



A course under
MHRD scheme on Global Initiative on Academic Network (GIAN)
On
Diversity and Identity among Indian Jews
by Prof. Shalva Weil



Course Venue:

Date: 23-31 January 2017

Time: 4:00-7:00 PM

Overview

The Jews of India represent a miniscule minority residing in harmony among Hindus, Muslims and Christians for generations. India is the only place in the world where Jews never suffered antisemitism, except during the Portuguese colonial period, as will be demonstrated in the course. The three major Jewish communities – the Bene Israel, the Cochin Jews, and the ‘Baghdadi’ Jews – retained their faith in monotheism in a polytheistic environment, whilst at the same time, being influenced by caste and religion in their daily practices. In the final analysis, Indian nationalism and global politics decided their fate. Today, most Indian Jews live in the state of Israel. However, their impact on Indian society was great, whether in the field of the arts, the military, commerce or in the free professions.

The course throws new light on the diversity of India’s Jewish communities, spinning the unique narratives of each community. It includes in the discussion the temporary sojourn of

European Jews, who fled the Holocaust to India. In addition, it touches upon an increasing global phenomenon of weaving “Israelite” myths whereby the Shinlung of north-east India, today designated the “Bnei Menashe”, are migrating to Israel, and new Judaizing groups are emerging in India, such as the “Bene Ephraim” of Andhra Pradesh.

The course provides a critical analysis of the position of the Jews in India both synchronically and diachronically. It questions the assumption that the Jews are a monolithic group by virtue of their religion. It discusses the role of narrative and memory in the establishment and maintenance of diverse Jewish communities, and questions the construction and reconstruction of Jewish identity in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

Objectives

The objectives of the course are as follows:

- i) To demonstrate that a major universal monotheistic religion, Judaism, can be vibrant within the multi-cultural and multi-religious nexus that is India.
- ii) To examine the impact of caste, religion and global politics on the emergence and maintenance of Jewish communities in India.
- iii) To inform students of the diversity of Indian Jews historically and synchronically in contemporary India and Israel.
- iv) To discuss the historical contributions of the major Jewish communities and significant Jews to India.
- v) To examine in depth the unique narratives of different Jewish communities.
- vi) To discuss with students the impact of Jewish communities on India and India’s impact on them.
- vii) To examine new Israeli-Indian identities in a post-migration and transnational era.

Course Details

Day 1 - Monday, 23 January 2017

Lecture 1: 4.00-5.00 PM

The Impact of Caste, Religion and Global Politics on India’s Diverse Jewish Communities

Lecture 2: 5.30-6.30 PM

Indian Jewish Identity during the Raj: Attitudes to Colonialism, Indian Nationalism and Gandhi

Q&A 6.30-7.00 PM

Day 2 - Tuesday, 24 January 2017

Lecture 3: 4.00-5.00 PM

From Oil-Pressers to Admirals: The Bene Israel from the Konkan

Lecture 4: 5.30-6.30 PM

The Baghdadi Jews and the Sassoon Legacy: Financial Prowess in the 19th-20th Centuries

Q&A: 6.30-7.00 PM

Day 3 - Wednesday, 25 January 2017

Lecture 5: 4.00-5.00 PM
On 'Paradesi', Malabar Jews and Freed Slaves among the Kochi Jews of Kerala

Lecture 6: 5.30-6.30 PM
Muziris Heritage Project and the Reconstruction of Malabar Synagogues

Q&A: 6.30-7.00 PM

Day 4 – Thursday 26 January 2017

Lecture 7: 4.00-5.00 PM
“Other” Jewish identities in India; European Jews who reached the Hospitable Shores of India before and during the Holocaust; Walter Kaufmann: the musical genius who composed the AIR signature tune

Lecture 8: 5.30-6.30 PM
“Lost Israelites”: Bnei Menasseh from Manipur and Mizoram and newly emerging Jewish identities

Q&A: 6.30-7.00 PM

Day 5 - Friday, 27 January 2017

Lecture 9: 4.00-5.00 PM
Bene Israel emigration to Israel: religious discrimination, racism and acceptance in the new state.

Lecture 10: 5.30-6.30 PM
The creation of new Indian-Israeli identities among the different Jewish communities in Israel

Q&A: 6.30-7.00 PM

Day 6, Monday, 30 January 2017

Examination and Certificate Distribution

Teaching Faculty

Shalva Weil D.Phil, Senior Researcher at the RIFIE (Research Institute for Innovation in Education) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, is a foremost world scholar on Indian Jews. She is a graduate of the L.S.E. and Sussex University, UK; during her D.Phil she conducted three years' fieldwork among the Bene Israel Indian Jews in Israel. She is editor of *India's Jewish Heritage: Ritual, Art, and Life-Cycle* (Marg 2002; 3rd edition 2009) (this book was presented to President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, on his state visit to Israel by PM Benjamin Netanyahu), co-editor of *Indo-Judaic Studies in*



the Twenty-First Century: A Perspective from the Margin (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007) and co-editor (with Prof. David Shulman) of *Karmic Passages: Israeli Scholarship on India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008). Her publications include 80 articles in scientific journals such as *European Societies*, *Man*, *Human Organisation*, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* and *Current Sociology*. She has published chapters on the Bene Israel, a book on Cochin Jews, essays on the Baghdadi Jews, entries on Indian Jewry in all major encyclopaedias, and papers on the Shinlung (“Bnei Menasseh”) in Mizoram and Manipur, as well as articles on other subjects, such as ethnicity, diaspora, ritual and femicide. She is on the editorial board of several Indian and international journals, including the *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies*, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, and the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*.

Who can attend?

- Students at all levels (Bachelors/Masters/M. Phil/Ph.D.,)
- Faculty from academic institutions
- Professionals/researchers in Media/research institutions
- Students/scholars of religion/West Asia/Islam

Where and When to attend?

Committee Hall (Room No. 128), SIS II, JNU,
9-17 November 2016, 4:00-7:00 PM

Registration Fees

Students: .500/-
Faculty/Professional: .1,000/-

The above fee includes all instructional materials.

For Registration:

<http://www.gian.iitkgp.ac.in/GREGN/index>

Total number of seats available is 60 (sixty) and hence registration shall be done on first-come-first-serve basis.

Course Coordinator

Professor P. R. Kumaraswamy

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