Minorities among Minorities
Identity and Existence in Modern India

A Journey through the Jewish, Parsi and Chinese Communities of India

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The 20th century represented the beginning of an era of unprecedented connectivity and globalisation, as large numbers of people sought their fortunes in distant, foreign lands and countries. With this large migration and movement of the masses, a fallacious belief has often resulted in the belief that such migrations are unique to modern times. In reality, the migration, and movement of peoples has been an essential component of the human experience. Within this context, there exists considerable interest and motivation to study the case of India and its immigrant minority communities.

Modern India represents a unique society and product of millennia of external influences interacting with dynamic internal social pressures that have resulted in the existence of some remarkable minority communities. While traditional dissertations and works on India's minorities tend to focus on larger minorities, it may in fact prove useful to use the experience of India's smallest minorities and extrapolate certain conclusions with regards to Indian minorities in general. It is also of special significance that the smallest of India's minorities also represent India's most distinct and recognized immigrant communities. Indeed, the Jewish, the Chinese and the Zoroastrian, or Parsi, communities of India offer a unique opportunity to consider the notion of the acculturation and/or assimilation of immigrant communities within a fascinating context.

Before continuing with an examination of these minority communities, it becomes necessary to define the terms **acculturation** and **assimilation**. Acculturation is defined as a process of intercultural borrowing marked by the continuous transmission of traits and elements between diverse peoples and resulting in new and blended patterns, whereas assimilation is defined as a socio-cultural fusion wherein individuals and groups of differing ethnic heritage acquire the basic habits, attitudes, and mode of life of an embracing national culture.[1] It now becomes particularly relevant and interesting to consider the extent to which these three minority groups have acculturated and/or assimilated into India's dominant cultural paradigms. Indeed, an examination of both external and internal notions of the identity of each of these communities reveals that the economic and social success of India's smallest minority communities has largely rested on their definition of their position within larger Indian society and finding an appropriate economic and professional niche within it. Their identities are for the most part, self defined, however, remain inexorably tied with India's many ethnic and religious communities, and their daily lives represent a unique process of communal definition within a complex, diverse society and country. The structure of this work will thus follow a thorough exposition and analysis of each minority community before drawing upon the conclusions reached from a case-by-case analysis to extrapolate and examine some broader themes and generalizations that can be made with regards to minority definition, identity and existence in a pluralistic democracy.

The Jewish Community

Historically, the Indian Jewish community is India's oldest, distinct immigrant community. This community also represents India's smallest recognized minority, with a current population of six thousand[2] in a country of over one billion people.

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[1] Webster's Unabridged Dictionary

[2] Asha A. Bhende and Ralphy E. Jhirad, Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Jews in India (Mumbai: ORT India, 1997) 4.

The community's size, however, does not belie its rich heritage, complex history and remarkable resiliency and success over perhaps three millennia of presence on the Indian subcontinent. Any thorough analysis of this community must draw upon the community's history and consequently recognize its own internal diversity. Indian Jewry, indeed, is an ancient, unique community that, over time, has come to be divided into three subgroups: the Cochin Jews, the Bene Israel and the Baghdadi Jews.

The fascinating history of the Indian Jews can, in and of itself, form the basis for a purely historical dissertation, but nonetheless needs to be explored in a somewhat limited fashion. Historians speculate that the first Jewish traders may have had contact with the Malabar (Kerala) coast as early as the 7th century B.C.E. Generally speaking, however, the Cochin Jews trace their ancestry back to groups of people who left Israel or Yemen around the time of, or centuries after, the destruction of the Second temple in the first century C.E. [3] The Jewish population of Kerala, thus, has always maintained its identity as a legitimate member of the Jewish Diaspora. Indeed, the community maintained its religious traditions strictly, and found complete and immediate acceptance within the larger Jewish Diaspora in modern times.

The Bene Israel, on the other hand, represent a much larger group of people, who, until two centuries ago, maintained few Jewish traditions and were almost completely indistinguishable in their practices from local Hindu oil-pressers. Their tradition maintains that the community descended from seven men and seven women who survived a shipwreck off the northern Konkan coast near Bombay. As with the Cochin Jews, there are no reliable sources as far as the date of their arrival is concerned, with estimates ranging from the time of King Solomon in the 7th century

[3] Nathan Katz, ed. Studies of Indian Jewish Identity (Manohar: New Delhi, 1995) 2-11, 55-56.

BCE to the middle ages, when some Jews may have escaped persecution in Persia.[4] The Baghdadi Jews, the smallest community of Indian Jews, are a relatively recent arrival, following the British from Iraq and Syria, and setting up profitable trading and business ventures in Bombay and Calcutta in the 19th century. The histories of these three groups, however, are not mere cursory notes in considering Indian Jewish identity. In reality, they become critical and profoundly important in understanding how each group chose to define its boundaries and relationship with the majority Hindu community, and the level to which each group has assimilated or acculturated to the regional Hindu Indian cultures they encountered.

When considering the concept of Indian Jewish identity it becomes necessary to acknowledge the existence of a certain duality insofar as being Indian and being Jewish is concerned. The nature of this duality reflects, to different extents, how each Indian Jewish group has acculturated to the dominant community, and consequently their economic status, level of marginalisation and overall self-perception. Indeed, it is important to note, that while the Bene Israel community, the largest Indian Jewish community numerically, assimilated into the majority Hindu community for many centuries, the Jewish community in Kerala, the second largest Indian Jewish community, acculturated to the regional Hindu community.[5] This distinction is important, and largely tied to the historical circumstances surrounding the arrivals of these two communities in India.

The Cochin Jews arrived on the Malabar Coast with a thorough understanding of Jewish traditions and rituals, and thus, like most other Diasporic Jewish communities, adapted to the local environment while maintaining their distinct Jewish identity. One remarkable difference in the development of Cochin and Indian Jewish identity, in comparison to the development of most European Jewish identities, was the almost complete lack of anti-semitism in any form. Traditional

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[4] Katz, ed. 118-120.
[5] Katz, ed. 15-18, 47

analyses of the Jewish identity assume that it is defensive in character; that it is an identity borne from a response to pervasive anti-semitism through the centuries in Europe. This analysis, however, is not applicable to the Indian Jews.[6] Indeed, the Cochin community's existence was a model one, with amicable relations with their Hindu neighbours, and a brief period around 1000 C.E., when a Jewish kingdom rose in the village of Anjuvannam near Cochin.[7] The community held a pseudo-high-caste position in Kerala society, and was well respected for its traditions, levels of education, and the services members of the community offered to various local kings. Indeed, there exists a prevalence of rituals and customs in the Cochin Jewish community that mimic or follow the practices of the local Nambudiri Brahmins and Nayars[8], two communities that represent the highest castes in Kerala. These practices reflect the Cochin Jews attempts at confirming a self-perception of their community as an upper class, upper caste, and successful, elite group. Various studies note that the Cochin Jews not only subscribed to the ascetism practiced by the Nambudiri Brahmins during Passover, but also emphasized royal symbols like the Kshatriya Nayars during the autumn High Holy Days, a Jewish celebration of God's kingship. Acculturation for the Cochin Jewish community involved an adaptation of symbols of the local high-caste communities with their own traditions and rituals. This resulted in an Indian and Jewish community that proved to be remarkably successful, economically and socially.

In contrast with the Cochin Jews, The Bene Israel's ancestors arrived in India with few remaining possessions or documents, and with time blended in with the local lower-caste population of oil-pressers. They were known as the *Shanwar telis,* Saturday oilmen,[9] but otherwise largely assimilated into the local Hindu culture. This assimilation, however, was not total, and the vestigial Jewish observances they

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[6] Katz, ed. 1-2
[7] Nathan Katz Who are the Jews of India? (UC Press: Berkeley, 2000) 13
[8] Katz, ed. 17.
[9] Katz, ed. 89

maintained allowed for their 'discovery' by a Cochin Jew, David Rahabi, in the eighteenth century. With the arrival of religiously pious Cochin Jews, and Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century, the Bene Israel underwent a rather striking transformation, not unlike that of the Parsi community, as shall be examined later. The evolved from a rural, agricultural and lower-caste community to a successful, urban and well-known community under British rule, in Bombay. The development of the Bene Israel was also affected by the arrival of a third, somewhat obscure group of Indian Jews, the Baghdadi Jews.

The Baghdadi Jews that settled in Bombay and Calcutta formed two units, among an Iraqi Diaspora extending from London to Shanghai, and served as ancillaries to British trading networks during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[10] They remained a relatively small, and generally aloof community, not concerned with local Indian cultures or traditions, and, furthermore, did not consider the Bene Israel to be 'real' Jews. This perception on the part of the Baghdadi Jews, partly fuelled by racial considerations, as the Baghdadis were fair-skinned compared to the darker, 'native' Bene Israel, led to outright discrimination in the exclusion of Bene Israel members from Baghdadi hospitals and synagogues.[11] This discrimination, in part, was a result of British denigration of Indians on racial and cultural grounds, and the Baghdadi Jews' attempts at assimilating to the British, and maintaining a favoured position[12] insofar as trading matters were concerned. With the end of British rule in India, however, notions of Indian Jewish identity underwent some rather important changes, resulting in the eventual emigration of a good majority of the community.

The existence of these three Indian Jewish communities in modern India reflect, in part, the extent to which they fit into the framework established by the

[10] Katz, ed. 136
[11] Katz, ed. 144
[12] Benjamin J. Israel The Jews of India (Center for Jewish Studies: New Delhi, 1982) 27

majority Hindu and Muslim communities, rather than the model the British laid down. Not unlike other communities that thrived under the framework of the Raj, the Baghdadi Jews found themselves out of place in India, and questioned to what extent they truly were 'Indian'. If population statistics are any indication, the decline of the population of Baghdadi Jews from a height of perhaps five thousand in 1950 to perhaps two hundred and fifty elderly individuals in 1995[13] is particularly revealing of the community's status in modern India. Indeed the majority of the Baghdadi Jews have emigrated to Israel or to the West, having maintained continuous contacts with members of their vast trading network scattered throughout remnants of the British Empire. The Cochin Jews, have also, for the most part, migrated to Israel or, in smaller numbers, to the West. Their emigration, with time, from a peak of five thousand people to a few dozen elderly men and women who remain in the historical 'Jewtown' in Cochin,[14] is a product of both political changes and changes in the Jewish Diaspora, with the creation of the state of Israel. The Cochin Jews drew a good majority of their earnings from coconut estates[15], a system of land ownership that underwent considerable change with the election of a Communist government in Kerala in 1957. This, combined with a rise in Zionist and Jewish Nationalist sentiments among the Cochin Jews, and increased economic prospects, led to a large scale migration of this particular community to Israel, where over five thousand people now identify themselves as Cochin Jews.

The Bene Israel, by far the largest of India's Jewish communities historically, now constitutes an overwhelming majority of India's Jewish population, with most members residing in Bombay. A community that had, over time, assimilated and re-discovered its Jewish identity, it too has experienced considerable migration, related to a longing for return to Israel, and a rise in Zionist and Jewish Nationalist sentiments after the tragic events of World War II. Thus, only five thousand or so

[13] Bhende and Jhirad 9-12
[14] Bhende and Jhirad 9-11
[15] Israel 13

members remain in India.[16] Nonetheless, the survival of this particular group numerically, is related to their self-perception as Indians from their linguistic associations with Marathi and centuries of cordial, integrative relations with the majority Hindu communities of the region. These observations and conclusions allow then for a synthesized understanding of the Indian Jewish community.

The state of the Indian Jewish community today reflects both historical and modern pressures. It also reveals that though numerically the community may seem marginalized, it, in fact, is doing quite well economically, pedagogically and socially. Notable members of the community include General Jacobs, who supervised the surrender of the Pakistani Army in Bangladesh in 1971, and more recently, became the Governor of Goa. Though not as influential as the Parsi community economically and socially, the Indian Jewish community continues to play a much larger role than one would expect from their size. The migration of a good majority of the community in recent years has been a product of changes in the Diaspora rather than any problems with their lives in India. The current existence of the Indian Jews reflects, thus, a process of partial assimilation, restored to a state of acculturation, with amicable relations prevailing, and resulting in a truly successful immigrant experience.

The Parsi Community

The Zoroastrian Parsis of India have often been referred to as the "Jews of India", a statement that is of considerable interest, within the context of this paper. Statistically, the Parsis are India's largest immigrant minority, yet they comprise only approximately 0.0152% of the population.[17] Nonetheless, their economic and social influence on India has been unparalleled. As with the Indian Jewish community, Parsi

[16] Bhende and Jhirad 9-12
[17] Richard A. Schermerhorn Ethnic Plurality in India (University of Arizona Press: Tuscon, 1978) 17

and Zoroastrian history is profoundly important when considering an analysis of contemporary Parsi identity.

Zoroastrianism represents one of the world's most ancient extant religions, with its earliest roots still shrouded in mystery. Early Zoroastrian beliefs rose out of ancient Indo-Iranian traditions, and, as many modern scholars have discovered, ancient Zoroastrian traditions and texts find striking parallels in early Vedic literature. Around 1200-1000 B.C.E., the prophet Zarathustra, took these beliefs and unified an existing Iranian dualistic tradition within an ethical framework, constructing Iran's first major religion, a religion that would play a major role in regional affairs for two millennia. From the struggle between *Ahura Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu*, crudely viewed as good and evil, to summarizing the duty of humans to follow the path of good thoughts, good words and good deeds, the religion of Zarathustra is also thought to have had a profound influence on Judaism and consequently the world's major monotheistic faiths. The faith underwent several transformations with time, with the establishment of elaborate rituals and a fully developed theology arriving under the Sasanian dynasty, an empire that established Zoroastrianism as its official faith.[18] This history is key to understanding modern reformist Parsi attempts at retaining the core of the faith while re-interpreting the ritual aspect that developed with Sasanian Zoroastrianism. Nonetheless, Parsis trace their ancestry back to groups of Iranian Zoroastrians that fled after Muslim Arab armies defeated the last Sasanian King in 642 C.E. While no exact dates are available, it is presumed that by the eighth-ninth century C.E. the group that is now referred to as the Parsis received a hesitant welcome from the local Hindu ruler near Diu, on the coast of Southern Gujarat, in India.[19] Over the centuries, the Parsis of Gujarat worked as farmers, artisans, merchants, revenue collectors, and eventually shipbuilders and commercial traders.

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[18] Jesse S. Palsetia The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City (Brill: Leiden, 2001) 2-3

[19] Tanya M. Luhrmann The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1996) 76-78

The Parsis professed loyalty to the various political administrations they found themselves under, from the Hindu rulers, to the Moghuls, to, eventually, the British. It was under the British Empire, however, that the Parsi community moved *en masse* to Bombay, and flourished.[20] The Parsis became the favoured trading agents, merchants and shipbuilders of the British and, from Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy, the first Indian Baronet, to Sir Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Asian MP at Westminster, the Parsis found extraordinary fame and success during the heyday of the British Empire. This success however, needs to be explored, to understand why modern Parsis continue to perceive those years as the height of their community and why there is a now a general belief among Parsis that the community is in decline.

The Parsis, as an old immigrant group, found themselves among India's colonial elite during the days of the Raj. Indeed, general middle-class Parsi opinion saw the British as benevolent administrators[21] who enabled the basic qualities of Persian and Parsi nobility to emerge in a majority Hindu environment, along with striking entrepreneurial success. This intriguing notion of the *Good Parsi* that Tanya Luhrmann explores in her work, The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society, is an ideal that the Parsi community established as a means to achieve success under the conditions of colonial rule. The Parsis attempted to behave and modify their beliefs to mimic the "westernized, secularized English".[22] As Luhrmann argues, the Parsis, in order to maximize their opportunities for success in a colonial environment, treated themselves as different from their fellow Indians, and the majority Hindu and Muslim communities.[23] Indeed, Parsis in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, sought to strengthen their association with Persia and Zarathustra, since western scholars had taken a particular interest in Zoroastrianism as a 'noble precursor' to Judaism and Christianity. This 'anglophile' strategy proved so

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[20] Luhrmann 29-89
[21] Luhrmann 97-98
[22] Luhrmann 123-124
[23] Luhrmann 124

successful that the Parsis experienced a wave of entrepreneurial success, unmatched by any community, including the Parsis themselves, in independent India.[24] The fact that this success did not come easily in independent India has lead many in the community to consequently argue that the community is in decline. However, it may be that the Parsis, who, like the Baghdadi Jews, assimilated to the British during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, faced a certain degree of alienation and isolation in independent, nationalist, modern India. The adaptations the community made during the days of the Raj proved largely ineffective in the new India. While the community held, and continues to hold a great deal of admiration for the many Parsi nationalist leaders, like Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and Sir Dadabhai Naoroji, it has struggled to place itself coherently in a post-colonial Indian context. A combination of anglophile, Indian nationalistic and orthodox religious sentiment has lent a schizophrenic aspect to contemporary Parsi identity, a concept that has also, in recent years, been a source of much debate in the face of modernizing forces.

Understanding modern Parsi identity, and framing the community's notion of itself as a distinct minority group, demands an understanding of the synthesis of the many external factors, both historical and contemporary, that have shaped the Parsi community. The tradition vs. modernity debate, in particular, has gripped the community. From the case of the burial a well-known Parsi woman who married a Hindu man, to the burial of J. R. D. Tata, independent India's leading industrialist, and son of a Parsi father and a French mother who 'converted' to Zoroastrianism, a very public debate has raged on in community newspapers and Indian media with regards to traditions and notions of 'purity'. While the country honoured the life of J. R. D. Tata, a brilliant entrepreneur and industrialist, many Parsis were embarrassed that members of the community continued bickering and insulting the man as a "half-caste".[25] A vigorous backlash against the orthodox priest who made those statements did nothing to change the fact that the community had not been able to

[24] Palsetia 60-64
[25] Luhrmann 325-327

deal with the influence of the westernizing, secularizing forces it seemingly cherished, on its rituals and traditions. Studies of contemporary Parsi perceptions of the community also indicate a deep disappointment in their youth, especially Parsi boys. Indeed there is an unsubstantiated, yet widespread belief among Parsi adults that a large percentage of young Parsi men are homosexual.[26] This, in addition to a decline in their economic and social prominence, and increasingly public infighting among community members has led many to declare that the community is in decline. At this point it becomes interesting to examine the majority's perceptions of the Parsis.

A dominant community's perceptions of a minority often play a significant role in how the minority community defines itself. Within this context, it is useful to ask how the notion of the Good Parsi has played into the majority's stereotypical views of the typical Parsi. Indeed, the majority communities, namely Hindus and, to a lesser extent, Muslims, living in Bombay encounter various institutes, parks and charitable institutions named after famous Parsi individuals, yet the majority, also sees the community as insular. This insular characteristic of Parsi existence, while hardly uncommon in a very stratified, communal Indian context, may have changed over the last few decades, but the majority's perceptions remain little changed. While the majority Hindu community may see the Parsis as intelligent, successful and charitable, there also seems to be a perception that the community, as a whole, is partially aloof. This does not imply, however, that the majority views them as *less* Indian. Indeed, Hindu Nationalists along with all significant members of the Indian political establishment, cite the Parsis as an example of a minority that has integrated into India, essentially implying that there is no need to *Indianize* them.[27] As with the Jewish community, the Parsis are not numerically significant, and are economically successful and self-sufficient, prompting Hindutva elements of the political establishment to use the success of these communities as examples of Hindu charity and tolerance. All of

[26] Luhrmann 127-129
[27] Schermermon 286-287

this, thus, becomes particularly interesting when developing a synthesized view of Parsi identity.

Ultimately, the Parsi community of India represents an urbanized elite: a relatively unique and successful community. Beyond the community's own prognosticators and detractors, it becomes clear, that with remarkable education levels (~11% hold doctorates) and 90% literacy, they are India's single most educated, economically successful minority or majority community.[28] As the community struggles with its own identity, it must face the historical and contemporary factors that have shaped its identity, and come to terms with its position in Indian society. While the majority does not question their Indian-ness, the Parsis themselves often seek to distance themselves from being Indian, instead often associating themselves with British, Western or Persian attributes. But the fact of the matter remains, that, as a community, they have acculturated into Indian society, and their spiritual and communal centers remain firmly rooted in India. They are, despite all arguments to the contrary, a uniquely Indian minority community.

The Chinese Community

The Chinese community of India is perhaps the least understood, most obscure, and the most recent immigrant minority in India. The few studies of this unique community that do exist offer remarkable insight into a community that is visibly, linguistically and ethnically different from the dominant, majority community. While estimates in the 1960s place the population of Chinese in India at around 53000, these statistics are generally deemed maximal figures, and more accurate sources place their population at somewhere between 14000 and 53000 individuals,

[28] Palsetia 30-33, 334-336

primarily residing in the eastern city of Calcutta.[29] Their arrival, and the brief sketches of their history that are known, aid in explaining their unique position in India.

Apart from early Buddhist pilgrims, the first notable Chinese merchant arrived in India with a gift of tea to a native prince of West Bengal in the mid-eighteenth-century. It would be more than a century later, in 1865, when the British launched an economic program for India with the introduction of tea plantations and railroads, that relatively large groups of Chinese were brought in from Hong Kong and Macao to work as tea planets and carpenters. In the latter part of the nineteenth century a substantial group of Cantonese woodworkers and carpenters migrated and established themselves as the center of Calcutta's Chinese community. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a much larger group of unskilled Hakka Chinese migrated and discovered a profitable niche in leather tanning and leatherwork.[30] Reports in the 1960s confirm that eight thousand to twelve thousand or more Hakkas lived and worked primarily in the tanning industry in Calcutta. In addition to these main groups, over one hundred Chinese dentists from Ipoh, a city in Malaysia, were scattered throughout Indian cities.[31] The emigration of these Chinese groups came as a result of British colonialism, and as a group, the British and the Indians generally ignored the Chinese in India. Thus, it becomes clear that economic concerns alone motivated Chinese migration to India, in contrast with Jewish and Parsi emigration to India. Indeed, the Chinese community's very position in Indian society is a fascinating question to consider, especially as, in anthropological terms, they have maintained a high level of enclosure and neither assimilated nor acculturated to the dominant majority community.

Perhaps one of the key defining characteristics of the Chinese community in India, as an immigrant group, is their relatively recent arrival in India. Arriving in a

[29] Schermermon 290-292
[30] Schermermon 295-296
[31] Schermermon 296

colonial environment with purely economic interests, their interactions with the dominant majority community and the British remained on a superficial, exploitative level, in that the Chinese scrutinized both sides in India to profit economically from this knowledge. Studies that have broadly analysed the Indian Chinese community describe the community as very insular, and describe them as having among the "highest degree of enclosure" exhibited by any minority in India.[32] This concept of enclosure refers to the extent to which a community is separated from the dominant group and society in general, examining indicators such as endogamy, rigidity of group definition, and relations with outsiders, residential clustering, religion education and language.[33] The Chinese community, it would seem, had little reason to interact socially with the dominant community and unlike the Baghdadi Jewish community, and the Parsis. They also did not attempt to assimilate or acculturate themselves into the British paradigm. Thus, it becomes necessary to examine how the Chinese managed to survive economically with the degree of enclosure the community exhibited, and continues to exhibit. One of the few detailed studies that partially addresses this question considers the case of the Hakka Chinese tanners of Tangra, an area in Calcutta.

The Tangra Chinese community is composed primarily of Hakka Chinese engaged in the tanning industry.[34] They have carved out a profitable, yet socially low position for themselves in Indian society, and have maintained a rigid boundary between themselves and the rest of Indian society. This boundary comes as a result of the existence of a Chinese social structure within Indian society, in effect, a composition of stratified systems, to clearly separate the community from its neighbours and the dominant community. A community that was generally peripheral and marginalized in China, they are considered extremely peripheral within Calcutta

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[32] Schermermon 323-326

[33] Schermermon 323-324

[34] Ellen Oxfeld The limits of entrepreneurship : family process and ethnic role amongst Chinese tanners of Calcutta. (Harvard Ph.D. dissertation: Cambridge, 1985) 1-2

and thus, admittedly, are a very small community to consider within a larger Indian context. However, the community has made some social transitions in associating itself with Christians (without any religious change) rather than Buddhists and switching their language of preference from Chinese to English.[35] These changes were intended more to allow for easier adaptation when members immigrated to western countries, a trend that has resulted in a significant reduction in their population.[36] Not unlike the Indian Jews, the Chinese community too sees itself as part of a worldwide community, and sees emigration as part of a progression and a process of economic diversification for the community.

It thus becomes a matter of much interest to cogently define Chinese relations with the dominant majority groups in India. With the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the Chinese community faced considerable suspicion and severe restrictions on their movement, and questions concerning the citizenship status of the many second and third-generation Chinese Indians remained unresolved for more than a decade after the war.[37] Indeed, the Hakka community began renewing familial contacts abroad as a contingency in the face of increased Sino-Indian tensions. With the war, what was earlier a relatively subtle fact became clear: the Chinese and the majority Hindu and Muslim community of Calcutta were engaged in a relationship of mutual avoidance.[38] This is distinctly different from Jewish and Parsi relations with the dominant community, but it has been argued that this mutual avoidance still represents a certain degree of integration in its broadest sense; integration, in that there is peaceful coexistence, if little recognition or understanding, between the minority and the dominant community.[39] Questions of intermarriage, and social status have never really bothered the Chinese community, which, though it recognizes its relatively low socio-economic position as tanners in a stratified Hindu system, is insular enough to

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[35] Oxfeld 224
[36] Oxfeld 222-223
[37] Schermermon 301-309
[38] Schermermon 310
[39] Schermermon 310-311

remain unaffected by external perceptions. Of course, as with the other two immigrant groups surveyed, migration out of India has become prevalent, and the community's population has reached very low numbers; numbers low enough to consider the community marginalized.

It now becomes necessary to synthesize the analyses of each community, in an effort to extrapolate some generalizations about the nature of the minority in India and beyond.

Extrapolations & Conclusions

India is a country of startling diversity in cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious and social terms. It may consequently seem counterintuitive to have spent considerable time exploring some of the smallest and generally marginalized minorities in a country with strikingly large minority populations (minorities among minorities indeed). But, in reality, the examination of these three immigrant minorities offers a unique perspective into the minority experience in general.

The Jewish and Parsi communities of India mostly acculturated to the dominant ethnic group, separating their groups from the dominant community as a matter of reciprocal tolerance and goodwill in their relations with the dominant group. Indeed, these cordial relations were also amplified during the colonial era, with economic success arriving under the British. The Bene Israel, who were largely assimilated, were brought back into a distinctly Jewish and Indian context and became a remarkably successful urban ethnic group. The Parsis, to a much greater extent, capitalized on colonial rule by achieving tremendous economic and social progress, far beyond that achieved by the Indian Jewish community. This, however, has lent to a certain degree of self-imposed alienation among the Parsis, who distanced themselves from the dominant group as a means to assimilate into a British framework where they were the colonial elite. The Jewish community during the Raj

and in independent India saw no need to distance itself from Indian identity, but did embrace their Jewish identity, with large numbers immigrating to Israel. This, by no means, indicated any anti-Indian sentiment, rather stronger Jewish nationalist sentiments that were experience across the Jewish Diaspora after World War II. Neither the Parsis nor the Jews were perceived by the majority as less, or not, Indian since both communities contributed members to the nationalist cause, and numerous other famous Indian military and economic giants. In both cases, the communities were able to find economic niches in trading, military matters or agriculture, and with their acculturated traditions and rituals, attempted to reflect their upper-class / upper-caste occupations. This is markedly different from the Chinese community.

The Chinese community came to India for purely economic reasons, and as such, engaged in a degree of insularity not found among India's other minorities. Mutual avoidance, rather than reciprocal tolerance, best describes their relations with the dominant, majority community. Unlike the Jews and Parsis, no acculturation or assimilation occurred, but the Chinese community too found a notable economic niche in the tanning industry, a profession generally considered unclean by upper caste Hindus. The Jewish and Parsi communities are generally considered upper-caste within a stratified Hindu social model, due to the nature of their professions, but the Chinese would clearly be found among the lowest in such a hierarchy. However a key difference here is the lack of social contact, interest or even recognition between the Chinese and dominant community, reflecting, once again, the nature of their arrival in India and the nature of their clear demarcation of their identity as purely Chinese. Indeed the Chinese perception of themselves as outsiders in India is fuelled in part by the majority's perceptions of the community. In effect, while the Jewish and Parsi communities are considered truly Indian, the Chinese community is still considered a distinct non-permeable group that is Chinese, and happens to reside in India. This distinction, along with previous observations and conclusions allows us to draw some conclusions insofar as the nature of minority existence in India is concerned.

It would seem, thus, that a minority community's identity is shaped, in the case of immigrant minorities, by the nature of their arrival, be it for social or economic reasons, the extent to which acculturation and assimilation with the dominant or elite group occurred, the niche the community carves for itself within a larger societal framework, the dominant community's perception of the minority group, and, ultimately the history and ancestry of the community. In the case of India these conclusions, when applied with India's largest minorities, reveals possible sources for communal discontent, friction and violence over the past few decades. (For example, the nature of the 'arrival' of India's Muslim minority continues to play a role in the Ayodhya issue) Evidently there are tremendous complexities, with size of the minority being a key factor, when examining India's large minorities, nonetheless, it is useful to take the conclusions drawn from this selective examination of India's minorities into consideration.

India's three smallest, and three immigrant, minority communities offer perhaps one of the most unique and fascinating opportunities to look into the nature of minority identity and existence in, what is still considered, a secular democracy. Ultimately, their fate and their successes reflect the successes of the nation, as, though they may separate themselves from the dominant majority community, each minority forms a significant part of the remarkable patchwork, and unfolding drama that is modern India.

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