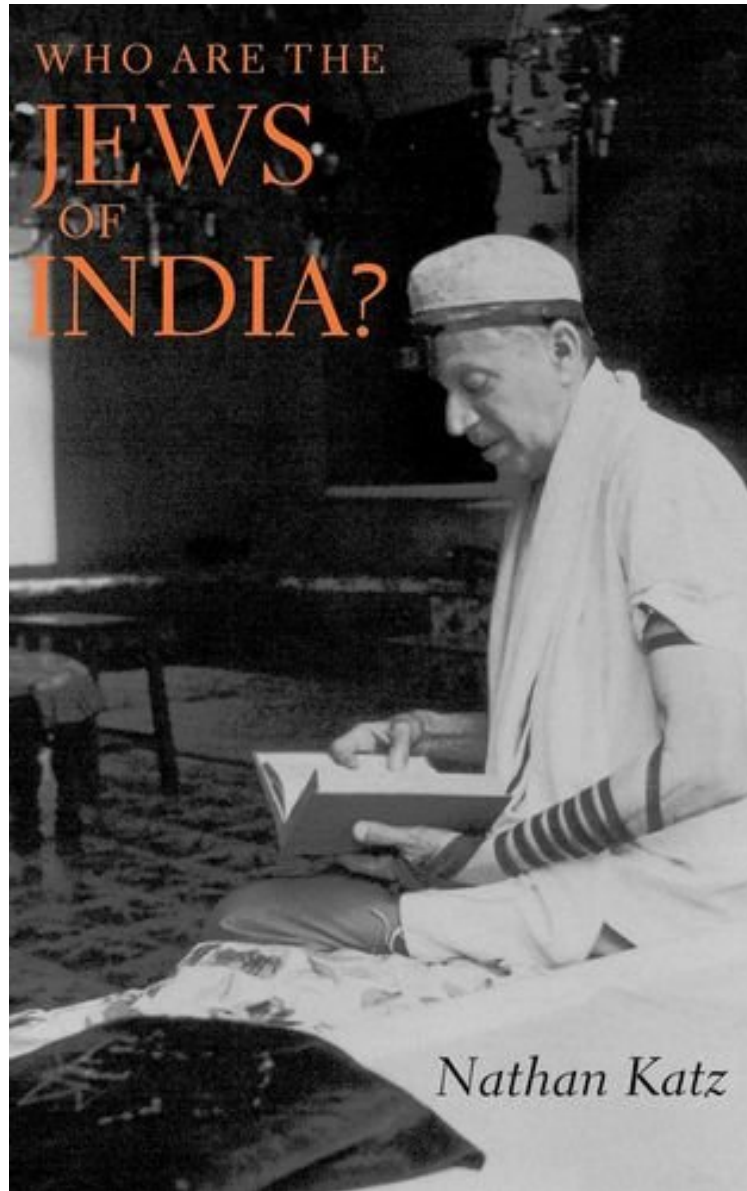


[Mobile pdf] Who Are the Jews of India?

Who Are the Jews of India?

Nathan Katz

*ebooks | Download PDF | *ePub | DOC | audiobook*



DOWNLOAD



READ ONLINE

#162262 in Books 2000-11-06Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.02 x .63 x 5.98l, 1.10 #File Name: 0520213238228 pages | File size: 35.Mb

Nathan Katz : Who Are the Jews of India? before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Who Are the Jews of India?:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Jew of IndiaBy Raananah KatzNathan Katz's book is well written, clear reading, and well documented. An important volume for scholars and readers alike.Fascinating actually.17 of 17

people found the following review helpful. A Happy Jewish Diaspora By Dr. C. J. Singh Who Are the Jews of India? By Nathan Katz (Berkeley, Calif.: UC Press. Reviewed by C. J. Singh (Berkeley, CA) Not many know that the Jewish diaspora reached India two thousand years ago. Although the size of the Jewish diaspora in India was always small, it invites study because its history of sustained harmony sharply contrasts with their history of periodic horrors inflicted upon them in Europe and elsewhere. It's fitting that the University of California Press is the publisher of the first comprehensive scholarly study of all three of the Jewish communities in India. It was a UC Berkeley professor of history, Walter J. Fischel, who pioneered the study of the Jews in India in his 1962 article, "Cochin in Jewish History: Prolegomena to a History of the Jews in India," published in *The Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*. Inspired by his article, several monographs soon appeared on each of the three Indian Jewish communities. And more recently, Indian Jews as principal characters have appeared in fiction such as Sally Solomon's "Hooghly Tales: Stories of Growing Up in Calcutta under the Raj," Gay Courter's "Flowers in the Blood," Esther David's "The Walled City," and Anita Desai's "Baumgartner's Bombay." In the introduction to this truly engrossing book, Nathan Katz writes: "Indian Jews lived as all Jews should have been allowed to live: free, proud, observant, creative and prosperous, self-realized, full contributors to the host community. Then, when twentieth century conditions permitted they returned en masse to Israel, which they had always proclaimed to be their true home despite India's hospitality. The Indian chapter is one of the happiest of the Jewish Diaspora." For spiritual reasons and for better economic opportunities, the emigration of Indian Jews to Israel was indeed "en masse." Today, the synagogues in India have stopped holding regular services because they often fail to gather a quorum of ten male Jews. Perhaps a more appropriate title of the book would be: *Who Were the Jews of India?* The three Indian Jewish communities have a distinct history: the Cochin Jews arrived as early as the first century; the Bene Israel Jews of greater Bombay arrived, they claim, 1600 years ago; and the Baghdadi Jews of the port cities of Bombay and Calcutta arrived in the middle of the eighteenth century. The largest section of the book is on the Cochin Jews. The connection between Cochin and the Jews goes back to the time of King Solomon (992-952 B. C.): teak, ivory, spice, and peacocks were exported to Palestine. The Cochin Jews claim their ancestors arrived in Shingly, near Cochin, on the southwest coast of India in 72 A. D., fleeing the destruction of the second temple by the Romans. They were allowed to settle in Cochin by the local maharaja, where many of them prospered as merchants, government officials and soldiers. Katz quotes from Mandelbaum's article in the *Jewish Journal of Sociology*: As late as 1550 "the Raja of Cochin refused to fight a battle on Saturday because on that day his Jewish soldiers would not fight; and they were the best warriors he had raised." Katz comments: "Probably India is the only country on earth so civilized that in war, out of deference to its esteemed Jewish soldiers, no battles were fought on the Sabbath." Katz notes that the Cochin Jews soon came to establish separate synagogues for white and brown Jews: "Fair-skinned European converts were sometimes accepted as white Jews despite the obvious fact that they could not have Jewish lineage. Similarly, some dark-skinned Yemeni Jews who had proper lineage were considered blacks and were not accepted into the white synagogue." The Bene Israeli community, which numbered 50,000 before emigration to Israel, 90 percent are gone to Israel, claims its origin to some sixteen or eighteen hundred years ago, they say, "when their ancestors were shipwrecked on Indian shores.... They came as refugees from persecution and political overthrow." Katz dismisses this as pseudo-history without elaborating. The Bene Israel divided themselves into subcastes: Gora, or White, and Kala, or Black. "The Goras were believed to be descendants of the seven original shipwrecked couples, while the Kalas were stigmatized as descendants of concubinage between a Gora Bene Israel and a gentile woman, usually low caste. They could attend the same synagogue, but as an example of discrimination, Kala could not be offered wine for kiddush until all Gora had drunk theirs." When the dark-skinned Bene Israel migrated to Israel, they encountered considerable racial prejudice. "As recently as 1997, an Ashkenazic (European) rabbi in Petah Tiqveh refused to register a marriage between a Bene Israel sabra (native Israeli) and her Ashkenazic groom. The matter caused a brief controversy, but worldwide rabbinic opinion was virtually universal in support of the young woman. The hard-line rabbi was suitably castigated and the marriage was celebrated. ... For generations, the Bene Israel were Jews in India. Now they are Indians in Israel." The Baghdadi Jews arrived in India around 1750 A. D. from the Middle Eastern countries and spoke Arabic and Persian as their first language. The Baghdadi Jews did not treat the Bene Israel community as their equals and after establishing themselves in India attempted to be accepted as Europeans by the British in India, attempts the British contemptuously rebuffed. "For a longtime the Baghdadis shared Calcutta's greytown with Armenians, Anglo-Indians, Greeks, Portuguese, and others not pale enough for the European 'whitetown' quarter." In Bombay, the Baghdadi Jews did more than simply identify with British culture. They utterly rejected Indian culture, particularly as embodied by their co-religionists, the Bene Israel." Katz ascribes the acculturation of the Hindu caste system by the Jews in India for the low-esteem with which the white Cochin Jews and the Baghdadi Jews held the Bene Israel. While it cannot be denied that the invidious caste-system might have influenced the Jews in India, I would argue that this discriminatory behavior reflects pervasive ethnocentric prejudice among many communities everywhere. Two relevant examples are the historic prejudice of the German Jews toward Slavic Jews and of most European Jews toward the European Roma people, who originated from Northwest India. On the harmonious history of the Jewish diaspora in India, Katz analyzes: "A crucial distinction between India and the rest of the Diaspora, however, is that in India acculturation is

not paid for in the currency of assimilation. By acculturation I mean fitting comfortably into a society while retaining one's own identity, whereas by assimilation I mean that the loss of that identity is a perceived condition for acceptance. The study of Indian Jewish communities demonstrates that in Indian culture an immigrant group gains status precisely by maintaining its own identity. Such is the experience not only of India's Jews, but also of local Christians, Zoroastrians, and recently, Tibetan Buddhists. This striking feature of Indian civilization is reflected by each of these immigrant groups. "Although Katz is right in ascribing Hinduism's acceptance, even encouragement, of differences, I would point out that the Hindus extend hospitality to the outside groups to the extent that the outsiders refrain from proselytizing Hindus. For example, Christian missionaries are vigorously opposed by most Hindus. Even Gandhi was completely against Christian missionaries in India: "If I had the power and could legislate, I should stop all proselytising.... It is the deadliest poison that ever sapped the fountain of truth." The major cause of conflict between the Muslims and the Hindus for more than a thousand years has been the Koranic injunction to convert all infidels and to slay those who refuse [Koran, 9.5]. Unlike the Muslims and Christians, the Jews in India never engaged in proselytizing activities. The greatest of the Jewish strategies for living and prospering in India lay in what the Jews did not do! As part of the project for writing this book, Nathan Katz, professor and chair of Religious Studies at Florida International University, interviewed many people in India and in Israel to provide the reader an understanding of "how these two great and ancient civilizations, Indic and Judaic, interacted within the very being of India's Jews. In Calcutta, Norman Nahoum, one of the small number of Baghdadi Jews who remain in India, tells him: "We are taught to abhor idolatry to prevent its assimilation into Abraham's family of religions, but if you look closely you will see that Judaism and Hinduism have so much in common. In India, we are accepted totally, at the same time we are treated with kid gloves, like special guests." Referring to Hindus, Nahoum says, "These people are civilized; the others are barbarians, bent on proselytization. If you ask any Jew who has lived in India, from Cochin to Calcutta, you will find that although the Hindus are called idolaters, they are more accepting of Jews than those so-called new religions that grew out of Judaism." In Cochin, interviewees tell him: "Anti-Semitism doesn't exist in our Indian dictionary." Professor Nathan Katz has written a heart-warming, scholarly book on the Jewish diaspora in India.-- C J Singh-----Addendum: 2016, Oct 30 For details on the European Roma people, please see my -review of Isabel Fonseca's "Bury Me Standing." Addendum: 2017, 19 Sept.: See my detailed amazon-review of Ian Hancock's "We Are the Romani People" 19 of 23 people found the following review helpful. finally a book on the subject!! By Neel Aroon I've been interested in learning about the Jewish Diaspora in India for a while now and have done a little research on the internet but the websites did not provide me with as much information as I wanted. Finally I found out about this book and it gives a really great account of the Jewish-Indian groups-Bene Jews of West India, Cochin Jews of Kerala and the Middle Eastern Jews in cities like Delhi and Calcutta. It gives detailed account on how they arrived in India and how they lived there with their neighbors and colonial rulers. The book also deals with how Zionism and Indian independence were both extremely important to Indian Jews and how they were torn between these two philosophies because of their emergence to the mainstream at the same time.

Of all the Diaspora communities, the Jews of India are among the least known and most interesting. This readable study, full of vivid details of everyday life, looks in depth at the religious life of the Jewish community in Cochin, the Bene Israel from the remote Konkan coast near Bombay, and the Baghdadi Jews, who migrated to Indian port cities and flourished under the British Raj. *Who Are the Jews of India?* is the first integrated, comprehensive work available on all three of India's Jewish communities. Using an interdisciplinary approach, Nathan Katz brings together methods and insights from religious studies, ritual studies, anthropology, history, linguistics, and folklore, as he discusses the strategies each community developed to maintain its Jewish identity. Based on extensive fieldwork throughout India, as well as close reading of historical documents, this study provides a striking new understanding of the Jewish Diaspora and of Hindu civilization as a whole.

"Based on extensive fieldwork in India and a close reading of historical documents, this study provides a new understanding of the Jewish diaspora as well as insights into the Hindu society it is located in."--"India Abroad From the Inside Flap" The last decade or so has seen a surprising amount of new publications on the Indian Jews. The awareness that the communities are disappearing has prompted memoirs by its elders as well as scholarly studies. *Who Are the Jews of India?* is the first book to present a readable, interesting, integrated treatment of the three distinct Indian Jewish communities that have evolved--the Cochin Jews, the Bene Israel, and the Baghdadis. It also brings together material on the Baghdadi communities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Southeast Asia in a way that I have never seen before. Its presence is most welcome; its scholarship is superior." Daniel Gold, author of *Comprehending the Guru: Toward a Grammar of Religious Perception* and *The Lord as Guru: Hindi Saints in North Indian Tradition*.