



# INDO-ISRAEL

## A Connect over Millennia



D.K. Hari  
D.K. Hema Hari

## Indo – Israel

### A Connect Over Millennia

*D.K.Hari & D.K.Hema Hari, Founders, Bharath Gyan*

### Ancient Civilizations

India and Israel are two ancient civilizations, with many millennia of antiquity. While the Indian civilization goes back to atleast 7000 BCE, Israel civilization dates to 4000 BCE.

These two may be young nations, with India gaining independence from the British in 1947, and Israel becoming independent in 1948. But they have a very ancient history, which are similar on many counts. On other aspects, the contrasts are also very telling.

Israel is an ancient land, just like India, and has a rich heritage spanning over many millennia. Their capitals, Jerusalem and New Delhi are equally ancient, and historic places.

While India is one of the biggest countries in the world, with the second largest population, Israel is among the smallest countries with a population of 8.38 million.

These two countries shared a remarkable bond, over many millennia, with their similarities and contrasts.

### Birthplace of Religions

India and Israel are the birth place of major religions in the world.

#### *Two Narratives*

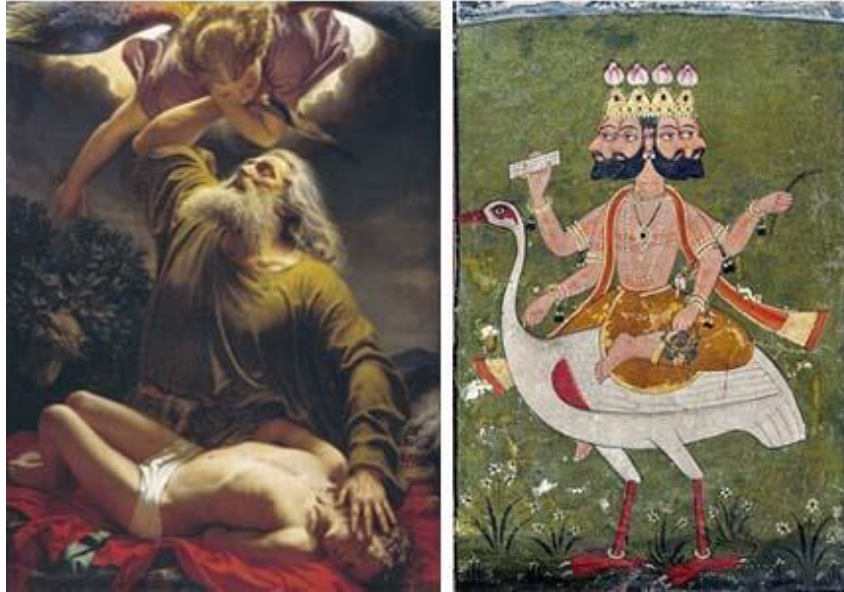
There are two primary world views, which have been the source of many religions.

- Brahma Theology – Which has its roots in the Indian tradition
- Abraham Theology – Which has its roots in Jewish Israeli tradition

The Abraham Theology, which has its roots in ancient Israel is the source of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, while the Brahma Theology having its roots in *Sanatana Dharma* of India, is the source of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

#### *Counter Narrative*

A-Brahma means “Counter to Brahma”. The Abraham Theology is a counter narrative to the Brahma Theology.



### Abraham and Brahma

#### *Etymological similarity*

Interestingly, the names of Brahma and Abraham, and their wives Sarasvati and Sara are etymologically similar.

### Noah's Ark and Matsya Avatar

There is much similarity in some of the legends of these lands too, like the legends of *Matsya Avatar* and Noah's Ark.

As per the *Purana*, God Vishnu manifests Himself before King Satyavratha, and reveals to him about the deluge that would hit the earth, in the coming week. He also assured the King that He would protect him and the other *rishi* from *pralaya*, in the form of a fish.



### Matsya

The Lord requested the King to collect samples of herbs, seeds and other living creatures to be placed in a boat. The boat is to be attached to the fish's horns. The Lord said, that He in the form of a fish would lead them during the deluge. Saying this, Lord Vishnu disappeared.

The King made ready a boat and carried out all the instructions of the Lord. As promised, there was a deluge in the coming week. The King got into the boat along with the *rishis* and other creatures. Lord Vishnu appeared in His *Matsya Avatar* and guided the boat during the floods.



*Matsya Avatar*

In the end, the boat was docked to a peak.

The above Puranic story is very similar to the story of Noah's Ark in which God saves Noah. As per the legend, Noah was warned by God of an impending flood, on the coming week. He was asked to onboard a boat with seven pairs of animals. The boat stayed afloat for 150 days, after which the waters receded. As in the legend of *Matsya Avatar*, here too, the boat comes to rest in mountain.

The story of *Matsya Avatar* predates Noah's Ark which is dated to be around 3000 BCE.





**Noah's ark**

## Legends of Parting of Waters

### *Krishna Legend*

After Krishna's birth, Vasudeva had to transfer Krishna to Gokula, on the other side of the Yamuna River. It was raining heavily that night and the winds were howling at a feverish pitch. Reaching the banks of the Yamuna, he wondered how he would manage to cross her safely with the child in such weather. Alone, he could have swum across. But he now had a baby.

Yet surprisingly, when he stepped into the waters, he found Yamuna parting and making way for them to cross over. The waters seemed to be leaping, wanting to touch the feet of Krishna but not daring to go any higher.



**Krishna being carried by Vasudeva across the Yamuna River in spate**

### *Moses Legend*

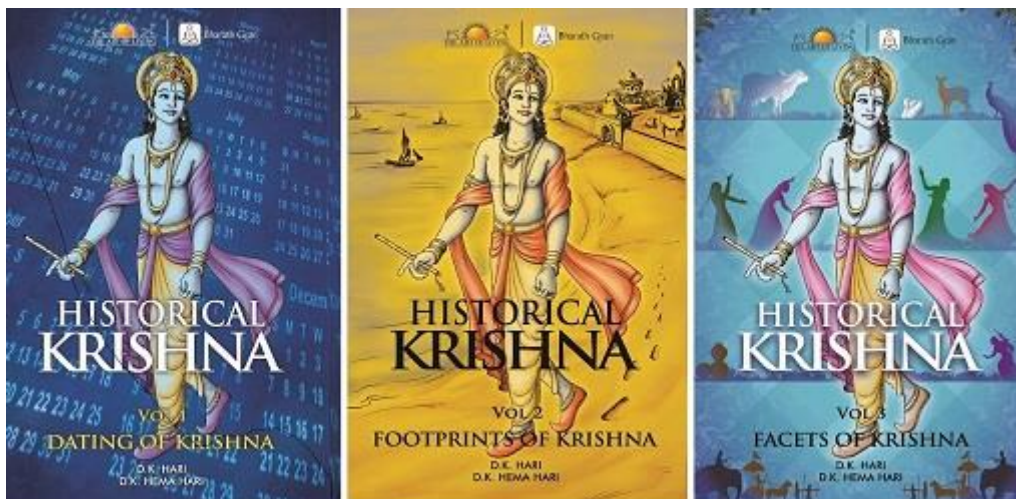
On similar lines, the Red Sea parted when Moses led his people, the Hebrews, out of Egypt.



### **Parting of Red Sea**

This theory of Parting of Waters, in the case of the above two legends is based on the principle of Wind Set Down.

More on this in our book, **Historical Krishna**.



### *The one who translated Bhagavad Gita into Hebrew*

The first person who translated Bhagavad Gita in Hebrew was an Israeli named Bezashition le Fanah. Later he adopted Hinduism in India.

## Star of David

Star of David is a hexagram that is the most sacred symbol in Judaism. It is known in Hebrew as the Shield of David.



**Star of David**

## David

As per the Hebrew Bible, David was the second King of the United Kingdom of Israel and Judah, who reigned between 1010 BCE and 970 BCE. He is referred to as a king and warrior, who was also a good poet and musician. In the New Testament, he is mentioned as the ancestor of Jesus.



**King David**



### Shield as God

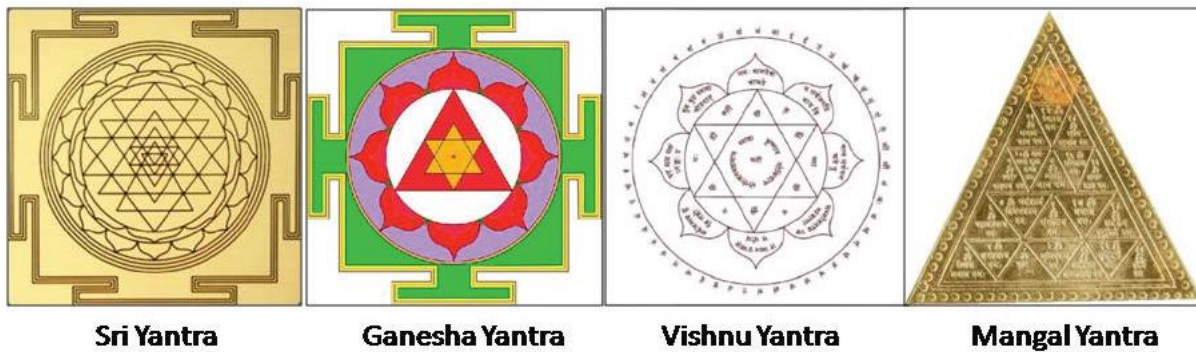
In the Jewish tradition, The Shield of David refers to the Divine Protection of King David and the Shield here refers to God.

### Similarity with Satkona

This is similar to the *Satkona*, a star, which forms a part of *Yantra*, in the Indian tradition.

*Yantras* are line drawings on copper plates or stone slabs installed in the sanctum sanctorum of many temples in India, with their installations dating back to many millennia.

Like the Star of David, these line drawing which consists of concentric triangles forming a star, is a shield against the evil forces, and is worshipped along with the Divine as the Divine itself.



### Some Popular Yantras

#### Krishna's abode

In the Brahma Samhita, a text dedicated to Krishna, *Satkona* or a star is used to describe the celestial abode of Lord Krishna - *Goloka*.

The relevant *sloka* from *Brahma Samhita* being,

*karnikaram mahad-yantram **sat-konam** vajra-kilakam  
sadanga-satpadi-sthanam prakrtya purusena ca  
premananda-mahananda-rasenavasthitam hi vat*

“The center of the divine lotus is the core — Krsna's residence. It is presided over by the Predominated and Predominating Moiety. It is mapped as a hexagonal mystic symbol [*sat-konam*]. Like a diamond, the effulgent Supreme Entity of Krsna, the Fountainhead of all divine potencies, presides as the central pivot. The great *mantra* of eighteen syllables [*Gopala-mantra*], which is formed of six integral parts, is manifest as a hexagonal place with six-fold divisions.” [*Sri Brahma-samhita*, Ch-5, Tx-3]



## King Solomon

The Israeli King David was succeeded by King Solomon.

### *The Righteous Prophet*

King Solomon is celebrated as a saint by the Eastern Orthodox Church. He is called the “Righteous Prophet and King”. He was a Jewish king whose era was a golden era in the Jewish kingdom.

His day is celebrated two Sundays before Christmas.

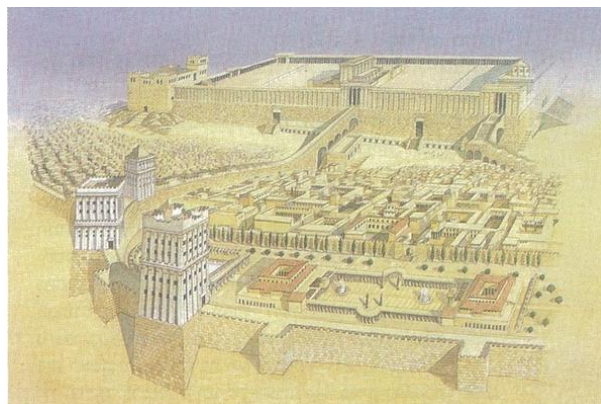


**King Solomon**

### *Raw materials for building palaces came from India*

King Solomon built his grand palace and structures in Jerusalem.

To build his city, King Solomon used a lot of teak wood and ivory from the East over the Seas.



**City Built by King Solomon, Jerusalem**

The land east to this place over the seas where both teak and ivory are plentiful is the Malabar Coast, in India, where Jews have lived across millennia.

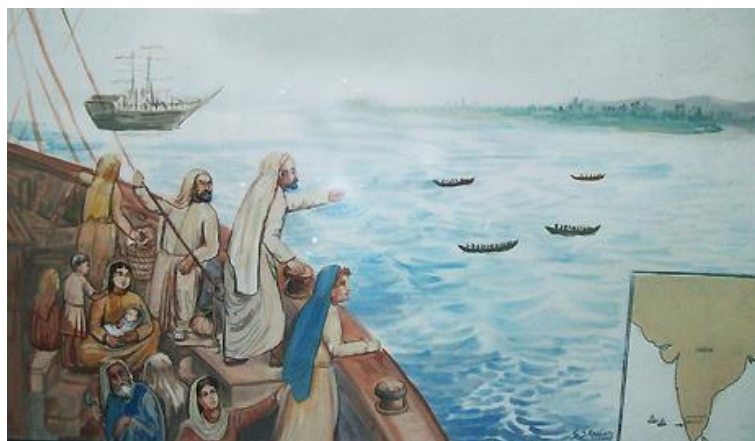


### **Kannimara Teak, Malabar Coast**

#### ***Findings of ASI***

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) through their excavations have been able to identify that the coast near Kollam, Kerala was a major trading center of yore.

The archaeological findings state that teak, ivory, indigo and spices was exported from the ports of Malabar Coast near Kollam, to Middle East and other European ports.



**Teak, Ivory, Indigo and Spices were regularly exported from Malabar**

It is from these shipments that the wood and ivory and indigo for the palace of King Solomon was supplied in those ancient days.

## India Welcomed the Jews

World War II is notoriously remembered for the mass extermination of Jews and the segregation and deportation of Jews from other parts of the world such as from Russia.

It was an act that stemmed from the prevalent negative attitude towards the Jews during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



## Holocaust of the Jews during World War II

*Photos courtesy - US National Archives and Records Administration*

### *Jews Portrayed Bad – 500 Years Ago*

Not just during World War II, but even 500 years ago, Jews were not held in great esteem by the society. The classic case is the treatment meted out in the Shakespearean play “Merchant Of Venice” to the Jewish moneylender Shylock. Shylock is given an evil portrayal in physical description as well as in verbal references to him.

### *An Animosity Right from Millennia*

All these portrayals and treatment meted out, were a culmination of the animosity towards the Jews which has come down from millennia.

The Jews were despised and persecuted in different parts of Europe and elsewhere since then.

It is only post World War II that the world has started viewing Jews, especially those from America, in a different light.

### *Jews Welcomed in Malabar*

In contrast the one land of the world where the Jews have been welcomed right through the times and not discriminated or prosecuted, has been in India.

This is borne out by the fact that some of the oldest Jewish Synagogues to the East of Israel are in Kerala, India.

Tradition speaks of Jews coming to the Malabar Coast of India on exile, after the destruction of the Temple of Solomon, during the Siege of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.

Once again when the second temple of Solomon was destroyed during the Second Siege of Jerusalem in 68 CE, another batch of Jews, fled to India as confirmed by records of this destruction.

As recounted by the Jews in India, there were 10000 exiled men and women who had landed in the Malabar Coast of India in 3828 of *Anno Mundi* (i.e. 68 CE). *Anno Mundi* means the year of the world in Latin and the Year after Creation in Hebrew. As per the Julian calendar, this corresponds to the date 6th October 3761 BCE.

These 10000 Jews had landed in four places, namely Cranganore, Dschalor, Madai and Plota. This fact, as mentioned by the book, “**The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela**”, is borne in a hand written letter by a Rabbi Yehezkel’s in 1768 CE to the Tobias Boas of Amsterdam, filed as MS 4238 in Merzbacher’s Library. It was earlier housed in Munich. This fact must be close to truth as it gives a picture from the Indian side, of the people who had migrated.





### Jews landing at the Malabar Coast in 68 CE

Source – painting from the book *Hutchinson's Stories of Nations* published by Hutchinson & Co

Jews have subsequently been coming to India as evidenced by synagogues which have been built and rebuilt over the last couple of millennia.

#### *Raja Baskara Ravi Varman's Immortal Gesture*

During the reign of Raja Baskara Varman I, the king welcomed the Jews and issued a royal decree in the Tamil Language of those days to the effect that,

*"the Jews were being given the village of Anjuvannam and it could remain in their possession, so long as the world and moon exists."*

***"As long as the world and moon exists."***

This royal decree, *sasanam*, engraved in 2 copper plates is now preserved in the Mattancherry Synagogue, one of the functional synagogues in Cochin. These copper plates bear the date 379 CE.



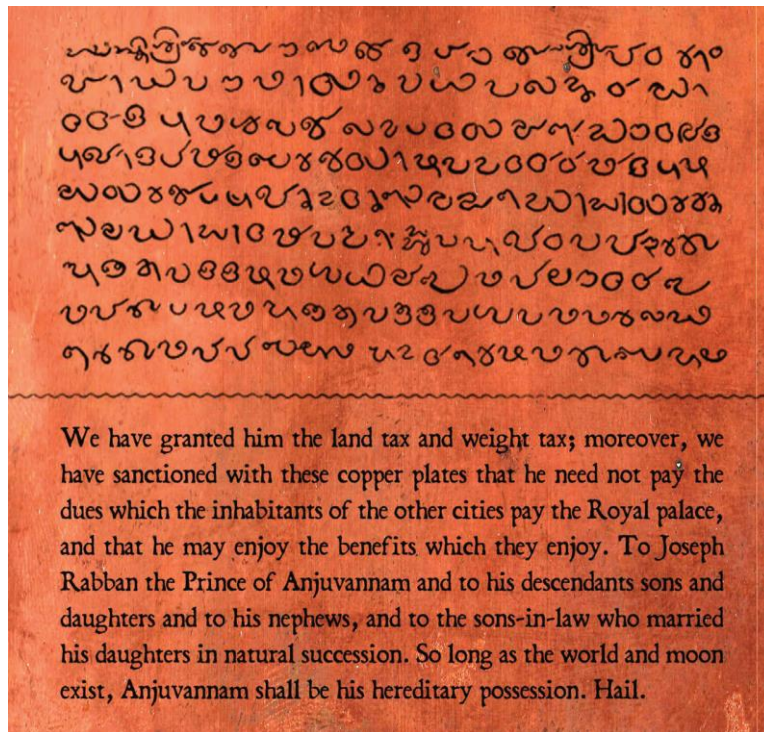
**The Mattancherry Synagogue, Cochin**

ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්  
 ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින් ප්‍රධාන පාලකයන් විසින්

---

We have granted to Joseph Rabban the village of Anjuvannam together with the 72 proprietary rights, tolls on boats and carts, the revenue and title of Anjuvannam, the lamp of the day, a cloth spread in front to walk on, a palanquin, a parasol, a Vaduga (i.e., Teluge) drum, a trumpet, a gate way, a garland, decoration with festoons, and so forth.





**The *sasanam* by Raja Baskara Varma in favour of Joseph Rabban, the Rabbi leader of Jewish settlers**

*Inscription and English Text Source – Jewish Encyclopaedia (1901),*

***PM Narendra Modi's Gift***

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his visit to Israel in 2017, gifted the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with replicas of the 2 sets these Relics that are the main artifacts in the Jewish history of India.



**Prime Minister Narendra Modi's gift to his Israeli counterpart**

### ***Welcomed for Posterity***

The Jews were thus not only “not prosecuted” in India, but sheltered. That too with a commitment for posterity until the sun and the moon shone!

With his proclamation, Raja Bhaskara Varman I ensured that not just that generation of Jews alone, but future generations could live in his land too.

He was also committing that not just he alone but his progeny and future generations of rulers of his land too would honour this commitment.

### ***Accepted Into Mainstream***

The king also gave grand privileges to the Jews in the principality of Kodungallur in Thrissur district, to settle down and carry out their vocation in peace.

From this perspective, the name of the village, Anjuvannam, warrants more than a cursory read. Anju means 5. *Vannam* is the Tamil / Malayalam word for colour which is called *Varnam* in *Sanskrit*.

The concept of Colour or *Varna* has been used in Indian context to denote distinction. Indian society was classified into 4 distinct *Varna*, categories, based on the vocation of the person.

***Was this name Anjuvannam, meaning 5 colours, given to this village to denote the inclusion of the Jews as the 5<sup>th</sup> Varna, vannam, vocation, in that village?***

Not just accepted and kept segregated in a refugee enclosure, but included in the mainstream population, as evidenced perhaps by the name of the village itself.



**Raja Baskara Ravi Varma handing over village Anjuvannam to Joseph Rabban for the Jews**



Ever since then, the Jews lived as a rightful denomination of India in Kodungallur. Kodungallur or Cranganore as it was also called, was referred to as “a substitute Jerusalem in India” and many writers have referred to the intertwining of these two cities.

Continuous records since then show a flourishing presence of Jews in Kodungallur and nearby villages of the Malabar Coast until destruction by a cyclone around 1300s forced them to relocate to areas around Cochin.

Though unsaid, it also implies that even this relocation during was not opposed by the locals.

Where the Jews found discrimination in India was from the Muslims and the Portuguese, who had settled in the Malabar Coast and were dominating trade from Malabar during the 1500s.

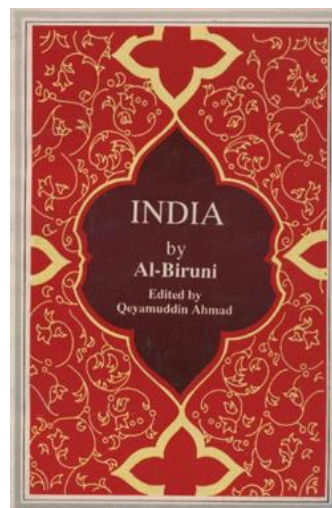
There was a further influx of Jews from Iberia, modern day Spain, around 1400s into Cochin. These were European Jews as against the earlier Jews who had migrated from Central Asia. The Mattanchery synagogue or Pardesi synagogue built around 1500s was the centre of the European Jew also called Pardesi Jews.

*Pardesi* means foreigner. This term itself shows how much the Jews who had migrated to India before the 1400s, from Central Asia had identified themselves with this land and its native people.

### *Jews in Kashmir*

This welcome was extended to the Jews was not only in the south of India, in Kerala but in the north, in Kashmir also. This was observed over 1000 years ago and recorded by Al Biruni in his book Kitab-ulhind, where, in page 99 he writes,

*“Kashmir in former times, they used to allow one or two foreigners to enter their country, particularly Jews.”*



**Al-Biruni and Kitab-ul-Hind book**

## In War

### *Indians liberated Israeli cities*

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in turn gifted Modi with a photo that depicts Indian soldiers on December 11, 1917, leading a British military column to liberate Jerusalem.



### **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gift to our Prime Minister**

Indian soldiers played a key role in the liberation of the cities of Jerusalem, Haifa and Acre, from the Turkish Ottoman Empire and Germans, during World War-1.



Indian soldiers fought as a part of 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade, in the 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division, on behalf of the British, in the year 1918-19. Around 1 lakh Indian soldiers fought for the cause of a Jewish state that made Israel a reality.

### *Haifa*

Haifa is a prominent Israeli city that the Indian soldiers help liberate. Today, it is the third largest city in Israel.



**Haifa, Location**

Soldiers from three Indian states, sacrificed their lives while contributing to the liberation of the Palestinian post of Haifa from Ottoman Turks in 1918



**Indian soldiers marching in Haifa after it was liberated**

*Image Courtesy : wikicommons*

### ***Teen Murti Marg***

The three statues, *Murti*, on the circle of the *Teen Murti Marg* in New Delhi, depict three Indian regiments from Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad, who took part in the Haifa liberation.



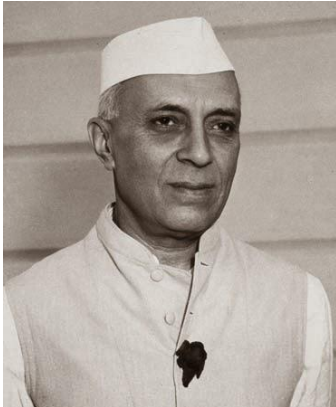
The *Teen Murti Memorial*, which houses these statues, was designed by British sculptor Leonard Jennings. It was built in 1922.



***Teen Murti Memorial***



In August 1948, *Teen Murti Marg*'s most famous building, *Teen Murti House*, became the official residence of independent India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who lived here for sixteen years until his death on May 27, 1964. After Nehru's death, the Central government decided to convert the *Teen Murti House* into a memorial that would keep alive Nehru's memory and legacy.



**Jawaharlal Nehru**



**Teen Murti House**



**Teen Murti Marg Road**

### ***Household names in Israel***

Today, some of these soldiers may be unknown in their own lands, but have become household names in Israel. Their names figure in the history textbooks at schools for their contribution in liberating the Israeli cities.

A cemetery of 70 soldiers who gave up their lives, exists in Jerusalem. Another cemetery for the Indian soldiers is in Haifa.



**PM Modi paid homage to Indian soldiers who sacrificed their lives during World War-1 to liberate Jerusalem**

### ***Teen Murti Haifa Marg***

*Teen Murti Marg* was renamed *Teen Murti Haifa Marg*, on the occasion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel in July 2017.

## **1971 Bangladesh Liberation War**

India fought the 1971 War in the then East Pakistan, and comprehensively defeated all the forces of West Pakistan. Thus a new nation was formed, "The People's Republic of Bangladesh".

### ***Lieutenant General Jacob Farj Rafael***

The one behind 1971 India's victory was an officer of Jewish origin.

His name is Major General Jacob Farj Rafael.

Major General Jacob served as the Chief of Staff of Indian's Army's Eastern Command, that humbled the Pakistani Army, in East Pakistan, during this major battle.

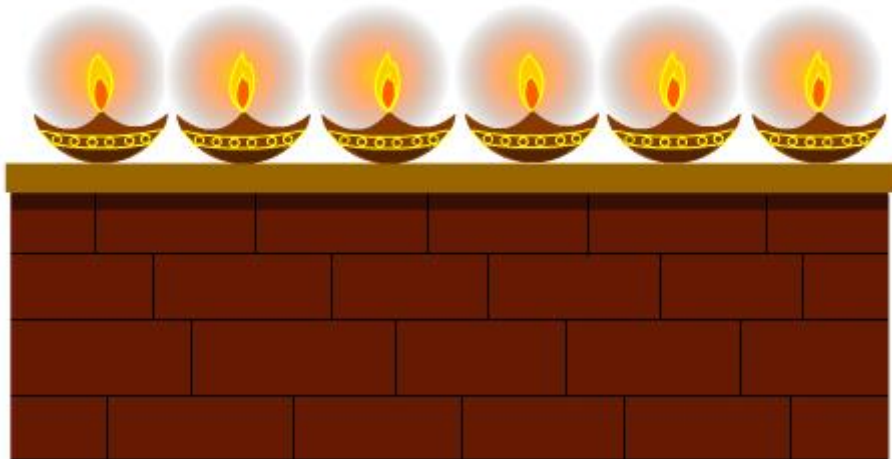


**Lieutenant General Jacob Farj Rafael**

## Similar Festivals

### *Deepavali*

One of the important festivals celebrated in India is Deepavali. *Deepa* means “lamp” and *Avali* means, “row of”. Deepavali means a “Row of light”.



Deepavali is a festival of lights celebrated in the month of November, when people light lamps and arrange them in rows and other patterns, in front of their house and in the street.

### **Deepavali - India**





A similar festival exists in Israel too.

### ***Hanukkah Festival of Jews***

In the Jewish tradition, Hannukkah, a festival of lights, is also celebrated around the same period, i.e. in the month of November. This festival is celebrated for 8 days.



**Hannukkah, a Jewish festival of lights**

The Jewish family light candles on the fourth night of the festival, and do so on each night, on the subsequent nights of the festival.



**A Jewish family lighting candles**



An illustration of Hanukkah



## Post-Independence

India and Israel became independent nations in 1947 and 1948 respectively.

### *India's first Miss India, a Jew*

Post-independence, even though there were few differences, Indo Jewish bond immediately came to fore when Actress Esther Victoria Abraham of Baghdadi Jewish family, became India's first Miss India in the year 1947.



**Actress Esther Victoria Abraham**

### ***In Mumbai***

The largest group of Jews is to be found in Mumbai, who have made this city their home, for centuries.

There are two distinct communities of Jews in Mumbai, the Bene Israelis and the Baghdadi Jews.

The Bene Israeli group, having their roots in Israel are known as “The Sons of Israel”.

### ***Sassoon Family***

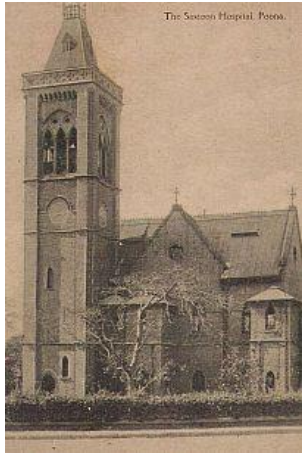
The Sassoons of Mumbai were among the richest families in the world. Sassoon is a Jewish surname, which means happiness in Hebrew.

This family built a hospital, a shipping dockyard and a library, which still bears the same name Surname.



**Sassoon Dockyard**





**Sassoon Hospital, Original Building**

**Sassoon Hospital as it stands today**

The David Sassoon library in Mumbai, which was built in 1870, is the place where B R Ambedkar wrote the final draft of the Indian Constitution.



**David Sassoon Library**

They also built the largest Synagogue in Asia, known as Lal Deval in Pune.



**Lal Deval Synagogue, Pune**

There is a popular synagogue known as Kneset Eliyahoo, located in the city, which is of ancient antiquity.



**Kneset Eliyahoo Synagogue in Mumbai**

An ancient cemetery of the Bene – Israeli community, dating to atleast 2000 years, is located in a village near Mumbai.

***In Kochi***

A small community still lives at Kochi in the state of Kerala. The Paradise Synagogue in Kochi is an attractive tourist destination.



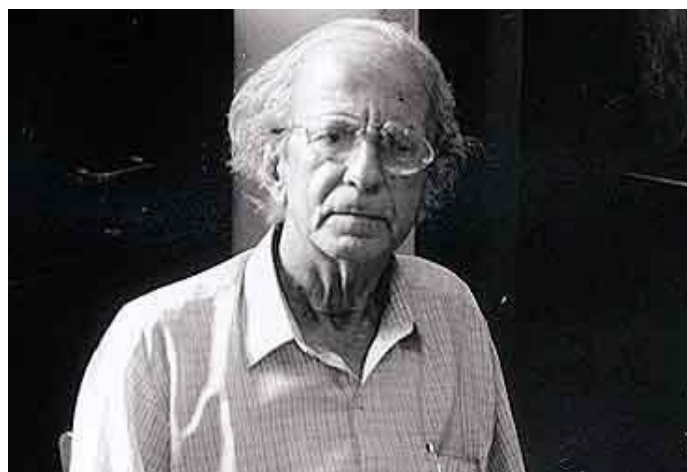


**The Jewish Paradise Synagogue in Kochi**

## **Jews Excelled in India**

### ***Nissim Ezekiel***

Nissim Ezekiel was a Jewish Indian poet. He was also an actor, editor and a playwright. His poems in English were well received in the country. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his poetry collection, "Latter-Day Psalms", from Sahitya Akademi, the Indian National Academy for letters.



**Nissim Ezekiel**



### ***Florence Ezekel Nadira***

Florence Ezekel Nadira is an Indian actress of Jewish origin, who performed in the films of 1950s and 60s, which include Shree 420, Pakeezah and Julie, for which she won the Best Supporting Actress Award from filmfare.



**Florence Ezekel Nadira**

### **Smallest Minority in India**

Today, Jews are the smallest minority in India, with a population of only 5000, and with 3700 living in Mumbai alone. They live in small groups in the cities of Kochi, Calicut, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Kolkata.

Others gradually emigrated to Israel, over the last 69 years, after the formation of the state of Israel.

### **Diplomatic Relations**

India and Israel forged a diplomatic relation in the year 1992. It however took 25 years for an Indian prime minister to visit Israel.

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel in 1917, was a first by an Indian prime minister. This visit brought to focus the close bond that exists between these two countries.



A chrysanthemum flower was named after Prime Minister Narendra Modi by the Israeli establishment during his visit, as Indo Israel relations reached its blossoming stage with the visit of the Prime Minister to Israel. This relation between the two countries will further flower with the visit of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to India in January 2018.



**Israeli Chrysanthemum flower named after Modi**

**Email** [bharathgyan@gmail.com](mailto:bharathgyan@gmail.com)  
**Website** [www.bharathgyan.com](http://www.bharathgyan.com)  
**Blog** <http://bharathgyanblog.wordpress.com>  
**Twitter** <http://www.twitter.com/bharathgyan>  
**Facebook** <http://www.facebook.com/bharathgyan>  
**You Tube** <http://www.youtube.com/user/bharathgyan>

**Our Books Avail**

**In India** <https://www.sattvastore.com>  
**Outside India** <http://www.amazon.com>  
**Teleshop** 1 800 258 8888 (India Tollfree)