

Jews, Judaism and Israel in India's English-Language Fiction: A Glimpse at What India's Elites Read or Believe

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The sheer size and diversity of India makes it difficult to accurately gauge Indian perceptions of Judaism and Israel, perhaps more so than for any other single country. Even Chinese perceptions are perhaps easier to assess. In China the daily news and publications that influence public perceptions on foreign issues are controlled and not too difficult to follow, and the country has more academic centers studying Judaism and Israel than India. Some of these academic centers are conducting occasional, rudimentary opinion assessments to review Chinese public opinion about Jews or Israel.² The Indian people speak not one, but dozens of languages and a lot of Indians are still illiterate. Thus, nationwide opinion polls are likely to encounter enormous problems. However, the Jewish people and Israel need to understand the image they currently have in India's collective conscience if they want to strengthen their long-term bonds with this emerging power. The chances are good, amongst others because India like China carries less negative theological and historic baggage in relation to Jews than Europe and the Muslim world.

The few available statistical data on Indian attitudes are difficult to compare because they measure different issues. Some of them indicate higher support and sympathy for Israel in India's urban middle classes than could be found today (e.g., in Europe). There is also much anecdotal evidence by Indian Jews as well as Jewish and Israeli visitors who often report friendly comments by Indians, but such chance encounters are no proof either. Can 1,200 million Indians really express an opinion on such a complex foreign policy issue and can they be polled like an American or European public? Different ways must be explored to find answers to this question.

Two scholars have shown such ways. Popular opinions do not form overnight. They are often the result of past history, of older patterns of thought, belief and prejudice. This is why the Anglo-Russian historian Yulia Egorova has chosen to track past and recent Indian perceptions of Jews and Judaism. Her *Jews and India: Perceptions and image* is a systematic analysis of what India's political, religious and intellectual leaders of the last 150 years had to say about Jews, Judaism, Zionism and anti-Semitism.³ The other author is P.R. Kumaraswamy, India's leading Israel scholar. His indispensable book *India's Israel Policy* describes the history of India's policies toward Jews, Zionism and Israel from 1920 to 2010, against the background of the dominant attitudes and ideologies of the Indian elites during this period.⁴ Both books show the evolution of Indian public attitudes toward Jews and Israel.

Our approach focuses on India's contemporary English-language literature and what can be found there on Jews, Judaism and Israel. Great fiction can be a better introduction into the mood of a time and the thought of a social class than an opinion poll or a sociological doctor thesis. No opinion poll could have told us what we can learn from Balzac's work about French society in the early 19th century. Thus, a country's literary elites often reflect widely shared public perceptions and the conflicting political trends of their society. This was certainly true for French literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. In India too, major opinion trends in regard to Jews and Israel, which Egorova and Kumaraswamy have identified in their books, can also be found in the country's literature. Both authors lend credence to our assumption that the books of India's most popular and widely read English-language novelists published between 1980 and 2010, if and when they speak about Jews or Israel, reflect relevant Indian views of their time. The latter limitation must be emphasized. India is changing fast, not only economically and socially, but also culturally and intellectually. The opinions of 1980 were no longer dominant in 2000, and those of

2000 are changing by the day. Daily events and political changes in and outside India will shape new opinions that are likely to find their way into the literature of the future.

This article speaks of the large number of English-language novels and other books written by Indians, many of which were also translated into Indian languages. But the limitation to India's English-language fiction can be seen as problematic. Faruq Taji, an influential Indian novelist, editor and journalist, and also an iconoclast, told an Israeli audience in 2011 that he despised India's English writers. He argued that they were commercial, had nothing to say and did not affect a single Indian—*notwithstanding the fact that he is himself one of India's respected and successful English-language novelists*.⁵ It is true that only a minority of Indians are sufficiently fluent in English to read fiction books in that language. They are said to number 6-7 percent of the total population, or approximately 100 million people, but this figure is likely to include many if not most Indian intellectuals, policymakers and opinion makers, and it has been said that Indians, particularly the young, are avid book readers.

Indian literary works have existed for three thousand years, but Indian fiction writing about social and political issues came only with the British in the 19th century. "The novel is of the West," said V.S. Naipaul, a great Indian novelist himself; "it is part of that Western concern with the condition of men, a response to the here and now"—in other words, it is the opposite of age-old Indian thought that is concerned with the eternal questions, not with the "here and now."⁶ Hence, India's modern literature has a foot in two worlds: the West and traditional India. A number of themes and perceptions in Indian literature are grafts from the West, particularly from English-language literature. It was British rule, and the foreign Protestant missions that came with the British, which spread ideas about Jews and stimulated the first known Indian discussions about them.⁷ The indigenous Jews who lived for two thousand years in complete peace in India had little or no effect on these discussions. Hence, the literary image of the Jew is partly also an import from the West. Moreover, for some Indian authors, the Jew who is at the same time at home and a stranger in a particular culture or language could be a metaphor of their own cosmopolitan life and wanderings.

Today, India is blessed with many outstanding and internationally respected English fiction writers. We have chosen twenty-five books by Aravind Adiga, Chetan Bhagat, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Vikas Swarup. Moreover we added two books by India's internationally best-known economist and political philosopher Amartya Sen. His work will help us to corroborate some of the conclusions that can be drawn from the lecture of the fiction writers. All these names are famous in and outside India. Most appear on lists of the "Ten Most Important Indian Writers" that can be found on the Internet.⁸ Two, Naipaul and Sen, are Nobel laureates. Many of these authors have spent a considerable part of their lives outside India, mainly in America or Britain, some live permanently there, and one, Naipaul, has never lived in India. Yet they are quintessentially Indian, focused on Indian problems and want to speak to the Indian public. Four of these authors, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth have published five books (two by Rushdie) with major Jewish characters and themes. In addition, there are at least five more books by these and other authors containing important references to Jews or Judaism.

It is unlikely that we missed other well-known English books on Jewish themes by these or other prominent Indian novelists. General and Jewish book critics and literature chroniclers have reviewed all five books just mentioned. So far we have not been able to find any additional books with major Jewish themes. Have we missed English books written by leading Indian novelists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries? This is most unlikely as Jewish and other literary critics would have made such books known.

We have to mention in this context the Indian Jewish fiction writer Esther David born in Gujarat, who has published several, partly autobiographic English novels that describe the life of India's Jews at the time of independence and later. Her work will be briefly

reviewed below in the subsection *India in Contemporary Jewish Fiction*. It is about the thoughts and perceptions of Indian Jews, not of India. Her books are little known in India although one has been translated into Gujarati. Much better known in his homeland is the Indian Jewish poet Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004). Some of his English poems have over the years become compulsory reading in Indian schools. Ezekiel did not follow most other Bene Israel Jews to Israel. He tied his fate to India, becoming the "Father of Modernity in Indian-English Poetry," as some Indian critics have called him. Yet his Jewish roots are never in doubt, and his perpetual quest for identity is quintessentially and universally Jewish. One of his two autobiographic "Jewish" poems, *Background, Casually*, speaks of his Jewish people's marginality in India and its modest origin: "My ancestors, among the castes, were aliens, crushing seeds for bread," and then the poem discloses his unhappy school days in his most often quoted "Jewish" stanzas:

I went to Roman Catholic school
A mugging Jew among the wolves
They told me I had killed the Christ
That year I won the scripture prize
A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears
I grew in terror of the strong
But undernourished Hindu lads
Their prepositions always wrong
Repelled me by passivity
One noisy day I used a knife.

The poem could have been written almost anywhere in the Diaspora and seems to modify the often presented image of an India where Jews were allegedly never abused or marginalized. Ezekiel's second "Jewish" poem, *Jewish Wedding in Bombay*, is a masterpiece of biting irony. "Her mother shed a tear or two but wasn't really crying. It was the thing to do,"¹⁰ Ezekiel mocks the increasingly empty religious traditions he grew up with and sets them in parallel with the growing emptiness of his own marriage. Ezekiel's few verses could have told Indians and Indian novelists something new about Jews, but curiously and despite his nationwide fame, he does not seem to have influenced the Indian literary or more general views of Jews that the following pages will examine.

Returning now to Indian fiction writing, there are three novels written not in English, but in Indian languages that include Jewish themes or characters. Apparently only one has been translated into English. The first of these novels appeared in 1939. The well-known Marathi writer Visram Bedekar (Marathi is the language of the State of Maharashtra and its capital is Mumbai/Bombay) published a novel on the problem of Jewish immigration.¹¹ It is the author's only prose writing. For reasons that have as much to do with the novelty of his Marathi style as with the predicament of the Jews, his book took the Marathi literary scene by storm. Bedekar illustrates a particular issue of that time. Before World War II, Gandhi, Nehru and Indian intellectuals discussed the plight of Europe's persecuted Jews and the possibility of their immigration to India, but the British colonial authorities closed India's doors to fleeing Jews. Years later, after partition, the widely read, sometimes controversial Urdu writer Saadat Hassan Manto (1912-1955) published the short story *Mozelle*. Manto moved in 1948 from India to Pakistan. His novel captures the violence of partition through the story of a Jewish woman in Bombay who saved the life of her former Sikh lover and his fiancée. *Mozelle* exists also in English and French, and the English version was republished in Pakistan in 2010. Finally, in spring 2013, Sheela Rohekar, currently the only Indian Jewish writer of the Hindi language, published her long-awaited Hindi novel *Miss Samuel: Ek Yahudi Gatha*. Rohekar speaks of the life of India's Bene Israel community sixty years after most of them had left for Israel. Her novel is the first to do this in the most widely used native Indian language. This could turn out to be an important event in Indian and Jewish

literature, but only the future will tell whether the book will have some influence on Indian thought or whether it will remain an isolated, little noticed event.

We have not been able to identify other Indian-language novels about Jews written between 1939 and 2013. Thus, it would seem that Jewish themes in Indian books are very recent; they appeared, with few exceptions, since the late 1980s, which is long after Jews began appear in Russian and Western literature.

Finally, in order to contrast Indian literary views of Jews with Jewish literary views of India, we have examined three novels with Indian settings, written by two Jewish novelists, Esther David mentioned above, and the famous Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua.

Nine Indian Fiction Writers and One Philosopher

I. Four 20th-Century Classics

1. Anita Desai
2. Amitav Gosh
3. Salman Rushdie
4. Vikram Seth
- II. Two Radical Writers
5. Vidadar Surajprasad Naipaul
6. Arundhati Roy
- III. Three New Voices: The 21st Century
7. Aravind Adiga
8. Chetan Bhagat
9. Vikas Swarup
- IV. One Philosopher
10. Amartya Sen

India in Contemporary Jewish Fiction

1. Esther David
2. Abraham B. Yehoshua

A Summary

I. Four 20th-Century Classics

The five books with important Jewish characters and themes are Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), Amitav Gosh's *In an Antique Land* (1992), Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), and Vikram Seth's *Two Lives* (2005).¹² Several other books of Salman Rushdie, particularly *The Satanic Verses* (1988) contain important references to Jews that must be considered. These four authors have so far published more than fifty novels. Five books about Jews can be regarded as a relatively substantial proportion of the total, considering that Jews were few in India and that no Indian or foreign Jew ever played a critical or lasting role in India's long history. Two books are about the Holocaust, one real (Seth) and one fictional (Desai), both written with obvious sympathy for the victims. One (Gosh) is about a real Jewish Egyptian long-distance trader of the 12th century and is equally sympathetic. The two books by Salman Rushdie, both completely fictional, speak about two powerful Jewish leadership figures, one Indian from Cochín and one American. Both are dubious, immoral characters. Here Rushdie introduces a few Western anti-Semitic motives into his narratives. In contrast, most Jewish references in *The Satanic Verses* are well-informed and positive. Desai, Gosh and Rushdie barely mention Israel, in contrast to Seth who offers extensive and very hostile comments

about the Jewish state. All four authors, in all their books, also show great concern about Islam, India's religious tensions and communal violence. These five books with major Jewish themes are not isolated from the other writings of their authors. They are connected to and influenced by these writings. Thus, the following review includes also other, often more important and better known books of these authors. This will help the reader to better understand the authors' worldviews and motivations, which have helped to trigger their interest in Jews.

1. Anita Desai

Anita Desai was born in 1937 to a Bengali father and a mother of German origin and grew up in India. Today she divides her time between India, the United States and England. The *Independent* of London calls her "India's finest writer in English." She is certainly India's best-known women writer. In contrast to other writers, the background of her stories is generally not the headline-making events of 20th-century India. She writes about small people who straddle different cultures and social classes, try to confront, appease or simply survive the ensuing tensions and in the end are all doomed to fail. Born to a "mixed" couple, Desai is since her birth at home in different cultures. She is the first famous Indian fiction writer who wrote a novel about a Jew and the fate of his people, *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Her Baumgartner is a failure. Saul Bellow, Philip Roth and other American authors have invented plenty of Jewish characters who are failures and so has the movie star and filmmaker Woody Allen. Their background is American Jewish culture and their failure is part of a well-known American scene. Desai's "heroes" are failures too, and so is her only Jewish character, Hugo Baumgartner.

Baumgartner's Bombay appeared in 1988.¹³ Maybe Desai's invention of this fictional Jew was rooted in her mother's German origin (rumors have it that she was Jewish but we have found no proof of this). In any event, the theme of Jewish exile and emigration raised in *Baumgartner's Bombay* was already known to some Indian readers, because Gandhi and Nehru had repeatedly mentioned the tragedy of European Judaism and also because the Marathi writer Vishram Bedekar had published in 1939 a narrative about this theme, as mentioned above. Anita Desai was motivated by the death of an Austrian Jew who had left a trove of letters related to the Holocaust. This happened in postwar Bombay.¹⁴ In the West, the eternally "wandering Jew" is an old Christian stereotype. Desai's Hugo Baumgartner, a wandering Jew, is a small man crushed by history and the clashes of cultures: "In Germany he has been dark—his darkness had marked him the Jew, *der Jude*. In India he was fair—and that marked him as *franghi* ["Frank," meaning a European]. In both lands, the unacceptable."¹⁵ Baumgartner is the son of an educated, well-to-do Jewish middle-class family in Berlin. When the Nazis take power, Hugo flees to India, leaving behind his old parents who refuse to immigrate like so many other Jews and will later be killed. He tries to find his way in an unfamiliar Bombay, but is soon picked up by the British who send him to an internment camp with other Jews but also many German Nazis—a true occurrence in 1939 and later. The British saw no difference between German Jews and Nazis. When a desperate Baumgartner tries to explain the difference, a British official barks at him: "Stop that whining and show me your passport, will you?" "German, born in Germany"¹⁶ he snaps—that is all he needed to know. In fact, approximately two thousand persecuted European Jews survived the war in India. Many others who had nowhere to go were eager to flee to India, but in 1939 the British closed the doors to Jews. They worried that their arrival would antagonize India's Muslims and claimed that thousands of additional Jews might cause social and economic hardship to India's native population, which numbered according to census figures 378 million people. Both Gandhi and Nehru were more generous and ready to save some more, but they too were afraid of a massive influx of Jews.

Baumgartner is released when the war is over. He tries to eke out a living in Calcutta where he witnesses the massacres that follow partition. He sees many Muslims running for their lives. Millions share now the tragic fate of the Jews. He moves finally back to Bombay where his life degenerates. He becomes a derelict beggar in a slum area, surrounded by a large number of stray cats. He is finally murdered by a young German drunk and drug addict to whom he had given shelter and who wanted to rob him of his few belongings. Baumgartner survived the Nazi monsters who wanted to kill him because he was a Jew, only to be killed later by a young German who had no idea that he was a Jew. Is there any sense to his death? Blind fate first saved him from the Nazi Germans and then destroyed him through the hand of another German, like in a Greek tragedy. There is ambivalence and an unsolved mystery in this narrative. Desai dwells on Baumgartner's identity problem. Is he a Jew, a German or simply an unwanted foreigner? Or is he a metaphor for Desai herself, the peregrinating daughter of an Indian father and German mother who lives in different countries?

Baumgartner's Bombay was apparently not a great success with the Indian public—some of Desai's biographies and book lists do not even mention the book—and the Jewish public did not pay great attention either. Anita Desai is intimately familiar with India but not with Judaism and German Jewish middle-class homes. Her Hugo Baumgartner is incongruous and does not come to life. The Baumgartner parents could in fact have been the typical, completely assimilated German Jews who wanted to be nothing but good German patriots. But this is not how they are presented. The grandparents are "strictly orthodox" and the Baumgartner parents are still moderately observant. On a Friday evening they light the Sabbath candles and have the traditional Sabbath meal. But this is the only reference to a Jewish tradition in the book and therefore looks somewhat out of place. There is not a word about British Palestine or America where tens of thousands of German Jews fled to escape persecution and death—certainly a key issue in the anxious debates among the Jews of the time. We read that the ashtray in the house is "in the form of a Prussian helmet" and "the barometer shaped like a pistol,"¹⁷ not the most typical accessories even in an assimilated Jewish middle-class home after World War I. Few if any Jews remained Prussian militarists after the defeat of 1918. To give her story a touch of authenticity, Desai inserts a large number of German words, phrases and poems into the text. However these contain so many German-language mistakes that the effect on a German speaker is the opposite of what the author intended.

Baumgartner's end is unlikely and strange. When the war was over most Jewish survivors could not return to the lands of persecution. Emigration became again the main topic of conversation. But our hero, an educated and healthy Jewish survivor who is still in his best years does not plan a new life elsewhere. He becomes a pauper who is aimlessly hanging on in war-torn India. As a real-life Jewish figure Baumgartner is implausible, but then a fiction writer is not a historian. Desai's novel tells of a timeless human tragedy. Things happen to Baumgartner; he does not choose them nor can he change them. Because he falls between cultures, he becomes a symbol of victimization and failure; this is not a so much a typically Jewish than a universal human fate.

Anita Desai's intention is laudable. When she wrote her book, Holocaust denial was already spreading across the Muslim world and had begun to infect fringe elements in the West. She helped to make the tragedy of the Jewish people and the ripple effects it has had even in remote India known at least to some Indians who were not yet aware of it, or who were not interested, because India itself had lost many millions of human lives to famine and civil war between 1943 and 1948. Today, no respectable Indian writer would deny or belittle the Holocaust. Desai's book is a small mark stone in the history of world literature, the first important Indian fiction about a Jew.

Desai wrote many other, more successful books, which also describe human tragedies. Small people struggle and fail because they cannot cope with the stronger forces of history and society. Two novels will be mentioned:

—In *Custody*, published in 1984, narrates the calamities of a small-town, impoverished university scholar.¹⁸ He hopes to escape the drabness of his life by interviewing India's "greatest living Urdu poet," the—fictional—Muslim sage Nur Sahib. But the project collapses because the psychological, financial and technical problems are insurmountable. Behind the scholar's failure lies centuries of struggles between Hinduism and Islam. Already at the beginning Nur complains bitterly that Hindu civilization has destroyed the beauty of Urdu poetry. His allegation seems to anticipate the ultimate failure of the endeavor. Desai's work, like that of many others, shows that Indian writers cannot ignore the significance and problem of Islam in India's past and present.

—*Fasting, Feasting* (1999) is another successful book and illustrates other fault lines of India's old civilization that is buffeted by the winds of change.¹⁹ A minor, small-town official—again a small man—wants to better if not his own life, than at least that of his three children. But no happiness will come to this family. The first daughter falls in school and life. Her father scolds and humiliates her because he is unable to grasp that the poor child is retarded. The second daughter, smart and dynamic, marries a rich man in Bombay, takes to fashion and the good life and breaks with her family. In a rare visit back home she copiously insults her mother and sister: the women in Bombay "don't walk around like washerwomen unless they are washerwomen."²⁰ The son Arun is brilliant and like all brilliant young Indians must absolutely study in America. But the culture shock shatters him. He lodges, lonely and sad, with a family that cannot understand why he does not eat meat. Interwoven with these tales is the story of the most beautiful girl of the family, a cousin who marries another rich man but is ill-treated by her sadistic mother-in-law. She dies young, burnt alive, by suicide as the family claims or more likely murdered by her mother-in-law—one of India's most horrific cultural fault lines. Again, the failures of small people symbolize larger failures of their culture and society.

2. Amitav Gosh

Amitav Gosh, born in 1956 in Calcutta (Kolkata), Bengal is one of India's best-known writers. Most of the few books he has published so far have won international prizes. His *In an Antique Land* of 1992²¹ is the second Indian book after Desai's that puts Jews and their history in the center of the narrative. The book shows impressive scholarship and a deep interest in the meaning of past and present history. The publishers called *In an Antique Land* "non-fiction," though it reads like a fiction. It weaves together two tales that seem at first sight to be completely different because they are separated by eight hundred years. One is the author's personal tale. During the 1980s he lived in an Egyptian village to write a doctoral thesis on social anthropology. The second is the tale of Abraham Ben Yiju, a powerful Jewish long-distance trader and scholar who lived in 12th-century Egypt, Aden and India. It is this Jewish link to India, the meeting of two old civilizations, which fascinated Amitav Gosh.

Gosh likes Egypt which is "far gentler, far less violent, very much more humane"²² than his native India. But his book does not begin, as one would expect, with his move to Egypt. It begins with an enigmatic phrase: "The slave of MS H.6 first stepped unto the stage of modern history in 1942."²³ The "slave"—probably a misleading translation of the broader, ancient Hebrew term *eved*—is Bomma, a well-known name in certain parts of southern India. Bomma is Abraham Ben Yiju's Indian business agent, his helper and a greatly respected member of his household. He traveled long distances for his patron and controlled large sums of money. He may have converted to Judaism but this is not clear. He appeared in a medieval letter first reported in 1942 in a Hebrew academic journal. MS H.6 is the letter's catalogue number in the Hebrew University National Library of Jerusalem. The letter is one of many thousands found in the late 19th century in the *Geniza* of the Ben Ezra

synagogue in Cairo where large numbers of Jewish manuscripts of centuries past had been preserved. The historian Shlomo Goltin based his monumental work on the Mediterranean Jewish society of the Middle Ages on these letters²⁴ and prepared a book particularly on the Jewish India traders. This book was unfinished when he died in 1985.²⁵ Amitav Gosh discovered Goltin's work already in 1978 and became completely absorbed by the stories and travels of Abraham Ben Yiju, Bomma and other Jewish traders. He began to identify with Bomma, his long-vanished Indian compatriot. Bomma gave him a feeling of familiarity and belonging; it is as if he too belonged now to this thriving and open multicultural world of the past. He decided to follow the trails of Bomma and Ben Yiju wherever they would lead, to India, Egypt or Western university libraries. He was already fluent in modern Arabic and learned to master medieval Judeo-Arabic, which is written in Hebrew letters, so that he was able to read these letters in the original. This was an extraordinary achievement. Few modern fiction writers, if any, can claim similar scholarship in a difficult ancient language, acquired for the purpose of writing a novel. Gosh knows that studying the life of Ben Yiju and others has historic importance beyond their personal adventures. Fustat in Egypt and Aden began to play a pivotal role in the global economy of the time because they linked the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean, and Jews played a role in this economy. Ben Yiju was Tunisian, son of a rabbi and a scholar and calligrapher, like many other Jewish traders. He moved to Mangalore on the Indian Malabar coast where he stayed for seventeen years, set up factories and became very rich. He married an Indian girl, Ashu, certainly after having converted her to Judaism, and she bore him children, his main business contacts who are known from their letters were all observant Jews. They were also part of the dominant Arab civilization.

Thus, Amitav Gosh lived in his mind for years in two worlds that both connected Egypt and India, worlds that were distant in time yet in his imagination linked in many ways. His book *An Antique Land* is a testimony of this link. His narrative ends with an unpleasant personal experience that he invests with symbolic meaning. Egyptian friends told him of an annual pilgrimage to the nearby tomb of a "Sidi Abu-Hasira" in Darnahour, according to them a saintly Muslim man of Jewish origin. When Amitav Gosh went to visit the tomb, he was stopped by armed Egyptian police. He did not know that the tomb was that of Rabbi Yacov Abu-Hadzera and that it attracted many Jewish and Israeli pilgrims. "But you are not Jewish or Israeli," scolds the officer, "you're Indian—what connection could you have with the tomb of a Jewish holy man, here in Egypt?"²⁶ He asks his men to drive Amitav Gosh to the railway station and orders him to take without delay the next train to Cairo. Gosh's two worlds, the ancient and his own were just about to touch when the link between them broke. He now understands that "the remains of those small, indistinguishable, intertwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim, had been partitioned long ago." Earlier, he had expressed the inkling that something may have been amiss in the often celebrated "golden ages" between Muslims and Jews. He wondered why Egypt was so indifferent to the removal of all Geniza manuscripts to other countries: "In some profound sense, the Islamic high culture of Masr (Egypt) had never really noticed, never found a place for the parallel history the Geniza represented (read: the history of the Jews), and the removal only confirmed a particular vision of the past."²⁷

Here Amitav Gosh enters a territory on which Indian writers do not like to tread, namely the issue of Muslim and Arab attitude to Jews and Jewish history. P.R. Kumaraswamy emphasized more than once that Indian intellectuals often refused to admit that concern about India's Muslims affected and biased Indian policies and attitudes toward Israel.²⁸ India claims to be a secular state where no religion can determine or even influence policy. Admitting that Islam and apprehension about India's Muslims have indeed massively influenced Indian policy would dent this claim. The issue of Muslim attitudes toward Jews and Judaism has become a "taboo" subject because it touches on too many Muslim idiosyncrasies and sensitivities. The works of Gosh, Rushdie and Seth leave no doubt that

this "taboo" has infiltrated even Indian literature—with the main exception of being the diaspora Indian Napsal who is very attentive to Muslim anti-Semitism. More often Indians want to believe that Jews have suffered only in Europe and Arabs under European colonial rule, including (according to some), under Israeli rule, whereas Jews allegedly lived comfortably under Islam. But in old and recent times Jews have also suffered at Arab and Muslim hands; their life under Islam was not uniform; it could be good or tolerable but often enough it was bad. Some of the facts were, or should have been known to Indians because the Indian press did report on anti-Jewish discrimination and persecution in Arab lands.²⁹ But the Indian elites mostly did not see it because Muslim anti-Semitism is counter-intuitive and not part of India's intellectual baggage. What India wishes to remember is a long history of friendship between Indians and Arabs, and particularly Egyptians. Amitav Gosh's perceptible comment that Islamic high culture had no consideration for Jews and their history is an exception. Gosh does know that Jews have occasionally been massacred by Ben Yijun's letters had asked anxious questions about these tragic events. However, this was three decades before he came to Egypt: the expulsion of Egypt's entire Jewish community of nearly 100,000 souls, a first group after Israel's War of Independence in 1948 and the largest group following the Suez war of 1956. Abraham Ben Yijun, Gosh's hero, was once a distinguished member of this proud community and particularly of the Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo. It is these expulsions and similar ones from other Arab countries that sealed the fate of Amitav Gosh's Judeo-Arab world, and the incident in Dammanhour, which had opened his eyes, was only a minor after-shock.

Amitav Gosh opened for an Indian and wider audience a window to a colorful world that had vanished long ago. Otherwise this world was known only to a experts. The erudite, letter-writing Jewish traders who linked the Mediterranean to India were proud and respected members both of their religious communities where they played major roles, and of the wider multicultural civilizations of Islam and India. Amitav Gosh loved this medieval world where a Jewish trader and scholar made India his home and linked it to other continents and where Hindus, Muslims and Jews were living, trading and flourishing together.

—*Sea of Poppies* (2008)³⁰ is Gosh's later book that many regard as his first great novel. Much of this story takes place on a ship that crosses the Indian Ocean in a tumultuous voyage. The Jewish hero of *In an Antique Land* kept crossing the same ocean, connecting different countries and cultures. Gosh's fascination with sea travel, old history, exotic adventure and encounters between civilizations connects the *Sea of Poppies* with the earlier book *In an Antique Land*.

Sea of Poppies is the enthralling saga of the Baltimore schooner *Ibis*. We are in the late 1830s, shortly before the Opium Wars between the British Empire and China. The *Ibis* began as a slave ship that its British owner converted into an opium carrier after Britain abolished the slave trade (1807 and 1833). The ship's history thus embodies two of the vilest offenses that Western colonialism has committed in the 19th century. Fate has thrown together on the *Ibis* a cast of Indians and Westerners so diverse that they could never have met on land in 19th-century India. Though they are still "ensnared by the illusionary differences of this world"³¹ could it not be said "that they were all kin now; that their rebirth in the ship's womb had made them into a single family?"³² This is Gosh's preemptive utopia of a fraternal, caste-free India. The book narrates the lives of all of these travelers before they choose, or were forced to board the *Ibis*. Except for a few rich and privileged ones among them, most of their lives were hard, short and cruel. Amitav's political and moral credo appears indirectly in a cynical speech that he puts into the mouth of an Englishman who defends the impending war against China. "The war, when it comes, will not be for opium. It will be for a principle: for freedom—for the freedom of trade and for the freedom of the Chinese people.... If it is God's will that opium be used as an instrument to open China

to his teachings, then so be it.³³ Again, Amitav Ghosh's gripping narrative is supported by impressive scholarship.³⁴

3. Salman Rushdie

All Indian writers included in this review are humanists. All are deeply affected by the wars, cruelties and intercommunal bloodshed, which have accompanied the rise of this great nation. None seeks to justify what Indians—defined in the broadest sense as citizens of former British India—have done to other Indians since 1947. Salman Rushdie is perhaps the most deeply wounded of all of them and also the most famous, albeit for the wrong reason. In 1989 Iran's religious ruler issued an edict ordering Rushdie's assassination for allegedly insulting Islam's prophet. Rushdie is the only Muslim in our selection; he was born in 1947 in Bombay. When one of his characters says that "despite my Muslim background I am enough of a Bombayite to be well up in Hindu stories"³⁵ the author obviously speaks of himself. Fate has torn the old India into two parts, and the wound of partition goes through Rushdie's heart, the more so as his family is from the disputed land of Kashmir. His books are full of betrayal, murder and massacres. He narrates these events in a jocular, ironic, sarcastic or cynical language, but his language is a veneer. Underneath this veneer horror is manifest. No single, straightforward interpretation fits any of his books. The following interpretations focus on Jewish themes because Rushdie shows more interest in Jews as well as greater knowledge of their history than other Indian writers. We have analyzed five of his books, which is half of the fictions he had published by 2009. Interesting Jewish characters appear in three of them.

—*The Satanic Verses*.³⁶ This is Rushdie's first book with a fair number of open and hidden references to Jews and Judaism. There is a Jewish subtext to this book, but only to the parts that narrate events in London. Published in 1988, this fiction is inspired partly by current events and partly by the—real or invented—life of Mohammed. No fiction written in the 19th and 20th centuries could match the world-wide uproar caused by this book and the international political crisis that followed the author's condemnation to death by Iran. *The Satanic Verses* consists of stories alternating between reality and dream sequences and between widely different centuries. A large literature has grown that tries to interpret the book's riddles and identify its literary sources. A convincing interpretation, put forward by several reviewers, sees *The Satanic Verses* mainly as a metaphor of the eternal wrestling match between Good and Evil, between God and the devil. The frame narrative that holds the stories together is the adventures of two friends who are protagonists of this cosmic wrestling match. Gibriel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha are Muslim actors from India. They are the only survivors from a hijacked plane that explodes over the English Channel. In a miraculous transformation Gibriel takes on the personality of the archangel Gabriel who according to tradition has transmitted Islam's holy book to the Prophet. Saladin takes on the personality of the devil.

Jews appear early enough. When Gibriel and Saladin touch down on an English beach, miraculously unharmed, they are given shelter by a kind old English lady, Rosa Diamond. But soon Saladin is arrested by a nasty English immigration official, Officer Stein. Both are typically Jewish names; the message seems to be that some Jews are nice but others are not. Later on, an English football fan insults Saladin because of his apparently Jewish-sounding name: "Sally—who? What kind of name is that for an Englishman?"³⁷ More tragic is the story of Otto Cone, a Polish survivor from a camp "whose name was never mentioned." Cone's real name was Cohen, from Warsaw. "He wanted to make it as if it had not been" and insisted to celebrate Christmas because it was "an English rite."³⁸ But his family loves East-European Jewish food, "soup and kreplach," "gefilte fish," "tsimmes"—one wonders how many of Rushdie's Indian readers have ever heard of these foods. Finally, Cone-Cohen's struggle to "wipe the slate clean" of his Jewishness fails, and he kills himself,

Jumping into an empty lift shaft, Rushdie knows a lot about Jews. His Cone-Cohen is not a product of his fantasy. Quite a number of Holocaust survivors committed suicide decades after their liberation. The most famous case was the Italian writer Primo Levi who in 1987, one year before the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, jumped to his death from the third floor of his house. He was probably the model for Cone-Cohen's suicide. The tragic end of these Jews leads Rushdie to a philosophical reflection about his main theme, the struggle between Good and Evil: "Why does a survivor of the camps live forty years and then completes the job the monsters didn't get done? Does great evil eventually triumph, no matter how strenuously it is resisted?"⁴³ But is the division between Good and Evil always clear? Surely it is not between Gibril Farshita and Saladin Chamcha. The first is not entirely good and the second not entirely bad. Each has something of the other in himself. Rushdie does not get the answers he is looking for from Islam, because "the name of the new religion is submission."⁴⁴ He looks to Judaism's eternal questioning for answers. He gives a number of quotes from the Jewish Bible, a book which was absent in his earlier novels. He recites from the Psalms, "King David calling out through the centuries."⁴⁵ His most important references relate to the question of Good and Evil. It is the great Jewish prophets who addressed this question, such as the Prophet Amos of the 8th century BCE: "Shall there be evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?" or Deutero-Isaiah: "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things."⁴⁶ Is then God the source of Evil too? We are left with no answer, only with another question, which is appropriate for a Jewish-inspired text, but this new question opens a window of hope: "Is it possible that evil is never total, that its victory, no matter how overwhelming, is never absolute?"⁴⁷ There is a deep philosophical quality to Rushdie's reflections.

The same cannot be said about the—often fantasy-based—chapters that describe how Mohammed founded Islam, the chapters that triggered the ire of Muslims. As said above, there is no Jewish subtext to these chapters. The Jewish-Islamic link is ignored. There is no mention of the Jews whom Mohammed met and tried to convert, no mention of the Jewish tribes who sparked his anger when they refused to accept him as their prophet, no reference to the biblical and other Jewish sources of the Koran. There is only one Jew—"Rehana the Jew," one of twelve whores who work in a secret—and imaginary—brothel in Mecca in the time of Mohammed. There is a striking contrast between Rushdie's vast and often detailed knowledge of Western and Indian Jews (about the latter see *The Moor's Last Sigh* below) and his silence about the Jews of Islam. This silence indicates a "taboo." We have already mentioned the problem in the section about Amitav Ghosh. It is as if Rushdie was afraid to contradict current Muslim claims according to which Islam was a new, independent revelation that owed nothing to Judaism. He must have known better.

—*The Moor's Last Sigh*.⁴⁸ The Moor, part history and part fantasy, appeared in 1995. All the action takes place in mid- and late 20th-century India, with fewer mirades and human transformations than in earlier books. It is Rushdie's first book with a Jew, his Christian wife and their half-Jewish son as main characters.⁴⁹

The historic frame of the book is the fall of Muslim Granada to Christian conquest and the expulsion of Spain's Jews in 1492 and five hundred years later in 1992, the travel back to Spain of the half-Jewish son of the main character who is a late descendant of these Spanish Jews. He is the "Moor," a nick-name for Moraes Zogoby, son of Abraham Zogoby from the old Jewish community of Cochín in Kerala State, southern India. His mother is Aurora da Gama of Cochín, who claims to descend from the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama. Abraham and Aurora met by coincidence in 1939. Aurora is the young, tempestuous heiress of a wealthy Christian family of spice traders. Native Christians form the main part of the economic upper class. Aurora falls in love with this dangerously handsome employee of her family's business enterprise, but is aware that her inappropriate passion will defy class and convention. The Da Gamas react with the same consternation to Aurora's bad news—her falling in love with a poor Jewish boy—that a wealthy Christian family in Europe

would have shown in the same situation. India is surely not anti-Semitic—as long as a girl from a good Christian family does not fall for a poor Jew. The Jewish reaction is predictably just as hostile. Abraham's mother Flory, who is the caretaker of Cochini's famous synagogue decorated with blue Chinese tiles, disowns her child "because it was unheard of for a Cochini Jew to marry outside the community."⁴³ "A Christy was not bad enough, you had to pick the very worst of the bunch!"⁴⁴ Probably Rushdie was aware that Cochini Jews feared intermarriage, and parents encouraged their children to immigrate to Israel for this reason.⁴⁵ One of the leading Hindus said: "Aurore da Gama and her Jew were no more than flies on the great diamond of India."⁴⁶ Rushdie revolts against such attitudes: "Christians, Portuguese and Jews! Chinese tiles promoting godless views...can this really be India? ...Majority, this mighty elephant, will not crush my tale beneath her feet. Are not my personages Indian, every one? Well then: this too is an Indian yarn!"⁴⁷

This book of 1995 is the first by an Indian mainstream novelist to speak of India's own Jews and their old history at some length, with sympathy and even nostalgia. He knows details of their history with which generally only a few experts are familiar, for example that the Jews of Cochini had a proud martial tradition and that once a battle between Cochini's Hindu ruler and an enemy army had to be postponed because his Jewish soldiers refused to fight on the Sabbath!⁴⁸ Rushdie reminds Indians that their Jews are an integral part of India's history and deserve their attention and respect: "They have almost gone now, the Jews of Cochini. Less than fifty of them remaining, and the young departed to Israel. It is the last generation...This too is an extinction to be mourned; not an extermination, such as occurred elsewhere, but the end, nevertheless, of a story that took two thousand years to tell."⁴⁹ People who know the city today report that some Cochini's share Rushdie's feelings and others are resentful that the Jews left although they were never persecuted.⁵⁰

In Rushdie's story, the Zogoby family traces their name back to Mohammed XI, the last Sultan of Andalusia who surrendered to the Christians and was called "El-Zogoby," the "unfortunate." It is an Arab name; in real life no Cochini Jew ever had such a name. In Rushdie's fiction the sultan had a Jewish mistress who sailed in 1492 to India when the Jews were expelled from Spain, pregnant with his child. Thus started the lineage of Flory and Abraham Zogoby. Abraham did not forget his lineage. When he was banished from the fellowship of his own people for marrying a Christian, an inner voice told him "that he must guard his Jewishness in the innermost chamber of his soul...and keep his truth there."⁵¹

But soon his life takes a radical turn. He transfers the family business to Bombay and makes a pilgrimage of respect to the old man Sassoon, head of the great Baghdadi-Jewish family "which dominated the city for hundred years."⁵² But the old man leaves him in no doubt that the city is closed to him. Disowned by his mother, rejected by his community, excluded by India's most influential Jew, humiliated by his increasingly overbearing wife Aurora, he begins to supply girls to the city's brothels. He smuggles heroin, speculates in property and traffics in arms. Finally he gets involved in a secret scheme to finance and develop nuclear weapons "for certain oil-rich countries." His son Moraes discovers the project and suddenly understands that his father has become a monstrous criminal. Now that Abraham has betrayed his own Jewish people by his support for the nuclear scheme of Israel's deadly enemies, it is Moraes who rises to the defense of his people and confronts his father violently: "Excuse me, but I find that I am a Jew."⁵³ Abraham sneers at him, asks him whether he wants a "yarmulke," a Yiddish term for a skull cap, phylacteries, or a one-way ticket to Jerusalem, but he also warns him: "Many of our Cochini Jews...complain of the racism with which they are treated in your precious homeland across the sea."⁵⁴ In fact, complaints about color discrimination of Indian Jews in Israel have often been heard in the past and can still be heard, from Indians as well as Indian Jews themselves.⁵⁵

Abraham has become a "race traitor who was repeating on an appalling, gigantic scale the crime of turning his back on mother and tribe." Rushdie will return again to the image of this self-hating Jew who was once spurred by his people for marrying out and finally gained the power to destroy the Jewish state by arming its enemies. Abraham was

like a deity who "wrought havoc upon the mere mortals below; but also, and in this he differed from most deities, among his own kith and kin."⁵⁸ Rushdie knows enough of Jewish history and psychology to understand the genesis of Jewish self-hate in his Abraham. Fortunately it will not come to the worst. Abraham gets entangled in a fight with the largest and most dangerous Hindu crime syndicate of Bombay. The result is that half of Bombay is blown up in a large series of gigantic explosions. Abraham perishes in one of his own skyscrapers. His son Moraes flies over the burning city on his way to Spain, the origin of the Zogibys, where he plans to look for his Jewish roots. He says to himself: "I am a Jew from Spain, like Maimonides," but senses that "Maimonides' ghost laughed at me."⁵⁹ He already anticipates that his quest will fail.

Salman Rushdie's Abraham Zogiby is the first Indian Jew to enter world literature through a major Indian fiction writer. Abraham has many traits that have variously been described as Jewish although only few are recommendable. His early life was difficult and poor, but he struggled to reach the highest levels of wealth and power. He is tenacious, clever and cunning. His survival instincts and tenacity are his most Jewish character traits. His wife Aurora dominated and stung him in later years, but her "Abraham was tougher than any frog: she stung him...but he did not drown."⁶⁰ Yet ultimately Abraham is a monster, a symbol of deception, exploitation, immorality and cold-blooded murder on a massive scale. This is how he responded to minor injustices and humiliations that he had largely caused himself. His readiness to condone a possible nuclear genocide of his own people and benefit from the related financial transactions makes him truly demonic, but also unreal. He is Shylock, Hitler and Madoff in one, in fact too demonic to be credible. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a mixture of true Indian Jewish history and Western anti-Semitic stereotypes. Such stereotypes existed before Rushdie. "Anti-Semitic mythologies...created in the West became part of the shared codes of knowledge among the Indian reading public," said Egorova.⁶¹ In reality, there is no Indian model for Abraham Zogiby. The history of the Jews of Cochin is, according to their own tradition, at least two thousand years old. In the Middle Ages many were long-distance traders, and the community received land and protection from the local kings. In the 18th century some became rich and rose to senior positions as political advisors of local rulers. Their economic and cultural interaction with their non-Jewish environment was as far as is known, unproblematic. No Cochin Jew is known to have played a critical, negative role in Kerala's history or beyond, comparable to the imaginary Zogiby.

If this is the image of the Jew that readers will take from the book, and not Rushdie's respectful description of Cochin Jews in general, then the author will have helped to reinforce an anti-Jewish stereotype. It is true that many of his major characters are negative. His worldview is pessimistic, and his style morbid. Nobody who enters the world of Rushdie's fiction returns as a great soul. The long-term effects of great literature are never predictable. Two years after the *Moor* appeared Arundhati Roy's main book *The God of Small Things*, which is also set in Kerala, was published in 1997. Critics noted structural similarities between the two novels and emphasized Rushdie's pervasive influence on Indian literature.

—*Shallmar the Clown*.⁶² *Shallmar the Clown* (2005) is Rushdie's second fiction with a Jew as major character, not an Indian Jew this time, but an American of French origin. In *Shallmar* there are no longer any miracles and fairy tales. What occurs in this novel is extraordinary but not impossible in the real world. It is one of Rushdie's most personal books. Here he opens his wounded heart. The book has a dedication: "In loving memory of my Kashmiri grandparents." *Shallmar the Clown* is about the tragedy of Kashmir, the agony of a once great civilization where Hindus and Muslims lived in peace and more rarely, even intermarried. It is about a Paradise Lost, and as for all lost paradises, Rushdie's story too may embellish past history.

The action takes place in two regions: California and Kashmir. It centers on four persons: the American Jew and famous ambassador to India, Max Ophuls; the Kashmiri Muslim Shalimar Noman, called "the Clown" because he was an amazingly agile tight-rope walker in a Kashmiri circus troupe; Boonyi Kaul, a ravishingly beautiful Kashmiri Hindu girl who becomes first Shalimar's wife and then deserts him for America to become Max Ophuls' mistress; and India Ophuls, the daughter whom Ophuls fathered with Boonyi Kaul. After Boonyi elopes with the ambassador, Shalimar swears that he will not rest until he has killed both of them as well as the offspring they might have. "Honour ranked above everything else," he prepares his revenge for twenty years, succeeds to enter the aging, unsuspecting ambassador's Californian household as a servant and sits his throat. Max Ophuls had long before tired of Boonyi and sent her back to Kashmir—now a desperate, prematurely aged and heavily overweight woman. Shalimar discovers and murders her. He then goes back to America to fulfill the last part of his vow, that is, to kill India Ophuls, but is arrested and condemned to death for the murder of her father Max. He flees from the San Quentin State Prison and breaks into the home of India Ophuls who now calls herself Kashmiri Ophuls. Kashmiri, a master archer, is waiting for him, her weapon ready. The book ends with suspense. We do not learn who will kill whom. During the twenty-five years of this family drama, the greater drama of Kashmir is unfolding. A Muslim insurgency is fueled by Islamist propaganda and foreign-trained terrorists, and is put down by the army's equally cruel counterinsurgency. Rushdie shares the pain of both Hindus and Muslims and a few times lets his personal rage burst out, reporting barbaric horrors in harrowing detail.

The personal stories of Shalimar and Boonyi and the story of Kashmiri would have been equally gripping if the American ambassador had not been a Jew. Did he have to be a Jew, and which of his traits could be regarded as typically Jewish? First, his name. The famous novelist and critic John Updike published a review of *Shalimar the Clown* as soon as it appeared: "Why, oh why did Salman Rushdie call one of his major characters Maximilian Ophuls? Max Ophuls is a highly distinctive name, well known to movie lovers as that of a German-born actor and stage director. Why has Rushdie attached a gaudy celebrity name to a different sort of celebrity...?"⁶³ The answer is that Rushdie knew something that Updike ignored. The real Max Ophuls was a German Jew, born Maximilian Oppenheimer. He did not want to carry this most Jewish of all German names in a time of rising anti-Semitism before World War II. Rushdie's Max Ophuls bears a name transferred from another Jew who also had an issue with his identity and wanted to hide it.

Rushdie's picture of Max Ophuls is larger than life. There is a touch of unreality in his achievements. Max grows up in Strasbourg as son of "highly cultured Ashkenazi Jews," in a street that is today "La rue du Grand Rabbin René Hirschler."⁶⁴ When the Germans occupy France Max joins the French Resistance, which needs his exceptional talents. There seem to be no limits to Ophuls' aptitudes. He turns out to be also an outstanding aircraft pilot, a flying ace who flees in a small plane to London. Apart from such fantasies, Rushdie's description of the German occupation and the fate of the Jews of France is meticulously researched, as was his description of the Jews of Cochín. After the war, Max Ophuls turns his back on France and immigrates to the United States where he embarks on a truly dazzling career. He becomes "one of the architects of the post-war world, of its international structures, its agreed economic and diplomatic conventions"⁶⁵—in short, he personifies at least three American presidents and five secretaries of state. Rushdie's enumeration of Max Ophuls' achievements tests the reader's imagination. He is in addition, a terrifically handsome and attractive man, a tennis champion, a dandy and lady killer, and a sexual predator until his eighties, like Zogobly.

The destruction of Kashmir burdens Ophuls, and he denounces it on television. He even claims to see a parallel between the suffering of the Jews and that of the Kashmiris. But poor Boonyi, his Kashmiri mistress, sees no such parallels when she understands that her former lover has decided to discard her: "I should have known...I should have known better than to lie with a Jew. The Jews are our enemy and I should have known."⁶⁶ Did

Rushdie slip into one of the vilest anti-Semitic propaganda stereotypes of the Nazis—about rich, lecherous Jews who seduce and rape innocent German girls? Ophul's is stung by her anti-Semitic slur: "The past reared up. Briefly he saw again the army of the Jewish fallen... In this moment of the story he was not the victim. In this moment of passion, Boonyi had the right to claim kinship with the lost." In other words, in a moment of passion, Boonyi had willingly left her husband and ran off with a rich lover. Now she finds herself cheated and abandoned. She is not the first girl in this situation and will not be the last. Is her fate really equal to the death of millions of Holocaust victims? Rushdie cannot possibly mean this. The bitter argument between Boonyi and Max is a metaphor for something much larger. In the meantime Max Ophul falls from grace and loses his ambassadorial position when the scandal comes to light. But the United States cannot do without him. He becomes the "United States Counter-Terrorism Chief," a secret position. He is "the occult servant of American geopolitical interest," the "invisible Max, on whose hands... there almost certainly was... a quantity of the world's visible and invisible blood."⁶⁷ Now Shalimar's revenge—at first sight no more than a traditional Muslim honor killing—takes on a cosmic significance. Was not Shalimar "the hand of justice, the appointed executioner of some unseen high court... in response to his [Ophul's] unknown unlisted unseen crimes of power?"

Did Henry Kissinger inspire Rushdie's image of this powerful but controversial American Jewish policymaker? Rushdie's message is unambiguous. Max Ophul is a metaphor for the United States under the Bush administration—the book appears in 2005. He is a Jew because he symbolizes the alleged Jewish influence on American politics as well as the alliance between the United States, Israel and the Jewish people in the fight against Islamic terrorism. *Shalimar the Clown* can be seen as an indictment of President Bush's controversial "War on Terror." The Kashmiri Boonyi Kaul's bitter complaint that she was wrong to "lie with a Jew" may also be an indictment of India's increasingly close links with allegedly Jewish-dominated America and with Israel at the time of the Bush administration. India's left-wingers were and are loudly protesting against this link. Does Boonyi's complaint also signify more specifically a more widespread Indian or Rushdie's personal conviction that America shares responsibility for the bloodshed in Kashmir? The Clinton administration did indeed interfere, regarded Kashmir as an international and not only internal Indian problem and did not clearly take India's side against Pakistan. Rushdie uses the Muslim and Western anti-Semitic myth of a Jewish world conspiracy that had infiltrated India long before⁶⁸ as a literary motif, although it is most unlikely that he believed in it himself. *Shalimar the Clown* is great literature and could survive longer than the memories of specific policies of the Bush years. It contains so far Rushdie's most unflattering perception of a Jew—and of America. Max Ophul's, the immensely successful but morally questionable American Jew appears much less as a fantasy than the invented Cochin Jew Abraham Zogobly. Other reviewers too have seen in Max Ophul's a metaphor for a Jewish-influenced America. One review has the title "Fear of a Jewish Planet?"⁶⁹ The reviewer is rightly concerned that Rushdie now "risks falling into older (that is anti-Semitic) stereotypes." Rushdie's Jewish readers and friends will look with anticipation and perhaps some concern for his future books.

Rushdie has written two earlier books—if not more—that are interesting from a Jewish point of view.

—*Midnight's Children*.⁷⁰ This is Rushdie's second book of fiction, published in 1981, and the one that first made him famous. It does not speak of Jews, but it already shows Rushdie's deep preoccupation with Islam. *Midnight's Children* amalgamates miraculous fairy tales, invented but credible details and India's real history into an inseparable narrative. This mixture of marvels, fiction and truth has roots in India's oldest literary traditions and would remain a trademark of much of Rushdie's future work. In the West, *Midnight's Children* was read as a fantasy, in India as almost history amongst others because the author attacked

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi whom he abhorred. The book spans events from independence to the war with Pakistan in 1965 and the Bangladesh war of 1971, which ended in the mass slaughter of the country's civil population by the Pakistani army. Rushdie dwells in horrible detail on this crime in which the world has never taken much interest. His reading of India's contemporary history is irreverent and bold: "A nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom."⁷¹

He does not hesitate to challenge deeply held Islamic beliefs. He argues for re-editing the Koran, putting the chapters in chronological order so that the book would make more sense.⁷² Rushdie speculates about the beginnings of Islam, but there is not a word about the numerous Jewish, that is biblical, Talmudic and Midrashic sources of the Koran, or the critical, adversarial place of the Jews of Arabia in the prophet's life and teaching. Chinese Islam experts have said that one cannot understand Islam if one does not know Judaism.⁷³ We found no similar awareness in Rushdie's work or in that of other Indian authors. The issue is a blank page. We encountered the problem previously in *The Satanic Verses* and in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* and spoke of a "taboo" area.

—Shame.⁷⁴ Soon after *Midnight's Children* the novel *Shame* (1983) was published. Now it was Pakistan that received Rushdie's unflattering attention. It came in the form of a political satire that is as sarcastic as *Midnight's Children*, but even more devastating: "Pakistan, the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself."⁷⁵ Choosing "shame" as the for a fiction about Pakistan is revealing: "Wherever I turn there is something of which to be ashamed."⁷⁶ Rushdie understands why a Pakistani father murders his young daughter after she has gone out with a white boy; this is a culture nourished by a "diet of honour and shame." The same culture explains Pakistan's unhappy history. There is a rare and insightful comment on current Muslim anti-Semitism: "Anti-Semitism, an interesting phenomenon, under whose influence people who have never met a Jew vilify all Jews for the sake of maintaining solidarity with the Arab states which offer Pakistan workers, these days, employment and much needed foreign exchange."⁷⁷ However, Islamic anti-Jewishness has deep theological and historic roots that are much older than the needs of oil-poor countries to fawn upon oil-rich Arabs, but Rushdie avoids this subject. And there is an even rarer mention of Israel, a simple quip: Iran is one of the only two theocracies on earth, "Israel being the other one."⁷⁸ In 1983 Israel's prime minister was Yitzchak Shamir, a dogmatic nationalist but no religious man, and his foreign minister was Shimon Peres, not an Orthodox Jew either. The defamatory comparison with Iran—if it is not meant as a joke—may illustrate more widespread misunderstandings about Israel among Indian intellectuals.

4. Vikram Seth

Vikram Seth, born in 1952 in Calcutta (Kolkata) is one of the most famous Indian writers of the postwar generation. He is from Bengal, like Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, the early 20th-century poet Rabindranath Tagore and many others. Bengal was a cradle of modern Indian literature and poetry. Vikram Seth is a novelist, poet and travel writer who masters, apart from Hindi, Urdu and English, also Chinese, German and French. His *Two Lives* (2005) is together with Rushdie's *Shalimar*, the most recent Indian book with a major Jewish theme. Twelve years earlier, in 1993, a book appeared that the critics would call his unparalleled master work, *A Suitable Boy*. This book contains Seth's worldviews, shaped by India's violent history of the 20th century. It is with these views that the author, already prejudiced against Israel, later visited Israel and judged—misjudged—the country.

—Two Lives.⁷⁹ Seth's visit to Israel is mentioned at the end of the nonfiction book *Two Lives*, which was published in 2005. These two polemical pages are the weakest part of the book. Otherwise this is arguably the most touching book that an Indian novelist has written so far about a Jew and the Jewish fate. Like Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* of 1988,

the book is about the Holocaust, but in contrast to hers, this one is based on intimate personal knowledge. It was an immediate success, reprinted several times and translated into foreign languages.

The "two lives" are those of Vikram Seth's granduncle, the dentist Dr. Shanti Behari

Seth from North India, and his Jewish wife Henry Caro from Berlin. For an Indian it goes

without saying that a person's life always involves also the life of his entire extended family,

which means in the case of "Auntie Henry" the life of her mother Ella and her beloved sister

Lola, both murdered by the Nazis. Shanti Seth began to study dentistry in Berlin in 1931. In

1933 he looked for a room and moved in with the Caro family. An Indian risked nothing in

Nazi Germany. Shanti's British passport, issued in 1938 had the entry "Race and Caste:

Aryan (sic) Hindu (Khatn)."⁸⁰ Henry died to London one month before the war, and in 1940

Shanti enlisted with the British Army. Back to London, he finally married Henry in 1951. In

1969 when Vikram Seth was 17 years old, he moved in with his granduncle and aunt who

treated him like their own son. Henry died in 1989. The inconsolable Shanti destroyed all

documents related to Henry but missed a trove of letters left by her in the attic. Vikram

discovers it and decides in 1994 to write this book. He looks for all available traces of

Henry's murdered family. He visits Israel for this reason. Sitting before a computer in Yad

Vasem, Israel's Holocaust museum, Vikram discovers the Gestapo records of mother Ella's

and sister Lola's deportation in 1943. Ella perishes in Theresienstadt, Lola in Auschwitz-

Birkenau. The sequence of Lola's martyrdom is well known because she shared it with

millions. Vikram Seth describes the probable events in excruciating detail, from the

selection at the railway ramp in Auschwitz and the sadism of the SS guards to the agony in

the gas chamber and the removal of gold teeth and hair from the corpses. As he stares at

the documents on the computer, he is suddenly gripped by psychosomatic symptoms that

have been observed among other family members who identify with the suffering and death

of their loved ones. He, the "quasi-agnostic Hindu" as he calls himself⁸¹ begins to shake

violently and uncontrollably. A German school boy who visits the Holocaust Museum with his

class sees Vikram's distress and offers help. Vikram rejects it; the last person he wants to

come near to him is a German, any German. Soon other symptoms appear. Vikram can no

longer stand the German language, which he had liked so much before. He refuses to use

German, an attitude well known from Holocaust victims in Israel—the writer Aharon

Appelfeld is among them. "The stench of the language in which I had read the phrases from

the Gestapo letter clung...The very words stank."⁸² After the war, Henry refused to speak to

her Indian husband about the death of her mother and sister and evaded young Vikram's

questions. Husband Shanti never knew how much Henry had mourned for them, but Vikram

Seth reads the letters from the attic and discovers her silent pain: "I have suffered

unending torment over the fate of my loved ones, and will never get over it," she wrote to a

Jewish friend.⁸³ The silence of Holocaust survivors noted by Vikram Seth; their refusal to

speak of the unspeakable is a symptom that has often been found in Israel and elsewhere.

Vikram Seth's portrays his "Auntie Henry" with great sensitivity. It will be difficult to find

the long-term psychological consequences of the Holocaust. It will be difficult to find

another non-Jewish author from a remote, not directly affected country with the same

sensitivity.

The fate of Henry's family spurred Vikram Seth on to learn more about the history

of Germany and that of the Jewish people, including Israel. India's knowledge of the latter is

"sporadic," he admits, with some understatement. The only history and geography he had

learned in school was that of India and the former British Empire. Jews and Judaism played

no noticeable role in Indian history, he says. But Vikram Seth's ignorance extends to many

elements of Judaism and Jewish history. He believes that the roots of Zionism were in

Germany, which is wrong. He mentions that Indian Jews left for Israel "largely for economic

and social reasons,"⁸⁴ which is partly correct but he omits the longing for Zion, the memory

of the old homeland that played a considerable role in Indian Jewish ritual and folklore no

less than in Jewish prayers everywhere else. Before Vikram Seth came to Israel he had

worked out his own views on the Jewish state, he asserts confidently, but these views are anything but original. They are copies of Gandhi's anti-Zionism of the 1930s, but they ignore Gandhi's subtle change of mind after the Holocaust, when he conceded, as Kumaraswamy and others have shown, that Jews too had a historic claim to Palestine. Gandhi's erstwhile anti-Zionism was primarily inspired by his fervent hope to keep India together, prevent the dreaded partition of the country and for this reason showed his sympathy with Muslim concerns in general. Vikram Seth, however, did not need to feel bound by such political calculations—certainly not so many years after India's partition. His comments about Israel provide an introduction into the mindset of a part of the Indian intelligentsia. Kumaraswamy characterized this hostility toward Israel as dominated by "a very selective sense of morality" and "moral self-righteousness."⁸⁵ Both qualifications fully apply to Seth. Apart from his research in the Yad Vashem Museum he reports no relevant observation from his visit to Israel yet claims that the country presents a "picture of terror, injustice and arbitrariness"⁸⁶ almost since 1948. In *A Suitable Boy* he played Hindu extremism, not the Republic of India itself. He would never question India's or Pakistan's right to exist, irrespective of the millions who were killed or expelled by both sides after 1947, but he questions Israel's. He concedes that during the Nazi persecutions, the Palestinian Arabs should have shared some space with the oppressed Jews—the fact is that they refused to do so—"but that the Jews could then carve out their own state in Palestine does not follow."⁸⁷ Vikram Seth directs his particular ire against the notion of a Jewish state, as for him "Jewish" can only mean a religion. He adopts Nehru's distaste of a possible Hindu state that would discriminate against Muslims just like Pakistan was discriminating against non-Muslims. "As for states...that deliberately favour one religion over another...these in effect perpetuate inequality and injustice...Jewish control of the nation is central to the idea of Israel....Historic yearning for certain religious sites or landscapes or a belief that one is divinely ordained to possess a particular part of the earth is hardly an excuse for creating one's living space at the expense of others."⁸⁸ The author belongs to India's large Hindu majority and ignores what it meant for Jews to be only a small, defenseless minority wherever they went. He also ignores that the Arab states have destroyed the "living space" of nearly one million Jews, nearly all of their Jewish inhabitants. Most of these had nowhere else to flee but to Israel. Also he refuses to see the Jews as a people, a nation, a civilization with a history linked to a specific land. Vikram Seth found in aunt Henny's letter trope in the attic a Hebrew-German prayer book. At the end of *Two Lives* he is reading Henny's Jewish prayers to his imaginary Jewish-Israeli audience, preaching to them "love our neighbour" and more. During the European Middle Ages and later, some of the Christian clergy too liked to quote from Jewish scripture to upbraid the recalcitrant Jews who resisted their pressure to convert to Christianity. The tact with which Seth had described the tragedy of Aunt Henny and her Jewish family has now vanished. The author is not alone in this respect. The combination of deep sympathy for the dead Jews of the Holocaust with equally deep antipathy for the living ones of Israel is well known in the West. What can also be found in the West is Seth's double standard. The radical Indian writer Arundhati Roy (who will be discussed later), attacks Israel with the same vigor as Seth. But she attacks her own country, India, even more severely for perceived human rights violations. Nobody can blame her for double standards. Not so Seth. There is only one black sheep: Israel.

—*A Suitable Boy*.⁸⁹ *A Suitable Boy* is important for our context because it helps to explain why not only the author, but also other important members of the Indian elite were—and some still are—so hostile to Israel. Filling almost 1,500 densely spaced pages, *A Suitable Boy* is one of the longest English-language novels ever written. It is today regarded as one of the great classics not only of Indian, but also of 20th-century world literature. The story is set in postpartition India of 1951/1952, at the time of the country's first general elections. The place is a fictional town, Brahmpur near the Ganges River. Seth's narrative weaves together the fate of four upper-class families of Brahmpur. Three are Hindus, one is Muslim,

Their lives evolve against the background of India's tumultuous history of the early 1950s. Vikram Seth is a master of connecting personal lives to India's grand history. Prime Minister Nehru arrives on the scene on pages 1035-1037 to help in an election and stays involved in the story until the end. Seth describes the material and spiritual culture of India's upper classes in great detail. He sees India very much through upper-class eyes. The "Dalit" or Untouchables, the starving landless peasants, the emaciated beggars remain in the shadow, mostly silent, although their suffering is recognized. The offspring of the well-off live in a world that looks back to that of the ruling Mogul Courts of the 17th and 18th centuries. This world is no longer the India of the 21st century.

The novel examines many of India's topical problems. The Hindu-Muslim strife is on top of the list. Vikram Seth will later transfer his Indian expertise in this subject to the Middle East in order to judge the Arab-Israeli conundrum. In 1951 the pain of partition remains acute in India and the danger of new wars with Pakistan is on many people's mind. But the main problem is inside India. Vikram Seth is a moderate Hindu who fears Hindu extremism more than that of any other creed or party. Forty years before, Nehru had the same fears. Seth continues to back Nehru's past moderation about Islam and Pakistan, against the "Hindu chauvinist right-wing" which disparaged him as "almost an honorary Muslim."⁹⁰ Seth's detailed descriptions of religious beliefs, practices and events will not endear Hinduism to his readers. Seth introduces an upper-class Hindu extremist who liked to "talk about his favourite great man—Hitler; six years dead but still revered by him like a god...and how atavistic and admirable a force the Indo-Germanic bond was."⁹¹ Such opinions could indeed be heard in India—Arundhati Roy too refers to them because they have still not died out—but India is not free of Muslim fanaticism either. The narrative's dramatic peak comes when a Shiite mourning procession in Brahmapur inadvertently crosses the way of a joyful procession in honor of a Hindu god. Both sides believe that they are victims of provocation and tear each other apart in a horrific orgy of bloodshed and arson. Although Seth tends to see the Muslims as the most aggrieved community, he is not blind to Hindu pain and bitterness. Hindus do not despise other religions, whereas Muslims in his story show their contempt for Hinduism in provocative words or gestures. Hindus still harbor a deep resentment of the persecutions they suffered two and a half centuries ago when the Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb, a fanatical Muslim, began to destroy their temples. And the horrors of partition left deep traumas in Hindus that have not healed. "At the word Pakistan...withered old Mrs. Tandon flinched. Three years ago her whole family had to flee the blood and flames and unforgettable terror of Lahore....Several of her friends had been butchered....It was too much for her imagination. She felt ill. The pleasant chatter in the garden of Brahmapur was amplified into the cries of the blood-mad mobs...."⁹² Seth knows that such deep traumas have not only psychological but also long-term political consequences. Nehru was already afraid that Hindu India would be tempted to take revenge for past Hindu sufferings. If Pakistan treated minorities barbarically this was no reason for India to do the same: "The thought of India as a Hindu state with its minorities treated as second-class citizens sickened him."⁹³ And as said at the beginning of the review of Seth, it is with this thought in mind, born in India's cruel and complicated history that Vikram Seth visited Israel a few years later.

II. Two Radical Writers

We call two of the best-known Indian writers "radical" because they diverge from the moderate consensus of mainstream authors when they speak of the role of Muslims in India's religious tensions and past history. They represent two contradictory extremes in a wide spectrum of opinions. The Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul is bitterly hostile to Islam and to the Arabs who forced their religion on others. He sees Islam as a brutal, imperialistic creed that has done untold damage to India and the rest of Asia. The writer Arundhati Roy is a human rights campaigner and according to official Indian views, also a left-wing trouble-

maker. She sees the Muslims in India and elsewhere as an oppressed and discriminated against minority and keeps protesting to defend their rights. The work of both Naipaul and Roy confirms that Islam was, and perhaps still remains India's central preoccupation. Neither of the two has written a book about Jews, but their books contain comments about Jews or Israel and their relationship with Islam that are likely to reflect the convictions of other Indians as well.

5. Vidladar Surajprasad Naipaul

V.S. (Vidladar Surajprasad) Naipaul, grandson of an impoverished village Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh, was born in 1932 on the West Indian island of Trinidad. His poor rural origin sets him apart from the other, middle- and upper-class novelists, and he is also the only Indian who received the Nobel Prize for literature (2001). He is the only diaspora Indian among them.

Our survey is based on seven of his books: five nonfiction, one fiction and one mixed. The fictional *Half a Life*⁹⁴ and the collection *The Writer and the World: Essays*⁹⁵ will be used when appropriate. Naipaul is deeply concerned with the history and future of India. He looks at the country's failings with the critical eyes of a diaspora Indian who is both an outsider and insider. He expressed this concern mainly in three travelogues written after his visits to India in 1962, 1975, and 1995/1997.

—*An Area of Darkness*.⁹⁶ This is the first of his three travelogues, known as his "Indian Trilogy." In 1964 Naipaul was 29 years old when he visited India for the first time. From the minute he arrived in Bombay he was gripped by a feeling of alienation from the land of his ancestors. "It has taken me much time to come to terms with the strangeness of India," he wrote in his second travel book, *India: A Wounded Civilization*.⁹⁷ He was torn between engagement and repulsion, interest and despair. There is an obvious parallel to Naipaul's deep ambivalence. It is the conflicted attitude of some Jewish Diaspora intellectuals toward Israel: they too are attracted and repelled, sometimes engaged but more often critical. However, diaspora Indians can also be endowed with a clear-sightedness that people who never left India are lacking. When Naipaul speaks of the Mahatma Gandhi who settled in India only at the age of 46, he keeps emphasizing this particular advantage. "He looked at India as no Indian was able to....He does not ignore the obvious. He sees the beggars and the shameless pundits and the filth of Banarases....He sees the Indian callousness, the Indian refusal to see."⁹⁸ Naipaul was not prepared for India's immense poverty, its panic in face of the Chinese invasion of 1962, the paralyzing caste system. He also reveals his deep bitterness about what Islam has done to India, a subject to which he will often return.

—*India: A Wounded Civilization*.¹⁰⁰ The crisis of India is not only political or economic; it is the crisis of a "wounded civilization," cites his second travel book in 1975. Maybe Gandhian India had been created too swiftly: "The India to which independence came was a land of far older defeat."¹⁰¹ Critics attacked him for allegedly supporting Hindu extremists or for being one himself. Salman Rushdie mocked him: "Heavyweight figures in the intellectual tier spoke of a new awakening of the suppressed cultural energy of the Hindu masses."¹⁰² But Naipaul flays his own religion, Hinduism, with the same vehemence that he usually reserves for Islam. Hindu India is eternal, but this "India taught the vanity of all action."¹⁰³ "Hinduism has...exposed us to a thousand years of defeat and stagnation."¹⁰⁴ But his deepest criticism is moral and philosophical: Hindus have no obligation outside their clans, so he argues; no higher idea of human association; no general idea of the responsibility of man to his fellow. Speaking of the oil shock of 1973, which impoverished India and enriched

the Arabs, his bitterness comes to the surface: "India is again at the periphery of this new Arabian world."¹⁰⁵

—India: *A Million Mutinies Now*.¹⁰⁶ When Naipaul returned for the third time to India in 1988/1990, he found a fast changing country. Everything was stirring. If independence had been like a revolution, "now there were many revolutions within that revolution."¹⁰⁷ These revolutions should not be wished away; the "liberation of the spirit" that had come to India had to come as a disturbance, a rage, a revolt. Now the commitments to individual regions, castes and classes came into the open and struggled to assert themselves. When India decided to drop its one-sided hostility to Israel and accept diplomatic relations with the country in 1992, it did so in a general climate of challenging past assumptions and policies. And in midst of this pandemonium of "a million mutinies now" Naipaul detects the contours of a new India, an India with a national idea. The unexpected optimism of this avowed pessimist, which has so far been justified, comes through at the end of the book.

Naipaul's main resentment and preoccupation is with Islam. He never lived in a Muslim country but after the Iranian revolution of 1979 he spent seven months visiting Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. In 1995 he visited the same four countries again. He conducted a large number of interviews with people from all walks of life and published two landmark travel narratives that were widely read and debated: *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981)¹⁰⁸ and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (1998).¹⁰⁹ Naipaul shows little interest in the Arab world. He wants to understand how the Arabs spread their religion in Asia and converted so many to Islam, eliminating and "vandalising"—Naipaul's own term—the older Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. He uses stark words, which few writers of the same caliber have dared to say in public:

"The Arabs were the most successful imperialists of all time, since to be conquered by them...is still, in the minds of the faithful, to be saved."¹¹⁰ "Everyone not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert's worldview alters. His holy places are in Arab lands; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own, he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. The disturbance for societies is immense, and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved; the turning away has to be done again and again...In the Islam of converted countries there is an element of neurosis and nihilism. These countries can be easily set on the boil."¹¹¹ "The cruelty of Islamic fundamentalism is that it allows only to one people, the Arabs...a past and sacred places....Converted peoples have to strip themselves of their past..."¹¹²

The list of similar quotes could go on and on. Of course he became very controversial and raised a lot of anger because he could not simply be dismissed as an ignorant rabble-rouser. Pakistan reviled him. The American professor of Palestinian origin Edward Said assaulted him as a "neo-colonialist." "Uncomfortable Indian intellectuals tried to wipe him off the Indian slate by declaring that he was not a genuine Indian because he was not born and raised in the country. Naipaul's rage may be one-sided, but it is still shared by other Hindus. Among India's great English novelists, however, Naipaul is a lone voice in this respect. In Naipaul's Muslim travel narratives we meet for the first time a number of Jews. Not real Jews of course, but the Jewish ghosts who inhabit the wild fantasies of some Muslims. Naipaul is very attentive to Islamic anti-Semitism. In Iran, Zionism and Israelis are blamed for "sabotage."¹¹³ Pakistanis complain that their nuclear bomb is opposed by "International Zionism" and that a Jewish-Indian-Russian conspiracy is underway to put Pakistan down.¹¹⁴ More interesting is a long discussion between several people in Malaysia.¹¹⁵ A *hajj* (a Muslim who made the pilgrimage to Mecca) said that most tobacco

manufacturers are Jewish," and in order to destroy the Jews we must not consume their products." He asks his friends to read Henry Ford's anti-Semitic book about the Jews; "the Jews are the enemies of God." But then the *haji* changes his tack unexpectedly, "What do you know about the history of the Jews?...They are a genius race....This is confirmed by the books of God....Other races are jealous of them because they are a genius race. They have contributed much in the sense of concepts. Karl Marx." But soon enough the *haji* falls back into his old tack. God converted the Jews to monkeys and their prestige declined. And therefore "the Jews are now pulling down the whole society with them." On Naipaul's second visit to Iran, a historian explains to him that the Zionists had made the United States their first idol or false god and now they were turning India into their second idol. "The Zionists are going to wound India again. They will kill Gandhi again...."¹¹⁶ There is sense in all this madness. Jewish power, whether imaginary or not, is dreaded. The Jewish genius and its beneficial contributions are acknowledged, but how to reconcile this fact with the allegedly well-proven nastiness of the Jews and their degradation remains a riddle. And the just beginning official relations between India and Israel, long before they turned into a major military link, were already an obsession in Iranian and Pakistani minds. Like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and other Indian novelists, Naipaul keeps away from the biblical roots of the Koran and the Jewish encounters with Mohammed, although these are the roots of

But hostility to Islam does not necessarily guarantee sympathy for, or even interest in Muslim anti-Semitism.

Jews and the Jewish state, in India no more than in Europe. There are objective remarks about Jews in Naipaul's books, but they are minor and innocuous. One relates to Gandhi's Jewish associates, "fellow seekers after the truth,"¹¹⁷ another one to the anti-Semitism of black radicals in Jamaica,¹¹⁸ a third one to Israeli technical assistance in Africa.¹¹⁹ The only really important comment we could identify in seven books has an indirect link to Judaism. In the paper "Our Universal Civilization," Naipaul admits again his unhappiness with his Hinduism and his admiration for a biblical core concept, which he presents as Christian. He speaks "of the Christian precept Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. There was no such human consolation in the Hinduism I grew up with, and—although I have never had any religious faith—the simple idea was, and is dazzling to me, perfect as a guide to human behaviour."¹²⁰ It is true that the New Testament reports this precept as a word of Jesus,¹²¹ but it has been recognized long ago that this "Golden Rule" is a core principle of Judaism. It is based on the Hebrew Bible and mentioned in Jewish scriptures that predate Jesus. Its final expression can be found in a response from Hillel, one of the most venerated teachers of Rabbinic Judaism who, according to some, was also Jesus' teacher: "What is hateful to you, don't do it to your fellow man. This is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary. Now go and learn!"¹²² Naipaul was no more familiar with the Jewish roots of Christianity than he was with the Jewish roots of Islam. Thus it is Christianity alone that earned his gratitude and admiration—of which the Jews might have claimed a fair share as well.

6. Arundhati Roy

Arundhati Roy lives in New Delhi. She was born in 1961 to a Bengali Hindu father and a Syrian-Christian mother from Kerala, a state of thirty million inhabitants who speak the ancient language Malayalam. Syriac Christianity is one of the Eastern Churches going back to the early centuries of Christianity. Kerala boasts the highest level of literacy of all Indian states and is economically better off than other parts of India. According to the census of 2001, 25 percent of the Keralese are Muslims, and 19 percent Christians. In Kerala's capital of Cochin there was also an old Jewish community, with the oldest (and very beautiful synagogue) in India. They numbered several thousand souls and have nearly all left for Israel. Many Jewish objects are still exhibited in the local museum. A high proportion of Hindus, maybe 30 percent or more, belonged to the lowest caste, the "Untouchables" or

Dalit. Roy spent her younger years in Kerala and was educated at Corpus Christi College, but describes herself as a nonreligious Hindu. Like Anita Desai, the other Indian women writer under discussion, being the child of a "mixed" couple made her particularly attentive to the tensions between cultures, castes and religions.

—*Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy*.¹²³ Apart from her only novel, the best-selling *The God of Small Things* (see below), Arundhati Roy's publications are political and social. *Listening to Grasshoppers* appeared in 2009. Roy is a radical activist who campaigns against what she perceives as India's grave human rights violations. Her sharp criticisms, including those of Israel, are mostly shared by India's left-wing intellectual elites. Indian observers have said that the influence of radicals is getting weaker. Nevertheless, Arundhati Roy's voice continues to be heard and her work is well known.

Her book is first and foremost a polemic against contemporary India and its politics, elites, democratic institutions, external alliances and economic liberalization. It is a reflection of her deep pessimism about the future of India, the West and the world. Some of Roy's Indian concerns, for example about the judiciary, police abuses or corruption, have been raised by others as well. Roy's sharp English prose expresses an unbridled rage; her choice of words is more than once loose and excessive. In this book, the main reason for her rage is discrimination of the Muslims of India and Kashmir. "India has a shamefully persecuted, impoverished minority of more than 150 million Muslims who are being targeted as a community and pushed to the wall."¹²⁴ The culprits are Hindu nationalists, and particularly the hated BJP, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which was in power from 1996 to 2004. Arundhati Roy is incensed when in 2002 Hindu militants massacred two thousand unarmed Muslim civilians in the state of Gujarat, an event that also plays a major role in Chetan Bhagat's *The 3 Mistakes of my Life* (see section 8 below). She calls the killings "genocide," a term that should not be used lightly. Roy uses it without restraint; it reoccurs dozens of times all through the book. She appropriates not only this loaded term, but also the whole vocabulary of the Nazi Holocaust and transfers it to India to excoriate Hindu extremists. The Hindu perpetrators are "fascists": "Fascism's firm footprint has appeared in India."¹²⁵ Worse than that, Hindu extremists "prepare for the Final Solution"—presumably the extermination of all living Muslims ("Final Solution" was the Nazi code word for the extermination of all Jews), and Hindus are allegedly thinking of "founding a global Hindu empire."¹²⁶—a Hindu Reich? Therefore the "parallels between contemporary India and pre-war [that is Nazi-ruled] Germany are chilling."¹²⁸ Fascism? Fascism? The Final Solution? Hindu fanatics have indeed said and written horrible things, but they are not India and do not rule India. Roy can live, speak and write freely in India's capital where all her books are available. In any Fascist country she would have been silenced, if not worse, and in Nazi Germany she would have found herself in no time in a concentration camp and almost certainly executed. Of course she knows that the Indian reality is more complex, and she even responds to those who blame her for loose language, arguing that her use of "fascism" is justified for certain crimes. She admits that the Bollywood superstar who is most beloved by all Indians is a Muslim with a typically Muslim name, which could never have happened to a Jewish actor in Nazi Germany; she also knows that Indian Muslims too committed acts of terrorism, but she keeps being carried away by ideology and emotion. Roy's preferred black sheep is India, but Israel and the United States follow soon after. The growing links between India and Israel, particularly in the defense fields, are a betrayal of Palestine and India's nonaligned past and trigger Roy's repeated indignation. The mere occupation of the Palestinian territories is "genocide in a fishbowl, genocide in slow motion"—again the same irresponsible use of words.¹²⁹ "The US and Israeli armies don't hesitate to...drop daisy cutters (8,600 kilogram bombs that were used in Vietnam to flatten forests) on wedding parties in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan"¹³⁰ which is a grotesque lie. She berates "Ariel Sharon's bestial invasion of Palestine (*italics added*)"¹³¹ without explaining that he did so to put an end to the horrific Palestinian suicide bombings that had

killed and injured thousands of innocent civilians. Roy's vocabulary is—in this case—ominous, even if inadvertently so. Fanatical Islamist preachers have compared Jews to "pigs and monkeys." Whoever compares any human beings to animals opens the first door to genocide, and in this case the term is justified.

Roy does not speak of Jews or Judaism. Her problem is with Israel. Her pervasive hostility to the Jewish state goes beyond faulty judgments and factual errors. This blanket rejection, coming from a self-proclaimed Hindu with great psychological intuition, calls for an explanation. In India Jews were barely noted and never persecuted. Jews never blamed India for any ill-deeds as European Jews rightly do, thus making Europe feel ill-at-ease. Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jain holy scriptures do not know of Jews who allegedly killed God's son or rejected His Prophet. Nothing in the civilizations of India and China made Jewish life as problematic as it often was in the Christian and Muslim worlds. A confluence of factors explains Arundhati Roy's hostility toward Israel. One of these is her defense of all groups perceived as discriminated minorities. Arundhati Roy, like other Indian radicals, maintains the Congress Party's former, uncompromising hostility toward Zionism and Israel long after India had changed its policy of nonrecognition of Israel.¹³² But there could be several other reasons. Arundhati Roy's early Christian education in Kerala's Corpus Christi College and in her home environment could easily have influenced her perception of Jews, even if it is today a subconscious influence. Gandhi himself has made comments about Judaism, which he did not regard as defamatory, although they repeat antagonistic Christian misinterpretations. Finally we have to consider the shared hostility to Israel and the international solidarity of the radical left to which Arundhati Roy belongs. The radicals are meeting, reading and applauding each other across all borders. Just as in the past, the English language, culture and political ideas have "colonized" the mind of many Indians before independence, so do now new ideas coming from the same old Britain and Europe colonize the mind of some post-independence Indians. The anti-Zionism of the Indian left is not entirely home grown; it is partly a foreign import, as much from Europe as from the Arab world, a "mimicry of the West"¹³³ as Naipaul called the colonial and postcolonial Indian tendency to adopt Western modes of thought. The imitable Salman Rushdie, sharp eye and nasty tongue, commented on the same tendency and captured it in seven words: "Europe repeats itself, in India, as farce."¹³⁴

—*The God of Small Things*.¹³⁵ Published in 1997, this is so far Roy's only book of fiction. It was praised as a "masterpiece." India's Nobel laureate Amartya Sen mentions this book respectfully.¹³⁶ In Kerala the Malayalam language edition of her book is said to be very popular. *The God of Small Things* does not mention the Jews of Cochin, Israel or other foreign countries except for a few references to China and England, but it holds one of the keys to Arundhati Roy's political convictions, including her vitriolic hostility toward Israel. Roy is an uncompromising defender of all "under-dogs," in India particularly the Muslims and "Untouchables," and in the Middle East the Palestinians. Roy's book brings up four major themes: the ways of life of Kerala's Syrian Christians; the evils of a caste system that allows the "Untouchables" to be oppressed and killed by the "Touchables"—Roy's sardonic term for all higher castes; the Communist Party actors are a well-to-do family of Syrian Christians who have a pair of seven-year-old twins who were born in 1962 "amidst rumours of Chinese occupation and India's impending defeat."¹³⁷ for Indians still a traumatic event. The relations within this extended Christian family are nasty and dominated by intrigues, jealousy and physical violence. Are these Roy's own childhood memories? Maybe her pessimism and permanent revolt against injustice go indeed back to her own childhood. Maltreatment of the Untouchables enrages Arundhati Roy. Velutha is an untouchable worker in the family's factory who has made himself indispensable by his unmatched technical competence. He is the most sympathetic, honest and humane character in the

whole story. But his professional and human success has given him an assurance that is unacceptable to the "Touchables," the higher castes. When a young cousin who visits from England drowns accidentally, Velutha is accused of murdering her, and when in addition it is discovered that he had a love affair beyond the forbidden caste boundary, his fate is sealed. A police detachment hunts him down and beats him to death. Roy is a left-wing radical, but no friend of the Communist Party. She despises the Communist Party of Kerala, its cynical power games, its corruption and its betrayals. Velutha is ultimately a victim of the Communist's betrayal because they could have saved him but did not do so "for ancient reasons of their own"—even they still adhered to the old caste discriminations.¹²⁸

III. Three New Voices: The 21st Century

Several new, mostly young and hitherto unknown Indian-English fiction writers emerged rather suddenly between 2004 and 2009. Three will be reviewed: Aravind Adiga, Chetan Bhagat and Vikas Swarup. In style and mentality these three have a lot in common, and they differ from the older generation of "classical" novelists. They are bold, funny and irreverent. They too lay India's failings, but they do it in a jocular and less heavy-hearted way than did Desai, Rushdie, Naipaul, Seth and others. All three have already conquered a large Indian audience, mainly among the young, and a few of their books have also become popular in the West. Are they the new voice of India's letters, the voice of a new epoch? It is too early to tell, but it is clear that these authors have struck a chord with India's young urban readers who—to a large degree—have the future of the country in their hands. Those who want to understand India's youth should read Adiga, Bhagat and Swarup. Adiga, Bhagat and Swarup do not mention Jews in the books we have read. Maybe this has no significance and will change when they continue to publish. Or maybe it is significant and means that this new generation has no use for Jews, the Holocaust, Israel, the Middle East conflict, etc. Their audiences and references are in India, not in the West. They seek the recognition of Mumbai and Bangalore, not of London. Some comments in these new books indicate that foreign models, opinions and events may no longer have the same import that they once had for a preceding generation of readers and writers. This could raise interesting challenges to other countries that plan to increase cultural links with India.

7. Aravind Adiga

Aravind Adiga, born 1974 in Chennai (Madras), Tamil Nadu, became world famous and controversial in India almost over night when he published in 2008 his first book *The White Tiger*.¹²⁹ The book contains fictitious letters, which an equally fictitious Balram Halwai writes to "His Excellency Wen Jiabao," Prime Minister of the "Freedom-Loving Nation of China." Thus, the tone is given at the very beginning. It is irresistibly funny, ironic, mordant—and deadly serious if one reads carefully. China's prime minister prepares a state visit to India and needs to better understand this complex country. Balram Halwai generously volunteers his advice to the premier. Balram is a low-caste Hindu from a small village. He can barely support his meagre life as a servant and driver of a rich and corrupt master in Delhi. While feigning obedience to his master he observes his country with a merciless eye and dreams of a better life. None of India's "holy cows" escapes his biting sarcasm. Not Gandhi. Not India's hard-won independence in 1947 when the "law of the zoo" (British rule) was replaced by the "law of the jungle." Not India's much vaunted democracy: "We may not have sewage, drinking water and Olympic gold medals but we do have democracy."¹³⁰ Not free elections; "the three main diseases of this country" are "typhoid, cholera and election fever." Not India's religious diversity embodied in "thirty-six million plus four" gods, of whom thirty-six million are busily protecting the Hindus, the trinity the Christians and one god the Muslims. Not the grandiloquent claims that India "invented everything from the

Internet to hard-boiled eggs to space-ships before the British stole it all from us."¹⁴¹ And not India's astounding economic growth. One evening the narrator squats in the open to relieve himself, in line with hundreds of building workers who squat for the same purpose. They live and sleep in the open, near their half-completed skyscrapers. He looks away, ashamed like they are, but then looks up again and begins to laugh. They look back at him and laugh too. What do they laugh at? At the world's admiration for India's economic miracle? At our ignorance of the indignities that accompany it? Six hundred million Indians have no toilet, more than half of the total population. It took this young, irreverent Indian fiction writer to remind his readers of this unpalatable fact, otherwise mentioned among our authors, only by another merciless observer, V.S. Naipaul.¹⁴²

Four issues dominate Balram's thought and fill his letters to Mr. Wen Jiabao: How will India cope with China's rise, how will it cope with its Muslims, with its pervasive corruption and with the horrific injustices committed against the poor and down-trodden? China haunts Balram like so many other Indians: "Parliamentary democracy...We will never catch up with China for this single reason." The Muslims are a riddle. Balram asks for China's advice: "Mr. Premier, have you noticed that all four of the greatest poets in the world are Muslims? And yet all the Muslims you meet are illiterate or covered head to toe in black burkas or looking for buildings to blow up? It's a puzzle, isn't it? If you ever figure these people out send me an e-mail."¹⁴³ Balram observes India's corruption from a safe distance until one day it strikes him directly. His master's wife, "Pinky Madam," gets drunk, takes her car and kills a child in a wild hit-and-run drive. Balram is asked to sign a "voluntary" admission that he was the guilty driver. "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid, middle-class masters."¹⁴⁴ Balram's dream to become one of India's great entrepreneurs, which is the only asset India has over China, is compromised. But now a cruel plan begins to grow in his head: "A billion servants are secretly fantasizing about strangling their bosses." This is what Balram finally does, in a gruesome murder scene. He steals his boss's ill-gained money and sets up his own enterprise. His last letter informs the Chinese premier that even if he is caught, he will never regret having slit his master's throat because "It was all worthwhile to know...just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant."¹⁴⁵ Then he adds his new e-mail address, just in case Premier Wen Jiabao wants to reply.

There are no significant references to other nations or cultures in this book except for China. The reason appears toward the end when Balram turns in anger to India's youth. For too long have Indians looked for foreign advice and emulated foreign models: "People in this country are still waiting for the war of their freedom to come from somewhere else—from the jungles, from the mountains, from China, from Pakistan. This will never happen...." The book of your revolution sits in the pit of your belly, young Indian. Crap it out, and read. Instead of which, they are all sitting in front of colour TV's and watching cricket and shampoo advertisements."¹⁴⁶ Now Aravind Adiga drops the buffoon's masks and gets serious. Other Indian intellectuals and leaders have made similar statements. But this attitude is not a fertile ground on which links between India and other cultures can flourish. However, Balram/Adiga does not believe for a moment that India is on its way out. On the contrary: "White men will be finished within my lifetime....My humble prediction: in twenty years' time, it will be just us yellow men and brown men at the top of the pyramid, and we'll rule the whole world. And God save everyone else."¹⁴⁷ Adiga's book is also a warning that the trajectory toward this goal might be less trouble-free and straightforward than some enthusiastic Indian authors want to believe.¹⁴⁸ Serious social upheavals could still lie ahead and the Communists or other radical parties may not have said their last word.

Almost hundred years before *The White Tiger*, Oswald Spengler, the German philosopher of history, predicted the end of the West within no more than two hundred years. Spengler left open who would replace the "white man," but today he would applaud Aravind Adiga's book that appeared exactly midway between his own book *The Decline of the West*, first published in 1917, and what he expected to be the final years of the West. Spengler added

8. Chetan Bhagat

that the Jews, for whom he had great sympathy, were doomed and would also disappear because they got themselves inextricably linked to the West.¹⁴⁹ Adiga's book is a useful reminder of Asia's fast-growing importance for the Jewish people.

Chetan Bhagat was born in New Delhi in 1974. By 2010 he had published four novels, the first in 2004 and three others in 2005, 2008 and 2009. They mainly report imaginary discussions between young Indians. Bhagat's success in India is phenomenal. He is the biggest selling English-language novelist in all of India's history. Each of his books was reprinted dozens of times and read by millions. Two books have already been turned into Bollywood movies. Bhagat has found a common language with India's young who turned him into a national cult figure. Is he the voice of a generation? The BBC has interviewed Bhagat extensively, but he is still barely known in the West and his books are difficult to get. We analyze two of them.

—*One Night at the Call Centre* (2005).¹⁵⁰ The writer reports that he wanted to write an Indian youth story. One night he met a beautiful, enigmatic Indian woman on a train ride to Delhi. She advises him to base his story on a call center because what is going on there reflects Indian youth better than the university campus. She also offers to help him to write a good story, but on one condition. He must promise to include in his book the most important call that will come during the night: a call from God. The writer is startled but agrees reluctantly. *One Night at the Call Centre* will turn out to be a religious wake-up call. This book is a transcript of imaginary conversations among six employees during one night in a call center in Delhi. Indian call centers help Western, mainly American companies in their operations. They take calls from customers and help them solve technical problems with newly bought appliances. More than 300,000 young Indians work in call centers, always in night shifts because of the time lag with the West.

The young employees of the call center banter about girls, bosses, job security—the same issues that would come up in the West. They have no interest in politics and despise all politicians. “All kinds of people...commit suicide. But politicians never do....People do it because they are really hurt. This means they feel something,”¹⁵¹ Not that India's earlier basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything.¹⁵² Not that India's earlier politicians have a greater reputation: India is poor because “the losers who have run our country for the last fifty years couldn't do better than make India one of the poorest countries on earth.”¹⁵³—so much for the Nehru dynasty. The six employees are interested in no foreign country or culture except America. Their attitude toward Americans is condescending: “The brain and IQ of a thirty-five-year-old American is the same as the brain of a ten-year old Indian.”¹⁵⁴ Americans are “the biggest cowards on this planet.”¹⁵⁵ Says one of them. But this youth is resolute to help India make up for its lost years and get it out of its poverty and backwardness. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* will say the same in 2008.

One night all six colleagues take a car for an outing, but they miss the road and the car slides into an open high-rise building site. It stops at the edge of a deep hole. The slightest movement could precipitate all of them falling to their death. They are terrified, and one of them tries to call for help but his cell phone is not connected. And then suddenly God calls. He tells them how to get out of danger and encourages them to correct the mistakes they have made in their recent lives. The caller finds it “unusual for God to use a cell phone, I had never considered my life important enough for God to call me.”¹⁵⁶ God explains: “The most important call in the world is the inner call....The voice tells you what you really want....That voice is mine....I have a contract with all human beings: you do your best, and every now and then I will come and give you a supporting push.”¹⁵⁷ They are saved and will change their lives.

Ignoring his original promise, our writer would like to leave the part with God out of the story, but his enigmatic lady companion persuades him to let God stay in. The train approaches Delhi. Suddenly her face begins to shine, and he sees an open book at her side with a quote from the Bhagavad-Gita, Hinduism's best-known sacred text: "Always think of Me, become My devotee, worship Me and offer your homage unto Me...."¹⁵⁷ His head begins to spin and she places her hand on it. He loses consciousness. When he opens his eyes she has disappeared. He is kneeling on the floor with his head down. "Do you need help?" asked a passing porter.

One Night at the Call Centre strikes a secular Western reader as naive if not bizarre. In a Western country stories of a divine appearance or of salvation by miraculous, divine intervention will not become nationwide bestsellers for educated readers. Apparently India is different. Is this the old India that is still alive, or did Bhagat detect a major movement back to religion among India's youth? If this is so, some details of the story are noteworthy. All characters of the story are Hindus, but neither Brahma nor Shiva nor Krishna nor any other Hindu god is ever mentioned. It is always God with a capital "G." A Jew might find the story striking. It contains essential components of his own religion: an invisible, almighty God who speaks to people and controls their fate, who demands of his faithful to worship Him and who in ancient times was sending prophets and intermediaries to proclaim his message. In fact, Hinduism has developed monotheistic streaks, both in ancient times and in the early 19th century. The Hindu reformer Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833) called for a far-reaching reform of Hinduism, back to what he regarded as the religion's authentic values, namely belief in the unity of God.¹⁵⁸ What did Chetan Bhagat's have in mind when he introduced such ideas into a bestseller for Indian youth?

—*The 3 Mistakes of my Life: A Story about Business, Cricket and Religion*,¹⁵⁹ *The 3 Mistakes of my Life*, Chetan Bhagat's third novel is a political manifesto. The story's background tells of the dramatic events that occurred in 2001 and 2002 in the state of Gujarat and its capital Ahmedabad where Bhagat had spent most of his happy childhood. In January 2001 an earthquake destroyed a part of the state and buried 30,000 people or more. In February 2002 Hindu extremists incited a mob to massacre hundreds of Muslim civilians, as revenge for an arson attack on a train where more than fifty Hindu pilgrims had been burned alive. Bhagat dedicates the book "to my country, which called me back," and states his goal at the beginning: it is "making India read."¹⁶⁰ He reached his goal in no time: *The 3 Mistakes of my Life* was published in 2008; at the beginning of 2010 it was already into its seventy-fourth reprint!

"Business, cricket and religion," as the subtitle suggests, are three of the main preoccupations of India's young generation. The reader encountered business and religion already in *One Night in a Call Centre*; cricket is new. The background of the story is Ahmedabad's intercommunal violence of 2002. This will engulf four young friends who are ardent cricket fans. Three are agnostic Hindus. The fourth is Ali, a small, subdued Muslim boy from a poor family. Ali shows an extraordinary gift for cricket. He is so outstanding that his three friends decide to invest their money into training for him to turn him into one of India's top national cricket players. But then the earthquake and the anti-Muslim riots that follow the burning of the train with Hindu pilgrims intervene. Ali narrowly survives the riots, recovers from his wounds and becomes one of India's leading national cricket players. Bhagat's educational novel confronts India's extremism and intolerance and in this particular case Hindu intolerance. "The problem in Indian Hindu-Muslim rivalry is not that the one is right and the other is wrong...It is...that there are no conciliatory mechanisms."¹⁶¹ And "in India you don't know whether someone will like you or hate you because you are from a certain place."¹⁶² Bhagat published his book in 2008 when the campaigning for India's national elections of 2009 was in its early stages. The outcome was a victory of the secular Congress Party and a relative defeat of religious parties. It seems that Bhagat, like

great fiction writers in other civilizations, was able to gauge the mood of the time better than some of the pollsters who had not predicted this result.

The 3 Mistakes of my Life is not interested in foreign affairs, no more than *One Night in a Call Centre* was. It rarely mentions other countries: Australia several times because India lost a major cricket match to its rival, and once—Israel. After the September 11 attack, "the Israeli Prime Minister" is quoted as saying that "the world will never be the same again."¹⁶³ The quote is innocuous and without any positive or negative connotations. However, it does corroborate a research result by the Samuel Neaman Institute in Haifa that found that most of the Indian middle-class individuals polled knew virtually nothing about Israel, and when they did know something, it often centered on the Middle East conflict.¹⁶⁴

9. Vikas Swarup

Vikas Swarup was born in 1963 in Allahabad. Since 1986 he has been a career diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service. His first record-selling novel *Q and A* about a penniless waiter of Mumbai who becomes the biggest quiz show winner in history was translated into thirty-four languages and turned into the best Hollywood movie of 2008, *Slumdog Millionaire*.

—*Six Suspects*.¹⁶⁵ His second book *Six Suspects* appeared in the same year. Swarup is as bold as Adiga and Bhagat in laying bare all of India's crimes and faults—murder, corruption, theft, inefficiency, dirt—but he is even more hilarious than they are. The book is so funny that some readers might love India more and not less after they have read it. It is very similar in intention and tone to the books of Adiga and Bhagat. The key story is about the murder of a rich, despicable character who is the son of a minister. He had shot dead a young bar-maid who, following Indian laws, had refused to prepare one more drink for him because he was already completely drunk. A short time later he was killed himself. The police pick up six suspects. Who is the murderer? The narrative branches out into a complex web of parallel stories, one of which is about Muslim terrorism and thus interesting in our context. One of the six murder suspects is a simple-minded, obviously innocent Texan forklift driver who was lured to India by a fraudulent marriage advertisement and is relieved of all his money. He is kidnapped by three Muslim terrorists who keep beating him badly and threaten him with execution if the United States does not accept their conditions. Exactly at the moment when he is forced to shovel his own grave a CIA drone strikes the hideout and kills the three Muslims while the Texan survives. Swarup's description of the exchanges between the American who barely understands what is happening to him and his three captors who are not familiar with the American's Texan idiom are among the more hilarious pages of the book: The author turns a cruel kidnapping suspense into a permanent laughing matter. The irreverence with which this Indian diplomat scrutinizes and lampoons the beliefs of the three Muslims is striking. One is an Arab, one is Pakistani and one is an Afghan. Swarup brings to light their sexual obsessions, which are presented as a key source of their religious fanaticism. He shows their lust for money and plunder and their unconcealed addiction to everything American, particularly technology. All three are called Abu-something, the one most interested in computers and other technological gadgets is "Abu Teknikai." As *Six Suspects* was published in 2008, it cannot be seen as a reaction to the Mumbai terror attacks that took place at the end of November 2008. Swarup reacted to earlier Muslim terror and kidnappings in India and the world, and his reaction is ridicule and contempt, not a rationalization of Muslim rage allegedly due to discrimination, foreign occupation, and so forth, as can sometimes be found among Western commentators.

IV. One Philosopher

10. Amartya Sen

Amartya Kumar Sen is a liberal Hindu, born 1933 in West Bengal, today Bangladesh. He is a philosopher and economist who received a Nobel Prize in economics, one of many distinctions that he received from other sources. *Time* magazine counted him as one of the world's one hundred most important intellectuals. He certainly is the foremost Indian intellectual currently living in the West. We include him in this list of fiction writers in order to get an additional and different perspective on the place of Jews and Judaism in contemporary Indian thought. Do Sen's views match those of the great novelists, or do they contradict them? Two of Sen's main books will be reviewed.

—*The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*.¹⁶⁶ This has become a widely read modern book about Indian culture. It covers a kaleidoscope of subjects and ideas. Sen mentions Indian Jews and their origins from biblical times to the 19th century more than a dozen times, even referring to the ethnographic work of the Israeli scholar Shalva Weil who studied Indian Jewish communities. All his mentions are brief but respectful. "India had the benefit of having Jews much longer than Europe"¹⁶⁷ he writes, a gracious way of using India's long history to convey a discreet compliment to the Jews, though not to Europe. He touches upon the history of world Judaism once, but makes a significant factual error. He emphasizes that Islam had a long tradition of tolerance of other religions and offers as proof the life of Maimonides "who fled the persecution of Jews in Spain in the twelfth century to seek shelter in Emperor Saladin's Egypt."¹⁶⁸ Amartya Sen does apparently not know that Maimonides was forced to flee from the Almohades (fanatical Muslims who massacred the Jews of Spain, drove them out or forced them to convert to Islam). He seems to infer that the persecutors were Christians. What the case of Maimonides shows is that Muslims most often tolerated Jews, but always treated them as inferior and at regular intervals also persecuted them. Sen's historic scholarship is phenomenal but here his scholarship yields to a deeply ingrained Indian ideology according to which Muslims did not persecute or harm Jews, only European Christians did. We have come across the same ideology in the works of some of India's novelists.

Amartya Sen paints a fresco of Indian culture and history that is at variance with some of the West's traditional ideas about his homeland. India, an immensely diverse country, has never been exclusively Hindu. India is quintessentially an "argumentative" civilization. It had to accept doubt, heterodoxy and dialogue. The "roots of scepticism" in India go back a long way, with "masses of arguments and counterarguments spread over incessant debates and disputations."¹⁶⁹ The *Mahabharata* presents two contrary arguments because we must take note not only of the arguments that won but also of those that lost.

Some of the spiritual and cultural parallels between Indians and Jews are compelling.¹⁷⁰ Judaism too has been called an "argumentative" creed that had often coped with heterodoxy. The Talmud is one giant compendium of "arguments and counterarguments spread over incessant debates and disputations," and the Talmudic text often also carefully records the arguments that lost. "Scepticism" exists already in rabbinic Judaism and became stronger from the 17th century on. Amartya Sen never refers to such parallels, be it that Judaism is too marginal to *The Argumentative Indian*, or that he knows too little of it. And there are more parallels. An Indian genealogical tradition says that "all human beings have the same father"¹⁷¹—among ancient civilizations to the west of India probably only the Jews shared the same belief. It is enshrined in the creation story of *Genesis*. Another parallel can be found in Indian Buddhism. Buddhism like Judaism enhanced the social importance of literacy because of the religious importance of the written text.¹⁷² Sen points to the importance of literacy and heterodoxy as among the main roots of scientific creativity, which developed in ancient India. There are similar explanations for

scientific excellence among the Jews of modern times. It is scepticism and the departure from orthodoxy that nourished in both civilizations the "courage to disagree,"¹⁷³ which is so essential to scientific discovery. An in-depth comparison of Indian and Jewish civilizations remains to be done. Amartya Sen does not do it. He is not at all prejudiced against Judaism, on the contrary. He is at home in Western, Indian, Chinese, Muslim cultures and philosophies, but perhaps less so in Judaism. This seems to confirm what we found among Indian fiction writers too.

—*The Idea of Justice*.¹⁷⁴ This is Amartya Sen's latest (2009) major work, which has been greeted as an epoch-making contribution to the history of philosophy and to the improvement of our troubled, imperfect world. Sen defines his aim most succinctly: "What is presented here is a theory of justice in a very broad sense. Its aim is to clarify how we can proceed to address questions of enhancing justice and removing injustice, rather than to offer resolutions of questions about the nature of perfect justice."¹⁷⁵ Amartya Sen proposes a political philosophy that aims at reducing injustices on earth rather than drawing up blueprints for an ideally just but utopian state. Reducing injustice calls for alternative assessments, criteria for a comparative justice and global perspectives.

The idea of justice is absolutely essential to every period of Jewish history and every branch of Judaism, biblical and rabbinic, orthodox and liberal. Judaism can be seen as a permanent debate about the nature and practice of justice and an unending fight against injustice. Amartya Sen offers many concrete examples from the history of the West, of Greece, India and Islam, but only one that can be called Jewish, though with reservations. It is the story of the "Good Samaritan" in the New Testament.¹⁷⁶ "Love your neighbor as yourself!"¹⁷⁷ is a central commandment of the Jewish Bible, repeated in various forms in the Christian Bible too. But "who is our neighbor?" asks Amartya Sen. The answer to this question will help define justice as well as injustice.

The story of the Good Samaritan claims to answer the question of "who is our neighbor." A Jew is attacked and gravely injured by robbers who leave him bleeding on the wayside. A priest and a Levite from the temple of Jerusalem pass by and ignore him. It is a Samaritan who belongs to a minority shunned by the Jews, who saves the injured man. Hence, says Jesus who is reported as telling the story, it is a foreigner, a Samaritan who acted as the real "neighbor" to the injured Jew, not the servants of the Jewish temple. Jesus's point is that the definition and borders of "neighborhood" must be flexible. The story as narrated in Luke has an obviously polemical, anti-Jewish, intent. The historian Geza Vermes notes that the story conflicts with other New Testament quotes of Jesus who is reported as sharing the general Jewish hostility against the Samaritans. Vermes therefore suggests that the version in Luke is not authentic but was created by the early Church.¹⁷⁸ In fact there were intense rabbinic discussions about the scope and meaning of the "love-your-neighbor" commandment both before and after Jesus, but Amartya Sen is probably not aware of them. He knows this key component of Jewish ethics only after it was passed through a Christian filter used to prove the superiority of the Christian faith. The same problem emerged already in the work of another Indian, V.S. Naipaul. He refers to the "Golden Rule"—"do unto others as you would have others do unto you"—as the basis of his own ethics and calls it a Christian principle when originally it is an older, Jewish one. Neither Sen nor Naipaul are Christian. Both know and cherish principles of Jewish ethics, but only in a modified and partly polemical Christian form as many Western Christians do. We argued earlier that the encounter of the Jewish people with the great civilizations of Asia could be a historic chance because these civilizations carry no anti-Jewish baggage; they have no theological argument with Judaism. Of course, if Judaism is known only through a Christian prism as is sometimes the case in India, this chance could easily turn into a liability. To sum up, one may say that Amartya Sen's work corroborates several conclusions that can also be drawn from the lecture of great Indian fiction.

India in Contemporary Jewish Fiction

We will ask a reverse question, complementary to the one that this article has tried to answer. What is the image of India in Jewish and Israeli fiction, and how does it compare to the image of Judaism in Indian fiction? We found only two Jewish novelists who wrote books with Indian themes in English or were translated into English: the Indian Jewish author Esther David and the Israeli A.B. Yehoshua. There are a few more books by lesser known authors in Hebrew. They have not been translated and critics have said that they are of low literary quality. Apparently no American or other well-known Jewish novelist has written fiction about India. In spite of the limited material available, a comparison between the two views—the Indian literary view about Jews and the Jewish literary view about India—is revealing. It shows profound understanding and sympathy for India by two important Jewish mainstream authors, not matched by equally strong sympathy for Jews and Israel by Indian authors.

1. Esther David

Esther David was born in 1945 to a Jewish (Bene Israel) family in Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat where she often lives. She wrote, among others, five partly fictional and partly autobiographic books about the Jews of India. Her work is a beautiful testimony to the saga of her people, but though some of her books have been translated into Gujarati she has no national following in India comparable to that of the great Indian novelists reviewed in the preceding pages. India has never known any antagonism to Jews but has never shown much interest in them either. The Jews were unproblematic and too few.

Regrettably, Esther David is not sufficiently known to the Jewish and Israeli reading public. The history and culture of India's Jews is a fascinating chapter of Jewish Diaspora history. Indian Jews have shown a capacity for creative cultural interaction with religions and civilizations not linked to the Bible. Hindu civilization is very different from most other civilizations the Jews have encountered in their long history, except for China of course. The prosperity and longevity of the Jewish communities in India shed doubt on a Western theory according to which Jews remained Jews for so long only because of external pressure. There was little or no hostile external pressure on the Jews of India yet most remained Jews to the core and did not forget the land of Israel. However, Esther David's stories also show that India's independence brought changes when it became easier to cross the visible and invisible walls between religions and communities. Jewish children had Hindu friends and became more familiar with Hindu practices. Some of their elders began to fear a danger of "assimilation," but just then the State of Israel was born. The immigration of the bulk of the community put an end to most Hindu-Jewish interaction and with it also to many dilemmas. The history of Indian Jews raises fundamental questions about Jewish world history. How would Diaspora Judaism, Jewish law and history have developed in the absence of daily interaction with, and hostility from Christianity and Islam? It will never be known for sure, but Indian Judaism allows for some fascinating "virtual history" speculations.

—*The Walled City*.¹²⁹ Esther David's first novel (1997) is an autobiography of her childhood and adolescence in the "Walled City," the old inner city of Ahmedabad where she grew up in a tightly knit traditional Jewish environment. The book traces the strictly controlled lives of three generations of women in an extended Jewish family. The stone walls of Ahmedabad are a metaphor for many other walls: walls between religions and communities and walls between generations. But the winds of change begin to challenge old patterns of life and thought. Some religious tension is in the air. The Hindu majority shows no hostility to Jews, but there is self-questioning among Jewish youngsters. Esther's best friend is a Hindu girl, Subhadra. As a meat-eater Esther is not allowed into Subhadra's family kitchen. "Between

us there is a wall of dead animals and birds," and Esther remembers that she felt "hidden with guilt for the ways of my ancestors."¹⁸⁰ "Sometimes I question my Jewishness." The colorful and noisy Hindu festivals in temples and streets attract her, but she also knows that it is "terribly un-Jewish" to celebrate the festivals of other religions. Could these be signs of the young generation to immigrate to the recently born State of Israel.

The chronicle of this family develops against the background of the sights, sounds and fragrances of India. Esther David brings the "magic of India" to live like few other novelists. Her description of India's foods, spices and cooking, of animals and plants, of music, scents and textures are enchanting. An Indian reviewer called her book a "living archive," a "visit to the childhood museum." But she also remembers the horrors of India and her childhood fears. She sees an insane woman lying naked in the street, screaming in pain. The woman is giving birth, but the little girl does not understand. Says a bystander: "Men are beasts. They don't even leave a madwoman alone. The child will now belong to the street. The beggars will help." The girl has a bad night but next morning her mother tells her firmly, "You did not hear anything last night. It was a bad dream."¹⁸¹ Esther David's images of India's dark sides are stark, but it is the enchantment and magic that are likely to carry the day in the memory of her readers.

—Book of Rachel,¹⁸² The book's action takes place toward the end of the 20th century in Danda in the Konkani region south of Bombay. A large part of the Bene Israel lived in this and in other villages of the Konkani. Most of them left for Israel. *The Walled City* had shown how Jewish history in India began to unravel; the *Book of Rachel* shows the closing chapters.

Rachel is an aging Bene Israel woman who stayed in India although her daughter and two sons have immigrated to Israel. Her dilemma—having to choose between her love for her family and her love for India, her village and the tomb of her husband—is painful. She cannot imagine living in a country other than India. The Hindus in the village are "caring and affectionate" with her. She speaks Marathi with the right accent and knows all the Maharashtra customs so well that her friends introduce her to other Hindu visitors as a Brahmin. To give her life meaning, Rachel has become the caretaker of the village's abandoned synagogue, but "without a community what was the sense of a house of prayer?"¹⁸³ Her life changes completely when she learns that members of the synagogue board have decided to sell the land on which the synagogue stands. Rachel confronts them: "I have been a servant of the Lord, not of your synagogue committee."¹⁸⁴ Then she discovers an 18th-century document proving that the land belonged to her family. It was Shivali Maharaj, the 17th-century Hindu ruler of the Maratha (current-day Maharashtra) region, who had given the land to her family to show his gratitude for the help he had received from the Jews in his independence struggles. This is Esther David's only reference to an event from India's larger national history. Most of the Jews of the Konkani lived all their lives in their villages, and in Esther David's story they barely took note of India's larger national history.

The synagogue board had already asked a Hindu lawyer to prepare the sale of the land, but the evil scheme comes to naught when the lawyer "had a strange but mystical encounter, a divine one."¹⁸⁵ Suddenly he saw an old man in front of him, astride a horse, and he became paralyzed, unable to move. "I knew it had been a spiritual visitation.... At that very moment I decided to cancel the deal," Rachel knew it was the "handwork of the Prophet Elijah." Indian Jews worshipped Elijah and used to ask him for intercession in case of need. The *Book of Rachel* ends with a divine appearance just like Chetan Bhagat's *One Night at the Call Centre*, which was published one year earlier in 2005. In India, religion intrudes into every aspect of life even today, and divine appearances are apparently still expected to happen to people from all walks of life. There is no criticism of anything Indian

in the entire book. For Esther David's last Konkani Jews, the image of India continues to shine brightly.

2. Abraham B. Yehoshua

Abraham B. Yehoshua was born in 1936 to a fifth-generation Sephardi family in Jerusalem. He is one of Israel's best and most widely known and translated fiction writers. He is a persistent critic of Israeli society and of its government policies and professor emeritus of literature at the University of Haifa. Many of his books are set both in Israel and in a foreign country.

—*Open Heart*.¹⁸⁶ In the Hebrew original, the book's title is "Shiva me-Hodu," *Return from India*. *Open Heart* is set in Israel and India. A.B. Yehoshua had never visited India when he wrote this book. Yet his images of people, places and ceremonies are so detailed and realistic that they can captivate even readers who know India well. A young Israeli internist, Beniy, accompanies his hospital director and the director's wife to India to bring home the couple's daughter Einat who has come down with a life-threatening case of Hepatitis B. Einat is infatuated with India and its spirituality. The three travelers spend several days in Varanasi to watch the crowds of pilgrims, the funeral pyres and the colorful ceremonies at the border of the Ganges. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* described similar scenes, which ended in horror. In Seth's narrative a panic had led to hundreds of pilgrims being crushed to death, but this is not the image of India that A.B. Yehoshua wants to convey to his readers. This book is a discreet homage to the tens of thousands of young Israeli visitors who are attracted by the magic of India. It is also an interrogation about their motives. The writer wants to understand the genuine though often naive seekers of truth and spirituality who flock to India because they need a respite from Israel. Jewish seekers after Eastern spirituality—Hinduism, Buddhism, Tibet, Zen or whatever—are not a new story. Already the Mahatma Gandhi knew them well and once scolded one of his admirers, a Jewish woman from England who begged him to convert her to Hinduism.¹⁸⁷ A.B. Yehoshua is not sarcastic about these "Indian Israelis," but he has no illusions about them either. "Beyond the poverty and ugliness [of India] there was a spiritual power that could suck them in, especially those whose sense of identity was tenuous, who felt unable to achieve their ambitions, and who were always quick to look for a way of escape."¹⁸⁸ India affects the attitude of visitors toward religion. Beniy marries a friend of Einat, Michaela, who is equally in love with India and has spent a long time there as member of a small team providing free medical help to the poor. When he asks his bride whether Buddhists are allowed to marry, she shoots back in anger, "Buddhism isn't another vicious religion looking for ways to oppress people and frighten them [read: like Judaism], but a means of alleviating inevitable suffering."¹⁸⁹ But under the wedding canopy her feelings change. She likes the strict Orthodox rabbi who performs the ceremony. "She did not find the ceremony too long... (it excited her with its exotism. From the day she had left India she had been thirsty for ritual... and enjoyed connecting the mystery she found in our marriage ceremony with all those rites and rituals she had come across in the streets of India."¹⁹⁰ Michaela, Einat and others try to clarify what India does to them. They grapple for words: "There is something very strong here. It's hard to explain. Something very ancient—not like historical ruins in Israel, it's not historical, it's real."¹⁹¹ The most compelling is the sense of time. Time's different there—it's free, open, not harnessed to some goal.... It's the true time, the time that hasn't been spoiled yet."¹⁹²

At the beginning of the story Beniy the young doctor and the hospital director do not share Michaela's, Einat's and other backpackers' enthusiastic longings for India, but the impressions from their first encounter with the country are so strong that they reconsider many of their preconceptions. The hospital director was first "shocked and horrified... and especially indignant at the sight of the sick and maimed lying abandoned," but then began

to ask the question "whether the great gap between our own world and theirs granted us a spiritual advantage too." Perhaps it was just they "who can give us a truer sense of the universe through which we pass so quickly, and help us to assuage the longings we feel for immortality."¹⁹³

A.B. Yehoshua does not ignore India's famished, sick and dying, but does not dwell on the scenes of poverty, disease, corruption and violence as Rushdie, Naipaul, Seth and other Indian novelists like to do. He too knows very well that terrible abuses still happen in India. He describes how Michaela and Einat once watched a widow being burned in a remote village and even for this horror the two young India-lovers try to find explanations if not excuses. Yehoshua's purpose is not to criticize India or Israel; the first he leaves to his Indian colleagues and the second he does abundantly on other occasions: is purpose is to explore India's spiritual meaning for so many young Israelis. *Open Heart* is a little monument of sympathy and an invitation to a meeting between cultures. Esther David's books about the Jews of India are equally respectful of India but do not have the same large audience. A.B. Yehoshua has a large following. His India book was reviewed by many journals and read by a large number of people. The Israeli film director Menahem Golan turned it into the movie *Return from India: A Story of Forbidden Love*, which many Israelis have seen. No other novelist has written anything equally significant about the current links between India, Israel and Jews.

A Summary

The "raw material" of this article are twenty-five English fiction books by nine Indian, and three by two Jewish novelists, all famous 20th and 21st-century authors. We found five Indian books that place a Jewish hero—or counterhero—into the center of their narrative (Amita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie with two books and Vikram Seth), and at least five more that contain significant references to Jews, Judaism or Israel. Three Jewish novels set in India (two by Esther David and one by A.B. Yehoshua) were chosen to provide a counterpoint to the Indian novels about Jews.

In order to assess whether the opinions put forward by these Indian books reflect more widely held views among the Indian elites, we needed corroborating evidence from other sources. This we found in the works of three authors: India's internationally best-known economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, India's leading Israel expert P.R. Kumaraswamy and the historian Yulia Egorova, who analyzed the views that important Indian politicians and intellectuals of the last 150 years have voiced about Judaism. It appears that the five Indian novels about Jews represent ideas that are or were more widespread among the Indian reading public.

Five books about Jews and Judaism is a relatively significant number, considering that Jews played almost no role in Indian history and exerted no known influence on India's old civilization, nothing comparable to the enormous role of Jews in the history of Christianity and Islam. These five books were written more than a hundred years after Jews began to appear regularly in Russian, West European and American literature. Thus, after the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, Jews and their fate have for the first time raised interest and entered the conscience of a great civilization from which they had largely been absent before. But interest does not necessarily mean deep understanding or sympathy. There is strong sympathy for the dead Jews of the Holocaust and appreciation of their suffering by Desai, Seth, Rushdie and others, which is important in a country that has 200 million or more Muslims, and in the work of Amitav Ghosh there is sympathy for a Jewish 12th-century trader who was linked to India. But generally there is little perceptible knowledge of the Jewish religion and civilization or of Jewish and Israeli history. References to Israel are rare and indifferent, unflattering or plainly hostile. Only Rushdie shows considerable knowledge of Jews and Jewish history in India and the West and a nostalgic respect for the Jews of India who have left the country. However, the Jewish "heroes" in his

two books with Jewish themes are certainly clever and powerful, but also profoundly immoral. This bitter satirist is no more anti-Jewish than he is anti-Islamic, anti-Hindu or anti-Christian, but by borrowing and spreading anti-Semitic stereotypes that were alien to traditional India, he risks doing more harm to Jews than his parodies of individual Muslims, Hindus or Christians would do to their respective communities.

There are certainly Indian intellectuals and diplomats who are as widely read about Judaism and Israel as any Western intellectual, and these are the Indians whom Jews and Israelis are most likely to meet. Nevertheless we suggest that the paucity of knowledge about Jews and Judaism that can be found even in the reviewed books is a widespread Indian phenomenon. A research team of the Samuel Neaman Institute in Haifa has in 2009 come to the same conclusion.²⁴ Most of the Indian middle-class individuals polled know virtually nothing about Israel—and by inference it is most unlikely that they know more about Judaism. Ignorance is sometimes compounded by a second problem. Indians know more about Christianity and Christians, both local and foreign, than they know about Jews. Therefore, Judaism is sometimes seen through polemical Christian eyes, or cherished principles of biblical morality are presented as purely Christian although their origin is Jewish.

If there is one concern that dominates the work of nearly all Indian authors it is Islam. Indian writers are deeply concerned with the place of Islam in India and the world, with past or current violence between Hindus and Muslims and the need for India's religions to live in peace with each other. One can find many references to the origin and history of Islam in the works of our writers, but nothing on the relationship between Judaism and Islam or Muhammad's brutal encounters with the Jews of Arabia, and almost nothing on the Jews of Islam in our time, particularly the tragedy of their flight and expulsion from Arab and other countries where they had resided for two thousand years. P.R. Kumaraswamy has shown that the Indian intelligentsia has often refused to admit that concern about Indian Muslims has biased India's policy toward Israel. Admitting such an influence would put an unwelcome question mark over the official claim that India is a secular country where no religion can determine foreign policy. In public discourse the issue is for many a "taboo" area. It seems that a similar "taboo" exists even in Indian literature.

A large gap separates the image of India in Jewish literature from the image of Judaism and Jews in Indian literature. Can one speak of a contemporary "Jewish view" of India, and do a few Jewish novels represent such views? The material upon which to base a provisional answer to this question is limited: the books of the Jewish Indian writer Esther David, two of which are included in our inquiry, and one widely read novel by Israel's famous author A.B. Yehoshua. We have not been able to identify novels about India written by other, equally well-known Jewish mainstream writers.

The contrast between Indian and Jewish literature is striking. Esther David and A.B. Yehoshua show not only a broad and sophisticated knowledge of India, but also an intuitive understanding and profound sympathy for the country, its people and culture. Judging from the large number of Israeli backpackers who stream to India and the smaller numbers of Israelis and Jews captivated by Indian spirituality, India seems to be popular among many younger Jews. Esther David and A.B. Yehoshua wrote their books for an already receptive audience.

P.R. Kumaraswamy has reviewed the long, strenuous efforts that Jewish, Zionist and Israeli leaders have made to reach out to India and ask for India's friendship. He compared these efforts to India's often cool, indifferent and sometimes hostile reaction, and spoke of "unrequited love."²⁵ There seems to be an element of "unrequited love" even in literature: Jewish writers showing deep understanding and sympathy for India, versus Indian writers acknowledging the Holocaust and showing some interest in Jews, but little affection, and certainly not for Israel.

But "India is malleable" said an Indian friend of Israel, and India is changing. One of the tasks of a Jewish and Israeli cultural outreach to India should be to better acquaint

India's writers—at least the younger generation—and their reading public with Judaism and Jewish history, the literary relationship between the two cultures has barely begun.

Notes

1. This article is a greatly extended version of Chapter 6 from *India, Israel and the Jewish People: From History to Geopolitics* by Shalom Salomon Waid and Artelle Kandel to be published in late 2014 by Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) in Jerusalem. The text has been critically reviewed by several experts: Antoine Halff, Artelle Kandel, Dr. Shimon Low, Dr. Kenneth Robbins, Prof. Yitzhak Shichor. Thanks are expressed for their numerous, helpful comments.
2. See for example Fu Xiaowei, "Chinese Views of Israel and Judaism and the Mission of the CICS" (The Center of Judaic and Chinese Studies at Sichuan International Studies University in Chongqing), *Points East: The Sino-Judaic Institute*, 25, 1 (March 2010): 12ff.
3. Yulia Egorova, *Jews and India: Perceptions and Image* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
4. P.R. Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
5. *Words on Water: India and Israel in Conversation*, A Meeting between Indian and Israeli Writers in Mishkenoth Shaananim, Jerusalem, December 5, 2011.
6. V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London: Picador, 1964, 2002), p. 230.
7. Egorova, *Jews and India*, pp. 2, 7, 9, 12.
8. See for example "Top 10 Indian Writers in English Today," www.chillibreeze.com of May 23, 2010, a website that includes Adiga, Bhagat, Desai, Gosh, Rushdie and Seth, that is six of our nine, among the ten most important writers. There are several other, almost identical lists, with the main difference being that most include also Naipaul among the ten.
9. www.sotosay.worldpress.com/2009/10/21/an-essay-on-nissim-ezekiel-background-casualty, April 28, 2013.
10. www.poemhunter.com/nissim-ezekiel, April 28, 2013.
11. Rajendra Dengle, "Ranangan or Response in Marathi Literature to the Theme of Jewish Emigration," *Jewish Exile in India 1933-1945*, ed. Anil Bhatti and Johannes H. Voigt (New Delhi: Manohar-MaxMuellerBhavan, 1999), pp. 172-85.
12. Thanks are expressed to the India experts Mr. Shimon Low, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dr. Kenneth Robbins, Washington, DC and Dr. Gmit Shan, University of Haifa, who helped the author in identifying the relevant Indian fiction books.
13. Anita Desai, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (London: Vintage Books, 1998; first publ. London: W. Heinemann Ltd., 1988).
14. Rainer Lotz and Rekha Kamath, "Interculturality: A View from Below: Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay*," *Jewish Exile in India 1933-1945*, ed. Anil Bhatti and Johannes H. Voigt (New Delhi: Manohar-MaxMuellerBhavan, 1999), pp. 163ff.
15. Desai, *Baumgartner*, p. 20.
16. Ibid., pp. 104ff.
17. Ibid., p. 27.
18. Anita Desai, *In Custody* (London: Vintage Books, 1999; first publ. London: W. Heinemann Ltd., 1984).
19. Anita Desai, *Feasting, Fasting* (London: Vintage Books, 2000; first publ. London: Chatto & Windus, 1999).
20. Ibid., p. 104.
21. Amitav Gosh, *In an Antique Land* (London: Granta Books, 1998; first publ. 1992).
22. Ibid., p. 210.
23. Ibid., p. 13.

- ²⁴ S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 5 vols. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967-1988).
- ²⁵ The book was completed and published twenty-eight years after Goitein's death. It is a comprehensive collection of the India-related letters from the Cairo Geniza in English translation: *India Traders from the Middle Ages—Documents from the Cairo Geniza* ("India Book"), by S.D. Goitein and Mordechai Akiya Friedman (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008), 918 pages (also published in Hebrew by the Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem).
- ²⁶ Gosh, *Antique*, p. 339.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 95.
- ²⁸ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, pp. 15, 68ff.
- ²⁹ Egorova, *Jews and India*, p. 62.
- ³⁰ Amitav Gosh, *Sea of Poppies* (London: John Murray, 2009; first publ. 2008).
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 521.
- ³² Ibid., p. 449.
- ³³ Ibid., pp. 120, 121.
- ³⁴ Ibid., pp. 531ff.
- ³⁵ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage Books, 2008; first publ. London: Jonathan Cape, 1981).
- ³⁶ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Vintage Books, 2006; first publ. 1988).
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 163.
- ³⁸ Ibid., pp. 295ff.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 298.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 125.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 175ff.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 323.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 467.
- ⁴⁴ Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Vintage Books, 2006; first publ. London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).
- ⁴⁵ J.M. Coetzee, "Palimpsest Regained," *The New York Review of Books*, 43, 5 (March 21, 1996).
- ⁴⁶ Rushdie, *Moor*, pp. 70ff.
- ⁴⁷ This is mentioned in Maina Chawla Singh, *Being Indian, Being Israeli: Migration, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Homeland* (Delhi: Manohar, 2009), p. 106.
- ⁴⁸ Rushdie, *Moor*, p. 98.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 87.
- ⁵⁰ This story, reported by Rushdie happened really in 1550 when the allied Cochim and Portuguese armies fought against the Raja of Vatakenkur. The Raja of Cochim refused to attack on a Saturday because his Jews would not fight and they "were the best warriors he had raised." See David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochim," *Jewish Social Studies*, 1 (Oct. 1939): pp. 423-60.
- ⁵¹ Rushdie, *Moor*, p. 119.
- ⁵² Oral communication by Dr. Ophira Gamliel, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- ⁵³ Mandelbaum, "Jewish Way of Life," p. 100.
- ⁵⁴ Rushdie, *Moor*, p. 180.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 337.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 341.
- ⁵⁷ Singh, *Being Indian*, pp. 56, 96ff.
- ⁵⁸ Rushdie, *Moor*, p. 417.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 388.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 170.

- 61 Egorova, *Jews and India*, p. 80.
- 62 Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (London: Vintage Books, 2006; first publ. London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).
- 63 John Updike, "Paradises Lost: Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*," *The New Yorker*, Sept. 5, 2005.
- 64 Rushdie, *Shalimar*, p. 221.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 66 *Ibid.*, pp. 337ff.
- 67 *Ibid.*, pp. 544ff.
- 68 See Egorova, *Jews and India*, p. 69.
- 69 Anna Guttman, "Fear of a Jewish Planet? Jewishness, Globalization and Cosmopolitanism in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*," presented at the Association of Commonwealth Language and Literary Studies Triennial Conference, Vancouver, BC, August 2007.
- 70 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- 72 *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 182, 411.
- 73 Shalom Salomon Wald, *China and the Jewish People: Old Civilizations in a New Era* (Jerusalem: JPP, 2004), p. 70.
- 74 Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Vintage Books, 1995; first publ. London: Jonathan Cape, 1983).
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- 79 Vikram Seth, *Two Lives* (London: Abacus, 2006; first publ. New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
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- 86 Seth, *Two Lives*, p. 357.
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- 89 Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* (London: Phoenix, 1994; first publ. 1993).
- 90 *Ibid.*, pp. 1035. A passing reference to Nehru can be found already on p. 319.
- 91 *Ibid.*, pp. 505ff.
- 92 *Ibid.*, pp. 22ff.
- 93 *Ibid.*, p. 1037.
- 94 V.S. Naipaul, *Half a Life* (London: Picador, 2002; first publ. 2001).
- 95 V.S. Naipaul, *The Writer and the World: Essays* (London: Picador, 2003; first publ. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
- 96 V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London: Picador, 2002; first publ. London: André Deutsch, 1964).
- 97 V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (London: Picador, 2002; first publ. London: André Deutsch, 1977).
- 98 Naipaul, *Darkness*, p. 74.
- 99 *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- 100 Naipaul, *Wounded*.
- 101 *Ibid.*, p. x.

- 102 Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown*, p. 473.
- 103 Naipaul, *Wounded*, p. 23.
- 104 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 105 *Ibid.*, p. ix.
- 106 V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (London: Vintage, 1991; first publ. London: W. Heinemann Ltd., 1990).
- 107 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 108 V.S. Naipaul, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982; first publ. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).
- 109 V.S. Naipaul, *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999; first publ. 1998).
- 110 Naipaul, *Believers*, p. 142.
- 111 Naipaul, *Beyond Belief*, p. xi.
- 112 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 113 Naipaul, *Believers*, p. 35.
- 114 *Ibid.*, pp. 87ff.
- 115 *Ibid.*, pp. 270-74.
- 116 Naipaul, *Beyond Belief*, p. 219.
- 117 Naipaul, *Wounded*, p. 88.
- 118 Naipaul, "Power?" *The Writer*, p. 136.
- 119 Naipaul, "The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro," *The Writer*, p. 231.
- 120 Naipaul, "Our Universal Civilization," *The Writer*, p. 517.
- 121 *Gospels of Matthew 7:12 and Lucas 6:31.*
- 122 Bab, *Talmud Shabbath 31a*. On this question see Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 98ff., and Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Hillel: Un sage au temps de Jésus* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005), pp. 63, 99ff.
- 123 Arundhati Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy* (London: Hamish Hamilton-Penguin Books, 2009).
- 124 *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 125 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 126 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 127 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 128 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 129 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 130 *Ibid.*, p. 189.
- 131 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 132 Kurnarawamy, *India's Israel Policy*, follows and explains this policy in great detail from the 1920s to the 1990s.
- 133 Naipaul, *Darkness*, p. 230.
- 134 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 256.
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- 138 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 139 Arvind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008).
- 140 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- 141 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

- 142 V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London: Picador, 2002; first publ. London: André Deutsch, 1964), pp. 70 ff.
- 143 Adiga, *White Tiger*, p. 40.
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- 145 Ibid., p. 321.
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- 147 Ibid., p. 305.
- 148 See, e.g., Pavan K. Varma, *Being Indian: Why the 21st Century will be India's* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004); Nandan Nilekani, *Imagining India: Ideas for the New Century* (London: Allan Lane-Penguin, 2008).
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- 167 Ibid., p. 331.
- 168 Ibid., p. 286.
- 169 Ibid., p. 3.
- 170 Characteristics of Jewish civilization that are also comparable to India are explored in Shalom Salomon Waid, *Rise and Decline of Civilizations: Lessons for the Jewish People, with a Foreword by Simon Peres* (Boston and Jerusalem: Academic Studies Press, 2014), particularly Part IV chapters 1, 3, 10.
- 171 Sen, *Argumentative*, p. 11.
- 172 Ibid., p. 81.
- 173 Ibid., p. 30.
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- 175 Ibid., p. ix.
- 176 Ibid., pp. 170ff. The story of the Good Samaritan is in Luke 10:30-36.
- 177 Leviticus 19:18 and 19:34.
- 178 Vermees, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*, p. 154.

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