>

Solly Saul recalls his amazement on reaching Calcutta to be greeted by his father, whom he had left behind in Mandalay. While Solly and his relatives were struggling across the mountains, an airlift had brought some of those remaining in Mandalay to India. By April 7, 1942, Mandalay was devastated; the railway, the hospital and the Bank of India were in ruins. Some 70,000 refugees remained in the

area, and the governor of Burma sent a plea to the secretary of state for Burma to request American airplanes for an immediate airlift to India for those physically unable to make the long trek or who might be most endangered by the Japanese presence. Flights were organized from Magwe (150 miles southwest of Mandalay) and Shwebo. Abraham Manessah Jacob, who had stayed in Mandalay to guard his small crockery business, was one of the fortunate ones to secure a seat on the plane, arriving in Calcutta on April 17. On March 8, he had sent his wife Sarah and three of their five children ahead of him to safety in India via the overland trek. Sadly, once in Calcutta, he learned that his pregnant wife had died of malaria two days before.<sup>27</sup>

After heavy bombing by the Japanese, the airfield at Myitkyina was closed on May 6. Refugees unable to get flights but who had reached Myitkyina, "were told they'd have to walk through the Hukong Valley, the hardest part of the route, and weak with hunger and illness, they simply could not. So they sat there and died, unrecorded. A party of Allied troops, going through two years later, found the bodies piled in jeeps and trucks. No one knows who they were. Whether any...Jewish refugees would have been among them, there's no way of knowing," recalls Yoma Ullman, who was part of the evacuation organized by the Burmah Oil Company.<sup>28</sup>

### Calcutta

Approximately 1,500 Jews reached Calcutta; the exact number is elusive, since many were immediately taken in by relatives and never appeared on the roles of the Jewish Refugee Relief Association at 3 Theatre Road. The Jewish refugees were met at the boats from Rangoon and the trains from Assam by members of the Burmese Refugee Committee and by a representative of the Calcutta Baghdadi community, who greeted them as one does with extended family, with food and offers of clothing, cash, and other assistance. Except for this welcoming party, there was no formal assistance from the government or any other organization, and the refugees had to fend for themselves. Despite the obvious hardships of refugee status, the Jews were fortunate, for thousands of other refugees, without the ties of an international family network as existed for the Jews, huddled on the streets of Calcutta, hungry, destitute, disease-ridden.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The complete history of Jewish residence in Burma prior to World War II is documented in chapters 1 through 5 of my book, *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), from which this article is adapted. It is based on extensive archival research in the United Kingdom, Israel, the United States, and Burma, as well as some seventy-five interviews and other personal communications between 1987-2006.

<sup>2</sup> Roberta Cohen, ed., *The Jewish Communities of the World* (London: World Jewish Congress), 1971), 60.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Draper, *Dawns Like Thunder*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Aung San became Minister of Defense in Ba Maw's puppet government (1943-45). Disillusioned with Japanese promises should they win the war, and unhappy about their treatment of the Burmese forces, he switched allegiance to the Allies in March 1945.

<sup>5</sup> "It was impossible to build underground air-raid shelters in the marshy land on which the city stood." Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 97.

- <sup>6</sup> Estimates for the first bombing are 2,750 dead and 1,700 wounded. Hyman, *Jews of the Raj*, 160. There was one Jewish casualty, Shlomo Solomon.
- <sup>7</sup> Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 167.
- <sup>8</sup> Mavis Hyman, *Jews of the Raj*, 159 (Governor General to Secretary of State for India. Deciphered telegram 14:1:42. POL 361. IOR, File L/P&J/8/436. Oriental & India Office Collections [OIOC]. The British Library, London).
- <sup>9</sup> Interview, April 1994, and *Sephardi Bulletin* (New South Wales Association of Sephardim), March 1995: 14.
- <sup>10</sup> Personal communication, letter, August 16, 1993.
- <sup>11</sup> Draper, *Dawns Like Thunder*, 215.
- <sup>12</sup> In four months, from mid-December 1941 through mid-May 1942, the Japanese advanced 1,000 miles.
- <sup>13</sup> Personal correspondence, 1994.
- <sup>14</sup> Manahadur Rai (M. Gyi), "'Gorkhali ayo!' Gurkha Soldiers in the Battle for Imphal, 1944," *Command* 16 (May-June 1992).
- <sup>15</sup> Interview, July 1993, and Hyman, *Jews of the Raj*, 159-77.
- <sup>16</sup> A potentially deadly disease transmitted by sand flies that affects the spleen and distends the abdomen.
- <sup>17</sup> Estimates of the number of refugees vary widely, from 100,000 to 200,000. Hyman puts the number at 200,000, based on Extracts from Report by the Administrator General on the Evacuation of Refugees from Burma to India (Assam), January-July 1942. Section I.IOR, File L/P&J/8/439 (OIOC). The British Library, London.
- <sup>18</sup> Hyman, *Jews of the Raj*, 164.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview, April 10, 2004.
- <sup>20</sup> Draper, *Dawns Like Thunder*, 252.
- <sup>21</sup> *Burma Today*, January 1945, Government of Burma, Simla, as quoted in Andrus, *Burmese Economic Life*, 35. This supports the British estimate, as quoted by Hyman, 162, 245.
- <sup>22</sup> Personal account, October 1994.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview, July 1993.
- <sup>24</sup> Conversation, September 1994.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview, July 1993. It is a duty of every Jew to take part in a Seder ritual on Passover; Albert Judah means that he recited the *haggadah* and fulfilled the ritual requirements.
- <sup>26</sup> Hyman, *Jews of the Raj*, 133.
- <sup>27</sup> Hyman, *Jews of the Raj*, 170.
- <sup>28</sup> Personal correspondence, July 6, 2003.

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## Searching for the Ratu Hospital: Dreams and Judaism in the Imagining of Mizo Nationalism

By Myer Samra

As much as the emergence of Judaism in northeast India is a by-product of Christian missionary activity in the region,<sup>1</sup> it is also an outgrowth of the ethno-nationalist aspirations of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo people (the "CHIKIM"<sup>2</sup>), whose historical range straddles the states of Manipur and Mizoram in India and Chin State in Burma (Myanmar), with outlying populations in the neighboring Indian states of Assam, Nagaland, and Tripura, the Arakan region of Burma (now the Rakhine State), and the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh. Such nationalist aspirations arose in the wake of British occupation from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century in each of the territories inhabited by these people and have continued to evolve in the successor states to the British Empire in India.

In this article we shall be examining the experience of one individual, a woman from Mizoram, whom I shall refer to by the pseudonym Mawii (pronounced Moy-ee), in its social and historical context to see the factors that led to her adoption of the Jewish religion. In Mawii's case, the connection between her nationalist feelings and Judaism is mediated by a dream, interpreted by her and her friends as a revelation. For Mawii it is an honor, perhaps a sign of grace, to have been chosen to receive such a message.

In the Western world, we generally regard dreams as private matters, of little consequence except for the psychological well-being of the dreamer. Mawii's case illustrates the relationship between the ambient culture and the individual dreamer as a social being, with the individual and the culture each contributing to the shaping of the other.<sup>3</sup> As isolated as a person may seem while asleep and dreaming, Mawii's experience demonstrates the impact of society on what is dreamt and how it is interpreted.<sup>4</sup> By recounting her experiences to other Mizos who listen and learn from her story, Mawii in turn contributes to the shaping of the broader culture, affirming beliefs she shares with a small but substantial segment of the population. In this way, the dream itself is transformed from being simply a private matter into a social phenomenon, relevant to questions of identity, nationalist aspirations, and spiritual concerns that have confronted the people of Mizoram and their congeners in adjoining territories.

I met Mawii in Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, a few days before the Jewish festival of Passover in 1992. Mawii had come to consult with Gideon Rei, who at the time styled himself as the "Chief Chazzan" and served as spiritual guide to the "Benei Menashe" congregations in Mizoram. "Benei Menashe" is the term by which the followers of Judaism in the region identify themselves, indicating a belief that they are the descendants of the biblical tribe of Manasseh.<sup>5</sup>

Mawii sought advice from Gideon Rei as to how she should go about celebrating the festival. With Gideon's assistance as interpreter, I asked Mawii about herself and how she came to join the Jewish community. She was happy, indeed keen, and proud to recount her story. Given that Mawii has lived all her life in Mizoram, we shall be focusing on conditions in that state, while also touching upon developments elsewhere in the CHIKIM world, particularly in Manipur, where there has similarly been a significant move toward Judaism.

## Mizoram

Mizoram, which became India's 23rd state in February 1987, is a small territory in northeast India, wedged between Bangladesh to the west, the state of Manipur to the north, and Burma to the east. Located around latitude 24° north and longitude 93° east and covering an area of 21,087 square kilometers, most of its land consists of a range of hills running north to south (average height 900 metres above sea level), with the highest peak, Phawngpui or the Blue Mountain, rising to a height of 2,165 meters.<sup>6</sup> Because of its altitude, Mizoram enjoys a pleasant, mild climate, with temperatures ranging between 11°C and 29°C. Heavy rainfall averaging 208 centimeters per annum gives it a lush, verdant landscape.<sup>7</sup>

It is easy to overlook Mizoram, which was known as the Lushai Hills District until 1952: its population of less than one million constitutes a minute fragment of the one billion citizens of India. As with much of northeast India, Mizoram's inhabitants are racially distinct from the majority of Indians, being of Mongoloid appearance and speaking a language that belongs to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. The people belong to that coterie of tribes which F. K. Lehman designates "the Northern Chin."<sup>8</sup> Altogether there are over two million people, belonging to no less than forty-five identifiable "tribes" of "Chin," speaking related but distinct dialects. Many of these dialects are mutually intelligible, while more distant communities cannot understand one another, even though their languages contain numerous words of common origin.<sup>9</sup>

The term "Chin" employed by Lehman is the general designation for these tribes used by the British in Burma. In India, the term "Kuki" was used to refer to members of this set of tribes. Neither term has had widespread support among the people themselves since both have pejorative connotations. In the mid-nineteenth century, John W. Edgar, who served in the administration of Bengal, observed "I have never found any trace of a common name for the tribe among them although they seem to consider different families as belonging to a single group, which is certainly co-extensive with what we call the Kookie tribe."<sup>10</sup> The people of Mizoram were known to the British as "Lushai Kukis" prior to their adoption of the term "Mizo" for themselves in 1946.<sup>11</sup>

The Lushai Hills were annexed by Britain in 1891, to put an end to the raids from the territory into areas already under British control.<sup>12</sup> At the time, the territory comprised numerous ministates, each a single village or a small cluster of villages, ruled by a chief, and owing fealty to no outside authority. Such independence was celebrated in a popular maxim, that "it is better to be the head of a cat than the tail of a tiger."<sup>13</sup>

Within the Lushai Hills, a chief was the ruler of a realm rather than a defined territory. Subjects owed allegiance to a particular chief, regardless of where they might wish to settle. Practicing slash-and-burn agriculture, people moved frequently from place to place.<sup>14</sup> Villages were not permanent settlements, and realms also shifted over time. Warfare between these village states was endemic. Consequently, villages were frequently located on hilltops or the higher slopes to afford maximum protection, while cultivation took place farther down the hillside.<sup>15</sup>

The dominant "Lusei" tribe in Mizoram has only lived in the area since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, thrusting their way westward from Burma and propelling longer-established, kindred tribes northward toward Manipur.<sup>16</sup> Early in the nineteenth century, members of one Lusei lineage, the Sailos, gradually defeated

other chiefly lines and came to dominate the territory, albeit as individual chiefs within their separate realms.<sup>17</sup>

Lehman suggests that the complex social structure centred on chieftainship among the Northern Chin may have arisen during the sixteenth century to facilitate raiding into the territories of sedentary plains-dwelling communities, to procure material goods not otherwise available in their sparse hills districts.<sup>18</sup> The rationale for this raiding, and the attitude of the Chin to the Burmese, is evident from Lehman's observation that "Burman civilisation ... evoked both envy and respect" among the Chin, who "preferred his own hill country, owing to its cool climate, its relative freedom from tropical fevers, and its beauty, but he also was vividly aware of its relative poverty and of the difficulties of his existence there."<sup>19</sup> In 1910, Sir James Scott recounted one of a number of myths that highlighted these equivocal ties with the Burmans and offered a justification for the raiding. The Chins had been subjected to "such long continued and systematic ill-treatment on the part of the Burmese, that traditions accounting for this form a part of the national religion."<sup>20</sup>

Relations with the Bengalis and other plains-dwelling communities in India were equally strained. In Mizoram, these "foreigners" are called *vai*, a term also used in Burma. B. B. Goswami shows how this term, initially used descriptively for the plains-dwellers, has come to take on pejorative connotations, and has gradually come to be restricted in use to designate persons of "Indian" racial appearance, with the implication that such people cannot be trusted.<sup>21</sup> Such an attitude was evident in September 1994 when a Mizo man was stabbed to death in Silchar, a Bengali-dominated town just outside Mizoram. In retribution, Mizos went on a rampage, destroying numerous Bengali owned shops and vehicles throughout Mizoram.<sup>22</sup>

### British Colonial Rule and Christian Missionaries

British conquest had a dramatic impact on life in the Hills, hurtling isolated, self-sufficient, nonliterate communities into contact with the wider world and involving them in a multiplicity of relationships that transcended the boundaries of the microcosm of their face-to-face, village society.<sup>23</sup> In place of the one, traditional lifestyle open to the villager, the presence of soldiers, teachers, traders, government officials, and missionaries provided a staggering array of new possibilities.<sup>24</sup> While agriculture had been previously geared to subsistence, the penetration of the competitive market system undermined "the tribal communitarian life" in favor of a more individualistic ideology.<sup>25</sup> The imposition of taxes on land, guns, and rice, small as they were, forced these hillsmen to enter the monetary economy.<sup>26</sup>

Protestant missionaries, who established themselves in the Hills in 1894, played a major role in this transformation. With approval from the colonial authorities, the Christian missions also dispensed medicine and created a Latin-scriptured, written form of the local language based upon the dialect of the dominant elite of the Lusei tribe. This emerged as the common language of the territory. People who previously spoke other dialects gradually dropped them in favor of the Dulien-Lushai (now known as Mizo) language.<sup>27</sup> In 1912, the government assigned sole responsibility for running schools to the missions. Thus, the church had become the main source of contact between the tribesmen and the outside world: "the central agent of acculturation in a situation of acculturation where traditional societies were giving way to the process of modernisation."<sup>28</sup>

Not surprisingly, the missionaries came to be seen as agents of the Crown. The Haka in Burma's Chin State adopted the term *siang inn*, "government building" to designate a school, and *siang bawi pa*, "the lord representing the official culture" for a Christian missionary, where the word *siang* meaning "king," referred to "the King of England."<sup>29</sup> In this environment Christianity spread dramatically. By 1971 it had become the religion of over 85 percent of the population of Mizoram.<sup>30</sup>

Colonial support for the missionary churches went to the extent of allowing them exclusive rights in particular districts: the British Baptist Missionary Society in the South Lushai Hills, the Welsh Calvinistic Foreign Mission Society in the North Lushai Hills, and the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society among the tribal population in neighboring Manipur.<sup>31</sup> The Salvation Army, the Catholic Church, and charismatic denominations that attempted to enter the region found their efforts thwarted.<sup>32</sup> The Catholic Church was finally able to establish a mission in the Lushai Hills in 1940, while other denominations had to wait until 1947 when India achieved its independence. Since then, charismatic churches have grown rapidly. The United Pentecostal Church (UPC) has become the third largest denomination in Mizoram, after the Presbyterians (the church of the Welsh missionaries) and the Baptists.<sup>33</sup> Several attempts since Indian independence to form a United Church of Mizoram taking in the Presbyterian and Baptist denominations have failed on each occasion, resulting in increased denominational conflict.<sup>34</sup>

Charismatic practices entered the territory through "Revivalism" in the Welsh missions in 1906. While this innovation was enthusiastically taken up by many Mizos leading to a dramatic rise in the number of converts<sup>35</sup> and the development of a creative new form of music in worship, both the churches and the colonial authorities came to be concerned with the "excesses" of Revival. Major Anthony McCall, Colonial Superintendent of the District, recounts a number of incidents where individuals "claiming to be filled with the Holy Ghost," used this as a cover for assault and robbery. McCall quotes the Chief of Sainen that "some of these revivalists people are having sexual intercourse with others' wives freely."<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, "not having outlawed from the outset an unindigenous and clearly unhealthy manifestation of wild Lushai within a Christian framework," the missionaries were faced with the disturbing situation whereby their own Lushai Church leaders and colleagues challenged their European preceptors' right to give a final ruling on what the Bible did or did not sanction.<sup>37</sup> To rectify the situation, in 1935 the Welsh Presbyterian Church prohibited all manifestations of Revivalism, such as "listening to voices, prophecy [and] speaking unknown tongues."<sup>38</sup>

The churches continued to grow as a source of power and influence independent of the chiefs. Consequently, the baptized, educated elite came to resist the chiefs' customary claims and religious role. Traditionally chiefs could exact labor from their subjects and claimed the choicest portions of any animal slaughtered.<sup>39</sup> After independence, the new elites campaigned for the abolition of chieftainship, achieving this goal in Mizoram in 1954.<sup>40</sup>

### **Problems of Identity among the CHIKIM**

With the conquest of the CHIKIM, their territories came to be divided among the Assam, Bengal, and Burmese administrations. The cultural similarity of the various CHIKIM groups was not lost upon the British colonial authorities. As early as February 1892, the colonial heads were considering the desirability of bringing these

territories under one administration.<sup>41</sup> Although the South Lushai Hills came to be transferred from the jurisdiction of Bengal to Assam and joined to the North Lushai Hills, the CHIKIM territories otherwise remained separated from one another.

Prior to colonization, the commoners' horizons were limited to kinship relations, the local village, and the realm of its chief. Given the frequency of raiding even between villages from closely related groups, relations beyond the realm were hostile and fraught with danger. Cultural affinity could not unite people who spoke the same dialect, let alone all the CHIKIM groups. This situation changed with the imposition of the Pax Britannica and conversion to Christianity. Participants in church synods met and came to know individuals from farther afield with whom they could identify ethnic connections.<sup>42</sup>

A national consciousness was developing, seeing the CHIKIM groups as one people. Clearly they had a common ancestry, and they were close to one another culturally and linguistically.<sup>43</sup> The Atlantic Charter of 1942, which was to become the cornerstone of the United Nations, affirmed "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live": the right of nations to self-determination. This declaration had a decisive impact on members of the educated elite, who were encouraged to see in it support for the formation of a CHIKIM nation.<sup>44</sup> For them, the sentiment of a common identity among members of the various tribes, was emerging as an "imagined community" in Benedict Anderson's terminology,<sup>45</sup> as a nationality borne of common origins and a belief in a shared destiny—an overarching CHIKIM identity, extending beyond the confines of one's tribe or clan, and the territorial borders imposed by the British.

As we have noted, in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram), the domination by one clan led to its dialect becoming the *lingua franca* of the territory. The missionaries further enhanced its status when they used this dialect as the basis for a written language and the medium of instruction in their schools. These developments have assisted in the process of state formation and have encouraged an ideology that they were all the same, that they were all "Mizo." People have come to downplay their tribal differences in asserting that there was no difference between one Mizo and another, whatever their particular clan or tribal background.<sup>46</sup>

The division of their territorial range into different political domains has been another major problem hampering the achievement of unity among the CHIKIM people. The historical experience of groups living in the Lushai Hills/Mizoram, where the chiefs had been like independent princes, is significantly different from that of their colleagues in Manipur or Tripura, where they had the status of vassals to the king or maharaja.<sup>47</sup>

Notwithstanding the sense of a shared identity, outside Mizoram unity among the CHIKIM groups has been an elusive, if not exasperating, vision. Whereas the disparate so-called "Naga" tribes, who have very little in common with one another culturally or linguistically have forged a common "Naga" identity upon their embrace of Christianity, the absence of a single, widely accepted common name for the CHIKIM has impeded such unity among them.<sup>48</sup>

Names for the various CHIKIM groups have not been stable over any length of time. Tribes, clans, and subclans have sometimes been called after their eponymous founders, at other times they have been referred to by some distinguishing feature. One tribe is nowadays known as Hmar, meaning "north," in regard to their location in Mizoram.<sup>49</sup> Previously they were known as Kholhang, meaning "southern village," apparently a reference to their location relative to the

Singson clan.<sup>50</sup> The tribe known as Suantak in Burma have come to be called Vaiphei in Manipur, after Khovaipei, the first village they established in that State. The Gangte tribe (Rangte in Mizoram) identify themselves as emanating from a land called Gang-gam.<sup>51</sup> While some members of this tribe might now use Gangte as a surname, close patrilineal relatives might be known by the name of a clan (Khaimang) and others by a subclan name (Thangjom).

Although the CHIKIM groups outside Mizoram acknowledge their common heritage, they have not been able to achieve unity among themselves. Members of different tribes, and even clans within the one tribe, are likely to clash with one another. A strong emphasis on genealogical knowledge, coupled with a patrilineal clan structure, with traditional marriage alliances and a classificatory kinship system, create loyalties that radiate out from one's closest kin to more distant members of the ethnic group. Tribes distinguish themselves with distinctive designs in their *puon* or garments, particularly on ceremonial occasions and burials, much as their particular tartans identify Scottish clans. One can be a Phaltual, Baite, or Khaute at one level, while recognizing members of the other divisions as fellow Vaiphei who must be addressed according to classificatory kinship categories. In Manipur particularly, children are generally brought up speaking the dialect of their father's line, and clan or tribal gatherings are organized from time to time.

Tribal loyalties have influenced voting patterns in Manipur, where around 200,000 CHIKIM account for approximately 10 percent of the state's population, and from time to time conflict has flared up between closely related groups. In the 1950s, warfare erupted between two of the largest groups in the Churachandpur District of Manipur, the Hmar<sup>52</sup> and the Thadou speakers.<sup>53</sup> Many fled to Assam to escape the fighting. The translation of the Bible into the Thadou language in 1960, the first full translation in any CHIKIM dialect of Manipur by the Bible Society, upset the other tribal groups since it was called the "Kuki" Bible. These other groups demanded their own separate translations, even though the differences between their dialects are but slight.<sup>54</sup>

In Assam, fighting has arisen among speakers of the Thadou dialect, between those who were happy to be identified as "Thadou," and those who preferred to be called "Kukis." Thadou is the name of a reputed ancestor of a *segment* of the speakers of this tongue. Others who speak the same dialect who are not descendants of Thadou objected to having their language named for someone junior to them in lineage terms. Radio programs in the dialect in Assam and official references are now careful always to refer to the language as "Thadou-Kuki" in an attempt to placate both camps.

In 1999, conflict again arose in the Churachandpur District, when Paite were accused of treachery for not having supported a "Kuki" candidate for the Manipur Hills electorate in the Indian parliamentary elections, thereby allowing a Naga to take the seat. Bloody confrontation erupted, pitting the "Kukis" (i.e., Thadous) on one side against the Paite on the other.<sup>55</sup> The Vaiphei found themselves reluctantly drawn into the conflict on the side of the Paite. During a visit to Mizoram the following year, I met a number of Paite who had fled there to escape the conflict and appeared to have settled in relatively easily and happily.

Beyond such clan and tribal loyalties, in Mizoram the ideology that "we are all one" has led to an intolerance of the use of dialects other than the officially sanctioned Mizo one, and the conflicts between the groups in Manipur is seen as a dangerous manifestation of "communalism."<sup>56</sup> This view is exemplified by the



response of a prominent Mizo of Ralte background when I asked her about the dialect of her tribe, and she told me she knew nothing of her ancestral speech. On one occasion, she recalled, she had asked some old Ralte women to talk in Ralte, but she quickly became annoyed and irritated by the jarring sound of the language, which she found difficult to follow. She therefore asked them to stop. My friend affirmed a lack of interest in her Ralte background, stressing the importance for her of the common Mizo identity and form of speech.

### The Search for a Common Name

The lack of a single name with which they could identify has proven to be a problem for the CHIKIM people. As we have noted, neither of the terms frequently used by outsiders to refer to them—"Kuki" and "Chin"—has attracted widespread enthusiasm among the CHIKIM themselves. Consequently, many different terms have been proposed to designate the total community. Thus, they have been called the "Tukbemsom Tribe," a reference to the topknot in which the hair was previously worn by the menfolk in many of the tribes.<sup>57</sup> The term "Lusei," the former name for the dominant tribe in the Lushai Hills, has been translated by some writers as "long-headed" and may be a reference to the same custom.<sup>58</sup> Students in Shillong established an "Eimi (Our People) Union," and an "Eimi Fellowship" was founded in Ukhrul, while an "Unao (Brothers and Sisters<sup>59</sup>) Fellowship" was instituted in Jorhat,<sup>60</sup> each expressing the same idea—namely, that the various CHIKIM groups are "one."

The neologism "CHIKIM" created by combining letters from the words Chin, Kuki and Mizo, was also for a while used in some official publications in Manipur and in the names of ethnically organized churches. This term has the felicitous meaning "all the tribes," but as we have already noted, it has not caught on widely as an accepted name for the tribes and clans that had erstwhile been known as Chins and Kukis.<sup>61</sup>

In the 1950s, the name "Khulmi," cave people, was used in Manipur, alluding to the common myth of these tribes that they had emerged from a cave or a pit.<sup>62</sup> This shared origin is seen as a defining element of the identity of tribes belonging to the Kuki-Chin family, although the various groups use different words to refer to the primordial cave from which they had emerged.<sup>63</sup>

Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, who was largely responsible for drawing attention to the Judaizers in Manipur and Mizoram and for organising the settlement of over 800 of them in Israel, wrote of the "Shinlung Tribe (Menashe)," using Shinlung as a term to include the whole coterie of CHIKIM tribes, assuming that this was a common name accepted by all of them.<sup>64</sup> Following Rabbi Avichail, Shalva Weil has used the term in the same way, asserting, "In India they were known...collectively as the Shinlung."<sup>65</sup> Tudor Parfitt also uses the term "Shinlung," but uses it to mean specifically the Judaizing members of these groups.<sup>66</sup> Neither of these usages is strictly correct. From my understanding, very few CHIKIM dialects other than that of the Asho, plains dwelling Chin of the Arakan district, possess a phoneme equivalent in sound to English "sh." Many communities that I have encountered in Manipur are not familiar with the word, although close variants are to be found in Mizoram, from where presumably Avichail adopted the term.

The Hmar, located in southern Manipur and northern Mizoram, knew the word "Sinlung," which Rochunga Pudaitte refers to as "the ancient home of the Hmar

people," describing it as a city (Khaw Sinlung).<sup>67</sup> He does not, however, identify it as the name of any individual or tribal grouping. Colonel J. Shakespear records a Lushai legend, wherein "Chhinglung" is the name of the cave from which the CHIKIM had emerged,<sup>68</sup> while James Lorrain's Lushai dictionary has an entry "Chhin-lung, *n.* the name of the mythical rock from beneath which the progenitors of most of the present human race are said to have emerged after the thimzing darkness."<sup>69</sup> Again, these terms are given not as the name of a group but of a place. We do, however, find in Mizoram an organisation, headed by Lalchhanhima Sailo, called the "Chhinlung Israel People's Convention," a Christian organization that seeks to harness the putative Israelite origins of the CHIKIM for political purposes. Sailo we see uses the concept of the "Chhinlung People" as a generic term to encompass all the peoples who had emerged from the cave, namely all the CHIKIM, but in a context where he is also seeking to connect them with the biblical Israelites.

This bewildering range of epithets underscores the difficulties in trying to formulate an acceptable, common name for a set of tribes who recognize a common peoplehood. For the Rev. Dr. Hawingam Haokip, however, it is "encouraging" that so many people have tried: "These names may or may not be acceptable to all as a nomenclature. But they reveal a clear evidence [*sic*] that there has been a strong desire for unity and unification among the educated circle of the Kuki-Chin people."<sup>70</sup>

The ever-shifting names with which the CHIKIM have sought to identify themselves has led Weil to suggest that the CHIKIM tribes exhibit a contextual fluidity of "ethnic" categories similar to that demonstrated by Edmund Leach among the Kachin in northern Burma, who are transformed into Shan as they shift into a different ecological niche and adopt a more highly stratified political structure.<sup>71</sup> In particular, Weil points to the fact that Lian Tual, a Judaizer and "Secretary of the Community of Judaism" in Tiddim in Burma's Chin State wrote to her to say that his name was in Jinghpaw, the main Kachin language. Weil quotes his comment that "If this is Jinghpaw or Kachin tribe, we must be ancestry to the [biblical] tribe of Menasseh."<sup>72</sup>

In referring to the Kachin in this way, I assume that Lian Tual was aware of the fact that the Karen, a tribal group located to the east of the Kachin, had been identified already as descendants of Israelites by Christian missionaries as far back as the 1830s.<sup>73</sup> By association with the Kachin—and in turn on account of the Kachin's affinities with the Karen—Lian Tual was attempting to bolster the Israelite claims of his own community.

I do not consider Lian Tual's assertion to mean that the same process that operates among the Kachin are present among the CHIKIM. For the CHIKIM, self-identification essentially followed a segmentary, patrilineal pattern, similar to that described by E. E. Evans-Pritchard for the Nuer.<sup>74</sup> Alongside obligations to the chief, loyalty and moral responsibility was strongest to people closest to oneself in patrilineal kinship terms, receding as one looked to more distant kin, to members of one's dialect or tribal group, and then to the broader CHIKIM category, and kinship groups themselves were stratified according to the birth order of their founders. Concerning the Thadou, the largest CHIKIM tribe or language group in Manipur,<sup>75</sup> R. K. Das has observed, "Authority is based on status within a unilineal descent system. The elder brother and his descendants occupy a higher status than the younger brother and his descendants."<sup>76</sup> In such a system, one has identities that fan out as one moves away from one's core kinship group, as we have seen above with the Gangte and Vaiphei tribes.

### Emergence of the Term "Mizo"

"Mizo" is one name that has achieved a greater level of acceptance than all the others mentioned thus far. In 1946, members of the "Lushai Association" adopted a resolution calling for self-determination. Taking "Mizo" as the name of their nationality, they formed the Mizo Union as the vehicle for their political aspirations.<sup>77</sup> By 1952, the term had replaced "Lushai" in the name of the territory formerly known as the Lushai Hills District of Assam,<sup>78</sup> and the local language came to be known as "Mizo."

As Lalthangliana observes, "In the first census ever collected among the people of Mizoram (1901), there was no-one who called himself Mizo. But in the 1961 census, there were over 200,000 Mizo." In 1961, no one chose to identify by the former name of the dominant "Lusei" tribe, and the names of two other prominent groups, the Ralte and the Paihte had also disappeared, while the Hmar and Pawih had declined sharply. Clearly the overwhelming majority in each category had registered as Mizos.<sup>79</sup> Many people outside Mizoram, in the Churachandpur District of Manipur, in Tripura, and in the Chin Hills of Burma were also attracted to this new designation.<sup>80</sup>

The success of the name "Mizo" reflects the fact that historically *Zo* was a name most CHIKIM groups applied to themselves,<sup>81</sup> while *mi* is a common word for "man" or person.<sup>82</sup> Grammatically, the expected term would have been *Zomi*,<sup>83</sup> "Mizo" being a poetic inversion. L. S. Gangte reproduces a line from a traditional ballad in which a proud hunter describes himself as a *mizo*.<sup>84</sup> Goswami points out that already in 1912, Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear, first Superintendent of the Lushai Hills District, had written that "the general population of the hills is spoken of as Mizo," indicating that the word was not unknown in previous generations and that it was not restricted to any particular tribe or clan in the region.<sup>85</sup>

Unfortunately for the elite among the CHIKIM peoples, just as they were beginning to imagine themselves as one people, in 1947 their territories were parcelled out among the new postcolonial states of India, Burma, and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh), which had little thought for the CHIKIM people, located on the fringes of their respective nation-states, and on the fringes of public consciousness in the new nations.

Under British rule, ostensibly to protect the hill-tribesmen from exploitation by the more sophisticated plains-dwelling Indians and Burmese, the Lushai Hills District was administered as an "excluded area," into which the plainsmen could only venture if they obtained a special "Inner Line" permit, to enter the territory for a limited period of time.<sup>86</sup> This helped preserve the territory from the fate of Tripura and Sikkim, where the indigenous populations have become a minority in their own lands. However, it also meant that the CHIKIM were largely isolated from the movements and the struggles that went to forge the Indian, Burmese, and Pakistani national identities.

Although the "Inner Line" system protected the CHIKIM from exploitation by the plainsmen, it did not insulate them from the Western cultural influences of the administration, through the adoption of Christianity and the Latin script—developments that increased their alienation from the neighboring civilizations.<sup>87</sup> With the approach of independence for the Empire in South Asia, certain British officers sought to continue to protect the hill-tribesmen by detaching their territories

from both Indian and Burmese rule and merging them into a "Crown Colony," which would remain under British administration.<sup>88</sup> This scheme had the support of Sir Robert Reid, governor of Assam, who observed that these people were "not Indians in any sense of the word, not in appearance, not in habit, nor in outlook, and it is a historical accident that they have been tacked on an Indian Province."<sup>89</sup>

Although Prime Minister Winston Churchill sympathized with this proposal, it was eventually dismissed as being geographically and economically unworkable.<sup>90</sup> The inhabitants of the Lushai Hills District therefore had to choose whether to affiliate with India, Pakistan, or Burma. While segments of the leadership favored Burma, the majority resolved to join India, on condition that they would be entitled "to opt out of the Indian Union after ten years if they wish to do so."<sup>91</sup> However, none of the three countries proved sensitive to the special needs of the tribal populations or understood their concerns and suspicions.

Chatterjee observes that, "The military dictatorship in Myanmar (Burma) and theocracy in Bangladesh added miseries to the Mizos living there," so that those living under Indian rule are now grateful for their citizenship.<sup>92</sup> However, while India has remained a parliamentary democracy, during the immediate postindependence period it failed to win the loyalty of the Mizo people. The region was incorporated as a tribal district in Assam, and the government made a concerted effort to assimilate the tribal peoples into mainstream Indian culture. The Christianity that the Mizos now professed was viewed as "a hand maiden of colonialism" and was consequently considered potentially subversive.<sup>93</sup> The use of the Assamese language was promoted, along with Assamese culture.<sup>94</sup> Having learned contempt for "heathen" Hinduism, the Christianized tribals resisted these initiatives.

Meanwhile, trade routes and communication channels that ran from Mizoram through East Bengal were severed since this was now Pakistan, a separate and hostile nation. Similarly, contacts with fellow tribesmen now living in Burma or Pakistan had become more difficult, for they were beyond volatile international borders, and the tribesmen were obliged to demonstrate their allegiance to the countries within whose borders they happened to reside.<sup>95</sup>

### The Mizo Revolt

The dream of a larger, united territory embracing all the "Mizo" and allied tribes finally led to insurrection on February 28, 1966, after inept government handling of an extended period of famine. The Mizo National Front (MNF) stressed the differences between the tribal peoples and the Indians, the *vai*, expressing contempt for the latter who were regarded as heathens, while the Mizos were proud of their Christian beliefs and the level of literacy and civilization that they had achieved, courtesy of the missionaries and the colonial administration.<sup>96</sup>

It is instructive to see how both Indian nationalism and Mizo nationalism took inspiration from the west, though the two are fundamentally at odds with one another. India has sought to create a national identity embracing people of different racial, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, based on principles of a democratic, secular state, a nationalism based on notions of a shared fate arising from living in a particular territory, and the struggle for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>97</sup> While it is tinged with Hindu cultural forms, those of the majority population, it also has room for the operation of principles of equity, through various schedules to the Constitution of India, which provide special assistance to those

disadvantaged in society, through such measures as the reservation of positions for members of disadvantaged castes and tribes in the civil service and in higher education, exemption from income tax, and grants for schemes intended to promote their welfare and development.<sup>98</sup>

On the other side, the nationalism of the insurgents was based on claims of common ancestry—an extended kinship network—and bound up with the religion of the Mizos: the Christian religion that had been learned from the Western missionaries, together with the revivalist accretions that had come through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Hills. This was a nationalism based on common origins rather than simply on common residence, claiming the right to self-determination for the related tribals, in an expanded Mizo nation.<sup>99</sup>

Laldenga, the leader of the revolt, was a fine orator and attracted sympathizers among all sections of the population in Mizoram, from former chiefs to the common people. Leaders of CHIKIM groups in Churachandpur met with Laldenga in January 1965 and gave support to the vision of a greater, independent Mizoram.<sup>100</sup> The various Kuki groups in the Jampui Tong district of Tripura, who had accepted a "Mizo" identity, also participated in the revolt.<sup>101</sup> Laldenga inspired members of allied communities in other territories, persuading them of the validity of his claims. Many saw his cause as divinely inspired, and indeed Christian rituals played a significant role in the activities of the insurgents. Clearly Laldenga had enthused the masses, for B. B. Goswami records that "many rural people saw him in their dreams."<sup>102</sup>

Mizoram quickly fell to the Mizo National Front rebels, who proclaimed their independence.<sup>103</sup> However, military reinforcements marched on the territory and recaptured it, although the revolt continued to fester for many years. With popular backing from the common people, support and armaments from India's rivals Pakistan and China, the rebels could retreat across the border to East Pakistan after any skirmish, or seek shelter among sympathetic villagers and be ready to strike again whenever the opportunity arose. However, this situation changed dramatically in the aftermath of the Pakistan civil war which, with support from India, led to Eastern Pakistan's rebirth as Bangladesh. Because of Bangladesh's debt to India for its independence, the Mizo rebels lost their sanctuary in that territory and became more vulnerable to the Indian troops. A Mizo government in exile was established in Peking. The insurgency lingered on, even though it had lost any real chance of achieving its goal.<sup>104</sup>

In their determination to suppress the rebellion, the Indian army sought to control the population of Mizoram by clustering villages together, making them easier to keep under surveillance. Along the Silchar-Aizawl-Lunglei road, 106 villages with 50,000 inhabitants were regrouped into 18 "Grouping Centres."<sup>105</sup> Harsh punishment was meted out upon the rebels and anyone suspected of providing them with food and shelter. Villages and even churches were burnt down, men were tortured, women and young girls raped by members of the armed forces.<sup>106</sup> Hluna reports that should a villager complain against such actions, he was likely to be arrested and charged with being "a suspected MNF sympathiser."<sup>107</sup>

Villages in the Churachandpur District of Manipur, where the rebellion had popular support, also faced this treatment. On August 8, 1967, a band of insurgents had come to Chongmun, a Gangte village, spending the night there. As the 9th Bihar Regiment were pursuing them, they fled, leaving behind a Bengali bearer who was too sick to travel. When the troops came, they apprehended the bearer and

interrogated him about the identity of the insurgents. To save his own skin, he implicated nine young men—Hengin, Khamkhogin, Lalzathang, Paukhogin, Paukhokham, Saitawng, Tunzakhai, Vanlalsiem, and Vungtheng—from the village. The troops seized these men, interrogated them and tortured them inside the village church, gouging out their eyes before finally taking them to the cemetery and shooting them dead.

On April 6, 1986, almost nineteen years after the incident, the villagers erected a memorial stone "in loving memory of the innocent youngsters, who had been mercilessly shot dead in the village cemetery...after being inflicted with immeasurable sufferings in the church by the Indian security forces."<sup>108</sup> The memory of this incident has clearly left a searing impression on the villagers, instilling an understandable wariness in their interactions with the Indian government and the army.

As Roy-Burman has put it, "The traumatic experience of the famine in early 1960's and of the subsequent miscarriages of many development efforts have created a coral reef of distrust in the minds of the Mizos....The grouping of villages as a counter insurgency measure...has blurred the perception of humanistic nationalism, to which Gandhi committed the [Indian] nation through his life and more so, through his death; and it has strained the articulation of the proto-nationalism of the Mizos with the multi-dimensional nation building process of India."<sup>109</sup>

### **Statehood for Mizoram**

The rebels continued to make sporadic raids on the troops and the insurgency did not formally come to an end until June 30, 1986, when Laldenga signed an accord with the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, whereby the Mizos gave up their dream of independence, contenting themselves with the creation of a state of Mizoram, confined to the territory previously known as the Lushai Hills District (Mizo Hills from 1952).<sup>110</sup> The State of Mizoram was formally admitted into the Union of India in February 1987, and Laldenga was elected its first Chief Minister.<sup>111</sup> The Indian government has been generous in its financial support for the new state, wishing to prevent another uprising.

Most of the population within the new state of Mizoram were proud to have achieved statehood, though others continue to voice their disappointment that the nation-state for which they had fought had ultimately not come into existence. On his return from exile to Mizoram, Laldenga made a speech suggesting a determination to continue the agitation for a "Greater Mizoram," albeit as a part of India rather than as an independent country, and Mizos in the Jampui Tong region of Tripura agitated for inclusion, but settled for the creation of a Mizo "Regional Council" within Tripura.<sup>112</sup> CHIKIM outside the new state of Mizoram who had shared the dream of union with their kinsmen, whether in an independent nation or as part of a Greater Mizoram State, were disappointed when these aspirations failed to materialize.

This disappointment led to reluctance on the part of many of those living outside Mizoram to identify as "Mizo," particularly if they did not use the Dulien dialect for communication within the home. "Mizo" had shifted its reference from being an inclusive term for the members of all the related tribes, to identification with the inhabitants of a particular territory within the CHIKIM lands. Although the

people of Mizoram still identify their congeners from other territories as "Mizo," even if they do not speak the same dialect, those outside the state are more inclined to have regard to their particular tribal identities, and to seek out an alternative, inclusive name for the CHIKIM nation.<sup>113</sup>

### Identification with Israelites

The elements that we have seen as contributing to CHIKIM nationalism: a sense of common origin and a shared destiny, a strong religious faith, mediated through prophecy or the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, have all featured in the "Israelite" movement and the "Judaism" that has subsequently developed among a segment of the CHIKIM peoples, in their expression of what McCall has referred to as "the surrender of directional authority to mere novices in the intricacies of [the] doctrinal confusions which make up institutional Christianity."<sup>114</sup> The first "Israelite" community in the region was established in 1951 by Challianthanga (Pu Chala), a barely literate catechist with the United Pentecostal Church in the village of Buallawn, after he had a revelation telling him that the Mizo people were Israelites, that they had to practice the rituals prescribed in the Old Testament, and that to escape Armageddon, they would need to return to their ancient homeland in Israel. Many of Pu Chala's followers were fervent Mizo nationalists and supported Laldenga's cause. While they attempted to live as Israelites, they remained faithful to the belief in Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>115</sup>

Pu Chala's prophecies reached all corners of the CHIKIM world and found sympathetic audiences throughout the region, particularly in the Churachandpur District of Manipur, with many rebels crossing the border or preaching there. The next major development in this Judaizing faith took place in Churachandpur in 1975, after Thangkholun Lungdim (known as T. Daniel) returned from Bombay where he had gone to learn Hebrew and the ritual practices of the Jews. T. Daniel reported back to his colleagues in Manipur the astonishing fact that the Jews did not accept Jesus as either God or the Messiah. Consequently he advocated that the members of his community aspiring to live as Jews should abandon the worship of Jesus.<sup>116</sup>

Many of those who responded to this call had been members of Dr. H. Thangruma's Church of God (Zionist), a group that already accepted Saturday as the Sabbath, observed the festivals prescribed in the Bible, and believed that the CHIKIM people were descendants of Israelites. Whereas the religious practices instituted by Pu Chala were an entirely local development based upon his attempt to follow precepts from the Bible, T. Daniel introduced practices that he had learned from contemporary Jews in Bombay. As an accomplished songwriter, he composed many attractive tunes to accompany segments of the liturgy, still used today among Benei Menashe in Manipur and Mizoram. Intriguingly, while the notion that the CHIKIM peoples were Israelites had come to Churachandpur from Mizoram, now the practice of Judaism was carried back from Churachandpur to Mizoram in 1976, when T. Daniel's close associate, Jangkhothang Lhanghal (Joseph Jacob) was invited to preach among interested congregations there, mainly members of his former church, the aforementioned Church of God (Zionist). Joseph Rei (Rohluma), who had been a pastor in Thangruma's church in Churachandpur, took his family back to Mizoram that year and commenced the first Judaic congregation in Aizawl.

Gideon Rei, in whose home I had met Mawii, had himself been an MNF rebel. In those days, he had been known by his Mizo name, Vanlalkhuma. Vanlalkhuma had been caught by the army and imprisoned, but managed to escape and flee to Churachandpur. Although the police there came with a warrant for his arrest, his friends were able to induce the authorities to let him retain his freedom. Vanlalkhuma was the younger brother of Joseph Rei. In Churachandpur, he was also a member of Dr. Thangruma's church and had ventured with him in 1974 to meet the Jews of Calcutta, who pointed out to them, as T. Daniel had learned around the same time, that Jews did not worship Jesus. Though Thangruma held to his Christian faith while nevertheless seeking to be accepted as an Israelite, Vanlalkhuma (Gideon Rei) joined the newly formed Jewish congregation.

In January 1981, Gideon Rei was one of two men and one woman from Churachandpur who went to Israel at the invitation of Rabbi Avichail to study at a yeshiva,<sup>117</sup> their airfares being met by contributions from various members of the community, both in Manipur and Mizoram.<sup>118</sup> Gideon returned to Manipur in March 1983. Although he did not complete his formal conversion to Judaism in Israel, on his return to Churachandpur he was appointed as "chazzan" literally "cantor," but effectively spiritual leader at Beith Shalom Synagogue, the "mother" congregation of the Benei Menashe. Gideon responded to frequent requests from Mizoram to teach there, and the congregation in Churachandpur complained of his frequent absences from duty, until he finally left Churachandpur altogether and moved back to Aizawl in Mizoram.

Many people who wished to identify as Jews or Israelites, and others, looking at these groups from the outside, have not understood the difference between the religion taught by T. Daniel, Joseph Lhanghal, Gideon Rei, and their colleagues, who advocated practicing standard rabbinical Judaism as found among extant Jewish communities, and the belief system introduced by Pu Chala that came to be called "Messianic Judaism."<sup>119</sup>

It is not clear exactly how many people follow either of these tendencies, though the numbers practicing Judaism have been increasing at the expense of the "Messianic Jews" since Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail first visited Manipur and Mizoram in 1991, and especially as an increasing number of members of the community have settled in Israel. In 1994, Goell cited a recent Indian government estimate of 1,000 "Jews" in Mizoram and 2,900 in Manipur.<sup>120</sup> Out of an estimated 1,250 Sabbatarians in Churachandpur town in 1992, one author in Manipur designates 200 as followers of Orthodox Judaism and another 150 as Israels.<sup>121</sup> In 2001, a census of the congregations affiliated with the "Benei Menashe Council of India" recorded 2,281 members in Manipur, 22 members in Myanmar, 232 in Assam, and 21 in Nagaland.<sup>122</sup> These figures do not include members of congregations in Mizoram, since they are not affiliated with the same council. One would expect Mizoram to have half the number of adherents to Judaism found in Manipur. In March 2005, Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar spoke of up to 7,000 individuals in northeast India practicing Judaism.<sup>123</sup>

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Having set out the cultural and historical background, we can now turn to examine Mawii's personal experience. We shall seek to understand the process by which she



came to embrace the Jewish faith and the significance of that embrace in the context of Mizo nationalist aspirations.<sup>124</sup>

### **Mawii's Background and Her Dream**

Mawii was born in 1946 in Sakawrdai Village, Mizoram. Her parents belonged to the Hmar tribe and at the time of her birth participated in the Sakawrdai Mission Synod, the local Presbyterian Church. When she was a child, her father transferred his allegiance to the newly established charismatic church, the "UPC" or United Pentecostal Church.

Mawii was educated to grade 6, in the Mizo medium. Like most Mizos, her family were traditional *jhum*, that is, *swidden* (slash and burn) cultivators. She was married at 19 years of age, and her husband was aged 30. He too was a *jhum* cultivator, and they had 5 children. When I met her, she had separated from her husband because, she said, "He practised immorality," that is, he had committed adultery. Mawii had shifted to Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, in February 1991. She told me "I can't work [that is, engage in cultivation] because of bad health, and bad back. I have a little stall, selling eatables, biscuits, by my house. My eldest son is now 27 years old, but works for daily wages, living with me. If he got work from someone, he works. Sometimes, not find work, he rests." She continued:

I joined UPC 1956 while I was a child. My father liked to join UPC, and at the time I was very young, so joined as part of family. I was in UPC till 1976. I didn't know how to worship, but in my dream, the Lord called to me, 15 September 1976. In my dream, the MNF [that is, the Mizo National Front, who had initiated their revolt in 1966, a full ten years before Mawii's dream] got independent status [for Mizoram] and they selected me to be a nurse. I appreciated their selection very much, but I balked at the offer to work as a nurse, because with blood and sweat, many people had fought for our freedom. Those freedom fighters, I felt, should hold the good positions. After them, if there is some post for me, I will join. Because I am not a freedom fighter, I feel unworthy to hold the good position.

Mawii indicated that her husband had not been a "freedom fighter" either. However, it was significant that Gideon Rei in whose home we met had been one. This background afforded him some respect and prestige, independent of his religious role, among the people of Mizoram. Mawii continued:

But the MNF brought me a letter, as an enforcement, to serve in Ratu Village. During my preparation to join I awoke from my deep sleep. Then I kept in mind that letter, intensely. It was very big in my heart, day by day. Then I looked for an explanation, interpreting that dream, but nobody could explain this dream.

It is noteworthy that Mawii belongs to the Hmar, a tribe that is found in substantial numbers in northern Mizoram and across the border in the southern Churachandpur District of Manipur. The Hmar are known as an "Old-Kuki" tribe as

they had been residing in this region perhaps as early as the fifteenth century, the presence of some of their clans being first recorded in the Manipur chronicles in 1554.<sup>125</sup> Linguistically, they are quite close to the Lusei, who, as we have already seen, have only moved into the area since the eighteenth century.<sup>126</sup> They also differ from the Lusei in that they had a looser system of village administration and were less warlike than was the latter's highly organized system of chieftainship.

As we see, Mawii was educated in the Mizo language, and from the content of her dream, she clearly identified with the Mizo nationalist movement. While this may be typical of the Hmar in Mizoram, in Manipur, thanks in part to the efforts of Rochunga Pudaite—a gifted member of the community who was sent by Baptist missionaries to study theology in America—and financial assistance that he could garner from abroad, the Hmar have become one of the best organized, best educated, and most united communities in the Churachandpur district.

Pudaite's work, *The Education of the Hmar People*, identifies the Hmar as a separate nationality and advocates that they should have autonomy in their own areas, while schools should be established teaching in the Hmar medium.<sup>127</sup> Pudaite won considerable sympathy for his cause and has been funded to set up a hospital and other facilities for his community. Adherence to the Baptist Church is common among the Hmar in the Churachandpur District, whereas among their kinsmen in northern Mizoram, where the Welsh missionaries had operated, Presbyterianism prevails.

Mawii's situation highlights how different the fortunes of the Hmar had been across the border in Mizoram. Judaism has attracted many Hmar adherents in Mizoram, whereas very few of the better-off and better-educated Hmar from Manipur have chosen to join them. This is so even though tribals of all background interested in identifying an Israelite past, to validate their claims, often cite an ancient Hmar song with verses that ostensibly refer to incidents from the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, such as the parting of the Red Sea, drowning of the enemies, being guided by "cloud by day and fire at night," obtaining water from a rock and feeding on quails.<sup>128</sup>

Mawii was educated in the Mizo medium, and clearly we see from her dream that she identified as a Mizo more strongly than as a Hmar. I am not aware how well she might speak the Hmar dialect. My experience has been that Hmar from Manipur use their own language for daily intercourse, whereas their kinsmen in Mizoram tend to think in Mizo and are less fluent in Hmar.

Significantly, Mawii was overjoyed to "learn" in her dream that the insurgents, the "freedom fighters" as she calls them, had achieved their goal by creating an independent Mizoram. Also worthy of note is the fact that she could remember the exact date of her dream, which was a full ten years after the revolt had begun, and that the dream remained so clear in her memory and powerfully significant to her, so long after she had dreamt it. Remarkably, the dream had retained this potency even though manifestly the MNF did not win their struggle outright.

The fact that Mawii does appear to place such great store in her dream reflects her upbringing in the UPC denomination, described as an "off-shoot of the revival movement."<sup>129</sup> This is a charismatic church whose members seek guidance through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspires favored members of the community with revelations, through dreams or speaking in tongues. Mawii's readiness to treat

her dream so seriously shows her pride that she has been privileged to receive such a revelation.

### **Into the Covenant of Israel**

I think you will agree with me that, so far, the dream appears to have a strongly nationalist character without any particularly religious or Judaic overtones—except for one crucial detail: the location of Mawii's hospital, in the village of Ratu. As we shall see, Mawii certainly places considerable spiritual significance on the location.

You will recall that Pu Chala, who himself had previously been a UPC catechist, preached his message that the Mizo were Israelites and were obliged to observe the Sabbath, festivals, and dietary restrictions prescribed in the Bible. Pu Chala lived and preached in Buallawn Village, in the northern, Hmar-populated sector of Mizoram, and he himself was a Hmar. Pu Chala died in 1959, before the Mizo uprising. His followers were regrouped from Buallawn to Ratu Village at the start of the Mizo revolt in 1966.<sup>130</sup> In Ratu, they remained faithful to Pu Chala's teachings: They observed Saturday as the Sabbath, refrained from eating unclean animals, and observed the festivals ordained in the Torah. Yet with all that, they clung to their faith in Jesus as Messiah.<sup>131</sup>

Mawii continued her story:

This dream, I meditated on it, talked about it to everybody, and so in my mind arose the intention to go to Ratu Village to meet one mystic, Neikhuma, leader of the Jews there.<sup>132</sup> My mother guided me to Ratu Village. When we stepped onto the veranda of Neikhuma, my mother opened the door. The householder, Neikhuma and 5 Jewish members were sitting together inside.

Neikhuma got up to shake my mother's hand, but it was impossible. He aimed to shake hands with my mother, but his hand went towards me, and he said "O, my hand is to join my sister's hand before her mother's". Before we said a word, when he shook my hand, he called his wife who was working outside, "Wife, come!" and he said, "My Sister has something to say in a spiritual matter"—before I said a word...

And I sat on the bench. His wife approached me and put her hand on my head and then she prayed for me. After she prayed for me and said "Amen", I told all of my dream. They did not really interpret my dream, but they seemed to understand it well, because they clapped their hands saying "O, God will lead you into the covenant of Israel".

But in my mind, from long ago until today, I looked askance at those who called themselves Israelites in my neighbourhood, so I hesitated to join the Israel group.<sup>133</sup> Now I thought in my mind I will join the Israel group secretly, but I will walk and hold in the future the same position in UPC, as a teacher of children and secretary of our local church. I will work openly with them. But

Mr Neikhuma, the Judaism leader, understood all of my secret thoughts, saying "Though you refuse the eternal calling, nonetheless you must join us in the Israel covenant. God will compel you."

The community was starting to learn Hebrew at the time, short blessings before eating, at bedtime, eating and drinking. So I copied what was written into my notebook, the Hebrew prayers.

After one week, I went back to my village but continued to be a member of UPC. One Friday night I felt longing, a sentiment of melancholy hit me hard. What directs my longing I cannot say, but the emotional sentiment, the longing working on my heart, I didn't know what direction. I said, anyway, I will this night join the service of Israel group. And then I joined with them, the Friday night service. They embraced me with a warm welcome. But I didn't join.

After two weeks, Ngurliamthang, a Hmar speaker from Vairengte Village,<sup>134</sup> came and invited me to participate in the service of Israel group. Then I joined them. At that service, Ngurliamthang preached the sermon. First he said "You, my brethren, did you send your name to Zion, because we already sent our names from Vairengte to Zion".<sup>135</sup>

Those words moved me so much. Suddenly from my innermost depths, came out my name, "Elizabeth", so I named myself Elizabeth till now. After this happened for two years, I didn't decide whether to join Judaism permanently or not, but I joined Judaism, not knowing any procedures, any conditions of Judaism. I joined blindly for two months, not knowing how to celebrate.

The "Israelite" group in Ratu remains essentially Christian to this day, in that they continue to worship Jesus—although they observe Saturday as the Sabbath, refrain from pork, and celebrate the Pilgrim Festivals, the New Year and Day of Atonement from the Bible, rather than Christmas and Easter. By contrast, the community in Vairengte had begun to adopt rabbinical Jewish practices in 1976, the year that Mawii encountered them. As the congregation has developed, they pay no heed to the figure of Jesus. Curiously, having been inspired by a dream about Ratu, Mawii ended up attaching herself to another "Israelite" congregation, one that came to be theologically quite distinct from the people of Ratu.<sup>136</sup>

The way Mawii took up her new name, Elizabeth, is interesting. While for her it appears that she has once again heard the word of God, the name, though of Hebrew origin, appears in this altered form through the Septuagint and the New Testament, but not in the Hebrew Bible. Consequently it is not a name that to an English speaker would be identified as particularly Jewish. Thus, while she had moved essentially from Christianity to Judaism by becoming a member of the Israelite congregation of Vairengte, she had in fact adopted a name that is associated more readily with Christian than with Jewish usage.

### Interpreting the Dream

Some four months after Mawii had her original vision and after she had attached herself to the local, Vairengte Congregation, she finally "learns" its meaning. As she recounted to me:

In January 1977, I went to collect ginger from the field. The interpretation of my former dream came to my head, not by spoken word, but from my head, and inside me, suddenly, saying "I will interpret your dream". The words that came to me said: "In your dream, when MNF invited you to join the hospital, it is not a reality, but MNF is a personification of Zion, the Israel movement. So you will be a guide in your village for Israel group".

Therefore the word persuaded me that I am also [to be] a guide of Israel group in my village. Then we started to collect money for fare of Gideon's travel to Israel.<sup>137</sup> Then I remembered suddenly—when I was a little child, my parents often stated, in time of eclipse and earthquake, "We the children of Manasia are still living". Now I realised that our way is the authentic way, I confirmed it till now.

What we have here, strikingly, is a situation where an apparently Mizo-nationalist dream is somehow reinterpreted to be a call to embrace the Jewish religion. However, this is not really an abandonment of the Mizo-nationalist aspiration, as we see from the reference to Mawii's recollection of the use of the name "Manasia," connecting her back to her childhood and to the traditions of her people. The congregation that she has joined consider that the CHIKIM peoples are descended from the tribe of Manasseh, proof of which is evident from their identification as the "children of Manasia," who is taken to be Manasseh, the son of Joseph in the Bible.<sup>138</sup>

In the Mizo language—but not among many of its cognates—masculine names always have the suffix "-a", so that "Manasia" would be the male "Manasi."<sup>139</sup> Pu Chala did not initially declare which tribe the Mizos belonged to. He eventually came to believe that they were from the tribe of Manasseh, not on the strength of direct revelation or received tradition, but apparently through the advice of a *puithiam* (priest) from Burma.<sup>140</sup>

Manasia is also sometimes rendered "Manasa."<sup>141</sup> There is a Bengali Hindu goddess "Manasa," worshipped among the Meitheis, the dominant population of Manipur, who were Hinduized early in the eighteenth century, and among other Hindu communities of North East India.<sup>142</sup> However there is little to suggest that any of the CHIKIM communities in Manipur had previously worshipped any of the gods of the Meitheis.<sup>143</sup>

Neither "Manasa" nor "Manasia" would seem to be the original form of this word; indeed individuals hostile to the Judaizers in Mizoram informed me that this was a deliberate corruption of the earlier form "Manmasi," to bring the word closer to the biblical name. Writing before Judaism had arisen in Manipur, Pudaite held that "The first Hmar man is called Manmasi."<sup>144</sup> The formulation that Mawii remembers commencing "We the children of Manasia" would presumably have referred to the children of "Manmasi" in its original form.

This term, "Manmasi," appears in many of the CHIKIM dialects, though its exact meaning is unclear. Halkin notes that William Shaw, who wrote about the Thadous, "was not quite sure whether 'Manmasi' was a proper name or a word," but was inclined to believe it meant a human being, as against a spirit being.<sup>145</sup> Prim-Vaiphei notes that "Manmasi" "means human progenitor in Vaiphei, Thadou etc., but in Chiru Chothe it is used to mean man."<sup>146</sup> Whatever the origin of these terms, suffice it to observe that Mawii and many other CHIKIM, whether they have moved along the path to Judaism or not, are ready to accept that Manmasi, Manasia, or Manasa is synonymous with the biblical figure Manasseh, the eponymous founder of the tribe of that name, and that they therefore do draw from it the implication that they have an Israelite origin.<sup>147</sup>

I found it intriguing that Mawii's dream, which on the surface appeared to be a strong declaration of support for the MNF, could be recast by the small voice which spoke to her while working in her field. The national dream is now seen as an "illusion," the MNF becoming a representation of Zion, something perhaps more important and more enduring than national aspirations—or perhaps the reworking of those aspirations in the face of disappointment.

I can understand how the presence of Ratu in her dream could lead Mawii to want to visit the village, and perhaps to wish to adopt its religious practices. Yet apparently unwittingly, Mawii has gone beyond the Ratu group. Not fully recognizing at first the differences between "Israelites" who retain a faith in Jesus and those who have forsaken the Christian Messiah for Judaism, she has, perhaps unconsciously and a little hesitantly, taken herself out of the Christian community to which she had previously belonged.

And this process was aided by the very church that had taught her to look for signs and meaning in dreams, to follow revelation rather than precast doctrine. Ironically once again, however, this pursuit of her personal vision has led Mawii into another more structured system of behavior, as we find in her visit to Gideon Rei, seeking guidance in the performance of the Passover rituals.

### **Judaism as an Expression of Mizo Nationalism**

Although Mawii had committed herself to her new congregation before she had reflected on the way her forebears called out to Manasia, identification as a descendant of Manasseh is nevertheless a significant element in the emergent *Weltanschauung*, for it is in effect a proclamation of ethno-national identity, in a sense that perhaps makes the differences between "Messianic Jews" and those attempting to follow rabbinical Judaism less significant. Both groups recognize themselves, and each other, as members of the one nation, based on common descent, whatever their specific religious practices might be. This nationalism still incorporates the whole Zo, Mizo, CHIKIM nation, with its multifarious subdivisions, known to have a common origin. However, by identifying with one of the lost tribes of Israel, the "nation" of descent has now been expanded to include among its members the whole of the Jewish people.

The attraction of Judaism in this context is not so much that it is a world religion, replete with universal truths that resonate with the spiritual leanings of its Mizo followers, but rather that it is one of the national accoutrements of the descendants of the ancient Israelites, and the Mizo followers identify as descendants of those same Israelites. A similar notion is in fact embedded in Jewish

consciousness. Even though Judaism does accept converts, for many centuries it has not been a proselytizing religion; converts are accepted, but not specifically sought after. Judaism is infused with the ideology that Jews are the descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and converts are "adopted" into this "family" as sons or daughters of Abraham.

An implication that can emerge from this perspective is that only an individual descended from Israelites has a right to practice the Jewish religion. Such a view is seen among the Syrian Jewish community in America who will not admit converts into their congregations. Anyone from that community who marries a convert is also ostracized, being excluded from synagogue membership, honors in the synagogue, and from participation in the social functions of the community. The spouse of a convert cannot be buried in the congregation's cemetery, and their children are not accepted into the community's schools.<sup>148</sup>

The same concerns are present among CHIKIM who identify themselves as descendants of Manasseh. In the year 2000, in the town of Kolasib in northern Mizoram, I witnessed the struggle of members of the Benei Menashe with the implications of the nationalist-religious aspects of the Judaism that they had adopted. A man of Nepalese background, born and raised in Mizoram who spoke the Mizo language as well as any Mizo—and who in fact taught the language at a local school for Nepalese children—was attracted to the religious practices of the Benei Menashe congregation and sought to join them.

Members of the community were in a quandary as to whether they could accept him. They themselves had joined because they were persuaded by the belief that Mizos were Israelites and should therefore observe the religion of their ancestors. Was it also possible for a complete stranger to the tradition—as they perceived this Nepalese person so to be—to be included in the religious community? Eventually, uncertain as to whether they were acting appropriately, the local community permitted him to join, requiring him to undergo circumcision, and to append to his name the words "Benei-Israel Benei-Menashe," in effect identifying him as an "adopted" member of the Manasseh tribe within the Israelite nation, as well as a member of its religious community.<sup>149</sup>

Notwithstanding the particular features in Mawii's passage to Judaism and her unique personal experience, we see that in fact hers is consistent with the experience of other Benei Menashe. Mizo nationalist aspirations and prophetic dreams have been fundamental in this process, commencing with the revelation that initially propelled Challianthanga and his followers away from the received orthodoxy of the Christianity the missionaries had taught them.

Roy-Burman has highlighted the alienation of many Mizos from India's nation-building project, on account of perceived differences in race and religion, and the fact that Indian nationalists have failed to include them within their vision of the nation. As he observes, "Perception of a common present, participation in creating a common future, depends largely on the perception of a common past. ... If the rest of the nation fails to make the past of the Mizos a bit of its own past, the Mizos cannot be expected to be affectively tied-up with the future of the rest of the nation."<sup>150</sup>

If the hope of an independent Mizo/CHIKIM nation has already been dashed, and the Mizos and their congeners fit but awkwardly as part of the Indian nation, perhaps there is a better future for them in Israel, as part of the Jewish nation. In March 2005, Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Amar announced that he had accepted the claims of the Benei Menashe that they were descendants of ancient

Israelites, declaring that it was important to help them return to the Jewish religion. Accordingly Rabbi Amar proposed to send qualified rabbis to the region to formally convert to Judaism those who were living as Jews and wished to be recognized as Jews.<sup>151</sup> Once they had undergone conversion, they would have an automatic right under Israel's Law of Return to settle in Israel and to take up Israeli citizenship.<sup>152</sup>

Rabbi Amar's decision has vindicated the efforts of those in Manipur and Mizoram who have for many years asserted an identity as descendants of Manasseh and sought to live as Jews. They have in effect been given entry into the Jewish nation, with recognition that they have a unique past and a distinct history—yet a past that is bound up with that of the Jews, apparently as fraternal descendants of the ancient Israelites. Whether the Benei Menashe who take up the opportunity to settle in Israel will retain a distinct identity or assimilate into the broader Jewish world is yet to be seen. The racial difference from other Jews is not apparently as significant in this context to the Benei Menashe as the differences that the Mizos perceive between themselves and the *vai* of India.

Mawii came to understand her dream as indicating that she would become a guide for the Israel group in her village. Indeed, as events have transpired, she has become a pioneer in Mizoram along the road to Judaism and identification with the Jewish people, having trod the path before many of her compatriots.

### Postscript

In the year 2000, I visited Mawii at her home at Bungkawn on the outskirts of Aizawl. In the years since I'd first met her, much had changed in the practice of Judaism in Mizoram. In 1992, only around 20 Benei Menashe had managed to settle, as Jews, in Israel. By 2000, the figure was now close to 500 individuals and slowly continuing to grow. The increased contact and familiarity with Israel that had developed has had its impact upon the Jewish knowledge available to the community in Mizoram, who have gradually brought their practices more and more into line with the Orthodox Judaism to which they aspire.

Although she seemed a little subdued on this occasion, Mawii was still a member of the Benei Menashe and was following Judaism along with her children. One must admire the strength of commitment to Judaism manifest among the Benei Menashe, who remain a decidedly small proportion of the population. Although one finds throughout Mizoram a deep admiration for the State of Israel and the Jewish people, and Mizos are generally proud of their putative descent from ancient Israelites, many nonetheless find it inconceivable for a Mizo to reject Christianity, so intimately bound up has that religion become with their identity as Mizos.<sup>153</sup> Such people place pressure on wayward souls who would follow Judaism, not to forsake the Saviour.<sup>154</sup>

In the light of the greater familiarity with Jewish practices, I found it telling that Mawii was now calling herself "Elisheva" rather than Elizabeth. I did not ask her what she thought about the name, having regard to the almost mystical way the name Elizabeth had originally come to her.



## Acknowledgments

It has been my privilege to explore the manner in which many members of the Benei Menashe in Manipur and Mizoram have come to embrace the Jewish religion and to follow the adventure of its impact on their lives, in India and in Israel. I am deeply grateful to the generosity of spirit of the members of this community, who have opened their thoughts, and their homes, to accommodate me and my enquiries. Although there are many individuals who deserve my personal thanks, I shall restrict myself on this occasion to expressing my appreciation particularly to two individuals: Mawii (not her real name) whose fascinating life-story is the subject of this article and who told her story to me with enthusiasm; and Gideon Rei, whose readiness to interpret for me made it possible for me to learn of the richness of Mawii's experience.

I also extend my thanks to my friends Charles Solomon and Nigel Sinnott who read through an earlier version of this essay and offered me valuable comments that have helped to improve the final draft.

I am also fortunate that my wife, Miriam, is a member of one of the first families of the Benei Menashe group who chose to live as Jews. As Miriam is fluent in Mizo and the various dialects used in Manipur, with her by my side, I have had the good fortune to be able to consult with an expert on matters of historical detail, and to clarify linguistic concerns as and when they have arisen. I offer to you, Miriam, my heartfelt gratitude for your constant support.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> B. B. Goswami, "By-product of Christianity on the Hill Tribesmen of North-east India," *Review of Ethnology* 7(1-9) (1980):42-46; M. Samra, "Judaism in Manipur and Mizoram: By-Product of Christian Mission," *The Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 6(1) (1992):7-22.

<sup>2</sup> I shall use the abbreviation "CHIKIM" in this article as a convenient way to indicate the constellation of tribal groups generally known by the terms Chin, Kuki, and Mizo. This term was invented by Haokholal Thangjom, a former Manipur state minister, by combining letters from the words Chin, Kuki, and Mizo, and was intended to be used as a generic name. H. Thangjom, "Towards Constructive Destruction," in L. Haokip (ed.), *Kut Festival Souvenir* (Imphal, Manipur: State Level Kut Committee, 1990):19-21. "Chikim" in fact means "all the clans" or "all the tribes" in a number of the CHIKIM dialects. While it was used in publications from Manipur for a short while, Thangjom's term has not caught on more widely. In this article, I shall use CHIKIM as a shorthand term to refer to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo peoples, without thereby intending to suggest that it has any greater significance as an ethnic or tribal name.

<sup>3</sup> J. Valsiner, "Epilogue: Ontogeny of Co-construction of Culture within Socially Organized Environmental Settings," in J. Valsiner (ed.), *Child Development within Culturally Structured Environments, Vol. 2: Social Construction and Environmental Guidance in Development* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1988):292-294.

- <sup>4</sup> I. Edgar, "Dream Imagery Becomes Social Experience," in S. Heald and A. Deluz (eds.), *Anthropology and Psychoanalysis: An Encounter through Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
- <sup>5</sup> A fuller account of how this belief has arisen will appear later in this article. Shalva Weil, in her articles "Lost Israelites from the Indo-Burmese Borderlands: Re-Traditionalisation and Conversion among the Shinlung or Bene Menassehm," *The Anthropologist* 6(3) (2004):219-233 at 228, and "Dual Conversion among the Shinlung of North-East India," *Studies of Tribes and Tribals* 1(1) (2003):43-57 at 52, records that Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail suggested the appellation "Children of Menasseh" to the group, who had already been identifying themselves as the descendants of the biblical tribe.
- <sup>6</sup> Zaithanchhungi, *Israel-Mizo Identity* (Aizawl: St Joseph's Press, 1990):70 suggests another name for the mountain is "Mal Selaimon" and speculates whether this might not be "the namesake of King Solomon or Suleiman, The King of Turks."
- <sup>7</sup> S. Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 3 vols. (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House 1990):608.
- <sup>8</sup> F. 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):14.
- <sup>9</sup> Vumson, *Zo History, With an introduction to Zo Culture, Economy, Religion and Their Status as an Ethnic Miinority in India, Burma, and Bangladesh* (Aizawl, Mizoram, published by the author, n.d.):19-21. Lists comparing words in various CHIKIM dialects are to be found in H. Kamkhenthang, S. Prim-Vaiphei, Romeo Serto, and Hawingam Haokip (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986), Khup Za Go, *A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations Among the Zo People in North East India* (Churachandpur, Manipur: Chin Baptist Literature Board, 1996), C. A. Soppitt, *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontier with An Outline Grammar of the Rangghkol-Lushai Language and a Comparison of Lushai with other Dialects* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Firma-KLM Private Ltd/Tribal Research Institute 1893/1976):79-84; J. Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, 2nd ed. (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1988 [1912]):225-238.
- <sup>10</sup> R. G. Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition 1871-1872* (Calcutta: Firma KLM 1873/1978):9.
- <sup>11</sup> B. B. Goswami and D. P. Mukherjee, "The Mizo Political Movement," in K. S. Singh (ed.), *Tribal Movements in India*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982):134.
- <sup>12</sup> R. Gopalakrishnan, *Insurgent North-Eastern Region of India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995):105; B. B. Goswami, "The Mizos in the Context of State Formation," in S. C. Sinha (ed.), *Tribal Politics and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern India* (New Delhi: KP Bagchi 1987):315-319; Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition*.
- <sup>13</sup> B. Thangchina, "Christian Unity in Mizoram," in K. Thanzauva (ed.), *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Mizoram: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989):109.
- <sup>14</sup> N. Chatterji, *The Mizo Chief and His Administration* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1975):9-10.
- <sup>15</sup> H. N. C. Stevenson, *The Economics of the Central Chin*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1986):22; Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 47-52; Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 50.

- <sup>16</sup> Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 25.
- <sup>17</sup> Goswami, "The Mizos in the Context of State Formation," 314, 320.
- <sup>18</sup> Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 27-28.
- <sup>19</sup> Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 30.
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Lehman, *The Structure*, 32. Ironically, however, Lehman records the view of Professor G. H. Luce that the term "Chin" is in fact "an old Burmese word meaning 'ally or comrade,'" 3. Another suggested explanation for the term is that it derives from a Burmese word meaning "basket," a reference to the large baskets which the CHIKIM used to carry on their backs, held by rattan thongs strapped to the forehead.
- <sup>21</sup> B. B. Goswami, "Outgroup from the Point of View of Ingroup," *Man in India* 55(4) (1975):326-330. By contrast, Lehman, *The Structure*, 28-30, shows that the term *vai* in Burma generally had a positive connotation, representing admired aspects of Burman civilization. Goswami further observes that the term *vai* is no longer applied to the Europeans, despite their racial similarities to Indians. Europeans are referred to by the respectful term *Sâp* (sahib).
- <sup>22</sup> Myer Samra, "Buallawn Israel: The Emergence of a Judaising Movement in Mizoram, Northeast India," in Lynette Olson (ed.), *Religious Change, Conversion and Culture* (Sydney, Australia: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1996):128.
- <sup>23</sup> 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, India: Vendrame Institute, 1988):88.
- <sup>24</sup> F. Downs, "Christian Conversion Movements among the Hill Tribes of North-east India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in G. A. Oddie (ed.), *Religion in South Asia*, 2nd ed. (Columbia, MO: South Asia Publications, 1991):159.
- <sup>25</sup> Thangchina, "Christian Unity," 110.
- <sup>26</sup> Zothantluanga Ralte, "The Pace of Socio-Economic and Political Developments: Responses to British Colonialism and the Emergence of the Mizo Minority Nationality in Indian Politics," in J. V. Hluna, Sangkima, and Romesh Buragohain (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):59-62 at 60.
- <sup>27</sup> This process has not taken place in other territories. In Manipur, for example, the various Kuki tribes have assiduously sought to retain their separate dialects.
- <sup>28</sup> Downs, "Christian Conversion Movements," 173.
- <sup>29</sup> Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 39.
- <sup>30</sup> K. Thanzauva, "Introduction," in K. Thanzauva (ed.), *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Mizoram: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989):5.
- <sup>31</sup> Lal Dena, *Christian Mission*, chapter 2.
- <sup>32</sup> Lal Dena, *Christian Mission*, 65-70.
- <sup>33</sup> Thangchina, "Christian Unity," 110. Khup Za Go, *A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations*, 52 records a membership of 57,628 for the UPC in North East India. L. Jeyaseelan, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur* (New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House, 1996) reports that the 1981 census showed a total population of 134,766 individuals in the Churachandpur District of Manipur, of whom 118,887 were recorded as Christians (83). Only 3,500 of these were members of the United Pentecostal Church (106).
- <sup>34</sup> Thangchina, "Christian Unity," 113.

<sup>35</sup> Lal Dena, *Christian Mission*, 102.

<sup>36</sup> A. G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 2nd ed. (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1977 [1949]):223.

<sup>37</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 223.

<sup>38</sup> Lalsawma, *Four Decades of Revivals, the Mizo Way* (Aizawl, Mizoram: published by the author, 1994):213-214. Also see Goswami, "By-product."

<sup>39</sup> Lal Dena, *Christian Mission*, 110-111; Chatterji, *Mizo Chief*, 9, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Goswami and Mukherjee, "The Mizo Political Movement," 136.

<sup>41</sup> Foreign Department Report on Chin Lushai Hills, September 1892 (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1980); Petition from the Zo Re-unification Organization, Central Zone, Aizawl, to the Prime Minister of Great Britain for "Re-Unification of Chin-Lushai Land into One Administrative Unit," dated 29 January 1992.

<sup>42</sup> Downs, "Christian Conversion Movements," 168-169.

<sup>43</sup> S. Prim-Vaiphei, "Who We Are/ Who Are We," in H. Kamkhenhang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986).

<sup>44</sup> S. Chatterjee, "Minority Nationalities of N.E. India—the Mizos," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):42.

<sup>45</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 78-83 identifies ethnic rivalries among the various communities in Mizoram and the persistence of tribal loyalties in elections.

<sup>47</sup> D. K. Chaudhuri, "Changes in Tribal Societies in Tripura—the Lushai Reform Movement (1946-1950)," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):68; V. Venkata Rao, T. S. Gangte, and K. B. Devi, *A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Vol. IV: Manipur* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co. Ltd., 1991):40; Lal Dena, "Some Anomalies of Colonial Rule, 1891-1919," in Lal Dena (ed.), *History of Modern Manipur 1826-1949* (New Delhi: Orbit Publishers, 1990):81-82.

<sup>48</sup> Rev. Dr. Hawlngam Haokip, "Introduction," in H. Kamkhenhang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986):i-ii.

<sup>49</sup> James Herbert Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1940):159.

<sup>50</sup> P. S. Haokip, *Zale'n-Gam: The Kuki Nation* ("Zale'n-Gam": Kuki National Organisation, 1998):42.

<sup>51</sup> Haokip, *Zale'n-Gam*, 40.

<sup>52</sup> Population assessed as 30,670 in 1984: Lucy Zehol, *Ethnicity in Manipur: Experiences, Issues and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998):36.

<sup>53</sup> Population recorded at 78,883 in 1984: Zehol, *Ethnicity in Manipur*, 36.

<sup>54</sup> Zehol, *Ethnicity in Manipur*, 90; Khup Za Go, *A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations*, 81, 93-94.

<sup>55</sup> Weil, "Dual Conversion" refers to this conflict at 46. At this time, as they were in conflict with the Thadou, the group who had arrogated the term "Kuki" to themselves, the Paite temporarily sought identification and political alliance with the Nagas.

<sup>56</sup> I have observed the same situation among the Benei Menashe in Israel, with those who identify primarily as Mizo being critical of their neighbors from Manipur who persist in perpetuating their "petty" clan and tribal distinctions.

<sup>57</sup> Sawngtinlam, *The Tukbemsom Tribe* (Kangpokpi, Manipur: H. Seilal Press, n.d.):77; Prim-Vaiphei, "Who We Are," 23.

<sup>58</sup> J. N. Phukan, "The Late Home of Migration of the Mizos," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):8.

<sup>59</sup> Literally, "older sibling/younger sibling."

<sup>60</sup> Haokip, "Introduction," iv.

<sup>61</sup> I used the term "CHIKIM" in a presentation at an academic seminar in Mizoram in 1992 and was surprised to receive a submission from the floor requesting the word be altered to "CHIKIMI," to allow for a consonant and vowel from each of the words Chin, Kuki, and Mizo. When next I visited Manipur, I reported my experience to Mr. H. Thangjom who had initiated the use of the term CHIKIM. Mr. Thangjom responded that "CHIKIMI," would have no meaning, whereas "chikim" is understood to mean "all the clans" or "tribes" in various dialects.

<sup>62</sup> Prim-Vaiphei, "Who We Are," 22.

<sup>63</sup> H. Kamkhenthang, "Groping for Identity," 1-16 in H. Kamkhenthang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986):61. See also H. Kamkhenthang, *The Paite: A Transborder Tribe of India and Burma* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988):1-2 and Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, 148.

<sup>64</sup> Eliyahu Avichail, *The Tribes of Israel: The Lost and the Dispersed* (Jerusalem: Amishav, 1990):137-142.

<sup>65</sup> Weil, "Lost Israelites," 220.

<sup>66</sup> Tudor Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002); and Tudor Parfitt and Emanuela Trevisan Semi, *Judaizing Movements: Studies in the Margins of Judaism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> R. Pudaite, *The Education of the Hmar People* (Sielmat, Manipur: Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, 1963):21.

<sup>68</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, 93, 148.

<sup>69</sup> Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> Haokip, "Introduction," iv.

<sup>71</sup> E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1954).

<sup>72</sup> Weil, "Dual Conversion"; Weil, "Lost Israelites," 229. Notwithstanding Lian Tual's assertion, informants have indicated to me that this name is immediately recognizable as Paite or Tiddim Chin, regardless as to whether such a name might also occur in Jingphaw.

<sup>73</sup> Shalva Weil, *Beyond the Sambatyon: The Myth of the Ten Lost Tribes* (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1991):85; Hillel Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002):30-31; Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes*, 111-116.

<sup>74</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940).

<sup>75</sup> With a population recorded at 78,883 in 1984, in fact the Thadou were the largest of the twenty-three tribes recognized in Manipur and just slightly larger than the

largest Naga tribe, the Tangkhul, who numbered 76, 115: Zehol, *Ethnicity in Manipur*, 36.

<sup>76</sup> R. K. Das, *Manipur Tribal Scene: Studies in Society and Change* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1985):46.

<sup>77</sup> Chatterjee, "Minority Nationalities," 42.

<sup>78</sup> B. B. Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest—A Study in Politicisation of Culture* (Jaipur: Aalekh Publishers, 1979):105.

<sup>79</sup> B. Lalthangliana, "Mizo," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):7.

<sup>80</sup> Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 75; A. Dutta, "Ethnicity and Statehood in Mizoram," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):46; S. Thangkhagin, "Why Should We Be Called Zoumi," in H. Kamkhenthang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986):61.

<sup>81</sup> Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 30. Lehman suggests that the term zo "expresses their view of being backward and uncultivated" (see also 54-55). Thangkhagin, "Why Should We Be Called Zoumi," 64, however, asserts that Zou is the name of the ancestor of the tribes who regard themselves as zo.

<sup>82</sup> Thangkhagin, "Why Should We Be Called Zoumi," 55.

<sup>83</sup> Vumson, *Zo History*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> L. S. Gangte, "Who Are We?" in H. Kamkhenthang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986):47.

<sup>85</sup> Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 22; Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, Introduction and 109. In that vein, it is significant that Lorrain's *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, published in 1940, before the formal adoption of the term, includes an entry at 320: "Mi-zo, n. a Lushai; the Lushais. (*Lit.* Highlanders). Some use this name to include other neighbouring hill tribes." It is also instructive to see the way that Thangjom, who generally uses the term "CHIKIM" for all the CHIKIM group, finally comes out in favor of Mizo as the collective term, declaring, "Hallowed be thy name, Mizo, the blessed name": Thangjom, "Towards Constructive Destruction," p. 21. Thangjom avoids referring to "Mizoram," preferring to call it the "Lushai Hills District," a term that we have seen has not been in use officially since 1952, as he wishes to avoid associating the name Mizo with any one "administrative unit," in the CHIKIM habitat, since he wishes it to apply to all sections of the group, wherever they might reside.

<sup>86</sup> Dutta, "Ethnicity and Statehood in Mizoram," 45; Lalrimawia, "Inner Line (Mizoram): A Study in Historical Perspective," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):124-126.

<sup>87</sup> F. A. Quaraishi, *Christianity in the North Eastern Hills of South Asia—Social Impact and Political Implications* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: The University Press Ltd., 1987):41; Samra, "Buallawn Israel," 108.

<sup>88</sup> Chatterjee, "Mizoram Encyclopaedia," 203-205.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Chatterjee, "Mizoram Encyclopaedia," 203.

<sup>90</sup> Chatterjee, "Mizoram Encyclopaedia," 204.

<sup>91</sup> Dutta, "Ethnicity and Statehood," 45.

<sup>92</sup> Chatterjee, "Minority Nationalities," 43.

<sup>93</sup> Quaraishi, *Christianity in the North Eastern Hills*, 55. Robbins Burling, "Tribesmen and Lowlanders of Assam," in Peter Kunstadter (ed.), *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations*, Vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967):215-229, notes that when the Nagas fought to attain independence from India, "foreign missionaries were accused of encouraging the rebellion," since the leaders of the revolt were all Christians (221). Similarly, the Judaizing movement in Manipur and Mizoram has been regarded by some Indian nationalists and politicians, particularly members of the Communist Party, as part of a Jewish plot to subvert India, as in S. Berindranath, "Mythology of Zionist Propaganda: Mizos Are the 14<sup>th</sup> Lost Tribe of Israel!" *Blitz*, March 29, 1980, with the accusation that "some of those actively connected with the Underground Mizo National Front movement have been identified as having been trained in America and Israel." This attitude has resurfaced in 2005. Following the decision of the Sephardi Chief Rabbi to accept the Israelite claims of the Benei Menashe, Israeli rabbis were sent to India to formally convert members of the group to Judaism. These efforts were abruptly terminated as a consequence of protests from the Indian government that "Israel is trying to aggressively convert Indian citizens," Matthew Wagner and Herb Keinon, *Jerusalem Post Online Edition*, November 9, 2005.

<sup>94</sup> Quaraishi, *Christianity*, 57.

<sup>95</sup> Quaraishi, *Christianity*, 10.

<sup>96</sup> John Vanlal Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Mizo History Association, 1985):90-91.

<sup>97</sup> Despite the resentment of Christian encroachment in the tribal districts of North East India as "a legacy of the colonial West, a foreign doctrine implanted in their midst," Burling, "Tribesmen and Lowlanders of Assam," 220 notes that in 1963, the Indian government found it politically advantageous to take in tribal refugees from East Pakistan, many of them Christians, to highlight that India does not discriminate against any religion, whereas Pakistan discriminated against non-Muslims.

<sup>98</sup> R. C. Verma, *Indian Tribes Through the Ages* (New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1990). The CHIKIM tribes in general have the status of "scheduled tribes"—provided individuals register themselves as belonging to one of the named tribes recognized in a particular state. Their religious affiliation does not affect this status. Unfortunately for members of formerly untouchable castes who convert to Christianity, they are excluded from the advantages of scheduled caste status by a decree excluding anyone who professes a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism: Jose Kananaikil, *Scheduled Caste Converts and Social Disabilities: A Survey of Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1990). See R. K. Das, *Manipur Tribal Scene*, chapter 4 for an intriguing analysis of the situation of the Loi, who have worked hard to establish an identity for themselves as a scheduled caste of Manipur.

<sup>99</sup> Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 144.

<sup>100</sup> B. K. Roy-Burman, "Emergence of Mizo Nationality," in Dr. Romesh Buragohain, Dr. J. V. Hluna, and Dr. Sangkima (eds.), *Souvenir: International Seminar Aizawl Mizoram* (South Aizawl: Seminar Committee, International Committee Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):15-22, at 17.

<sup>101</sup> Chatterjee, "Mizoram Encyclopaedia," 449-450, 747.

<sup>102</sup> Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 144.

<sup>103</sup> Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 542.

<sup>104</sup> Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 157-162.

<sup>105</sup> Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval*, 98-99.

<sup>106</sup> Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval*, 101-103.

<sup>107</sup> Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval*, 103.

<sup>108</sup> I am thankful to Mr. J. K. Gangte, a prominent member of the Benei Menashe and a native of Chongmun, who discussed the matter with me. Mr. Gangte has written a mournful lament concerning this incident.

<sup>109</sup> Roy-Burman, "Emergence of Mizo Nationality," 21-22.

<sup>110</sup> A small sector of the Churachandpur District, centring on Vangai Village, was incorporated into Mizoram: see B. K. Dasgupta, "The Paite National Council," in K. S. Singh (ed.), *Tribal Movements in India*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982):125.

<sup>111</sup> Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 542; Tribal Research Institute, *The Tribes of Mizoram, a Dissertation* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1994):12-14.

<sup>112</sup> Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 450.

<sup>113</sup> B. K. Dasgupta, "The Paite National Council," 126-127, reports that in 1960 the Paite National Council in the Churachandpur District of Manipur submitted a manifesto to the Indian government calling for the creation of "Chinland" for "the reunification of the Chin people of India and Burma under one country." This Chinland was to take in all of Manipur, Mizoram, parts of the North Cachar Hills and Tripura, the Chittagong Hills of East Pakistan, the Arakan Hills, and adjacent areas in Burma. More recently, the Paite have lent their support to the creation of a "Zo-Gam" (Zomi Land) incorporating the same terrain. A similar vision of the same imagined nation, with yet a different name is seen in Haokip, *Zale'n-Gam: The Kuki Nation*.

<sup>114</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 223.

<sup>115</sup> Samra, "Buallawn Israel," 105-131; Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 188-191.

<sup>116</sup> Lemuel Henkhogin Haokip, "The Origins and Development of Judaism in North East India Upto the Present Day," in L. H. Haokip (ed.), *Judaism 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir* (Manipur: The Benei Menashe Council, 2001):20-28.

<sup>117</sup> Gideon Rei's companions in this journey were Simeongin Vaiphei and Rebecca Benjamin.

<sup>118</sup> Haokip, *Judaism 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir*, 24.

<sup>119</sup> This confusion is particularly evident among many of the people featured in Phillipe Stroun's 1997 film, *The Return of the Lost Tribe* filmed in Manipur and Mizoram. It is also evident in the book by Kailam Gideon Menashe, *The Lost Tribes in the World* (Churachandpur: published by the author, 1997). Ostensibly a follower of Judaism, Menashe's work is peppered with references to both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus, we learn, at 175, "was sent by Hashem to seek the lost ten tribes of Israel."

<sup>120</sup> Yosef Goell, "Forget the Lost Tribes, Aid Lost Souls," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 26, 1994.

<sup>121</sup> Jeyaseelan, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur*, 120.

<sup>122</sup> Haokip, *Judaism 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir*, 71.

<sup>123</sup> Yair Sheleg, "Amar: Bnei Menashe Are Descendants of Ancient Israelites," *Haaretz*, April 1, 2005.

<sup>124</sup> In the following pages, in the midst of quotations from Mawii, statements appearing in brackets are my comments on Mawii's words.

<sup>125</sup> Vumson, *Zo History*, 54.



<sup>142</sup> M. Kirti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Imphal: Manipur State Kala Akademi, 1980):300-301; Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East: Studies in the Formal Religions of Northern-India* (New Delhi: Manoharlal Publishers, 1984):50-61.

<sup>143</sup> In Manipur, some groups who have lived in the Imphal Valley for many generations have come to be absorbed into the dominant Meithei community, taking on the Meithei language and Hindu practices, while possibly maintaining some vestiges of their former tribal identities. Some families of the Manlun clan, originally members of the Zou tribe, belong to this category. Members of this group visited the remote Behiang Village on the Tiddim Road, close to the border with Burma, to meet with its chief, Pu Tongzapao Manlun seeking to learn about the Jewish faith that he followed. Notwithstanding their common roots, however, the two sides found themselves unable to communicate with each other. In Tripura, the Hlam/Halam tribe, who had lived there for centuries, had become partially Hinduized, while retaining their own language and Mizo-Kuki identity, and at least some of them participated in the Mizo uprising, see Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 448-449.

<sup>144</sup> Pudaite, *Education of the Hmar*, 63.

<sup>145</sup> Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 320.

<sup>146</sup> Prim-Vaiphei, "Who We Are? Who Are We?" 31.

<sup>147</sup> See Lal Dena, *Hmar Folk Tales* (New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House, 1995): ix; Hol Kho Lun Lungdim, "Israel/Jewish Theory of Our Origin—A Synopsis," in Lunminthang Haokip (ed.), *Kut Festival Souvenir 1991* (Imphal: State Level Kut Committee, 1991).

<sup>148</sup> Herbert C. Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House and New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1988):145. Syrian Jewish communities in Latin America follow similar rules.

<sup>149</sup> In private, the Nepalese man indicated to me that he would have preferred the appellation "Benei Naftali," romantically musing over whether the Nepalese might not in fact be descendants of the tribe of Naftali.

<sup>150</sup> Roy-Burman, "Emergence of Mizo Nationality," 21.

<sup>151</sup> See the article "Rabbinat Recognizes Bnei Menashe as 'Descendants of Israel,'" on Arutz 7 Israel National News, March 31, 2005; Yair Sheleg, "Amar: Bnei Menashe are descendants of ancient Israelites"; on [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com), April 1, 2005; Myer Samra, "Recognition for the Benei Menashe," address to the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, May 17, 2005.

<sup>152</sup> Mordecai Roshwald, "Who Is a Jew in Israel?" *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 12(2) (1970):233-266 provides a fascinating analysis of categories of inclusion and exclusion created by the interface between the Law of Return and *Halakhah* (rabbinical law), determining which people can or cannot claim citizenship in Israel, their civil, national, and religious status, and their ability to marry in the country.

<sup>153</sup> When members of an Israeli Beth Din visited Mizoram in September 2005 to formally induct members of the Benei Menashe into Judaism through conversion, hostility erupted among sections of the Mizo community. One prominent politician asked rhetorically: "How would Israelis respond if Christian missionaries went to Israel to convert their children." Although the rabbis had by this stage successfully converted around 218 Benei Menashe in Mizoram, their activities had created a diplomatic incident between India and Israel. The rabbis' permits to enter Manipur were withdrawn so that they could not carry out conversions for Benei Menashe in that state who wished to be fully recognized as Jews. For an account of this

<sup>126</sup> The Thadou, the largest of the Kuki tribes in Manipur, have only moved there during the mid-nineteenth century, having been forced out of what is now Mizoram by the invading Lusei tribes. Das, *Manipur Tribal Scene*, 45.

<sup>127</sup> Pudaite, *The Education of the Hmar*.

<sup>128</sup> Hol Kho Lun Lhungdim, *Kuki Culture and Origin* (M. Phil. Dissertation Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1983): 159-161; Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 222-224; Zaitchanchungi, *Israel-Mizo Identity*, 68-69.

<sup>129</sup> Thangchina, "Christian Unity," 110.

<sup>130</sup> Ratu was already in existence and featured in Mizoram's history of Revivalism. A Ratu villager, Puma, introduced a song-form that became popular during the first wave of Revivalism (1906-1908). See Lalsawma, *Four Decades of Revivals*, 45-46.

<sup>131</sup> Samra, "Buallawn Israel."

<sup>132</sup> Although Mawii here talks of Jews in Ratu, these in fact were Chala's Israelites, who continued to follow Jesus.

<sup>133</sup> In Mizoram, Judaism and "Messianic Judaism" are associated with poverty and low status, whereas a significant number of better-off and influential people in Manipur have adopted Judaism, hence Mawii's initial inclination to look down on the "Israelites."

<sup>134</sup> The fact that Vairengte is a border town may explain why Ngurliamthang apparently still spoke Hmar rather than the dominant dialect of Mizoram.

<sup>135</sup> This appears to be a practice carried on from Pu Chala's time. Weil, *Lost Israelites*, 228 quotes from the Rev. Dr. C. L. Hminga that, "There were several people going round the villages collecting names of those who would like to join the migration party. There was time when 'migration into Israel' was in the lips of almost everybody in Lushai."

<sup>136</sup> According to Reverend G. J. Hnamte, most of Pu Chala's original followers in Ratu are now members of his Church of God (Seventh Day), a denomination, which in practice is very similar to the pattern set up by Pu Chala, except that it does not hold to the idea that the Mizos are descendants of Israelites. See Samra, "Buallawn Israel," 113-115.

<sup>137</sup> This is Gideon Rei, in whose house we met. As noted earlier, Gideon visited Israel in 1981 to study Judaism. While the Judaizing congregations in Manipur and Mizoram raised the cost of his airfares, Rabbi Avichail and his *Amishav* organization arranged for his needs and those of the two colleagues who went with him, while in Israel.

<sup>138</sup> Myer Samra, "The Tribe of Manasseh: 'Judaism' in the Hills of Manipur and Mizoram," *Man in India* 71(1) (1991): 183-202; Zaitchanchungi, *Israel-Mizo Identity*, 29-30, gives further examples of the use of the name, as do Parfitt, *Lost Tribes*, 138, and Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 59, 80, 164, and 175. Many of the Christian Israelite groups in Mizoram now assert that they hail from the tribe of Ephraim. When attempts are made to bring all the Sabbatarians/Judaizers together, reference is made to "the sons of Joseph."

<sup>139</sup> In the same way, Mizos use "Davida" for David, "Paula" for Paul. Feminine names end with an "-i." Hence, one has names such as "Miriami," while English "Roberta" would become "Robertai."

<sup>140</sup> Samra, "Buallawn Israel," 120. However, Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 189 records that, "As far back as 1945, a Hmar named Zakaithanga had been told from heaven that Manmasi (the putative first ancestor of the Hmar) was Manasseh."

<sup>141</sup> Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 156, 192.

controversy, see the *Wikipedia* entry on Bnei Menashe and Matthew Wagner and Herb Keinon's article in the *Jerusalem Post Online Edition*, November 9, 2005.

<sup>154</sup> In the year 2000, I had been interviewing an elderly woman, in the home of a prominent local family affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. My informant had been a member of Challianthanga's Buallawn Israel and had since embraced Judaism. The mistress of the house was present in the room as we spoke. My informant and I were treated cordially, until I asked her how difficult it had been for her to put aside belief in Jesus as the Messiah. When my informant responded "Not at all," the mistress of the house flew into a rage, shrieking that it was unthinkable for a Mizo to forsake the Christ. Needless to say, the interview came to an abrupt and embarrassing halt at this point.



## Sita and Sarah: Female Complementarity or Special Revelation

By Madhuri M. Yadlapati

Hindu and Jewish traditions both have emphasized the religious role of married women in terms of complementarity to their husbands' responsibilities and have restricted women's responsibilities to the private sphere of the household. To what degree have Sita of the Ramayana and Sarah of the book of Genesis been overlooked as potential models of covenantal responsibility in their respective traditions? Highlighting the virtues of sexual purity, marital fidelity, and fertility in relation to divine revelation, this article asks whether their mythologies restrict women to raising more male children who will continue the covenant or dharmic responsibility or offer correctives to independent individualistic religion by teaching all of us, male and female, that parenting is a religious responsibility. One presupposition here is that aside from those rare persons who do something amazing for the world's population, those individuals who cure cancer, create a vaccine for avian flu, or develop a means of renewable energy, the vast majority of us who are parents will find that the greatest impact we have upon our community will be the children we raise. Parenting does not restrict or isolate individuals to the private sphere at all, but plunges them into a community larger than themselves, as anyone knows who has realized that the stay-at-home parent knows more people in their hometown as parents of their respective children than the conventional working parent who stays in one office all day long.

### Sita: The Mythic Rendition

Sita's special privilege with respect to the divine begins with the story of her birth and is captured in two tests or proofs of her virtue. According to Valmiki's account in the Ramayana, she emerges from the surface of the earth, born from no female womb, so she is called Sita, the furrow. She is said to have celestial beauty and qualities and therefore could be won only by one with great manliness or Rama.

After their marriage, Rama is unfairly exiled to the forest for fourteen years, and Sita dutifully demands to accompany him. While in exile in the forest, Sita is kidnapped by the evil *rakshasa* Ravana. Rama eventually rescues her with the help of his brother Lakshmana, General Hanuman, and his army of monkeys. He defeats Ravana's evil army and kills Ravana. However, once he has her back, Rama questions her reputation after she had been living in Ravana's home. In this, her first truth-test, Sita immolates herself, but Agni, the god of fire, refuses to harm her because she is so pure. Her sexual purity or marital fidelity, which is connected directly to her devotion and loyalty as a wife, is so fantastically great that she has gained supernatural powers—the god of fire himself cannot touch her and even defends her, publicly proving her purity and fidelity.<sup>1</sup> At first, Rama accepts her, but later upon hearing the gossip in his kingdom mocking his generous acceptance of his wife after she'd been in another man's house, he again rejects her and banishes her from his kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

At this point, Sita takes refuge in a hermitage and there gives birth to twin boys, Kusha and Lava. Years later, the boys are sent to Rama's court during a great sacrifice. When Rama realizes they are his sons, he summons Sita to the court and asks for some public proof of her purity, ostensibly to satisfy his subjects. Sita then swears, in her second truth-test, that if she is in fact innocent, the earth, her divine mother, would open up and receive her back forever.

She of course disappears into the earth, having proven her purity and fidelity beyond any possible doubt. Rama is miserable, having lost his wife for good, and never re-marries, gives away great charity, and rules his kingdom according to the rule of dharma (Right). During this "Ramrajya," it is said that the entire kingdom was happy and healthy and enjoyed economic and political prosperity. No one died at the wrong time, no one was sick; in fact, there were no violations of dharma at all.

### **Purity, Fertility, Divine Revelation, and Kingdom**

In Sita's case, sexual purity, marital fidelity, and matriarchy are intimately connected. For example, it is her extreme strength of purity and devotion to her husband that gain her supernatural power. Both truth-tests attest to this supernatural power. In the first, she is proven pure but Rama still banishes her from his kingdom. Even though he supposedly believes her, he has a greater responsibility to maintain his mandate of rule. The tale is often told in such a way that Rama chooses to sacrifice his own marital happiness for the sake of promoting a normative social order for his subjects. The rule of dharma is such a normative order that there emerges in this story at least no space for corrective action or reform of what might be considered normative.<sup>3</sup>

When Sita is considered the protagonist in the story, however, her purity and fidelity acquire an active responsibility for the social good. She must be exiled in order to maintain the appearance of an appropriate husbandly response to her questionable reputation. In this case, the rule of dharma functions in a legalistic fashion, according to which one's crime must be punished in order to maintain the rationality of rule. The punishment of a crime functions not just as a consequence, but it serves to undo the wrong that was committed that first upset the rule of Right (or dharma). In the case of Sita's banishment from Rama's kingdom, it is not just her actual purity that is in question, but her public reputation. The king must be respected at all costs, even if this means banishing his innocent wife. Social order and the mandate of rule demand that subjects respect their king. Sita's exile serves the larger social order by enabling this respect.

The second truth-test occurs near the end of the story, when she and her sons return to the court. Popular readings again depict Rama sympathetically. He himself believes her, as he always has, but he now needs some public demonstration of her innocence in order to satisfy public suspicion. While her first truth-test was defensive, the second is uncharacteristically assertive. She offers to prove her innocence publicly, but with this absolute and public proof, Rama would lose her forever. Again, Sita's purity is guaranteed by divine revelation for all to see. Divine powers vouch for her purity and fidelity. However, this second truth-test is far more assertive, and Sita in effect enjoys the last word.

Like her earlier exile, which secures the kingdom's stability, this second divine proof of her fidelity and her subsequent departure, functions again to secure order. Following her departure, although Rama is miserable, he rules his kingdom according to perfect dharma, and the result is the legendary Ramrajya, a utopian period of rule during which the entire kingdom enjoys economic prosperity, political stability, and physical health and happiness. This utopia is secured by Sita's departure, which itself is made necessary by the absolute proof of her purity. Her purity and fidelity are so extremely strong that they act as fertile ground for Rama's kingdom as a whole. Sita's fertility has not to do with bearing large numbers of children through a physical womb, but with providing in her character as wife and queen a symbolic field in which Rama can sow the seeds of Ramrajya.

Even common discourse teaches that if the women in a family are unfaithful, then the entire community suffers—dharma is broken. Sita's perfect and divinely proven purity guarantee the Ramrajya, even though this guarantee requires her own self-sacrifice. Another key element here is the importance of divine incarnation in human form. The setting for the Ramayana as a whole is said to be the adharmic rule of Ravana in Lanka. The gods need to stop him and so Vishnu comes to earth in the form of Rama for this purpose. Sita is needed as the incarnation of Vishnu's consort Lakshmi. Sita must marry Rama, they must be exiled in the forest, and she must be kidnapped in order to provide dharmic justification for him to wage this war and kill Ravana. The mythic elements of plot are themselves guided by the larger need to enforce the rule of dharma. Within this interpretation of a larger dharmic need for the incarnation of Rama and Sita, Sita becomes the primary protagonist to secure the earthly kingdom of Rama. Divine revelation uses her purity to bolster the human world with supernatural intervention and restore the rule of dharma on earth.<sup>4</sup>

### **Yahweh, Sarah, and a Covenant of Fertility**

The nature of Sarah's privileged revelation of the divine has much more literally to do with fertility than does Sita's, as Yahweh miraculously enables her fertility at the impossible age of ninety in order to guarantee future generations of the favored nation of Israel. Renaming her as Sarah, or princess, indicates Yahweh's intention for her role as matriarch of an emerging nation. The circumstances surrounding her relationship with Yahweh throughout Genesis have to do with her fertility, sexual purity, and motherhood. When Yahweh visits their home in the desert with two other strangers and says that Sarah will bear a child in the coming year, Sarah laughs. When confronted, she denies the laughter, but Yahweh insists that she did indeed laugh. She is not punished for the laughter or for a lack of faith but instead enjoys the privilege of repetition of God's promise.

When a doubtful Abraham asks Yahweh to fulfill his promises through his son Ishmael, Yahweh then promises to protect Ishmael as a favor to Abraham, but not as part of the covenant he has established with him. Yahweh's covenant is not with Abraham's children in general, but with Sarah's children in particular. Yahweh intends Sarah to be the princess and the matriarch of Israel.

One issue that emerges in this discussion is that Abraham's covenant must mean something miraculous. When Sarah gives the younger woman Hagar to Abraham, she is attempting to make Abraham's fatherhood happen by natural means. Roslyn Lacks addresses the need for the biblical Yahweh to clearly articulate His divine powers over other local gods and goddesses to facilitate His emergence as the greatest deity and indeed the only deity worthy of worship. She explains that the string of barren women in the Hebrew Bible (Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah) reinforces the concept of a transcendent deity, the God who is outside and above nature. For Canaanite and Babylonian women, fertility rested in the powers of the goddess. By miraculously making barren women fertile and matriarchs of a great nation, Yahweh demonstrates His transcendent power over nature and declares once and for all His ascendancy over the personified fertility goddesses who are tied to nature. Yahweh also obligates the entire nation to His own miraculous intervention in history. Sarah's miraculous fertility binds and marks the resulting nation of Israel as belonging to the Lord God.<sup>5</sup>

Sarah's miraculous fertility and her bearing Isaac also is not to be read simply as a fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. Judith Baskin remarks that the biblical commandment to *go forth and be fruitful* was read by rabbis to apply only to

men, not to women. Abraham's obligation to have progeny is satisfied with Ishmael's birth to Hagar. In this context, Isaac's birth becomes not simply God's intervention to satisfy his own commandment, but instead, it takes on the character of a gift of grace or privilege. Making Sarah fertile gives her the enjoyment of bearing children, of becoming a mother in the particular literal sense. On the one hand, fertility needs to be a miraculous intervention to support Yahweh's ascendancy as ultimate transcendent deity and provide miraculous foundation for this covenant with Israel, and on the other hand, His covenant honors the marriage of Abraham and Sarah. By restricting the covenantal privilege to the children of this marriage, Yahweh is also declaring His ascendancy over the multiple nature deities and privileging the progeny of a legitimate marriage over the relatively unrestricted fertility that is granted by natural forces. This demonstrates again the biblical account of Yahweh as the transcendent deity of a nation, that is, an emerging society that is to be guided henceforth by ethical rules and not simply natural laws. Yahweh not only needs to perform a miracle to establish His sovereignty, but He is also literally fertilizing, in Sarah, the foundation of a loyal and law-abiding nation led by Abraham.

### **Wife or Sister? Human Lies and Divine Consequences**

This issue of Yahweh's intervention to honor the marriage of Abraham and Sarah leads us to an earlier instance of Yahweh's protection of Sarah's sexual purity and marital fidelity. When Abraham takes Sarah to Egypt, he tells her not to reveal that she is his wife, because the Egyptians would then kill him in order to possess her (Genesis 12:11-13). Introducing her as his sister, Abraham is treated well by the pharaoh who favors Sarah. However, Yahweh punishes the pharaoh for unknowingly having taken Abraham's wife into his harem. The Pharaoh then returns Sarah to Abraham and sends them away with all their new possessions. While Yahweh punishes the pharaoh to protect Sarah's sexual purity, He does not punish Abraham for putting her in that risky position in the first place. In fact, Abraham clearly benefits from what transpires. After all, by telling this lie, he is given flocks, oxen, donkeys, camels, and slaves, all of which he is allowed to take with him. Abraham's actions represent a prostitution of his wife for his own protection and for his material gain. Because Yahweh does not rebuke Abraham in any way for his lie, but only intervenes to safeguard Sarah's sexual purity, He clearly endorses Abraham's actions. In the end, this prostitution of his wife yields Abraham enough resources to establish a new life in the desert.

### **Comparative Elements and Questions**

Two comparative elements emerge from the discussion of the stories of Sita and Sarah. One is divine intervention to protect the woman's sexual purity and guarantee her moral fertility as a queen or as a matriarch of a nation. The other is the long-term divine goal of creating a great nation that is a faithful and ethical society. In Sita's case, the motif of purity and fertility is doubly clear. When Rama suspects her faithfulness, Sita takes determinate action to prove herself and is defended by divine forces. In Sarah's case, Yahweh intervenes to protect her sexual purity and marital fidelity, which were put at risk by her own husband's foolish lie that she was his sister. In Sarah's case, there is clearly no suspicion of her fidelity. Whereas the divine defense of Sita's purity was due directly to her own virtue, Yahweh protects Sarah's purity with a larger plan of creating a nation of Israel through the marriage of Abraham and Sarah. Another instance in which Yahweh intervenes to dispel popular suspicion of Sarah is when, after Isaac's birth, Abraham



orders a great feast and invites people from all over the land to witness this miraculous work of his God in their lives. The Midrash explains that many people suspected that Abraham had simply taken someone else's child and was proclaiming him his and Sarah's own. So Abraham tells Sarah to open her clothing so that they may all see her breasts overflowing with milk. According to the Midrash, then, queens and great ladies from all over the land brought their children to be suckled by Sarah, because surely there was no greater fortune than to be suckled by such a miraculous and blessed lady. So in that case, as well, Yahweh's causing milk to flow unrestricted from her breasts served as a public miracle to prove Sarah's true story of giving birth at the age of ninety.

For both Sita and Sarah, the divine defense of their purity and virtue serves the higher purpose of guaranteeing both their marital fidelity and guaranteeing the public trust in their marital fidelity, both of which together act to secure the moral and royal foundations of a divinely blessed kingdom or nation. In both cases, the specific interventions are designed to serve the ultimate goal of God of securing that kingdom. Another similarity is that the divine defense of each woman is made necessary by her own husband's suspicion or irresponsible lie. Divine defense can be interpreted either as God's complicity in a prostitution of the wife for some larger benefit or as God's stepping in to clean up the mess made by foolish husbands. Either God is complicit in the prostitution of the women, or God is protecting them from their husbands' foolishness. However, the importance given to the larger divine plan, for Israel as a blessed nation or for dharmic order to be restored, lends greater support to the former interpretation—that God approves of the mens' actions in both cases, but then intervenes to protect or defend the women at the last point.

In His actions with respect to Abraham and Sarah, Yahweh is clearly building a covenant with the nation of Israel, which will be loyal to him alone and which is promised greatness. In the Ramayana, the result of all the events around Rama is the Ramrajya, a period of unparalleled political harmony and economic prosperity, during which dharma is perfectly observed. The events of the epic as a whole, however, also revolve around the divine or absolute rule of dharma. For example, the evil king Ravana of Lanka needed to be destroyed, so the gods in heaven decided to send Vishnu to earth as a mortal Rama in order to defeat him. Sita is commonly considered Lakshmi (Vishnu's consort) reborn. The supernatural circumstances of Sita's birth, discussed earlier, support the rule of dharma, which holds that a symbolic union of earth goddess and human king results in a great and powerful kingdom. Moreover, Sita must be born with extraordinary qualities in order to attract Rama and marry him. They must be exiled into the forest so that she may be easily kidnapped by Ravana. While they are exiled in the forest, she must be kidnapped by Ravana in order to spur Rama's war against him. It is only because Sita is kidnapped by Ravana that Rama decides to wage war against Ravana. This war is necessary to defeat Ravana, remove him from power, and restore the rule of order, that is, the order of dharma, to the world. This restoration of dharmic order through the military defeat of Ravana is the entire reason for Rama's life on earth. Sita's character and actions are designed around this ultimate goal. In their case, the restoration of dharmic order institutes the Ramrajya for all the people to enjoy, except, of course, for Sita and Rama. As a result of her second truth-test, Sita is received back into her divine mother, the earth, and disappears from the world. Rama remains on earth and rules as a righteous king, but he is forever miserable because of the loss of his wife. He never re-marries according to the myths, but lives a long life of ruling this great kingdom. The Ramrajya itself, although not for

their own enjoyment, depends on both their actions, specifically on Sita's purity and fertility, which then ensures her husband's mandate of rule.

What is behind this use of women's fertility as a ground of divine intervention? In other words, are Sita and Sarah enjoying a special privilege of divine revelation or are they being used, in the worst way, for a larger purpose that has very little to do with them? More generally speaking, are their religious roles ultimately relational, as a means to an end, or are they revelational, as truth-telling or truth-teaching? On one hand, in the Genesis accounts of Sarah, she is given the very personal joy of being a mother at the age of ninety-one. She does simply enjoy the emotional pride of being a mother. She is renamed Sarah, which means princess, her purity is protected by divine intervention before she gives birth to Isaac, she is not reprimanded in any way for her harsh treatment of Hagar and Ishmael, and then she even enjoys the public testament to the miracle when her breasts overflow with milk, disproving all the suspicions that other people may have had that Abraham was simply claiming another child as his and Sarah's. These are all marks of a personal privileged relationship with God. Yahweh does all these for Sarah's benefit without really asking anything of her in return. In contrast, Abraham has several religious responsibilities to fulfill.<sup>6</sup>

However, when we put these events side by side with the treatment of Sita's character, birth, actions, and emotions, all of which seem clearly to be directed at enacting this drama of what must happen on earth to restore dharma, a functionalist interpretation of both women as means to an end becomes more feasible. In the Ramayana, Rama and Sita both serve as actors in this incarnational drama to restore order. To some degree, although they are the principal actors in the drama, they seem not to be protagonists as much as actors playing the necessary predetermined roles. In the resulting Ramrajya, dharmic order is restored to earth, and the people prosper, but Rama seems to be more of a tragic hero, serving this larger purpose for the greater good, but never regaining Sita. When Sita is then deified in popular practice and held to be an exemplar of womanhood and wifely devotion, women are taught the value of self-sacrifice. Each individual woman's sexual purity becomes defined as the backbone of a moral society as a whole. Clearly, even though there are clear elements of revelational privilege in both these stories, those are not the elements that have dominated popular imagination.

Rather than simply dismiss this functionalist interpretation of women as wombs to produce future generations, let us ask what lessons can be derived from such an essentialist interpretation of women's responsibilities as mothers. Could Sita and Sarah represent worthy models of religious responsibility? In this case, the lesson of relationality, of our religious responsibilities lying not in our independent individualist actions, but in our responsibilities for others, applies to everyone and urges the fatal importance of personal virtue and parenting. Could these stories not serve as correctives for the dominant pattern of thinking about human agency as proactive and a will to power and instead teach us all to be more self-sacrificing, a virtue that is further enabled through an intimate relationship with God and divine revelation?

Struggling with the essentialism implied in seeing these women's roles and responsibilities primarily in terms of motherhood, I want to conclude with a few reflections. First, if Sita and Sarah are recognized as humans first, and not reduced to gender, they serve as models for male and female parents. They should be read as models of the religious responsibility of parenting and living for others over self-concerned living. Sita and Sarah do serve as models, albeit richly ambiguous models, of covenantal responsibility. Covenant implies obligations on both sides.

1. *They are asked to be self-sacrificing for the greater good.* This is of course a religious responsibility and a fairly typical religious ethic for men and women.

2. *Their self-sacrifice is demanded in the context of their sexuality and fertility.* This focus on sexuality and fertility as the essential characteristic of females is consistent with the historical contexts in which many sacred texts were established. Moreover, it is not unusual today.

3. *They enjoy the privilege of divine revelation and God defends and guarantees their purity, virtue, or fertility.* Readers do not have to retreat far in history to recognize the pressures falling asymmetrically upon women to be chaste until marriage and then profusely fertile after marriage. In those tragic cases where chastity and fertility do not happen, for whatever reason, women virtually everywhere today experience themselves too often at the least as "incomplete" women and at the worst as bearers of shame and humiliation, or even victims of violence.

Given this reflection on the tangible pains and pressures on so many women, what other context should divine defense address? Many women experience pressure to be chaste and fertile. In the examples of Sita and Sarah, God deliberately intervenes to protect and defend the women in precisely these contexts: God protects their purity; God enables their fertility; God defends their reputations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> By sexual purity and marital fidelity, I mean two different and distinct things, both of which apply together in this case. Sexual purity, for example, can be destroyed by rape, where marital fidelity would then stay intact. In the stories of Sita and Sarah, however, it is not only marital fidelity, but the exaggeration of sexual purity that is linked with marital fidelity and further into an extreme sort of wifely devotion in a larger sense. Sita's purity itself is legendary, as she refused to let Hanuman who arrives to rescue her on Rama's behalf, carry her out of Ravana's land, lest she be touched by another man. See later discussion of Genesis 12 in which Sarah's purity is preserved by Yahweh when she is taken into the harem of the Egyptian pharaoh, and he and his household are all afflicted, and he cannot handle her.

<sup>2</sup> This second exile of Sita to the forest is contained in a sequel to the earlier story and is considered by some not to be authentic to Valmiki's original. R. K. Narayan, for example, in his English translation of Kamban's Tamil rendition of Valmiki's epic, does not include it, but instead concludes the story with Rama's coronation in Ayodhya with Sita at his side. However, this second exile of Sita is well-known and recited, especially how her twin sons were raised in the forest by the sage Valmiki and confront Rama only when they're young men. It may well be a later addition to the original epic poem, as was common with the Mahabharata, in which later additions or revisions uniformly seem to be far more suspicious of women and are concerned that social order might be disrupted by any and all kinds of female self-assertion or impropriety. It is in later versions of the epics that women are portrayed far more negatively and with suspicion as the lesser sex, as weak in mind, loose-tongued, gossiping and nagging, and needing to be kept in a proper place as complements to their husbands and not as individuals with integrity of identity on their own account.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Falk analyzes, in her essay, "Draupadi and the Dharma," how the other great Indian epic, the Mahabharata, does address the ambiguities of the rule of

dharma. The plot of the epic itself develops as some difficult moral choice emerges for the characters, in which both options are appropriate dharmic behavior, but following one would break the other. Falk addresses the particular case of how the figure of Draupadi, as a woman and a wife of Yudhishtira, functions dramatically as a mouthpiece for revealing just such ambiguities within dharma itself. She represents a counterpoint to highlight the problems in the actions of her husband Yudhishtira, who is commonly cited to be a model of dharma, a son of dharma. Her marriage to five brothers itself represents one of these ambiguities in dharmic law. When Arjuna wins her hand in marriage and brings her home and calls to his mother what he has won, his mother Kunti calls out for him to share his prize with his brothers. A mother's command must be followed over the other dharmic law against a woman's polygamy, even when she clearly commanded something without intending precisely this result.

<sup>4</sup> David Kinsley, in his book *Hindu Goddesses*, illustrates the mythic tradition older than Valmiki of idealizing a marriage between a human king and an earth goddess portrayed as fertility. The union of the two is understood to result in political stability and economic prosperity of the highest kind. This makes sense of course, as when the land is fertile, crops succeed, and the community enjoys security. The union with an earth fertility goddess is said to make the king stronger and attest to his manliness. Mythically as well, such a union would represent a marriage of supernatural and natural, or divine earth and humanity, which engenders the rule of dharma, supported by divine revelation or intervention and enacted by human free will.

<sup>5</sup> See Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) for a thorough discussion of the claims made by the God of Genesis over human sexuality and fertility.

<sup>6</sup> In giving Abraham many religious responsibilities, Yahweh is of course not just demanding more of him, but putting him in a position of greater privilege. Giving or sharing responsibility with someone usually implies one's respect for them and for their abilities. Therefore, the fact that Yahweh gives gifts freely to Sarah, while demanding certain things in return from Abraham attests to a greater regard for Abraham and a more childish view of Sarah. (One gives gifts freely to children, without expecting anything in return. One enters covenantal relationships with responsible adults.)

## Competing Discourses: Nazis in Tibet and Jews in India

By Peter Levenda

### Argument

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, two discourses concerning racial and ethnic origins in Asia have competed for academic and popular attention. The first was the alternately fascinating and outlandish claims for the existence of the ten Lost Tribes of Israel in places as far removed from Israel as China and India, as well as in Great Britain and the New World. The second was the insistence by a group of German and other "Nordic" academics that the origin of the "Aryan" race was to be found in northern India and Tibet. Ironically, it would seem that the origin of the conflict between Jews and non-Jews had been situated in the same part of the world, in Asia—albeit by entirely different schools of thought and with totally different agendas and with horrendous results. In more recent times the former narrative has taken precedence but not without the tragic consequences of the Holocaust as the latter narrative struggled to impose its own view of history, archaeology, and anthropology upon the world.

### Historical Background

It is possible that the origin of the debate over ancient origins may one day be traced to the influence of Darwinian theory and its explosive impact on the cosmological and theological systems of Judaism and Christianity. Charles Darwin—in describing the process of evolution—brought into question the cherished beliefs of many Western monotheists in the concept of Genesis: that the world (and with it, humanity) was created in a process that took six days and that human beings were themselves created full blown from clay. Once the basic cosmological structure of Genesis was questioned, the entire edifice of Western religion was in danger of collapsing. Or so it seemed at the time (and still does, to a large extent). We need only refer to the tremendous impact on Western civilization of the theories of Copernicus and Galileo in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to understand how deeply Darwin was considered a threat to established religious thinking in the nineteenth century.

A reaction to Darwin's theories was to be found in the writings of Mme. Helena Blavatsky, a Russian-born medium and philosopher and some time intelligence agent whose *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) were to have such an amazing impact on European (and to some extent Indian) esoteric thought. Taking a page from Darwin, she managed to appropriate the idea of evolution and develop a spiritual dimension to it that satisfied a need in those who were threatened by what appeared to be the wholly materialistic and mechanistic approach of Darwin and to elevate it to a loftier sphere of races, root races, and the concept of spiritual evolution.

Unfortunately, these ideas could be misunderstood and misapplied. If humanity is indeed undergoing a spiritual—as well as physical—evolution, then it may be supposed that some humans are more evolved than others. Darwin's ideas of "survival of the fittest" could then be taken out of context and applied in a pragmatic way: the deliberate and cold-blooded eradication of the weak to ensure the survival of the strong.

Blavatsky's ideas appealed to the esoterically inclined, for the paranoia that is at the root of much occultism can be projected onto such ideas as political conspiracies and suppressed documents and secret texts. If Darwin was correct, then it stood to reason that the Church knew this all along and had decided to keep evolution secret in order to defend its temporal power and to restrict access to the process of spiritual evolution to its own initiates. What Blavatsky offered was a way for those outside the system to peek behind the veil and see the truth for themselves and thus begin their own journey of spiritual evolution. Indeed, her two principal texts—*The Secret Doctrine* and *Isis Unveiled*—promised just this type of access by their very titles.

A population in shock from Darwin's (and other) attacks on organized religion found itself in the position of being able to question *all* received wisdom. During the Renaissance and to some extent the Reformation, this was typified by the attempts of the Christian Cabbalists—including Isaac Newton, who devoted much of his life to an attempt to "decode" the Bible—to peek behind the Veil of Isis to see the inner workings of Nature and the secrets encoded in the Bible. By the *fin-de-siecle*, this had extended to include the works of critics who questioned the basic tenet of Christian faith: the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the midst of all of this questioning and secret-seeking, two main—at times contradictory, at times complementary—discourses fought for dominance over the popular imagination. The first was the idea, first broached in the eighteenth century but which took on steam by the end of the nineteenth century, that the ten Lost Tribes of Israel lived and worked among us. In part suggested by the claims of Joseph Smith, Jr.—the magician and occultist who became the founder of Mormonism—that the Lost Tribes had found themselves in the Americas, the idea was amplified by armchair archaeologists, etymologists, and epigraphers who claimed to have found evidence for the Lost Tribes in everything from geographical place-names to rituals, beliefs, and artifacts all over the world. It is almost too cruel to describe this as pseudoscience, since the methods employed were those of fledgling disciplines that had yet to find their way as hard sciences. The origins of archaeology as a discipline can only be traced to about 1829 at the establishment of an Institute for Archaeological Correspondence in Rome and, after all, it was the amateur archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann who discovered Troy in 1873. As it became known that discrete groups or clans of Jews had been found in India and China, the idea that the ten Lost Tribes were no longer a romantic notion of biblical history but a verifiable phenomenon took hold. If some heretofore isolated groups of Jews had been found as far away as Cochin and Kaifeng in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, then it could be conjectured that the Jewish exile had dispersed the tribes to the far corners of the earth, corners that might include the Americas as well as Asia and Africa. (Ironically, this concept would be used *against* the Jews by anti-Semitic organizations such as Christian Identity in North America, which would claim that white people were not only the *real* Israelites but the sworn enemy of the tribes of Judah!)

The second discourse was based more specifically on the inspiration of Blavatsky and her disciples, and it focused on the idea of spiritual evolution. Like the former case, this was based on amateur archaeology and etymology but with a serious new twist: the "science" of eugenics.

The romance of the idea of an Aryan race can be traced, ironically enough, to a work entitled *The Remains of Japhet, being historical enquiries into the affinity and origins of the European languages* by James Parsons, a fellow of the Royal Society who, in 1767 published this work: an attempt to prove that the languages of Europe

had as their origin the race of Japhet (as apposed to those of Shem—the Semites, the Arabs and Jews—and Ham—the African Egyptians and Cushites). Thus, it was an interpretation of Genesis that gave rise to a fascination with discovering the origins of the European “race.” Parsons was followed by Sir William Jones, a founder of the Royal Asiatic Society who, in 1796 and as Chief Justice of India, proclaimed that Sanskrit was the root of the European languages including Greek and Persian. Thus the die was cast. With Jones asserting that Sanskrit was the root language, and Parsons insisting that languages had their roots in specific races identified in the Bible, the dysfunctional marriage between race and language was blessed with numerous ill-bred and contentious offspring. Jews and Arabs, as Semites, belonged to one branch of the genetic family, Africans to another, and the white Europeans—united linguistically with their Sanskrit roots— belonged to the race of Japhet.

With Blavatsky, the race of Japhet was identified clearly with the Sanskrit language and, by extension, with ancient Sanskrit texts that developed (according to the scholarship of the day) out of northern India and Tibet. With a nod to Darwin, Blavatsky proclaimed that not only was the human race evolving but that the different races on the planet represented different levels of evolution with the Aryan race—that represented by Japhet and Sanskrit—at the highest level. This formed the core issue of her doctrine of *Theosophy*. The Vedas were obviously texts of ancient origin, and Blavatsky’s fascination with Hinduism is well known and amply documented, but this reverence extended to the Zoroastrian scriptures as well since they represented texts in the ancient Persian language which—as Sir William pointed out in his 1796 speech—was a descendant of Sanskrit. These scriptures were more ancient than the biblical texts and represented an “Aryan” point of view on cosmology, theology, eschatology, etc. The only elements of Judaism and Christianity worth inspection—according to Blavatsky’s writings—were those of the Kabbalah and other encoded systems of secret knowledge. In general, the Jews represented for Blavatsky a “degenerate” race:

The “Semitic” languages are the bastard descendants of the first phonetic corruptions of the eldest children of the early Sanskrit.... The Semites, especially the Arabs, are later Aryans—degenerate in spirituality and perfected in materiality. To these belong all the Jews and the Arabs. The former are a tribe descended from the Chandalas of India, the outcasts, many of them ex-Brahmans, who sought refuge in Chaldea, in Scinde, and Aria (Iran), and were truly born from their father A-Bram (No-Brahman) some 8,000 years B.C. The latter, the Arabs, are the descendants of those Aryans who would not go into India at the time of the dispersion of nations, some of whom remained on the borderlands thereof, in Afghanistan and Kabul and along the Oxus, while others penetrated into and invaded Arabia.<sup>1</sup>

In a footnote to this paragraph, we read: “The Afghans call themselves Ben-Issrael, children of Is (sa) rael, from Issa, ‘woman and also earth’, sons of Mother Earth. But if you call an Afghan Yahoudi (Jew) he will kill you. The names of the suspected twelve tribes of the Jews, and the names of the real twelve tribes of the Afghans, are the same.... Where are the traces of the Jewish twelve tribes? Nowhere. But there is a trace, and a deep one, that the Jews have tried to deceive people with the help of these names.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, you have the rationale for much of what would happen later, in a book published one hundred years after the pronouncements of Sir William Jones and only twenty-nine years after the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859). In

a bizarre reversal, Blavatsky refuses to accept that the Lost Tribes of Israel left the region of Palestine and wound up in Afghanistan and India; instead, she claims that Aryans from India and Afghanistan are the real "Israelites" and that the Jews have tried to deceive the world into thinking that they are Israelites when they are really descended from the outcasts of India. Thus, if she is to be believed, the Bene Israel of the Bombay region are not *descendants* of the Jews but are the *ancestral tribe* of the Jews!

In 1883, Sir Francis Galton formulated the concept of eugenics—based in part on his reading of Darwin, who incidentally was his cousin—and provided the scientific parallel (and solution) to Blavatsky's spiritual and pseudoanthropological *weltanschauung*. With Galton we have the introduction of forced sterilization and other forms of racial planning intended to rid the population of the diseased, the mentally disabled, the deformed, etc. With the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany—inspired tremendously by the writings of Blavatsky and the *voelkisch* philosophers Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels—we have the combination of "scientific" eugenics, Darwin's theory of evolution, and Blavatsky's concept of Aryan superiority based on language, religion, and occultism providing the impetus for the Final Solution, as the Nazis attempted to purify the human race by eradicating all the non-Aryan—"spiritually degenerate" as well as "physically degenerate"—elements. From this perspective, Nazism is only Theosophy taken to its logical conclusion.

### Indian Nationalism and Theosophy

One of Blavatsky's contacts in India during the time she spent in the East (the dates are uncertain, due to conflicting reports and unreliable testimony, but were most during the years between 1868 and 1885) was with the founder of the Hindu reformist and nationalist sect, Arya Samaj, Swami Dayananda Sarasvati.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Theosophical Society (TS) and the Arya Samaj were founded in the same year, Arya Samaj only a few months before the TS. Blavatsky, who would later claim that the orders to found the TS had come from her Masters in the East, had attempted to create the society as a combination of Freemasonry and Hinduism, and it is believed that this impetus came from Sarasvati and her admiration for him and his movement. Indeed, in 1878 Sarasvati would write, "the American Theosophical Society has become a branch of the Arya Samaj,"<sup>4</sup> but this mutual admiration was soon changed to contempt when the Swami attempted to gain control over the TS and force all its members to swear allegiance to him and to the precepts of strict Vedic Hinduism. Before the alliance had crumbled completely, there was a half-hearted attempt to create an amalgamation of the two groups—something called the Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart—but this did not last long as Blavatsky sought to form other alliances, mostly with the Vedanta movement and, later, with Mahayana Buddhism and Sikhism. The Arya Samaj, however, continued to thrive and was involved in massive demonstrations in the Muslim state of Hyderabad in 1939, agitating for Hindu nationalism, and was ever-present during India's move toward independence. Today, it has branches in many American cities as well as throughout India and in South America (principally Guyana) as well. Its connection, no matter how tenuous, with the Theosophical Society is not mentioned in its publications or on its website, however.<sup>5</sup>

That Blavatsky's society was involved in Indian nationalism is well known. Her successor, Annie Besant, was active in the Indian National Congress, and even today the Theosophical Society considers itself much more Asian than Western or Western-esoteric. Indeed, the headquarters of the society was moved from New York City, where it was founded in 1875, to India. Blavatsky's Indian influences do



not stop at Sarasvati, but they include a roster of famous and important Indian religious and political figures, among them the Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Kashmir, the Maharaja Holkar of Indore, Swami Sankaracharya of Mysore, and many others. Her support for Indian nationalism was grounded in her belief in the supremacy of the Aryan race, and in that she was not too far off from some of the other apologists for what would later become known as *hindutva*.

An expression coined by Hindu nationalist V. D. Savarkar (1883-1996) in 1923, *hindutva* indicates "Indian-ness" or "Hindu-ness" and was the title of a book Savarkar wrote while in prison serving a sentence for treason.<sup>6</sup> It identifies what it means to be a "Hindu" by associating Hinduism with the Aryans and with Hindu blood and culture and with the land itself which is seen as sacred to the Hindus. A version of the "blood and soil" doctrine of Nazi philosophers Alfred Rosenberg and Richard Walther Darre, *hindutva* was seen as congenial to Nazism and Savarkar someone to watch. In fact, the Nazi newspaper *Voelkischer Beobachter* ran an article on Savarkar when the latter came out in favor of German occupation of the Sudetenland.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, Hindu nationalist movements allied with the *hindutva* platform such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—while supporting relations with Israel—also run anti-Semitic articles on their websites, such as "Semitic Monotheism: The Root of Intolerance in India" by S. Gurumurthy,<sup>8</sup> which argues that monotheism implies a strong central state that was hostile to the type of plurality that existed naturally in India; that "Semitic monotheism," which could as easily be a code word for Islam as for Judaism, lay at the root of India's current religious strife. The BJP's support for Subhas Chandra Bose—himself an Indian nationalist who sought relations with Hitler's Germany—is also manifest in another article on their website that calls Bose the "mascot" of the BJP.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the relationship between *hindutva* and Nazism, while not necessarily one of close identities, is nonetheless problematic. The deeper similarities in themes of Aryanism, race, and religion that are exemplified by such individuals as Blavatsky, Savarkar, Sarasvati, and others would seem to indicate a common world-view, one that is molded more by accidents of genetics and geography than by choice or free will.

The former ambassador of Chile to India—the Nazi author Miguel Serrano—takes the idea of *hindutva* even further when he writes:

The secret language of the Quiche-Maya was Zuyua and that of the Incas was Scandinavian-Sanskrit. It is well-known [*sic*] that the Inca rulers were white and that among their blood relatives they spoke a private and sacred language, which they never taught to the population of the "slaves of Atlantis". Certain words will give us the key. *Inka* is really *Inga*, as the Spanish conquistadores spelt it. In old High German, *Ing* means derivation, ancestor, lineage. *Merovingian*, for example, has this root, meaning "he who comes from Mount Meru"; because *Mero* is Meru and *ving* is *weg*, the German for road. Thus, the *Inga* and we who are his descendants are *those who journey from Mount Meru*, in the Great Exodus, from far away, from the Nuptial Homeland, from the lost land of Avalon.<sup>10</sup>

### Waddell and the Sumer-Aryan Theory

The proponents of the Aryan theory were not all crank eugenicists or armchair archaeologists. One of the more infamous supporters of the Aryan supremacy—or perhaps we should say "Aryan primacy"—concept was himself a noted Tibetologist,

L. A. Waddell (1854-1938) who developed a "Sumer-Aryan" theory of the origin of civilization stimulated by his decipherment of the Indus Valley seals. The author of such works as *British Edda* (1930), *The Phoenician Origin of Britons, Scots & Anglo-Saxons* (1924), and *Aryan Origin of the Alphabet* (1927), his reputation had been made, initially, on the strength of such works as *The Buddhism of Tibet* (1895), *Among the Himalayas* (1899), and other works on the subject of Tibet, including ethnographic and anthropological studies. He entered the British medical service in India in 1880, at the age of twenty-six, and spent the next twenty years in Asia, during which time he accompanied military incursions into Burma, China (during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900), Chitral, and with the Malakand Expeditionary Force, among other campaigns. He was editor of the *India Medical Gazette* and contributed papers to scientific journals on the fauna of northern India and Sikkim. He explored legendary sites, such as Pataliputra and the Buddha's birthplace on the Nepalese border. In addition, he accompanied the British expedition to Tibet in 1904 and began a collection of Tibetan literature and artifacts that eventually found homes in the great libraries of India and England.

Waddell's renown as a Tibetologist (he was professor of Tibetan at University College in London from 1906-1908 upon his return from Asia) was stained by his involvement in Mesopotamian studies, particularly in the putative relationship between the newly discovered civilization of Sumer and that of the Indus Valley civilization. His *The Makers of Civilization in Race and History* (1929) explored the Sumer-Aryan hypothesis in great detail and was critically praised in the *New York Times* and in the *Daily Mail*, which gushed, "Startling book on our Sumerian ancestors—where the British came from."<sup>11</sup>

Christine Preston of the University of Wales, Swansea, has written an intellectual biography of Waddell as her Ph.D. dissertation in the Classics and Ancient History.<sup>12</sup> In this work, she explores Waddell's personal history and makes a brave attempt to rescue his reputation by pointing out the groundbreaking work he performed on the decipherment of the Indus Valley seals and his identification of some of them as Sumerian in origin—a claim that had been ridiculed in the postwar years but that has now been given a reappraisal by a new generation of scholars.

Waddell's scholarship and insight aside, his views on Aryanism were not much different from other pro-Aryanists of his day. When his views were attacked in printed form by Julian S. Huxley in 1935, Waddell reacted with characteristic venom. Although lengthy, this previously unpublished letter is worth quoting in full as it is a time capsule of pre-World War II Aryanism and anti-Semitism:

Ever since that startling basic discovery of such far-reaching world-importance was made a few years ago, namely that the Aryan Race, already known to be the foremost & most highly evolved of the five races of mankind, was also in fact the Originator, Chief Developer & Chief Diffuser of the world's civilisation down the ages—as conclusively proved & established by an overwhelming mass of positive, concrete & unshakeable scientific evidence, including the earliest known historical inscriptions & other authentic records—there has been evoked a hurricane of windy protests against the Aryans by writers mostly of Non-Aryan Race & of rival richly endowed Semitic coteries & propagandists. This was, perhaps only, to be expected, human nature & Jewish pretences being what they are. Hence, individuals of races & sub-races who cannot themselves personally claim to be of Aryan Race descent & physical type, the type illustrated for instance in the classic Greeks & purer

Britons, Scots & Anglo-Saxons, might nevertheless enviously strive to disparage & discredit their great benefactor, the Aryan Race.

But the latest of these futile & unfounded diatribes against the Aryan Race "out-herods Herod", & goes one (or two) better than any of the wildest ever perpetrated or imagined by them before. In their desperation, presumably at their total inability to disprove one iota of the solid mass of concrete proofs for the new scientifically established historical Truth that the Aryan Race originated & chiefly developed the World Civilisation, the two joint authors of a new booklet, "We Europeans: the Race Question: Theory & Fact", by Julian S. Huxley & A.C. Haddon, (Sept. 1935) audaciously & arbitrarily; without giving any valid evidence whatsoever, assert in effect that there never was any division of mankind into different races, & in particular, that there never was, nor is, any Aryan Race at all!

Such ridiculous & unfounded assertions might ordinarily be passed unnoticed as beneath contempt & due to the pitiful ignorance of the writers. But, as the two joint authors of this grossly misleading booklet in question are, strange to say, professed ethnologists, & the book is addressed to the general and educated British reader, it becomes imperatively necessary to expose not only the astounding ignorance of these writers in regard even to the physical traits of the Aryan Race & their persistence, but also their trotting out of & acceptance of the long-exploded ancient theories of Aryan origins, as well as their culpable suppression of the new epoch-making discoveries mentioned above. Significantly, the chief of the two joint authors in question is a grandson of the great comparative anatomist & ethnologist, Thomas Huxley, who was the ardent disciple & chief upholder & propagandist of Darwin, & the first establisher of the racial division of mankind on a scientific basis, by exact measurements of the skull, colour &, into separate & definitely distinct races of which the Aryan Races was found to be the most advanced in evolution. But Huxley himself repeatedly lamented in his lectures that he personally could not boast of being a pure Aryan in Race, because, as he expressed it, he was "only a mongrel". His grandson, however, less scientifically minded & unbiased, rebels against the stigma of "Non-Aryan"; &, in trying to escape from it, actually declares without a shadow of proof & against all the established facts, that different races do not exist, & more especially that there is no such thing as an Aryan Race.<sup>13</sup>

Waddell died in 1938, before the full range and scope of Aryanism could be demonstrated to the world in the form of the Nazi invasions and the Holocaust. That same year, however, the Third Reich decided to walk in Waddell's footsteps to the very doors of Lhasa, itself.

### **The SS-Tibet Expedition**

One of the activities undertaken by the Third Reich that most specifically illustrates how deeply the Nazis believed in the ideas of Blavatsky and her admirers was the highly publicized expedition to Tibet by a branch of the SS known as the Ahnenerbe, the "Ancestral Heritage Research Bureau." While the Nazis had been developing ties with Indian Nationalist leaders such as Subhas Chandra Bose who were considered sympathetic to their program and who were, obviously, anti-British, they were also committed to proving their claim that the Aryan race had its origins in northern India

and Tibet. Politically, Bose was willing to support Hitler; from a religious perspective, however, the Nazi Party's adoption of the swastika as their emblem emphasized Germany's intended spiritual affiliation with the tradition of Hinduism. Anti-British, pro-Nazi publications during the war years spoke of Hitler as an *avatar*, a spiritual leader who would help rid India of its British colonizers. During the author's own residence in Malaysia (1996-2003), Bose was still spoken of with reverence; pictures of Bose still adorned some Indian homes and no apology was made for the leader's association with the Nazi Party and its goals (as, indeed, none were made by Malay Muslims for the close collaboration between the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the Third Reich). Indeed, on one recent visit to Mumbai the author also noted a street named after the Nazi collaborator, which caused him to realize that in every conflict there is always more than one point of view and usually more than three.

Thus, the expedition to Tibet by the SS in 1938—before the actual outbreak of hostilities between Germany and the United Kingdom—had a dual purpose. In the first place it was seen (rightly or wrongly) as an intelligence-gathering mission and as an approach to the Tibetan leadership for support in the event of a Nazi-led or –sponsored attack on British interests in India. More important, however, from the point of view of the expedition members this was an opportunity to collect Tibetan racial and religious data in an effort to demonstrate the validity of the Aryan racial theory. Film footage taken by expedition members clearly shows their preoccupation with measuring Tibetan skulls on the one hand and with taping Tibetan religious ceremonies on the other. The expedition also made off with a complete collection of the *Kangschur* (*bKa' 'gyur* in standard Tibetan transliteration but usually spelled *Kangjur*), the 108-volume Tibetan sacred texts,<sup>14</sup> which they carried off on the backs of nine donkeys through the perilous passes of the Himalayas and onto a steamship bound for Germany just as World War II was about to break out.

Yet, as the author himself pointed out in *Unholy Alliance*, this expedition had other reverberations. Instead of merely collecting flora, fauna and, as well as religious and cultural artifacts and literature, the SS Tibet expedition was informed by the Aryanism of the Nazi Party. Film footage exists<sup>15</sup> of SS Tibet expedition members measuring the skulls of living Tibetans and recording the data, a procedure familiar to anyone who has studied the "ethnographic" methodologies of the pre-World War II eugenicists as well as the present-day methods of the white supremacy groups. The skull-measuring did not stop when the expedition members made their way back to Germany in the full glare of newspaper reporters and exploding flashbulbs; instead, one of the expedition's most important members, Bruno Beger, would begin collecting human skulls from living specimens at the Dachau KZ in his attempt to create a museum of the human races showing the evolution of skeletal structures in Jews, Slavs, Africans, Asians, various indigenous peoples and, of course, Aryans.

### Lost ... and Found

On the other side of the academic argument were those who were certain they had located—not the root of the Aryan race but—the Lost Tribes of Israel. This romantic notion had appealed to many armchair archaeologists since at least the eighteenth century in England, as noted above. Fueled by reports that Jewish tribes and trace evidence had, indeed, been located in India and China it seemed that one of history's great mysteries had been solved, but in what way?

The *Book of Mormon* provided support for the idea that the Lost Tribes had found themselves in the New World. Based on hieroglyphic engravings on miraculous plates that had appeared to the young sorcerer, Joseph Smith, Jr., in the

early nineteenth century in upstate New York, the sacred scripture of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints weaves a complex tale of truly biblical proportion. There is not enough space to explore all of the themes in any detail, but it should be enough to stipulate that the central idea that the Lost Tribes had made it to the Americas was enough for some adventurers to begin looking.

Their task was rendered all the more important and relevant when it became known that certain artifacts of a purportedly ancient Jewish provenance were discovered buried in various locations throughout North America. A stone containing an ancient Hebrew inscription "For Judea" was found during the excavation of the Bat Creek burial mound in eastern Tennessee in 1889; an engraved tablet was discovered during an excavation of the Grave Creek burial mound in West Virginia in 1838, said to be written in the Punic characters common in the Iberian peninsula of 2,000 years ago. In addition, there is a stone boulder in Los Lunas, Mexico, covered in an early (c. 1000 B.C.E.) form of Hebrew writing. Called The Decalogue Stone, it is said to bear an abbreviated form of the Ten Commandments.

Thus, in the nineteenth century there was ample evidence—albeit some of it quite controversial—that the Lost Tribes had somehow made it to North America. This gave rise to various questions. For instance, were Native Americans members of the Lost Tribes? This idea was usually rejected on racial grounds, unless it could be proved that the existing Native American tribes were the result of intermarriage between the Asian peoples who supposedly walked across the land bridge that separated North America from Asia more than 10,000 years ago and members of the Lost Tribes who came to North America after the invasion of Israel by the Assyrians in the eighth century, B.C.E.

Eventually, the position solidified in the writings of the British Israelites who claimed that they (the English) were the true descendants of the Lost Tribes, as evidenced by etymological traces to be found in place names, names of rivers, and topological features, etc., that were believed to be bowdlerizations of Hebrew names. Compounded with this idea was the persistent story that Jesus, as a child, was taken to England by his wealthy relative, Joseph of Arimathea, who was an international trader. If Joseph had trading partners as far away as Glastonbury Tor (one of the sites where Jesus was allegedly taken), why would the Jews have not already been there years, maybe even centuries, before?

In both these cases—Nazi origins in Tibet, Lost Tribes in Tunbridge Wells—there is a common theme: *We come from somewhere else*. We are not really Englishmen, we are members of the Lost Tribes! We are more than Germans, we are inheritors of the mantle of Aryan civilization, the builders of Mohenjo Daro and Ur! In this desperate attempt to find identity—and therefore meaning—in ancient sources and foreign discourses, there is more than a hint of dissatisfaction with life, with society, with the existing cultural narrative. Like UFO abductees, pointing to the stars and claiming they really belong *there* in space, the Nazi Aryans and the British and American Israelites point to a *there* in time. We might almost forgive them their dreams if it were not for the havoc they caused and the danger they still represent; for even some UFOlogists are not immune to charges of racism and anti-Semitism (as William Dudley Pelley's Silver Shirt organization of the 1940s demonstrates; Pelley was a fascist and pro-Nazi who believed in outer space contact). The American manifestation of the British Israelites can be found in the Christian Identity movement, which claims that the "white race" is composed of the survivors of the ten Lost Tribes of Israel and that, therefore, they are the mortal enemy of the Jews.

So, we have come full circle. How did this happen?

### An Attempt at Understanding

Stefan Arvidsson, in an article for the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* entitled "Aryan Mythology as Science and Ideology"<sup>16</sup> correctly links Aryan mythology with the works of Richard Wagner on the one hand, and the philosophy of Georges Dumézil on the other, but fails to notice the tremendous importance of Blavatsky and the *voelkisch* philosophers on the development of Hitler's own *weltanschauung*. Arvidsson sees a rebirth of some form of Aryan mythology in the works of Eliade and his circle, including Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung, Karl Kerényi, and Paul Tillich and Gershom Scholem!<sup>17</sup> He connects Eliade's phenomenological approach to religion with the desire to "re-enchant" the world by restoring a sense of mythology, which could be seen as the font of human values and meaning. With spiritual experience viewed as something immediate, personal, and essentially irreducible Eliade sought to rescue religion from history and historical relativism. This desire to transcend history—and in a sense transcend the legalisms of organized Christianity and Judaism, which can be seen as regulating the human spiritual impulse and robbing it of the immediacy of divine contact—was not confined to Eliade and the universalists. Hitler himself described that his approach to politics was to impact the human psyche directly, without bothering it with too many words, concepts, or complex ideas. Both the Nazis and a generation of scholars of religion—including some in the New Age movement—understood the value of direct experience of the divine; what they did not appreciate, perhaps, was the Talmudic injunction against the practice of "descending to the chariot."

A reaction against the technology preserved in the *ma'aseh merkavah* (the "works of the chariot") concerning methods of meditation and mystical practice that bring one on a journey through the seven heavens to a direct confrontation with the heavenly Throne; the Talmud warns that such practices are dangerous and could lead to madness, death, or apostasy. The burning desire of the Aryan apologists to restore a sense of magic and meaning to decadent Western society was just as reckless, perhaps. Soon, it seemed as if no excess was to be avoided in the attempt to create the perfect human society on earth.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed* for a comprehensive investigation of Blavatsky's Asian influences and personalities.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, in *Hitler's Priestess*, recounts the involvement of the pro-Nazi Savitri Devi with Arya Samaj, pp. 60-63 and Savitri Devi's relationship with the Chilean Nazi and former ambassador to India, Miguel Serrano.

<sup>6</sup> See also the cover story in the April 2007 edition of *Little India* (an Indian publication in the United States) entitled "Indian-ness" by Sudhir Kakar, which asks essentially the same question.

<sup>7</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> On <http://www.bjp.org/history/htv-gm-10.html>, retrieved April 13, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.bjp.org/history/htv-netaji.htm>, retrieved April 13, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Serrano, *NOS: Book of the Resurrection*, p. 103.

<sup>11</sup> Waddell, *Phoenician Origin*, front matter.

<sup>12</sup> Preston, Light on W. A. Waddell.

<sup>13</sup> Preston, in Appendix VIII: "Fact versus Fiction on the Aryan Race: typed draft and reply by Waddell to Julian Huxley's and Professor Haddon's 'Fanciful Vapourings.'"

<sup>14</sup> It is not specified if these were the traditional Tibetan Buddhist texts or those of the Bon-po tradition, which had a different canon but was also referred to as the *bKa' gyur*. My assumption is that the former were the texts carried out of Tibet: translations into the Tibetan language of the Sanskrit Buddhist canon as it was known in Tibet at the time. Discovering the present whereabouts of this specific collection would be valuable.

<sup>15</sup> Viewed by the author at New York City's Tibet House in 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Arvidsson, *Aryan Mythology*, p. 327.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345 fn.

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## Book Review

### *Letters to a Buddhist Jew*

Reviewed by Richard G. Marks

Akiva Tatz and David Gottlieb, *Letters to a Buddhist Jew* (Southfield, MI: Targum/Feldheim, 2004), 302 pages, ISBN 1-56871-345-2, hardcover

The previous volume of this journal offered a review of *Beside Still Waters: Jews, Christians, and the Way of the Buddha* (Wisdom Publications, 2003). In the book's section titled "Jewish Voices," seven Jews tell personal stories of how they discovered significant and often life-changing insights in the teachings and meditative practices of Buddhism and how they imported those insights into the framework of their lives as Jews participating in Jewish communities. The editors of the book, who value such cross-religious experience, followed those stories with an essay by Rabbi Arthur Green, a distinguished academic, communal leader, and expert in Judaism's "spiritual writings." Green does not condemn these Jews for learning from another religion, but he blames himself and other teachers for not speaking "the right spiritual language" that would have drawn them to Judaism's "pathways" before they sought spirituality elsewhere. Yet, writes Green, Jewish spiritual traditions are inherently difficult to approach, since Judaism is a highly intellectualized tradition requiring knowledge of Hebrew and a lengthy education in its texts and practices (235). He therefore sympathizes with Jews who seek spiritual riches in Asian traditions but wants to "welcome these seekers home." He invites them to "join with us and enrich us," and he believes that "our shared Jewish life is richer" for the experience of Jews who have "returned to Judaism by way of the East" (235-36).

Now Feldheim Publishers has issued *Letters to a Buddhist Jew*, a book on the same subject but devoting most of its pages to the arguments of a rabbi, Akiva Tatz, who, unlike Green, finds absolutely no value in a Jew's seeking spirituality outside of Judaism. Tatz argues that Judaism is home to all the spiritual practices found in Buddhism and that Judaism's doors open into a fuller world of reality than Buddhism knows.

Rabbi Tatz, a physician, lecturer, and author of five books, including *Living Inspired: The Thinking Teenager's Guide to Life*, and *Anatomy of a Search* (all published by Feldheim and Artscroll, two publishers of "Orthodox" or "traditional" titles), speaks out of a thoroughly traditional education in the Lithuanian mold (289), particularly as interpreted by his beloved teacher, Rabbi Moshe Shapira (9). His correspondent, David Gottlieb, a poet, playwright, civic activist, and member of a Conservative synagogue, had found "a spiritual resonance and sense of purpose" in Zen (288), the first spiritual awakening of his life (11), and had taken lay ordination. He writes to Tatz with fifteen questions revealing his grave disappointments with Judaism in general and Orthodox Judaism in particular.

These questions may be grouped around three main issues. Gottlieb challenges basic Jewish theology. He thinks he gains a direct and immediate experience of ultimate reality through Zen meditation, but he has never experienced God and finds it difficult to believe in an active, concerned God who issues commandments, especially in the face of the Zen notion of the inherent emptiness of all things. Jewish theology maintains a notion of a self responsible for performing commandments and seeking future goals, whereas Buddhists maintain that no self ultimately exists and that recognition of this truth will decrease suffering; from a



Buddhist viewpoint, therefore, Jewish theology seems to increase suffering. The doctrine of Jewish chosenness separates Jews from other people, but Buddhists learn to view everyone as interconnected. The supernatural revelation at Mount Sinai is unbelievable "myth," in contrast with the life of the Buddha, a human sage, which is credible history. Gottlieb also questions the functionality of Judaism's traditions. If Judaism does contain real spirituality, it hides it beneath arcane and impenetrable laws and commentaries that numb the mind and deaden the heart. Judaism is "confoundingly inaccessible." Finally, Gottlieb challenges Jewish religious life. Orthodox Judaism seems irrelevant to the modern world and spiritually vacuous, whereas Zen exhibits lively spirituality, "openness and awareness and compassion." He fails to find either joyfulness or practices of meditation in Judaism—both of which he has discovered thankfully in Zen—and he finds many Jewish rituals "arrogant, bizarre, and war-like" (13-18).

Rabbi Tatz's long response to these questions is the most comprehensive discussion of Buddhist ideas that has come out of traditional Judaism in our time. Unlike Maimonides' quick dismissal of Hinduism and Judah HaLevi's tirade against it in the Middle Ages,<sup>1</sup> Tatz's approach is to reason gently and patiently with Gottlieb, using his brief sketches of Zen ideas as a backdrop for wide-ranging, if not always pertinent, presentations of Jewish concepts, practices, and leaders. (Indeed, most of the ideas in *Letters* can be found, phrased in similar form, in Tatz's previous books, especially *Living Inspired*, published in 1993, and *Worldmask*, 1995.) *Letters* starts off sounding like a dialogue, with the second and third chapters containing a series of letters in which both parties reply to each other point by point, but this is quickly replaced by twenty-five chapters consisting solely of Tatz's discourses, concluding with another brief exchange. Although Tatz's surface tone is respectful, he lets drop some disparaging comments—for example, that Jews are drawn to Buddhism mainly because it is exotic or it is popular (32, 43)—and offers a general theory that denigrates Buddhism as merely human (rather than revealed) wisdom dependent on Jewish sources. According to this idea, framed as an exegesis of Genesis 25:6, the biblical Abraham sent the gift of his human wisdom to India where it then became the foundation of both Hinduism and Buddhism (45-46).<sup>2</sup>

Tatz's portrayal of Judaism looks in some ways a lot like Gottlieb's picture of Zen. Abraham was a courageous iconoclast like the Buddha (46), and the young Moses left his comfortable home when he perceived undeniable suffering in the world outside (47); Moses then became a great exemplar of humility, self-negation, and silence (266). Indeed, the knowledge that comes out of silence is the most important kind of knowledge in Judaism—a transcendent and inexpressible knowledge attained by the faculty called "the inner eye" (260-63). Yes, Jews do meditate when they pray, which involves a three-stage process of self-transformation that makes one conscious of one's desires and then sublimates them within the higher Will of God (237-47). Judaism has a communal form of meditation, too, called Shabbat, through which Jews enter an eternal present beyond normal consciousness (151). Tatz speaks often of self-negation, emptiness, humility, a "consciousness void of ego"; many Jewish rituals, such as the festival of Sukkot and the act of bowing in prayer, aim at annulling the self (184, 68). Judaism has a "system" of self-discipline and morality such as Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path; this Jewish system takes the form of commandments and training in self-discipline and morality (*Musar*), which together teach (in words taken from Gottlieb's description of the Buddhist path) "right thinking, right speech, right action, compassion, discipline of sensuality, limited use of intoxicants ... detaching, conquering delusion" (44). Like Buddhists, Jews too recognize that the world is

"empty"—in the sense that everything is an emanation of God; since "nothing exists except He," no being exists apart from God and all are part of an interconnected Oneness, separate and yet One (169-72). Also like Gottlieb's Buddhism, Judaism is countercultural, opposing the noisiness, shallow materialism, and egoism of a "neurotic" modern culture (140, 185, 265). Thus, the practices and ideas that Gottlieb values in Zen, as he has described them, are "already there in Judaism" (78, 296), "are basic in Judaism" (19). "Many Jews have gone to Buddhism," writes Tatz, "because they are unaware that Judaism contains the elements that they have found so appealing in Buddhism" (19).

But Judaism goes beyond this common foundation of similarities to offer a higher path to human fulfillment, joy, and truth. Thinking that Buddhism seeks to eradicate emotions and personality, Tatz uses the metaphor of "elevation" to describe the main difference in Judaism's approach. Self-negation in Judaism does not mean living without feelings, motivations, and one's own identity, but redirecting all of these into the service of God, subsuming one's own will under that of God's (102-3, 117-18). One "burns with motivation"<sup>3</sup> to serve. The Jewish concept of joy also differs from the joy that Gottlieb experiences in meditation. Tatz hints that Gottlieb's joy must be escapist or unrealistic in a world in which nearly everyone continues to suffer. Jews do not try to end their own suffering, and they even engage in actions (apparently the commandments) that increase their suffering. But they are "building the world," and their pain and selfless sacrifice here will blossom into an indescribable joy in the eternal world coming after resurrection. The joy-with-suffering which Jews experience in this world derives from their anticipation of the reward for their hard work and faith in the goal to be achieved.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, the main cause of pain and suffering is despair at being separated from God and the future world (224-35). Judaism also avoids the error found in Buddhism of seeking a spirituality based on physical asceticism. Tatz asserts that Judaism differs from all other religions not in its wisdom or morality but in its central concept of sanctifying the physical (210). Rather than rejecting and ignoring the body, Judaism tries to elevate it, to connect the spiritual and the material, which is accomplished mainly through the commandments of the Torah (207-14).

This Torah is "cosmic in its depth and scope." Buddhism carries its disciples to "the outer limits of the Universe," but "for all its acute insights into the nature of reality," it is confined to "the realm of human awareness" and cannot carry them "beyond the Universe to its Source," as can the Torah (46-48). The Jewish relationship with God and the Torah constitutes the most decisive difference between Buddhism and Judaism. Buddhism offers human wisdom about the physical universe; Judaism offers revealed knowledge, joy now and eternally after death, and transcendent reality. Only Torah can lead human beings beyond this world of confusion and doubt, called *alma' disfeiqā'* in Kabbalah (132).

The heroes of Tatz's letters are nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ashkenazi sages such as the Hafetz Hayyim, the Mir Yeshivah, and Rabbi Simḥa Wasserman. Absorbed in the world of Torah (164-65), they exhibit utmost humility, live content with their poverty (164), experience "surpassing serenity" (64), and live their lives simultaneously on two planes, the practical world and the higher spiritual realm. Their followers, "Torah-true Jews," struggle against the world's scorn and that of other Jews, to remain faithful to the difficult obligations of the Torah. Modern American forms of Judaism, in contrast, have no real connection with Torah (251); they, not Orthodoxy, are responsible for creating Jewish Buddhists. Exalting human self-sufficiency and permissiveness, compromised by modern Western culture, they offer convenience and "popularity," allowing Jews to follow their egocentric desires.

"You will have to exert yourself," writes Tatz, "you will have to seek out that narrow niche where the real Torah is found" (163). Tragically, however, most Jews remain ignorant and "asleep" (150, 161) because they refuse to accept the high task of learning Hebrew, devoting many years to learning texts and practices, and undergoing guidance by a true sage. This is why Jews like Gottlieb have failed to find Jewish spirituality, and never having studied authentic Judaism, they then search for spirituality elsewhere.

Tatz therefore cannot agree with Arthur Green that Jewish Buddhists encounter legitimate problems in discovering spirituality in Judaism or that, if they do return to Judaism, they in any way "enrich" it. Gottlieb and the Jews of *Beside Still Waters* have simply strayed from the path that leads most directly and effectively to deep spirituality, self-transcendence, human fulfillment, and God's presence shining through the "emptiness" of the world.

The apparent story in *Letters to a Buddhist Jew*, implicit in the arrangement of the letters, is the gradual success of a rabbi in overcoming the resistance of a Jewish Buddhist, until the rabbi has finally won and the Buddhist is returning to Judaism. Except that what Gottlieb really says at the end is this: "Although I do not understand or unquestioningly accept everything you say, I see the work and the wisdom in it" (298). Gottlieb is not even sure that, returning to Judaism, he will follow the form that Tatz considers authentic (287). Nor is it clear that any significant exchange of ideas has occurred between a Jew and a Buddhist in this book. For one thing, as Tatz freely acknowledges, he has learned very little about Zen from Gottlieb and the two readings that Gottlieb sent him (8, 12). After the first few chapters, Tatz mostly repeats what he had already written in previous books a decade earlier. Now it is interesting that Tatz's language in those books, coming out of Kabbalah and *Musar*, includes terms like self, ego, emptiness, self-negation, and silence that appear to be speaking about the same reality as Gottlieb's representation of Zen Buddhism. *Letters* looks like a dialogue, and Tatz seems to be answering Gottlieb's questions. But I often had the sense that both men were talking past each other in foreign languages. Tatz, in particular, fails repeatedly to grasp Buddhist concepts. For example, Zen Buddhists do not aim to separate the mind from the body—terms that become a meaningless distinction as one progresses in understanding (36). Nor do Zen Buddhists seek to eliminate their own suffering by ignoring the pain of others (34); they help others and lead them to see a reality beyond self. Indeed, universal compassion is a central theme of Buddhism, especially in the Mahayana tradition. (Theravada Buddhists assert that meditation and mental training lead to the Sublime States of *karuna* and *upekkha*, compassion for the suffering of others while maintaining equanimity.)<sup>5</sup>

"God," "revelation," "commandments," "resurrection" are all highly problematic terms and mean nothing to a Buddhist without a painstaking step-by-step construction of possibilities that may come out of her or his experience and reasoning.<sup>6</sup> Gottlieb begins to explain this to Tatz, but Tatz goes on speaking in the same way as before. Tatz appeals to a logic of medieval conceptualization, of Hebrew word roots and hidden numerical meanings, and of biblical archetypes and exegesis, and to supposedly common human experiences—none of which are plausible within another set of assumptions, experiences, and modes of reasoning. Tatz never even defines "God" or relates the word to Gottlieb's experiences in Zen practice. The distance between the two sides becomes starkly apparent when Gottlieb quotes his teacher. She writes, for example, "All phenomena are created in our minds by imputation or concepts, all phenomena arise co-dependently and all phenomena are just this, just perfect, just now." Or quoting the thirteenth-century

Zen teacher Dogen: "The sound that issues from the striking of emptiness is an endless and wondrous voice that resounds before and after the fall of the hammer" (284). Tatz honestly replies that such statements appear "inscrutable." The discussion between Gottlieb and Tatz can go on at such great length (nearly 300 pages) only because Gottlieb has translated Zen into a language that Tatz feels he understands. On the other hand, Gottlieb also seems unable to take up Tatz's words and logic and make them his own.

This book therefore stands, in my mind, as an example of a well-intentioned effort to communicate across religious divides that fails for lack of effort to understand the Other and to speak in ways that touch the Other. As difficult and time-consuming as it is to learn the archetypal and analogical reasoning of traditional Judaism in its own language and idiom, or to learn to pray or to read Talmud in the way that Tatz urges Jews to do—so are the worlds of language, practice, and concept in Zen (and in other varieties of Buddhism), equally daunting to enter and understand. What Gottlieb and Tatz have accomplished, however—despite their failures to hear each other or say anything really new to each other—is the initial listening, the respectful tone, the work of caring about someone you disagree with, of wrestling with *alma' disfeiqā'*, this world of confusion and doubt.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See my chapter, "Hindus and Hinduism in Medieval Jewish Literature," in *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-first Century: A View from the Margin*, ed. Nathan Katz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the history of this exegesis in Jewish literature, see my article, "Abraham, the Easterners, and India: Jewish Interpretations of Genesis 25:6," *JJS* 3 (2000).

<sup>3</sup> *Worldmask* (Southfield, MI: Targum/Feldheim, 1995), p. 215.

<sup>4</sup> In *Worldmask*, Tatz writes, "Because the effort and pain here build joy there, we can feel some of that joy, intimations of cosmic and eternal joy, in the work as it is being performed ... the only joy in this world" (p. 186).

<sup>5</sup> I thank my colleague, Timothy Lubin, for his advice concerning my statements about Buddhism in this paragraph and for his editorial suggestions throughout.

<sup>6</sup> See my essay, "Teaching Judaism in Thailand," *Approaches to Modern Judaism*, Vol. 2 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), pp. 75-91 on the problems of using words such as "God" and "holiness" meaningfully when speaking with Thai Buddhists.

## Book Review

### *India's Jewish Heritage: Ritual, Art, and Life-Cycle* Reviewed by Shlomo Deshen

Shalva Weil, ed., *India's Jewish Heritage: Ritual, Art, and Life-Cycle*  
(Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2002), 124 pages, ISBN: 81-85026-58-0. Illustrations.

Professor Shalva Weil has edited and brought to publication a notable, even astonishing book. Published by an organization bearing a general Indian title, "The National Center for the Performing Arts," the book is one in a series describing the art of some of the vast regions of the Indian subcontinent. One volume in the series was devoted to "Sikh Art: New Perspectives," another to "Bengal: Sites and Sights." But among the multitudes in India, the Jews amount to only a tiny minority, barely 5,000 individuals. Yet the series places the Jews of India on par with the huge populations of major regions of this vast country. For this reason alone Weil's book should attract the curiosity of the sociologist. Leafing through the book one ponders: What makes the Jews salient in the culture of India?

The volume is illustrated lavishly, in the format of art albums and is handsomely produced. The title of the book captures its content accurately: the Jewish heritage of India, as expressed in ritual, art, and folklore. The presumed interest of a general Indian readership in these subjects reflects the acclaimed religious tolerance of Indian society (with the exception of the animosity between Hinduism and Islam, linked to unique historical-political circumstances). This religious tolerance is exemplified nicely by the account in the book (37) of the central square that was built in the seventeenth century in the princely city of Chendamangalam in Kerala. In the middle of that square stood the palace of the local potentate. At equal distances from the palace, at the four points of the compass, stood shrines of four of the local religions: a Hindu temple, a Muslim mosque, a Christian church—and a synagogue.

For over three decades the editor has been studying the anthropology of Indian Jews, particularly the Bene Israel community, and among social scientists she is the authority in this field. Interestingly, Weil has integrated into the community she studies more than many other researchers, who similarly specialize in particular Jewish subethnic societies. She founded the Israel-India Cultural Association and assiduously nurtures ties with Indian Jews, both in India and in their countries of migration. This is reflected in the list of contributors of the various chapters in the book. Of the ten authors, five are from the three subgroups of Indian Jewry: two are Bene Israel, two Cochin Jews, and one of the Baghdadi Indian diaspora. Only half of the authors are of other backgrounds, one of whom, the daughter of the editor, is described as having been "born in the Bene Israel community of Lod (Israel)." One of the ten chapters describes the institutions and organizations, both general and Jewish, that Jews established in Mumbai (Bombay), the major center of the Jews in India. Another chapter focuses on the contributions of particular Jewish personalities to the society and culture of their country. Several chapters focus on Indian Jewish ritual life, particularly on customs of the individual life cycle and Jewish festivals. Another chapter is devoted to Indo-Jewish costume, contrasting modern and traditional fashions.

From the point of view of a social scientist, there are two particularly interesting chapters devoted to the history and architecture of synagogues in India. These chapters, by Jay Waronker and by Ilana Weil, afford avenues to an innovative

understanding of the larger field of Indian Jewry. From one we learn that since the sixteenth century, no less than thirty-four synagogues were built in the country, the most recent one in Delhi in 1956. The internal architecture of the synagogues of the Cochin-Kerala region has a unique feature that has not been documented anywhere else in the Jewish world, namely, the two podiums with Torah-reading desks (*teivot*, or *bimot* in Ashkenazi parlance) to be found in the main sanctuary of the synagogue (the men's hall). One of the podiums is placed, as is customary, in the middle of the men's hall, the other one, built close to the women's gallery, reaches the height of that gallery. This tall podium, with many steps leading to it, is used only on very festive occasions, family events in particular. This occasional conducting of the service and reading from the Torah in proximity to the women's gallery begs for an explanation. I would venture the following: Traditional Judaism practices segregation of women in synagogue services, while Hinduism grants women some equality and more active roles in its rituals. There is an age-old potential problem in Indian Judaism, I suggest, for female discontent that this dissonance might cause (unrelated to the modern ideologies, as is the case in Western Jewry). The Cochin synagogue architecture, I suggest, is a mechanism that enables the perpetuation of traditional segregation while simultaneously liberating Jewish women from the feeling of being spatially distant from the main scene of synagogue action.

Another intriguing point pertains to the architecture of Baghdadi and Bene Israel synagogues of the late nineteenth century, which reflects the social status of the nineteenth-century Jewish community leaders who were instrumental in building these synagogues. Both communities were exposed constantly to British colonial influence in the nineteenth century. Socially mobile Baghdadis came to fill trading niches created by the colonial presence, such as the import-export trade with England, the opium trade with China, and the booming real estate market. Mobile Bene Israel became civil servants in the colonial administration and career soldiers in the British India army. These leaders of their communities were drawn to the English culture and language of the colonial masters, to the extent of becoming "almost Englishmen" (to quote the title of anthropologist R. Fredman Cernea's recent book on the Rangoon Baghdadis). In time, most of Indian Jewry was drawn, to a greater or lesser extent, to the English ambience. Fashions, manners, and tastes among Indian Jews, particularly those of high status, increasingly followed English models. The Jews of India developed, similarly to their contemporaries of nineteenth-century Western and Central Europe, who underwent a movement of upward mobility into the bourgeoisie of their countries. Like mobile Jews elsewhere, prominent Indian Jews built grand synagogue edifices that marked their arrival into a superior class and distancing them from their original status as poor, humble Jews.

In respect to synagogue architecture, however, Indian Jews are to be distinguished from their European counterparts. The European synagogue builders were often hesitant to ape Christian houses of worship. Avoiding the neo-gothic and other church building styles of the nineteenth century, some of them developed instead, a novel style, unique to the period, the so-called Spanish, Moorish, or neo-Muslim style of synagogue building, which became popular throughout central and Western Europe, and in the United States of the late nineteenth century. The upcoming Indian Jews of that time similarly sought to distinguish their new synagogue architecture from that of other faiths. The European Jewish solution, however, was not well suited to them; it would have raised associations with Islam embarrassing in the predominantly Hindu environment. Since Indian Jews had little historical experience with the religion of the English elite, and no ingrained reservation to church Christianity and its related architecture, they did not share the

aversion of many Ashkenazi Jews to the imitation of church architecture. This may be the reason behind a quaint architectural phenomenon, charmingly depicted in the book: Indian synagogues built in fashionable neo-gothic and neo-classic styles, such as nineteenth-century English churches. Some of the synagogues even sport churchlike steeples, but instead of bells they contain large clocks. Indian Jews manifested a similar pattern in respect to the interior artifacts of their synagogues. They are reported to have imported expensive materials from England. In effect, the builders of Indian synagogues distanced themselves from their immediate Hindu religious environment through the idiom of architecture, just as the builders of many modern European synagogues did from their Christian environments. Each group did so in different ways due to the different religio-cultural and political circumstances of India and of Europe.

These are two ideas a sociologically oriented reading of this fine volume elicits. My suggestions are no more than informed speculation. The intriguing questions raised by this material are not answered definitively; to resolve them we require in-depth historical studies of particular building projects, as well as information about the views of contemporary worshippers in these synagogues. In showing how Indian Jews grappled, in their unique way, with problems common to Jews elsewhere, our reading of the material suggests the fruitfulness and potential of Judeo-Indian studies for general Jewish studies.

## Book Review

### ***Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma*** Reviewed by Jonathan Goldstein

Ruth Fredman Cernea, *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), xxvi, 141 pages plus 33 pages of bibliography, index, notes on the author, and appendices. Cloth bound edition: ISBN 0-7391-1646-0 \$58; paperback edition: ISBN 0-7391-1647-9 \$24.95. Contains illustrations.

In this book anthropologist Ruth Fredman Cernea uses the records of Rangoon's Musmeah Yeshua synagogue, the unpublished memoir of long-term resident Ellis Sofaer, and other arcane primary sources to explain how, despite war and geographic isolation, Baghdadi-Jewish identity was maintained in British Burma. Cernea thereby enlarges the already-substantial corpus of literature on Burmese Jewry and on the related topics of Burmese-Jewish emigration and Burmese-Israeli relations. That literature includes travelogues by Salomon Rinman (1884) and Israel Cohen (1925, 1956); memoirs and analyses by Israeli diplomats Moshe Sharett (1957), David Hacohen (1963, 1974, 1985), and Moshe Yegar (1984, 2004); and historical accounts by Reuven Kashani (1982), Nathan Katz and Ellen Goldberg (1988, 1989), Joan Roland (1989), and Cernea herself (1988, 1995).<sup>1</sup>

Cernea isolates specific mechanisms that reinforced Baghdadi-Jewish identity in Burma. First and foremost were the constant communication, travel, intermarriage, and commercial dealing, over centuries, with co-religionists mainly in Calcutta but also in Mesopotamia/Iraq, Bombay, Hong Kong, London, Shanghai, Singapore, Surabaya, Sydney, and the United States. She describes intercommunal celebrations of rites of passage and religious festivals, concluding that "such were the spiritual and communal ties between Baghdadi Jews that though physically separated they were never apart...[whether] in a small town in upper Burma, in the delta of the Irrawaddy River, or on the Andaman Sea." (xvi). "Memory" was a central feature of these celebrations. Real and idealized recollections of Baghdad, and even of biblical Babylonia, became significant components of Baghdadi-Jewish consciousness in Burma (xvi).

Cernea also describes externally and internally imposed sanctions that reinforced Baghdadi-Jewish identity. Some Burmese Baghdadis strove to be accepted by their Anglo-Saxon colonial masters by disassociating themselves from "lower class/caste" dark-skinned Jews of Bene Israel and Cochini origin. The efforts of these Baghdadis caused some Bene Israel to bring a case before the British High Court in Rangoon contesting their exclusion from the Musmeah Yeshua synagogue. The attempt to exclude the Bene Israel backfired. In April 1935, Judge Alfred Leach ruled that the Bene Israel could both vote and hold office in Musmeah Yeshua despite the claims of the synagogue that the Bene Israel were non-Jews. Ultimately, according to Cernea, the British "locked the door of the country club" to all Burmese Jews of whatever religiosity or complexion. Cernea concludes that "like children reaching for a soap bubble, the Baghdadis reached for total acceptance by the British—an elusive goal that conditioned their experiences in Burma and even beyond" (10, 73-75).

Cernea also discerns a robust diversity within the Rangoon Baghdadi community. A dissident group at Musmeah Yeshua led by Gabriel Solomon accepted the Bene Israel as full Jews. These maverick Baghdadis broke with their synagogue



elders and established a congregation of their own, Beth El, in 1932. Here Bene Israel were treated exactly like other Jews.

Cernea provides much information that goes beyond her specific objective of explaining the retention of Baghdadi identity. Although the book is entitled *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma*, in fact it overarches the date of October 17, 1947, when Thakin Nu and Clement Atlee signed documents in which Britain granted Burma full independence. The volume, as already noted, contains much information on Burma's non-Baghdadi Jews, specifically its Bene Israel, Cochini, and Ashkenazi populations; on the immigration of Burmese Jews to Israel, which received its independence from British rule on May 15, 1948, shortly after Burma did; and on postindependence Burmese Jewry. Cernea describes Burmese Jews who now live in Australia, Europe, and the United States. They retain strong, perhaps idealized, memories of their birthplace much in the way that their ancestors fantasized about Baghdad and Babylon.

A final strength of the book is that Cernea, in several appendices, has put into print for the first time a substantial corpus of primary source material about Burmese Jewry.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the text she provides extensive excerpts from unpublished letters and memoirs of Burmese Jews.

Looking beyond these many strengths, the book suffers from a few methodological and interpretive shortcomings.

First, Cernea makes no mention of Burmese-language sources. Was there any mention of the synagogue case, for example, in Burmese-language newspapers? If Burmese-language sources are irrelevant or non-existent, that should be stated explicitly. The same consideration applies to Japanese-language sources, especially for the critical four years of Japanese occupation. Did Japanese intelligence reports mention a Jewish community in this major military arena? Jewish communities in China, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and Singapore are mentioned extensively in Japanese intelligence reports.

It is also unclear if Cernea has a command of the Hebrew, not to mention the Judeo-Arabic, sources for this study. On page 52 she uncritically reproduces a quotation that *Neviim* and *Ketubim* are "sections of the Talmud." In fact they are sections of the *Tanach*. The usual Romanization of the Hebrew word for phylacteries is *tefillin*, not *tefillen* (92). Perhaps most seriously, on page xvii she writes that "the integration of the exiles from Spain into the trading networks and settlements of the Middle East can be traced through names such as Sasson [Sassoon] and Gubbay, which were once common in Spain and centuries later in India and Burma." In reality, the name "Sasson" probably derives from the Hebrew *sasson* (joy) as in *sasson ve-simchah kol hatan ve-kol kallah* in the *sheva berakhot* (seven blessings recited at weddings). "Gubbay" probably derives from *gabbai*, as the *gabbai* of a synagogue. In medieval Hebrew *gabbai* could refer to any administrative position in the community. The existence of these Hebrew names among Baghdadis is in no way illustrative of a passage through Spain.

Although the book has much useful information on Burmese-Israeli cultural and agricultural ties, the author does not explain that these connections evolved out of ideological affinity. In 1952 Burma and Israel were the only two countries in Asia in which Socialist (as opposed to Communist) parties were in power. The early meetings between Reuven Barkatt, Moshe Sharett, David Ben Gurion, David Hacohen, U Nu, U Kyaw Nyein, and Bo Shein—to which Cernea briefly refers—derived from that fundamental ideological affinity.

Cernea refers only briefly to Burmese-Israeli military ties, noting "military aviation" and "the training of...parachutists for the Burmese Army" (123). Is the

author unaware of the extent of the military relationship? She should at least allude to the corpus of unclassified information on the subject in the works of Andrew Selth and Mary Callahan.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, there are mechanical errors. Cernea refers to a "Colesworth" (18) and a "Colesworthy" (162) Grant. The correct name is "Colesworthy." Rabbi Ezekiel Musleah's seminal *On the Banks of the Ganga* was published in 1975, not 1955 (xxv). Bibliographical citations on pages 96 and 97 simply say "personal communication," hardly a scholarly reference. Cernea should specify the name of the communicator and the date, place, and length of those phone conversations, letters, or interviews. Ellis Sofaer's *Gaya: His Childhood* should be noted in the bibliography as a multivolume work, as it is on pages 35 and 49. Yitzchak Kerem's *History of Jewish Settlement in Burma* (18), and *Israel Today and Tomorrow* (125), should also appear in the bibliography. On page 21 Cernea refers to Baghdadis employing "Hindustanis in their stores" and "in their homes." "Hindustani" is either the noun form of the major language of northern India or an adjectival reference to that language. "Hindus" (or "Indians") were *the people* who spoke the Hindustani language and worked for the Baghdadis.

These weaknesses can be remedied easily in a second edition of this otherwise excellent study. Cernea and the publisher Rowman & Littlefield, a relative newcomer to the fields of both Judaic and Asian academic publishing, are to be congratulated for publishing this useful volume.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Salomon Rinman, *Masot Shelomoh Be-Erets Hodu, Birman, Ve-Sinim* [Hebrew: Solomon's Travels in the Land of India, Burma, and the Chinese] (Vienna: *Ba-Defus Shel G. Brag*, 1884); Israel Cohen, *Journal of a Jewish Traveller* (London: John Lane, 1925); Israel Cohen, *A Jewish Pilgrimage* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1956); Moshe Sharett, *Mi-Shut Be-Asyah: Yoman Masa* [Hebrew: From Traveling in Asia: A Travel Diary] (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1957); David Hacohen, *Yoman Burmah* [Hebrew: Burma Diary] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1963), partially translated into English and published in *New Outlook* [Tel Aviv] 6, no. 9 (58) (November-December 1963): 29-44; Hacohen, *'Et Le-Saper* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1974), translated by Menachem Dagut as *Time to Tell* (New York: Cornwall, 1985); Moshe Yegar, "A Rapid and Recent Rise and Fall," *Sephardi World* [Jerusalem], no. 3 (July-August 1984): 8; Yegar, *Ha-Masa Ha-Aroch Le-Asyah: Perek Be-Toldot Ha-Diplomatia Shel Yisrael* [Hebrew: The Long Journey to Asia: A Chapter in the Diplomatic History of Israel] (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 2004), *Perek Shishi: Burma-Myanmar* [Chapter Six: Burma-Myanmar], 113-39; Reuven Kashani, *Kehillot Ha-Yehudim Be-Mizrah Ha-Rachok* [Hebrew: The Jewish Communities in the Far East] (Jerusalem: Sephardic Council, 1982); Nathan Katz and Ellen Goldberg, "The Last Jews in India and Burma," *Jerusalem Letter* 101 (15 April 1988), 6; Katz and Goldberg, "The Mysterious Chin-kuki Tribal Jews of the Indo-Burmese Border Region," *Journal of the American Association of Rabbis* 5, no. 1 (1989): 3; Joan Roland, *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1989), republished with a thirty-page epilogue updating the earlier material and containing additional bibliography as *The Jewish Communities of India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1998); Ruth Cernea, "End of the Road," *Bnai Brith Jewish Monthly* 102, no. 10 (June-July 1988): 28-30; and Cernea, "Promised Lands and Domestic Arguments: The Conditions of Jewish Identity in

Burma," in Nathan Katz, ed., *Studies of Indian Jewish Identity* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 153-72. Studies of Baghdadi Jews living elsewhere in the Far East include Chiara Betta's "Silas Aaron Haroon and Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Shanghai," in Jonathan Goldstein, ed., *The Jews of China*, Volume 1: *Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 216-29 and Joan Roland, "Baghdadi Jews in India and China in the Nineteenth Century: A Comparison of Economic Roles," in Goldstein, *Jews*, Vol. 1, 141-56.

<sup>2</sup> See appendices entitled "Detailed List of Families to Be Evacuated from Burma to Israel, 1949"; "Additional List of Potential Emigrants to Israel, 1949"; "Jewish Community of Burma, 1959"; and "Jewish People and Their Descendants in Burma, circa 1986."

<sup>3</sup> Cernea refers only to Selth's article "Race and Resistance in Burma, 1942-45," which makes no mention of postindependence Burmese-Israeli relations. See Selth's detailed chapter "Burma and Israel," in *Burma's Secret Military Partners* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2000), 45-60; Selth, *Transforming the Tatmandaw* (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1996), 22-26, 53; and Mary Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 176-77, 181.

## The Hindu-Jewish Encounter, New Delhi, February 2007

By (P.V.) Meylekh Viswanath

When I visited R. Joshua Kolet, one of the few persons with *smikhe* (rabbinic ordination) in Thane, near Bombay, little did I expect the bombshell that he laid on me!

On his invitation, I visited him *erev shabes, parshes beshallakh* (in the Jewish tradition, the Pentateuch is divided into different *parshes* or divisions, which are read on Saturday: the weeks are, then, often referred to by the name of the *parshe* read on the Sabbath of that week). Friday night, we were talking about the *parshe* and the structure of the *nisyoynes* (troubles) that befell *Bnei Yisroel* (the Jewish nation). Joshua had his own interpretations of the *parshe* that partly complemented and partly countered mine (which I had, incidentally, taken from R. Liebtog). As we chatted, Joshua and I started talking about Hinduism and *avoyde zore* (loosely translated in English as idolatry). Joshua, who had spent a couple of years in Israel learning about pedagogy and then decided to spend a few more years getting *smikhe* (rabbinical ordination) from a Sephardic yeshiva, had not lost his independent spirit. He suggested to me, based on the text in *devorim* (Deuteronomy), that *hashem* (God) in the *khumash* (Pentateuch) was quite willing to speak in terms of gods, and it was only with the midrash and gemora that a more uncompromising attitude toward *elilim akheyrim* (foreign gods) developed.

I talked to him about my own ideas as to the essential similarity of Judaism and Hinduism. At this point, he dropped his bombshell! "I don't know if you're aware of this," he said, "but the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi is visiting India this coming week to dialogue with the Shankaracharya (the most respected Hindu leader in India)." He suggested that I might be an appropriate addition to the Jewish delegation given my knowledge of both Hinduism and Judaism. He promised to talk to the organizers in Delhi to see if they would invite me as well.

The following Monday (February 6, 2007), I called him up to discover that he'd kept his word and that I had been invited to the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit in New Delhi, which was taking place on Monday and Tuesday of that week. I was on my sabbatical in India and teaching in Bombay, but as luck would have it, I had a class on Monday. As a result, I could only leave on Tuesday morning. Joshua and I both left for Delhi on Tuesday by different flights. He met me in Delhi, and we took a cab from the airport for the Taj Palace hotel, where the summit was to take place.

Since my plane left at 6:30 am from Bombay and, sunrise wouldn't be until 6:36 or so, I had no time to *daven shakhris* (recite the morning prayer). As a result, as soon as we arrived at the hotel, I rushed to a nearby room to *daven* (pray). Let me fast forward a little bit and tell you about the Jewish delegation so you'll understand what happened next. There was the Chief Rabbi, Yona Metzger and his wife; Oded Wiener, the Director General of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel; R. David Rosen, International Director of Inter-religious Affairs, American Jewish Committee and Former Chief Rabbi of Ireland; R. Moshe Garelik, Director of the Rabbinical Center of Europe; R. Albert Guigui, Chief Rabbi of Belgium; R. Benito Garzon, Former Chief Rabbi of Spain; and the famous Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber, Professor of Talmud and Jewish Studies at Bar Ilan. In addition, there was the Israeli Ambassador to India, Mr. David Danielli, as well as Mr. Daniel Zohar Zonshine, Consul General of Israel at Bombay. So you see that there were a lot of high-powered people.

Well, as I put on my *tallis* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries, leather box-like appendages worn during prayer), I noticed that there was an Indian man in the background watching me. I thought no more of it, figuring that he was simply curious. To cut a long story short, he came and spoke to me after I finished *davening* (praying). It turned out that he was a security officer from the Delhi Police. The Chief Rabbi had not attracted any threats (the whole visit was rather hush-hush anyway), but the Israeli ambassador had had a few threats. So this security officer was interested in this bearded man (myself), taking out some boxes from a blue bag. All this I discovered a couple of days later, when I got friendlier with him. At the moment, he was satisfied to know that it was a religious object, having in fact seen me put it on my head and arm and *shokling* (characteristic rocking movement of many Jews during prayer) back and forth for fifteen to twenty minutes!

As soon as I was finished *davening* (praying), I rushed to the room where the summit was taking place. I was already quite impressed that a Chief Rabbi of Israel would be willing to talk to a group of Hindu leaders. Back in the States, I was used to Jews with little or no knowledge of Hinduism routinely refer to Hinduism as *avoyde zore*; no matter that on discussing the issue with them, it turned out that they knew very little of what Hinduism was or even what constituted prohibited *avoyde zore* for a non-Jew. This Rabbi Metzger was clearly a very courageous person. And as I listened, my respect for him grew.

While many rabbis believe that Hinduism is *avoyde zore*, R. Metzger clearly believed in the value of talking to Hindu leaders. While my later exchanges with R. Metzger provided no definite indication as to whether he thought Hinduism was *avoyda zara* or not, I believe (and his comments during the different sessions indicate) that even if he came to India not sure about the status of Hinduism, he left with a very different idea. Even if he didn't actually end up with the belief that Hinduism was within the parameters of *sheva mitsves bnei noyekh* (the seven commandments that are incumbent upon non-Jews as well), he certainly left with feelings close to that. In fact, the next morning (February 7), he accompanied Sadhu Atmaswarupdas of the Swaminarayan Tradition to the famous Akshar Dham temple in New Delhi. He spent several hours there; while I have no personal knowledge as to whether he actually entered the temple precincts, it was remarkable that he would even visit the temple—something many rabbis I know from the United States would not have done. (R. Daniel Sperber, who was part of the group confirmed that R. Metzger did, in fact, enter the temple and, in fact, that he spent quite some time inside and was extensively photographed there; in other words, it's no secret.)

Although I had missed the first hour and half of the summit, it was clear what the structure of the gathering was. Somebody from the Hindu side would speak about a specific topic, followed by a response from one of the rabbis. In addition to the European and American rabbis already mentioned above, there was also R. Joshua Kolet, as well as R. Abraham Benjamin, who taught at the Sassoon School in Bombay (and whom, incidentally, my wife Gitl and I had met more than twenty years earlier), as well as Mr. Ezra Moses, Honorary Secretary and Trustee of the Shaar Hashshamayim synagogue in Thane. However, unfortunately, the Indian delegation was given little or no role in the proceedings. I myself did not play any part in the discussion. Having only joined the delegation at the last moment, I did not think it appropriate to push myself forward.

On the Hindu side, there were many representatives. Although the Vedas and the Upanishads, as well as many other religious texts are held by all Hindus as holy, the interpretation of the content of these texts is not all the same. Hinduism operates on several levels, which can seem to contradict each other. As a result, it is even possible to have two contradictory religious views from two persons, with both of them holding that his view is the more correct view. Now, this statement of affairs might not be a shocking one; there are many religions, such as Judaism itself and Christianity and Islam, all of which have different sects, with each sect claiming to have the "correct" view of that religion. However, in contrast to these other religions, in Hinduism, the "other" view is also considered to be a permissible view at a certain level. This is not unlike the concept of *shiv'im panim la-torah* (seventy, i.e., many different views inherent in the Torah); or the notion that even when Hillel and Shammai have contradictory views of what the *halakha* (Jewish law) is, we say "eylu ve-eylu divrei elokim khayyi"; that is, "both this and that are the words of the living God." The surprise in Hinduism is that this conciliatory world-view holds even for elements that might be considered "basic."

The reason I mention this is that the Hindu side had representatives from many different *sampradayas* or traditions. Although the Shankaracharya had, in fact, not come to the Summit due to ill-health, there were *acharyas* (heads of ashrams) from many other traditions. Many of them were from the tradition of Shankara (6<sup>th</sup> century, C.E.), but some were from other traditions, such as Madhva and Swaminarayan. The tradition of Shankara is called *advaita* or nondualism. This refers to the essential identity of the Self (Atman) and the Whole (Brahman). *Advaita* teaches that the world is seen as multiple because of *avidya* (ignorance). However, in reality, everything is a manifestation of the attributeless and formless Brahman. In fact, the Chandogya Upanishad says "Tat tvam asi," which can be translated as "Thou art That," i.e., asserting the identity of the Thou (the Self) and the That (Brahman). (The Upanishads are canonical texts that, along with the Vedas and the Bhagvad Gita are acknowledged by all Hindus are representing the revealed Truth.)

Now, this is definitely problematic for Judaism, which in its Orthodox form insists on the distinction between the Created and the Creator. It was therefore surprising to me to hear Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the foremost Hindu leader at the summit (in the absence of the Shankaracharya) present an alternative interpretation of the *mahavakya* (or great utterance) "Tat tvam asi"—usually translated as "Thou art That," equating the human being with the Supreme Consciousness, known as Brahman. According to the alternative interpretation that Sri Dayananda Saraswati placed on this *mahavakya* or "great utterance," this does not mean the identity of Man with Brahman. In fact, he said that the fact that the two were placed in some kind of equivalence itself indicated that the two were not identical; else the statement would be nonsensical. What it means is that both of them share at a fundamental level that unboundedness of essence. "Tat tvam asi" is true, only at a transcendental level, but not at an individual level. This was one of the interesting exchanges that I caught that might have missed the periscopes of the other people in the hall.

Both on the Jewish and the Hindu side, many comments were made as to the essential similarity between the two religions. For example, a comparison was made between Makara Sankranti, a Hindu Winter Solstice festival, which occurs at about the same time as Tu biShvat. Swami Dayananda Saraswati spoke about the importance that both traditions placed on improving the world. He noted the

concept of "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinam," or the need to seek "the welfare of all things," in Hinduism, which is paralleled by the importance given to improving the world in Judaism.

R. Sperber, who had for a brief period, functioned as the Chief Rabbi in Calcutta several decades ago and, as a vegetarian, still had a deep connection to India, spoke about the similarities between Hinduism and Judaism. He recalled a "midrash" about the Hindu sage, Vyasa, who had acquired a lot of spiritual energy through meditation and penance. However, when he used his strength to try and create a new world that would be better, his strength failed him utterly. R. Sperber used this story to point out the need for Man to realize his limitations. There is a similar story in the gemara that tells about the attempt to eradicate various human shortcomings, such as the *yetser ha-ra* (the evil inclination in Man), only to realize that that too has its place.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati also spoke about the parable of the wave and the ocean—even though the wave seems to have an identity separate from that of the ocean, it is nothing but the Ocean, itself. The notion of God being transcendental and immanent, which Swami Dayananda mooted was echoed by the Chief Rabbi, who noted that in the Jewish tradition, God is known as both *mesovev kol almin* (encompasses all worlds) and *memalei kolmakom* (pervades all space), which refers to essentially the same idea.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati noted that whereas religions such as Islam and Christianity sought converts, thus failing to respect the integrity of other religions, Judaism and Hinduism realized that different religions might advocate different paths to God, but all of them reached the same destination. With all these sentiments trumpeting the essential similarity between Hinduism and Judaism, R. Rosen felt obliged to clarify the limits to religious relativism; that Judaism did not recognize the equality of all religions.

However, all this was said in such a masterful manner that nobody would have taken umbrage at what was, essentially, an assertion of the superiority of Judaism. In fact, most of the time, R. Rosen also functioned as the translator for the Chief Rabbi, whenever he spoke in Hebrew; he kept up a continuing translation of the proceedings into Hebrew for R. Metzger as well. R. Rosen's translations were more than translations; they were truly beautifully crafted interpretations.

It was truly amazing to see how respectful both traditions were of each other. In deference to the vegetarianism of the Hindu group, the Jewish group ate only vegetarian food. However, while the vegetarian food for the Hindu group was prepared on the premises of the hotel, the Jewish food was prepared in *koshere keylim* (kosher utensils) by the Chabad rabbi in Bombay and flown to Delhi; the plates and cutlery were bought new in Delhi for the occasion.

At the end of the day, leaders of both groups signed a declaration of mutual understanding and cooperation. I will end by citing two of the points from this declaration that I feel are most enlightening in terms of the mutual recognition of both groups.

- Their respective traditions teach Faith in One Supreme Being who is the Ultimate Reality, who has created this world in its blessed diversity and who has communicated Divine ways of action for humanity of different peoples in different times and places.
- Because both traditions affirm the central importance of social responsibility for their societies and for the collective good of humanity, the participants pledged

themselves to work together to help address the challenges of poverty, sickness, and inequitable distribution of resources.

#### ADDENDUM

#### **Declaration of Mutual Understanding and Cooperation from the First Jewish-Hindu Leadership Summit**

Delhi 17-18 Shvat, 5767; February 5-6, 2007

The first Hindu-Jewish leadership summit took place in Delhi 17-18 Shvat, 5767; corresponding to February 5-6, 2007; at which the delegation of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel convened with major religious leaders of Hindu dharma. It is planned that this historic gathering will lead to ongoing bilateral meetings on shared values and common concerns, many of which were highlighted at this summit.

The participants affirmed that:

1. Their respective Traditions teach that there is One Supreme Being who is the Ultimate Reality, who has created this world in its blessed diversity and who has communicated Divine ways of action for humanity, for different peoples in different times and places.
2. The religious identities of both Jewish and Hindu communities are related to components of Faith, Scripture, Peoplehood, Culture, Land and Language.
3. Hindus and Jews seek to maintain their respective heritage and pass it on to the succeeding generations, while living in respectful relations with other communities.
4. Neither seeks to proselytize, nor undermine or replace in any way the religious identities of other faith communities. They expect other communities to respect their religious identities and commitments, and condemn all activities that go against the sanctity of this mutual respect.
5. Both the Hindu and Jewish Traditions affirm the sanctity of life and aspire for a society in which all live in peace and harmony with one another. Accordingly they condemn all acts of violence in the name of any religion or against any religion.
6. The Jewish and Hindu communities are committed to the ancient traditions of Judaism and Hindu dharma respectively, and have both, in their own ways, gone through the painful experiences of persecution, oppression and destruction. Therefore, they realize the need to educate the present and succeeding generations about their past, in order that they will make right efforts to promote religious harmony.
7. The representatives of the two faith communities recognize the need for understanding one another in terms of lifestyles, philosophy, religious symbols,



culture, etc. They also recognize that they have to make themselves understood by other faith communities. They hope that through their bilateral initiatives, these needs would be met.

8. Because both traditions affirm the central importance of social responsibility for their societies and for the collective good of humanity, the participants pledged themselves to work together to help address the challenges of poverty, sickness and inequitable distribution of resources.

9. The representatives of the two faith communities also agree to constitute a Standing Committee on Hindu-Jewish Relations.

Rabbi Yona Metzger  
Chief Rabbi of Israel

Swami Dayanand Saraswati  
Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha



## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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