

# THE JOURNAL OF INDO-JUDAIC STUDIES

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## I. Articles

- 7      Rosenzweig's Philosophy of Buddhism  
by Norbert M. Samuelson
- 13     Buddhism on Rosenzweig  
by Bibhuti S. Yadav
- 33     Hindu Nationalism and the Israeli Experience  
by Gary Jeffrey Jacobsohn
- 57   Crossing Borders, Maintaining Boundaries: The Life and Times of  
Farha, a Woman of the Baghdadi Jewish Diaspora (1870-1958)  
by Jael Silliman

## II. Translations

- 81     A Tibetan-language *History of Israel* by Jamyang Norbu  
by Nathan Katz

## III. Reviews

- 91     Review Essay  
Living Encounters between Judaism and Hinduism/Buddhism  
Judith Linzer, *Torah and Dharma: Jewish Seekers in Eastern Religions*  
reviewed by Maurice S. Friedman
- 99     Opra Slapak, ed., *The Jews of India: A Story of Three Communities*,  
reviewed by Brian Weinstein
- 102    Maurice S. Friedman, *Intercultural Dialogue and the Human Image*  
reviewed by Kenneth P. Kramer
- 105   Mavis Hyman, *The Jews of the Raj*  
reviewed by Shalva Weil ←
- 107    J. B. Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin*  
reviewed by Joan G. Roland

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## From the editors

Welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*.

This annual journal is dedicated to analyzing the affinities and interactions between Indic and Judaic civilizations from ancient through contemporary times.

It is an ambitious intellectual undertaking. Not only are these interactions and affinities little explored, but when one views our world from their standpoint, everything looks rather different. For example, our understanding of the concept of 'religion' is modified when our cases in point are Hinduism and Judaism. Similarly, the way we view patterns of commerce in the ancient world shifts perceptibly when our reference points are India and Israel.

This new journal, then, seeks to develop a new field of inquiry. Not only are our data new, but these data compel us to view familiar patterns of interpretation with a fresh, critical eye.

By 'Indo-Judaic studies' we mean not only exercises in the history of religion or comparative philosophy, although these two modes of analysis will be well-represented in this and future issues of this journal; but 'Indo-Judaic studies' includes literature, sociology, political science, linguistics, anthropology and economics.

Several of these methods are represented in our first issue. It begins with companion pieces by Norbert M. Samuelson and Bibhuti S. Yadav, both of the Department of Religion at Temple University. Samuelson studies Franz Rosenzweig's understanding of Indian religious thought, and Yadav presents a Buddhist response to Rosenzweig. The two essays provide an anchor for 'Indo-Judaic studies' in the methods of comparative philosophy and philosophical dialogue.

The third article by Gary J. Jacobsohn, a political scientist at Williams College, addresses the rise of religious nationalisms in modern India and Israel. No doubt, as modern Asian democracies, Indian and Israeli experience ought to be comparable and mutually edifying, even if, as Jacobsohn concludes, the cases of India and Israel in this regard are more different than alike.

Jael Silliman of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Iowa presents a study of a middle class woman merchant of the Baghdadi Jewish community of Calcutta, who happens to be her grandmother. With rare access to family documents and memories, Silliman's ethnography challenges many of the images of the Baghdadi Jews of India presented in modern scholarship, which, she claims, focuses on elite males to the neglect of women and of the sizable middle class. Surely the study of Jewish experience in India is another staple of 'Indo-Judaic studies', this time approached from the perspective of women's studies and anthropology.

The fifth essay is a translation of a Tibetan philo-Semitic pamphlet by the contemporary fiery nationalist, Jamyang Norbu, by Nathan Katz of Florida

International University, the co-editor of this journal. We hope to present translations of otherwise inaccessible Asian-language writings about Jews and Judaism in order to explore the image of the Jew in Asian cultures.

A review essay by Maurice S. Friedman, professor emeritus at San Diego State University, explores the phenomenon of contemporary Jews who practice Hinduism and/or Buddhism. Part of the field of 'Indo-Judaic studies' is the experience of Jews with Indian spiritual traditions, those who have been dubbed 'JuBus' in a recent popular book.

These six articles are followed by four book reviews, three dealing with the Jews of India and one with intercultural dialogue.

An extended discussion ensued before we agreed on the name for this journal, and for this field. We had considered a linguistically rooted title, reflecting the prominence of Sanskrit and Hebrew in defining the cultures whose interactions we propose to study. We decided that such a title was too classicist to include contemporary political, economic and literary studies. We considered Hindu-Judaic and Hindu-Jewish, the former focusing on the religions and the latter on ethnicity, but felt these were too confining as well, in part because they neglected the very vital Buddhist-Jewish encounters we wish to explore. Eventually we opted for Indo-Judaic, a name which we hope invites analyses of all of the cultures of the Indian subcontinent, Buddhist and Parsi as well as Hindu, in their interactions with Jews, Judaism and Israel.

The first issue of our journal, then, introduces but does not exhaust the disciplines, issues and methodologies which will comprise the field the journal seeks to help define. In the future, we will present studies rooted in the discipline of the history of religions, linguistics and so on. We anticipate essays which explore the image of the Jew in modern Indian novels and of Hinduism in traditional Judaic literature. We remain interested in medieval Jewish travelers to India, as we do in the experiences of Jewish communities on the subcontinent. We welcome submissions which compare the ethnicity of 'Indo-Americans' and 'Jewish Americans'. How Hindu revivalists relied upon the 'Old Testament' as a rhetorical weapon against Christian missionaries falls under the purview of 'Indo-Judaic studies' too. Studies of diplomacy between India and Israel, of the Jewish contribution to the Indian cinema industry, of commercial links between west and south Asia during ancient times, and of Jews who played significant roles in the government, economy and culture of India, are all appropriate for this journal.

The editors are grateful to their institutions, the University of Saskatchewan and Florida International University, for the support which has been indispensable in launching a new journal and a new field.