

The Jews, Israel, and India

An Interview with Nathan Katz

- *The Cochin Jewish community is the oldest east of Iran. Most members now live in Israel, with only a few families remaining in Cochin.*
- *India's main present Jewish community is in Bombay, nowadays Mumbai. This Bnei Israel community is slowly growing in numbers.*
- *There are so many interactions between Jews, Israel, and India that a new academic field of Indo-Judaic studies has developed.*
- *In general, Indian perception of both Jews and Israel is very positive, affectionate, and with much idealization.*

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Nathan Katz, professor of religious studies at Florida International University, has specialized over the past twenty years in the Jewish communities of South and Southeast Asia. He observes that there are so many interactions between Jews, Israel, and India that a new academic field of Indo-Judaic studies has developed, with the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* extant since the mid-1990s. Katz, an Indologist, entered this field in 1986-1987 when he and his wife lived in Cochin with a Jewish family.

Katz remarks: "It was lonely work in those days. Now, however, we almost weekly get inquiries from students who want to do their doctorate in this area. In the United States, India, and Israel there is substantial interest in South and Southeast Asian Jewish communities."

Katz defines Indo-Judaic studies as: "the study of the interactions and affinities between Indian and Judaic civilizations from ancient times; cultural, literary, commercial, and so forth. This includes images of Jews in Indian literature and images of India in Jewish literature as well as contemporary diplomacy. The first step is the study of Indian Jewish communities because there one sees the interactions embodied."

The Hebrew Bible, Josephus, Philo

"There are several Indian-language loan words in the Hebrew Bible. In the Book of Kings when the First Temple is being built, some of the terms like ivory, linen, apes, and peacocks are clearly from North or South Indian languages. There are a few Mishnaic references as well

"A most interesting reference is found in Flavius Josephus. When he is describing the fall of Masada, he has Elazar say - after arguing for the martyrdom and getting nowhere - 'Consider the Hindus who don't know God from Sinai. They have no fear of death because of their great faith and they know the soul to be eternal. If they can be so fearless in the face of death, should not we be? When they go to their death they are cheerful and even take notes and presents from the living to their ancestors in Heaven.' This argument won the day.

"Philo of Alexandria also makes an interesting observation when he sees an Indian yogi imprisoned by the Greek armies that went to India. The prisoner was a great philosopher. The Greeks said, 'We'll give you everything. Please come to Greece and teach us.' And the swami, the holy man, said, 'No, I don't want to leave my people and my religion. I will stay in India.' Despite every effort to get him to assimilate and come to Greece and join that culture, he remained part of Indian culture. Philo used that - which is ironic because he was very Hellenized - as a model of fidelity toward one's own culture and religion against the overwhelming appeal of Greek culture at the time."

Katz also points out that there are many other issues on which the two worlds touch.

The Jewish Community in Cochin

Katz describes the changes that have taken place in the Indian Jewish community over the past decades: "Indian Jewish communities have become increasingly mainstream in the Jewish world. It is a global phenomenon that elites everywhere start to resemble each other. Similarly whereas once Jews in Cochin in South India were very different in terms of what we call traditions of Jewish observance from Jews in New York or Israel, that is much less the case today. One can no longer talk about such communities as isolated or exotic.

"Cochin is located near the southern tip of India on the far southwestern Malibar coast. Its Jewish community is the oldest east of Iran. Its narrative is that its founders came to India after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE. I analyzed as best as I could ancient documents such as Philo, Josephus, ancient maritime charts, Greek accounts, indigenous Indian historical documents, and texts from the Church Fathers from as early as the third century.

"The claim that Cochin Jewry is a two-thousand-year-old community can neither be proved nor disproved. It is plausible based on circumstantial evidence. We can with certainty document the Jews' presence in Cochin back until the tenth century, but they

were probably there much earlier. The community, however, has almost expired by now. Only a few families remain in Cochin. The fabled Paradisi Synagogue is minimally active. Most Cochin Jews live in Israel. At the time of Indian independence the community numbered two to three thousand. Nowadays, in Cochin perhaps twenty to twenty-five Jews remain.

"The Cochin Jews were for a long time a privileged minority. They did very well by being good Jews and earned great respect from their Indian neighbors, who viewed them affectionately. Among them were prime ministers, generals, shipbuilders, and international merchants.

"Cochin was not part of British India but under the sovereignty of a maharajah. The former princely state of the Rajah of Cochin remained a Hindu enclave. The banks were closed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Jews never had to take school exams on Shabbat. They had a guaranteed seat on the legislative council of the state of Cochin, even though their numbers didn't warrant it. They were also guaranteed a certain number of seats in the medical college and law school."

Losing Political Privileges with Independence

"In 1947 with Indian independence all maharajahs ceded their authority to the central Indian government. The princely states of Cochin, Travancore, and Calicut now became the state of Kerala. The new government envisioned a secular democratic state. For the Jews this meant that they lost their political privileges.

"One of the Nehru government's first policies was to ban the import of luxury goods. Many Cochin Jews were traders who brought to India luxury goods such as alcoholic beverages from the UK, fine clothes, and chandeliers from Europe. They sold them mainly to the British and other elites in India. The political change caused them economic problems. So did the nationalization of the coconut estates - the most economically valuable cash crop in the region - which were partly owned by them.

"The electric, municipal transportation, and water companies were also nationalized. Their Jewish owners got compensation but many Jewish employees lost their jobs. Political, economic, and religious factors caused their departure abroad, mainly to Israel. Once a critical mass of a community leaves, existential problems begin such as how to get a *minyan* [quorum] together for prayer. People also start wondering who their children would marry.

"The wealthy Jews of Bombay, such as the Sassoons, mainly went to England. The Koders, the last of the major Jewish families in Cochin, owned the only chain of department stores in the state of Kerala. They stayed till the end of a viable communal Jewish life in Cochin."

A History of Jewish Knowledge

"Cochin Jews had been international merchants for many centuries, and this led to good connections with the Jewish world. For instance, when the Shulchan Aruch, the main Jewish legal codex, was published in Europe in the 16th century, it arrived in Cochin only a few years later. The Jewish literature on the bookshelves of community members was very similar to what one found elsewhere in the Jewish world. The Bible with Rashi's commentary, the Talmud, the Zohar, and the Shulchan Aruch were standard texts there.

"The Cochin Jews never had rabbis. They had a system to authorize *chazanim* [cantors] who could lead the service. Almost every community member was knowledgeable in matters of Jewish law. Their legal documents were accepted in the Jewish world even on sensitive matters such as divorces or conversions. Marriage contracts are in perfect Aramaic. When they did not know specific things, being a mercantile community they were able to ask rabbis in faraway places. It sometimes took about twenty years to get an answer."

Katz is currently researching the responsa literature from Amsterdam, Cairo, and Baghdad to understand what replies rabbis there gave to questions from Indian Jews about Jewish legal issues. "One interesting modern question in 1986 concerned the only Zoroastrian family living in Cochin's Jewtown. As they were elderly, they worried about their future burial. Being monotheists they wanted to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. The elders of the Jewish community sent a letter to the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain asking whether this was permitted. The reply came that it was but they could not have non-Jewish religious symbols on their tombstones."

The Community in Israel

"In Israel many Cochin Jews live in close-knit communities and villages. Many others, though, have spread out over the country. Through an informal communication network, they get together for family festivities and holidays.

"The Cochin Jews back in India often had professional careers as physicians, bankers, and so forth. They spoke English well. When they came to Israel in the 1960s or 1970s they had access to reasonable positions in Israeli society.

"Many old traditions from Cochin were forgotten. Yet in the last decade there was a resurgence of songs in the Malayan language. The few older women who knew these back in India are now teaching the younger ones who never learned them. A women's group, which gets together to sing these songs and perform publicly, has recently become a focal point of Cochin identity in Israel."

The Mumbai Community

"India's main present Jewish community is in Bombay, nowadays Mumbai. In Israel they are known as Bnei Israel. Unlike the Cochin Jews the Bnei Israel were an isolated community. They knew almost nothing about Judaism and didn't even know the word Jew. Through a series of fortuitous encounters over about 250 years they were transformed from being perceived as a sort of Hindu caste, specializing in oil pressing, into mainstream or normative Jews.

"The Bnei Israel first met Cochin Jews and later Baghdadi Jews in Bombay. They started to study with their better-informed coreligionists, and that changed their ritual observance. The main change, however, was in the transformation of their identity and self-understanding.

"There are about sixty thousand Bnei Israel, about 90 percent of whom live in Israel. Not only in Israel but also in India, as they became mainstreamed into the Jewish world many of their distinctive practices have been fading out. This is especially evident in their pregnancy and childbirth rituals, which showed strong Indian influences. In the transition period, where they harmonized with normative Judaism, many traditions were lost.

"The Mumbai Jewish community is currently estimated at five thousand people. The city has about twelve million inhabitants. From that perspective the Jewish community is microscopic. Yet it has sufficient size to maintain a set of institutions, such as synagogues and a ritual bath. There is ritual slaughter and kosher food is available. There are Jewish community centers, supplementary schools, and an ORT vocational program. The community has its own newspaper.

"The American Joint Distribution Committee is the foreign Jewish organization that has made the largest contribution to community services. It sends rabbis and social workers to Mumbai. Some members of the Bnei Israel community have studied in Israel or in the United States and returned.

"Those who wanted to leave, which was the overwhelming majority, have gone abroad by now. Some of those living in India have returned from Israel. There is major travel between Mumbai and Israel. Families often have members in both countries. In recent years the number of Bnei Israel in Mumbai has started to grow. This is only partly because of births. There is substantial intermarriage as they are somewhat assimilated into the city's life, and this almost always leads to a conversion to Judaism. The Mumbai Jewish community is the only one that is likely to remain functioning in India. There are some Bnei Israel communities also in other cities such as Ahmedabad, Pune, and New Delhi."

The Baghdadis

"A third community is known in India as the Baghdadis. It refers to both Arabic and Persian-speaking Jews. Besides Baghdad they came from Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Basra in Iraq. They arrived in India in the late 18th century about when the British did.

"This was for two related reasons. In the late 18th and even more in the 19th century, persecutions in Iraq led many Jews to seek a place to emigrate to. Among them the most famous family were the Sassoons. The British were then opening new commercial opportunities in India. In those days Mumbai was a frontier town with all the economic opportunities such cities afford. Both push and pull factors thus brought Jews from the Middle East to India.

"Some others went to Calcutta or Rangoon in what is now Burma. They built the most magnificent synagogues in the Eastern world. The Knesset Eliyahu Synagogue remains functioning in Mumbai. Yet only a very marginal community life remains. Most members have emigrated to Israel, England, Australia, the United States, and Canada, or other parts of the English-speaking world."

Prominent Jews

"Some Jews have reached high positions in India. The Indian military hero of the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, which led to the establishment of Bangladesh, was Lieutenant General Frederick Jacob, a Jew from Calcutta. He is now the governor-general of the state of Punjab as well as the president of the New Delhi synagogue.

"Mumbai has had three Jewish mayors. So has Calcutta, even if the title there is different. Those Indians who read English know that the country's greatest poet of the second half of the 20th century, Nissim Ezekiel, was Jewish. He was a professor at Mumbai University and passed away a few years ago. Esther David is a very popular novelist and so is Anita Desai. Some Jews also write in Marathi, a Hindi-related language spoken in the state where Mumbai is located.

"India produces more movies than any other country in the world. That industry was started by Indian Jews. There was interaction between those who were developing Hollywood and those who were developing what became known as Bollywood, or the Bombay industry. In the past many leading Indian directors, producers, as well as actors and musicians were Jewish. Some well-known ones were the director-producer Ezra Mir, the actor and later producer Sulochana (Ruby Meyers), the actors Miss Rose and Ramola (Rachel Hayam Cohen), as well as the prizefighter-turned-actor Aaron Joshua."

The Bnei Menashe

Katz refers to yet another aspect of Judaism in India. "The Bnei Menashe are tribal people who live on both sides of the Indo-Burman border. They claim to be descendants of the lost tribe of Menashe displaced by the Assyrian conquerors in the eighth century BCE."

Katz first came to know about them when he visited Burma in 1984. "The then Israeli ambassador, Itiel Pen, asked me whether I had ever heard about these people who 'think they are Jews.' He said that for some years they had been petitioning him to help them learn Hebrew.

"He put me in touch with some of their leaders in Burma. Apparently fifty years ago some prominent figures of the community, who in Burma were shamans - animist religious leaders - had visions and dreams that they were not who they thought they were. Through a long process of interpretation they became convinced that they were a lost tribe of Israel."

Developments in India

"The Indian side of the border is a remote part of that country. Yet it is more modern than Burma. This meant that there were more Christian missionaries active in that area. Also there several tribal people had similar experiences to those in Burma. The degree of connection between these two groups is unknown.

"The momentum grew, and two parallel interests that developed in Israel spurred the growth. One was religious in nature. The idea emerged in certain circles close to the Chabad movement that the coming of the Messiah can be hastened by finding the lost tribes from biblical times.

"The key Israeli figure in this development was Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail of Jerusalem. His visits to India were very significant to the tribes there. He encouraged their recognition as the Bnei Menashe and as Jews. This got a further impetus when the Israeli Sephardi chief rabbi Shlomo Amar confirmed in spring 2005 that the Bnei Menashe were descendants of Israel and that leniency should be applied in their conversion. There is also a political dimension to this. There are people in Israel who consider that the more Jews, the better.

"There are a few different tribal groups in India who share the belief that they are Bnei Menashe. Several hundred members have already emigrated to Israel. Of those in India who want to convert, some want to emigrate to Israel while others are happy to stay in India. They have dreams of creating a second Israel in their home area. They even have their own national flag, modeled after the Israeli one. In it the biblical emblem of the tribe of Menashe is where the Star of David is in the Israeli banner.

"Among these tribal communities a much larger number, say one to two million, are Christians and wish to remain so yet also consider themselves descendants of the biblical kingdom of Israel. A much larger group of perhaps fifteen million people of the same ethnic identity do not identify with these notions."

The Israelis - Yet Another Group

"There is another, very visible, group of Jews in India" says Katz. "The Israelis who come to India after their military service are not a community, yet they are much noticed by many Indians. They have, however, little contact with the local Jewish community."

"In a visit in late 2004, I heard much Hebrew spoken in the streets and saw many signs in Hebrew in certain areas. These advertisements are usually for not very nice hotels, Kriya yoga classes, music courses, and so forth. One shopkeeper, when he saw my skullcap, insisted on speaking Hebrew to me, even though I speak some Hindi."

"The Indian perception of these tourists is frequently not positive as they have little to spend and tend to bargain the Eastern way. They are often seen as clannish and arrogant. Yet people also know that that there is compulsory military service in Israel and that these youngsters come from a tense situation."

Bringing Back Cultural Forms

"Young Israeli tourists mainly go to the north of India, the Himalayas, or to Goa but not farther south. There is some hope, shared by many in the Indian tourist industry as well as Cochin Jews in Israel, to add Kerala to the normal itinerary of young visiting Israelis. This could be a "roots journey" to rediscover something Jewish in India and through that, something Jewish in themselves."

"Many Indian shopkeepers think there are more Israelis in the world than Germans or French because they see so many of them. One may guess that a higher percentage of Israelis have visited India than people from any other Western country."

"The Israelis who go to India and return to Israel bring back with them some Indian cultural forms, especially what is often called 'spirituality' - which includes meditation - as well as sitar music and a taste for curries. The phenomenon is significant enough to be worth studying sociologically."

"Closely following these youngsters to India are the emissaries of Chabad. The role of Chabad in maintaining far-flung Diaspora communities, especially in Southeast Asia, is profound. Their work in ministering to traveling Israelis is also most significant, and to the best of my knowledge has never been studied."

"We should better understand issues such as, what do they do? What techniques do they employ? Also, what are the issues confronting traveling post-army Israelis? What do they seek from Chabad? Chabad has done more to respond to this phenomenon of young Israelis in India than any other Jewish organization or institution."

The Indian Perception of the Jews and Israel

"Many Indians know that there have been Jews in their country, according to their story, for two thousand years. They are very proud of the fact that Jews lived there for such a long time without experiencing indigenous anti-Semitism. It supports their self-understanding as an extremely tolerant society and welcoming to religious minorities and foreign groups.

"The fact that Jews lived in India without persecution is part and parcel of contemporary Hindu identity in the country and of Indian self-perceptions. This is especially significant for Indians as tensions with Muslims become stronger and even tensions with Christian missionaries become highlighted in the world press. Indians want to be able to say: 'We are a tolerant society. Look at our Jews who have lived here so long and so happily.'

"Many Indians are also aware that what they have learned about Judaism originates largely from Christian missionary schools, or comes from Marxist or Shakespearian anti-Semitism or, worse, often from anti-Semitic tracts. The Marxists are the ruling party in Bengal. Marxist ideology also has a disproportionate influence on campuses.

"During my last stay in India I was watching television one night. I tuned in a bit late and heard a person in a discussion program saying: 'The Jews are just like the Brahmins.' I smiled until he continued, saying that: 'The Brahmins are as bad as the Jews. They are bloodsuckers like the Jews and a blight on humanity.' Then I saw that his name was framed at the bottom of the screen and that he was one of the leaders of the Communist party. It was Marx's essay on the Jewish question that he was spouting back and applying to the Brahmins.

"We have to contend with these various anti-Semitic traditions. That is a lot to challenge, but these views are not as deeply ingrained in Hindu and Indian culture as they are in the European or Middle Eastern societies."

A General Positive Perception

"Most Indians are informed enough to grasp that the anti-Semitic claims come from distorted perspectives. They realize that authentic knowledge of Judaism, the Jewish

people, and civilization can only come from direct interaction between Jews and Indians. This is a fine starting point for further contacts.

"There is a great interest in learning. Earlier in the year I was interviewed on the *Patrika* newsmagazine, the most popular one on national television. It was announced in the newspapers that it would be a discussion of India and Judaism in five parts over five nights. The average viewership was 230 million people. That shows an almost passionate interest.

"In general, Indian perception of both Jews and Israel is very positive. It is affectionate and there is much idealization. One reason is that the Indians are very impressed by how the Jews managed, with the great multiplicity of tongues they spoke at the time, to revive and adapt Hebrew. This modernization of a sacred, ancient tongue by Eliezer Ben Yehuda is something they would like to emulate.

"There is, however, no practical way for India to have a single language to unite the country. Many Indians dream of reviving their sacred tongue, Sanskrit, as a common tongue or a link language among the diverse groups in the country. English used to serve that purpose, but with the present anticolonial mood that is impossible. Hindi, which is the most widely spoken language, is not acceptable to speakers of Dravidian languages of South India.

"These are linguistically unrelated to the northern or Sanskritic languages. The speakers of the South Indian languages fear being overwhelmed culturally by North India. They see that almost as a colonial experience. To speak Hindi for someone from Tamil Nadu is often worse than speaking English."

Opposing Muslims

"The Indian relationship to Israel is also influenced by the havoc Muslims caused many centuries ago in their country. The Hindu temple of Rramjanmabhumi, in the North Indian town of Ayodhya, is said to be the birthplace of one of their gods, Rama. When the Muslim emperor Babur from Kabul conquered India, he knocked it down and built a mosque on top of it. In all of North India, where the Mughals ruled, no old Hindu temple survives. The Muslim rulers destroyed them all. They often wrote proudly: 'We destroyed this Hindu temple. We constructed a mosque on top to the one God.'

"Even if this happened five or six hundred years ago, Hindus remain very sensitive about it. When they see the mosques on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem there is a deep resonance with their culture. They often ask Jews: 'How can you allow these buildings to remain on this place so sacred to you?'

"Indians also know that Judaism is a very old religion like Hinduism. Antiquity is valued and admired in their culture. That is another positive knowledge baseline. Respect for

Jews who don a skullcap, go to pray, and 'don't eat certain things' goes a long way in such a culture.

"Indians read much more than Americans. Books are sold on every street corner in many cities. In this way Indians know something about Jewish novelists. They also admire Israeli fortitude against the Arab enemy.

"Many Indians also know that Jews were slaughtered in the Shoah. I do not think they know the numbers. Perhaps six million doesn't seem as large to Indians as it does to Jews. It is, however, hardly known that several thousand Jews found refuge from the Shoah in India."

Idolatry and Transcendence

When asked about the pagan character of Hinduism and Judaism's strong traditional opposition to idolatry, Katz replies that this is a difficult issue. Yet, he says, "Paganism is indeed a term we would generally apply to Hindu religion. But many educated Hindus in most of their systems of exegesis or philosophy talk about one supreme spirit with no qualities or attributes, very similar to Jewish theology. Their term Nirguna, 'without qualities,' for the transcendence of God is almost Maimonidean. It characterizes an absolute God who is unmoved and untouched by history.

"One Hindu religious leader, a swami, told me: 'We should listen to you Jews more with your abhorrence of idolatry. We ought to pay more attention to what your religious teachers say, who insist on the sense of the absoluteness and transcendence of God. We have been too lenient by allowing people to worship God with forms, thinking that they will gradually grow out of that simplistic comprehension of God to a more abstract notion. Our tolerance has allowed them to get stuck in that lower understanding.'

Katz stresses that the person who said this was no liberal or modernist. "His was a deeply traditional point of view. The common level of practice is ineradicable and so is Hindu idolatry. But the more I understand - and have studied in some depth with their experts - the more I am convinced that their understanding of divinity at a higher level is not so different from the Jewish one. It has to do with their notion that it's really only the elite who become educated and philosophize."

Two Types of Universities

"There are two types of universities in India: religious and secular. The religious ones usually have a very positive attitude toward Israel. In the Indian educational system, the more traditional universities have increased in stature just as the right-of-center ideology in India in general has risen in acceptability, prominence, as well as in journals. These

tend to give Israel a better hearing than the Left. I spoke at some of these traditionalist universities and there was passionate interest and tremendous empathy. In many of them Israel is almost idealized.

"The academics at the secular universities are often no political friends of Israel. In late 2004 I was a visiting fellow at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, which is substantially Marxist-influenced. I spoke also at other secular universities where one is challenged about Israel's treatment of Palestinians. This time, however, I have heard no challenges to Israel's existence. This is a great improvement over the situation twenty or thirty years ago when that was on the table.

"There are Indian newspapers that follow the general leftist ideology. The *Hindu* in Madras, despite its name, is one of those. The *Amrita Bazar Pratika*, the Calcutta English daily, tends to be Marxist-influenced and rather hostile to Israel, while most vernacular papers are much friendlier to it.

"Even many of the secular leftists among Indian intellectuals have a great admiration for Jewish culture. In their world, Jewish literature, Labor Zionism, the secular Israeli, or Jewish culture are seen in a kindred, brotherly kind of way.

"Some reciprocal agreements have been reached between Benares Hindu University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I guess the two have an affinity, both being secular, left-leaning institutions located in the holiest cities of the two countries.

"When I visited Benares there was much enthusiasm about this relationship. If one could bring Indian scholars to Israel for training in any area - whether Judaic studies, Jewish history, Jewish literature, political science, information technology, agriculture, and so forth - this would be fairly inexpensive but an important step, with a positive influence on Indian-Israeli relations."

Attracting Tourists

"The Paradisi Synagogue in Cochin, which as said is still marginally functioning, became the focal point of India when in 1968 it celebrated its four hundredth anniversary. India even issued a postage stamp to commemorate the synagogue.

"Indira Gandhi, then prime minister, went there and said 'mazel tov.' 'How did you learn that word?' the Jews asked. She answered: 'I saw *Fiddler on the Roof*.' Indira Gandhi was no friend of Israel but she was not hostile to Jews as many of the older generation of socialists among the Indian leadership were.

"Recently the synagogue in Chandamangalim, which is even older than the Paradisi Synagogue, has been renovated. This has been paid for by the government of the state of Kerala. This was largely done at the impetus of the Cochin Jews in Israel but with the

full cooperation of the Kerala Tourism Department. In February 2006 there will be a celebration when an exhibition on Cochin Jews' life in Israel will go on permanent display in this synagogue.

"The communities in Israel that hail from the other seven remaining but derelict synagogues in Kerala also want these renovated. And the vision - we'll see how much of it gets implemented - is to put Cochin on the tourism map for Jewish travelers. After all the synagogues in the region have been renovated, they will become a cultural monument in India."

A Role in Growing Trade

"An Israeli consulate in Bombay was opened in 1950. In the 1980s Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi took the first steps toward better relations with Israel. He wanted to open the Indian economy and abandon strident third worldism. He understood the importance of information technology and other high technology. He had many contacts in the American Jewish community and thought that if you wanted to be friendly with America, you had to be seen as friendly with Israel, or as it was put in India, the road to Washington passes through Tel Aviv. Full diplomatic relations with Israel were, however, only established in 1992 after his 1991 murder.

"Indian Jews who have emigrated to Israel play a role in the growing trade between the two countries. Cochin Jews who traveled back to India became involved with the government of Kerala in developing Jewish tourism and, more significantly, in agricultural technology transfer.

"One example of how Indian Jews promote commercial contacts concerns a family who live on a moshav in the south of Israel and who are very successful in floriculture. They began to introduce Israeli agricultural techniques to Gujrat state, which has a rather dry climate. They started the application of the drip system of irrigation that was pioneered in Israel. There are many other cases of Israeli technology brought to India by Indian Jews living in Israel. This has a cultural influence as well."

The Government Level

"At government level there is substantial cooperation between Israel and India. It is frequently mentioned in Indian papers that there is intelligence sharing between the two countries. Bilateral trade is rapidly increasing. Israeli exports to India in 2004 came to about \$1 billion, mainly diamonds and gems. Israeli imports from India were slightly larger.

"An important field of Indian-Israeli cooperation is security. Indians feel that they are victims of terror. Their house of parliament and the stock exchange have been bombed by Islamist terrorists. The Hindi word for the violence in Kashmir is intifada. Many perceive the Palestinian violence as another head of the same Islamic fundamentalist dragon. Some Indian diplomats told me that they foresee a time when India's official pro-Arab position at the United Nations will also be softening."

Katz concludes by saying that the mix of diplomatic, commercial, security, tourism, academic, and cultural contacts is likely to foster an improving relationship between Israel and India. The Indian Jews in both countries are likely to continue playing a role in that.

Interviewed by Manfred Gerstenfeld

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Daniel Elazar, founding president of the JCPA, was a pioneer of Jewish communal studies. Many essays on the subject have appeared for over 25 years in JCPA publications such as Jerusalem Viewpoints and the Jewish Political Studies Review. This new publication "Changing Jewish Communities" continues in this tradition and will specifically address issues in Jewish communal studies. It is part of a JCPA project which includes a lecture series and a website with other related articles. Articles for this publication will include both interviews and essays and can be viewed at www.jcpa.org/cjc.htm.

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