



THE KOSHER LIFE-THE EXPERIENCES OF INDIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

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Abstract: This article tries to read the specificities of the rituals and food habits in the Indian Jewish community, in doing so to see the interpersonal belongingness with community factions and if gender and food play the key role in it. Food in Jewish community plays a vital role specially its purity which relates to the core Jewish culture. The history of food culture which binds the community, the people the cyclic feasts is something that speaks of their ethnicity. Culture, race and ethnicity are inextricably interconnected. The study of food, ritual and food practices is a vast space where cooking and eating practices are symbolic. Its often seen that these kinds of identities are maintained and preserved by migrants in multicultural societies¹. There is a strong tendency to preserve one's culture where one is staying in a migrant country and their culture is not the dominant culture. The paper will try to perceive the various nuances embedded with Indian Jewish community and their food and ritualistic food habits. Mary Douglas has noted a distinction between pure and polluted essence in food in this reference if may add that the purity of the community is the core of the existence of the Jewish community. The article will also explore certain roots of the food and the ritualistic food processes it also penetrates into the edibility rules the history of different factions of the Indian Jewish community and how they are related to the food and race².

Keywords: Ethnicity, Indian Jews, rituals, Dietary laws, Kosher, foods of Indian Jews

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Introduction

Food is memory, food is culture, food bonds families and communities. It fades into childhood reminiscences and the nooks and corners of the past. Food is also part of

our childhood. When a community decreases in number, its traditional food becomes a memory³pg no in endnote

If food is memory, then food is also the ethnicity⁴and identity, of each one of us Identity a term that ordinarily suggests a quality or stability, equality, or unchanging internal substance or essence⁵. When one delves into the cultural mechanisms of India's diverse Jewish communities and how they come to define themselves it is food that uniquely binds the community together Looking at Jewish cuisine there are basically three styles of Jewish making of food firstly the Sephardic this cites the food in the Middle East, Red Sea and North African region, Ashkenizic food from Europe and Russia, Mizrahi often referred as the authentic Jewish food based in Israel⁶ The pattern of the Jewish food is different Jewish communities across the world honour the laws of Kashrut also pronounced as Kash root, unlike most food laws, Jewish dietary laws are believed to be the conceptualization of Divine will that was expressed to Moses at Mount Sinai and it is embedded into Old Testament⁷. Kashrut is one of the important pillars of Jewish religious food and its implementations the aspects of eating and preparing food. Another important factor is Kosher which is essentially the backbone of Jewish food that prescribes and teaches the food patterns, and the process of cooking it. There are three main Kosher food categories that include meat, dairy, and pareve⁸ and this is maintained in whichever society a Jew is settled.

Research Question and Objective of the Paper

This paper is about food, and eating habits in ritualistic processes in the Indian Jewish community, the paper will try to see and understand the specificities, essentialities of rituals, food and eating habits of the Indian Jewish community, perceive its tenets in shaping the identity, belongingness and keeping the community together.

This particular paper is not merely about walking and talking about Jewish food but here I will argue that how the Jewish food is innately attached with the daily life, their neuro cognitive underpinnings,⁹ historical development of the community in India where food stands out as the identity marker. As language development has a process, food especially in the ethnic minority community also has a normative process though the final expression is significantly shaped by culture and environment quite relevant in this aspect as the Jews of India in different time span has come and settled in India in different geographical locations. This paper focusses on the ethnic food preparations in this case the Indian Jewish community its unique food habits and its this ethnic factions

the ubiquitous menu prevalent and relevant. Food consumptions will be empirically examined and the effect of it the mechanism of action and the holistic approach of consumption, ethnicity and gender in upholding it is the chief aim of the paper.

Theoretical Background

Food normally conveys who we are and from where we come as it opens doors to rituals, habitat, beliefs, and life itself¹⁰. Ethnic minority food is very important as the food is the symbolic, tone to the life, patterns and culture. Ethnicity refers to a type of social identity based on cultural background shared styles of life and experiences¹¹. The characteristics served as source of collective identity such as language and shared history or ancestry, beliefs and values. The community and its inter-related food, dietary laws can be studied and perceived under the refuge of ethnic background which will ultimately help in understanding the nuances and the specificities. It is said that ethnic borders can be changed in different ways, how does the ethnic minority group retain their ethnicity at the sametime keep a unique identity. The theoretical framework will help in exploring where the food is a tool in bringing out the specificities. There are basically three minority ethnic groups in India and other in Andhra Pradesh and North East still claiming for their recognition. According to Bulmer 1996 Platt 2011¹² 2007 ethnicity is seen often taken to represent a self-claimed or subjective identity linked to a perception of shared ancestry. Yuval Davis, Bulmer and Cornell discusses extensively ethnic groups and ethnicity. Nathan Katz and his extensive research is a structured framework through which the community can be delved through and its food and festivals can be understood.

The relationship between food and its identity in India is both in the realms of religiosity for certain faction and out of the realms for certain factions. To perceive the evolution it is necessary to note the unprecedented changes, with the history of the Jewish evolution in India, Klaff calls this as 'normalization'¹³, the ethnic element of Judaism began to take its precedence over the religious one, there was certain transformation but at the sametime assimilation of Jewish immigrants from various parts of the world to India at different period of time led into a culture in which there was little concept of unification of religion and everyday life. Indian society is marked by considerable heterogeneity and has therefore been perceived in terms of differences and similarities, in terms of religion, territory, language, and caste, and each one with diverse religions or languages or culture of different communities, having their own identity.

Food connects to many threads and many people with one identity among many, in one such construction of culture, ethnic minority community. The Jews ushered in India decades, and found themselves uprooted from their land forced move out from their homeland middle east, or Basra, or Aleppo and found their settlement in Konkon, parts of Kutch, Rangoon and other different areas. Jews in India as in other parts of the world are adherents of the religion Judaism. In Jewish law or *hallakah* there are two criteria for defining someone as a Jew either one of which is insufficient if one is the child of a Jewish mother, or if one is converts to Judaism in accordance with Jewish law then one is by the Hallakha is recognized as a Jew. Judaism since it follows the provisions of *hallakah* codified in the Torah and Talmud maintaining ritual and theology, at the sametime conservative Judaism maintains a commitment to *halakkah* but sees halakhic authority as continuing to evolve in the modern era.¹⁴ An important feature of the characterization of religion in the Judeo-Christian tradition¹⁵ is that it is contrasted to the mundane world and considered transcendent over it. The Jews of India in their ways, habitat, culture, and food is not really different from the rest of the Jews of the world, if speaking in terms of purity / kosher which is the core norm of all Jews but there is a deep influence of regional Indian cuisines. A unique way of understanding which speaks of the Jewish settlement in India in different parts of the country and their adoption, adaptation, assimilation and acculturation if any exists.

Critics also at times refers the Indian Jews as the orientalist Jews thus the question arise that does it need a orientalist understanding of the cultural pragmatism of the Indian Jews? The cultural practices of the Indian Jews is very unique says Nathan Katz¹⁶, the Cochinites has its own specificities, the Bene Israels, their own identifying factors and the Baghdadis their Arab middle-east culture which interpolates with certain local religiocities, resembles local Indianness, yet it is Jewish in its core. Thus, the Cochinites, settled in Kerala coastline, the Baghdadi settled around Mumbai, Calcutta regions beside the seashore along the Hooghly river the Bene Israel around the Arabian Sea thus though living apart in a geographically diverse area they were interlinked with food and has the strong regional influence. Thus, the staple diet as other Indian communities became fish and rice, though the Jewish dietary laws were strictly followed. Unique in the Indian Jewish food mostly all meals end with a sweet dish, where rice pudding or coconut milk, or halwa is made. Fish eggs, or succulent roe is preferred.¹⁷ Festivals and occasions of the Jews are mainly, Shabbath, Purim, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. Shabbath it says binds together, the members with the community

and family, traditionally, a bread and a goblet of wine is given for Kiddush, and platters of food.

In the Shabbath, usually challah bread, wine is used, the Jews of India use *sherbet*, with black currents, many women of Indian homes prepares the challah bread though ordered based challah bread is also available in organisations in Mumbai also in bakery shops like Nahoums of Kolkata In whatever country or whichever nation they might be Jewish people and congregations celebrate Shabbath on Friday night. The Shabbath dinner of the Cochinims, includes a fish dish pollichattu , meen pollichattu In India the Jewish homes especially make home made sherbet for shabbath prayers, which is unique as black seedless dry grapes. Very typical of the Bene Israeli s Hamotzi or Shabbath Bakhri is prepared where into a firm dough of flour, oil water and salt small ball are made of the dough and it is made a flatbread this is a dish typically of the Indian Jewish community. Kannavali or Shabbath Cake, is made with semolina, ghee, coconut milk, jaggery with raisins and dry fruits again is unque Indian Jewish food.

Purim – is a festival to celebrate the liberation of Persian Jews from Haman by the Queen Esther, queen of Persia. Purim falls on a full moon night . Puran Polis are the staple cuisines of this festival, and is a well known dish in Maharastra especially Mumbai and Pune. It is the Bene Israelis who use this food.

Rosh Hashanah- is the Jewish New Year this is celebrated as a mark of the earth's creation. Honey with apple or apple dipped in honey is a staple ritualistic diet and mandatory to eat. Often Bene Israelis are seen eating chik cha halva which is special made with dry wheat and fruits notes Esther David in her book *Bene Appetit the Cuisines of the Indian Jews*(2021). On the Rosh Hashanah day the Cochinims celebrate with roast chicken or biryani or Kubbah, with semolina cake or payasam made with coconut milk and homemade grape wine.

Yom Kippur, are days of reflection, repentance and penitence since the sun set of the Yom Kippur, the Bene Israels are said to make Kippur Chi Puri, these are basically sweet Puris, on the other hand the Bnei Meneshe's break the fast with a vegetarian meal and grape juice. For the Cochin Jews the same fast is broken by a wheat halva. Barbara C Johnson notes that two different types of food are served in two distinct parts of any pashta; pre dinner snacks and a main meal based on rice. Though many different snacks are served at the beginning of a *peshta* one is the traditional *pastel*, ie pastry, next is fenugreek sauce *hilba*. A common item in Sephardic And middle eastern Jewish cuisines, the pastel is marked as a peculiarly Jewish food in Cochin but with time it has

assumed a Indian identity and is marked as an Indian food by Cochinites in Israel¹⁸.

Hugh Lindsay¹⁹ focuses on 'Food Representations' says that diet and rituals employed in the preparation, display, and consumption of food which is important in the process of defining interactions between individuals of like or disparate status²⁰. The Jews have made a specific identity personal and cultural with *Kosher* theme for life. On the essentialities of Kosher depends the purity of the family, home and community. Social and cultural identity are understood under the terms which is eminently historical thoroughly material products of the interplay between multiple forces.

The word festival is derived from the latin, *festus* (of a holiday) and from the Indo European *dhes* or *dhesto*, the root of several words linked with religion. Feast and festivals are major events created by an entire community. Thus, food in religion or religion and food plays an important role in all religions of India. Rulings concerning the food that one was allowed to eat and how it should be eaten play an important part in Jewish religion. .Ethically religious festivals regularly celebrate and illustrates the importance of the social factors in religious experiences and religious gatherings. Food, indicates to certain religion the pointer to their cultural habitat. Similarly, food in Jewish feasts and festivals marks their essence, food is also an ideal symbolic medium not only because it is essential to life but also Jewish a food importantly define the Jews, Kosher the identity which is a water mark of their community.²¹. Cattle, sheep, goats, deer, gazelles and stags were among the animals that were considered pure²². Water creatures were considered clean if they swam using fin and scaly skin. Animals of the air were pure if they were two legged and flew with wings. The pig was considered impure because it was not a ruminant²³ though it had split hooves. According to Deuteronomy²⁴ there was further rules and laws of slaughtering too, here it is ordained that the meat should not contain blood . Moreover meat and milk cannot be mixed together which means that the preparation and consumption of these products is ought to be prepared on time. Now there are mythical tales and religious fables related to all these dietary laws. Isidore Grunfield (2010) in *The Jewish Dietary Laws* discusses vividly on the rules of the consumption of meat and fowl and on the fruits, the permissibility of wine, cheese and the laws on the leavened bread. Grunfield categorically explores the ethical base for the restrictions which is included to inculcate the Jew with the moral values- such as kindness, humility, helpfulness fairmindedness likeability sincerity and confidence in the ultimate good of man. Grunfield has a intense survey on

this topic where he talks about *hadash* the forbidden rules against eating of new grain, or *kilayam* the injunction forbidding of the mixture of seed. Nathan Katz (refer) who has consistently worked on the Indian Jews opines that these dietary laws and its presence in the lives of the medieval Jews that the Talmud forbids Jews from partaking in the bread, wine, oil, milk, and cheese of these gentile neighbourhood²⁵ The purpose of the Talmudic prohibition was largely to ensure the social cohesion of the Jewish community. While in the Middle Ages when the laws were actually ordained it became a method of personal conduct enabling the individual to preserve his inward sense of aloofness from those with those one came into daily contact.

It is also important to add here the moon which has emblematic importance in the religious life and the tradition Jewish life, firstly the cycles of the moon form the basis of the organization of the different festivals at different time. The Jewish year consists of the lunar months and the religious system which is tied to the lunar system. Birkut Rosh Chodesh is the blessings of the new month. budding of the new moon involves ceremonies on the sabbath preceding the first day of the lunar month. The new cycles of the moon begins in Jerusalem. A second month synagogue based ceremony is the Levana sanctification of the moon occurs during the waxing of the moon. This ceremony usually takes place outside the synagogue immediately after the sabbath, it serves to publicly greet the new moon here the aura of the moon symbolizes the divine presence in the life of the people essentially inhabitants of Israel. This ceremony usually takes place outside the synagogue immediately after the Sabbath. It serves to publicly greet the new moon, whose celestial aura is said to symbolize the Shekhinah; the divine presence of God among the people of Israel.

Every Jewish community has its typical Saturday dish one that is prepared on Friday (cholent) and cools overnight for Saturday preferably with the means to keep it hot but with an extinguished fire (²⁶). Notably, at Passover, the Jewish festival that commemorates the biblical story of the Exodus, Jewish people must partake of a ritual meal called the Seder, every part of which is prescribed by religious law. Each part of the meal is meant to symbolize a specific privation and hardship that the Jewish people had to endure during that moment in history. Apart from the Seder, the weeklong festival of Passover consists of the adherence to a rigid set of rules concerning dietary abstention. Specifically, the consumption, keeping, and owning of "chametz," or leavened bread, is strictly forbidden for the duration of the holiday. Furthermore, religious injunction commands the daily observance of the laws of Kashrut, extensive and complex rules that define what is and what is not fit for consumption (Kraut, 2004).

Notable examples of the laws of Kashrut, which are much too exhaustive to list in their entirety, include the proscription of pork and of the combination of meat and dairy products into one single meal. These dietary laws exist to help individual Jews identify with the Jewish people (Pollock & Siegal, 1983). In fact, Brumberg-Kraus (2002) contends²⁷ that one of the primary reasons that God commanded these laws was to distinguish the Jews from all the other nations of the world. Sources dating back to antiquity illustrate the success of this endeavour, not only for Jews themselves but for non-Jews as well. The Iraqi Jews for example prepares a rice with chicken called *tebit* this is seen in the Baghdadi Jews of Calcutta and also in Delhi, the chicken here is stuffed with rice and aromatics boiled in a broth with tomato paste and spices. The whole ensemble is kept in a pot then is slowly cooked on low fire this while process is supposed to take place whole overnight and as the Saturday lunch proceeds the fire has to be extinguished. Still now the *Sabbath*(Friday evening prayers after the sunset, where the food is also prepared for Saturday after prayers, a family and its members are supposed to be with the family and with prayers) food is prepared but with the passage of time and fast life only in community gatherings and special sabbath prayers such process is followed. Nathan Katz (refer) in his study tries to show the two-way purpose—firstly to achieve a balance between opposing forces and secondly the vital realities of life and the maintenance of the Jewish identity.²⁸Mary Douglas (2023) has pointed out in *Purity and Danger*²⁹specifically about the purity and the ethical values that percolates in the mind and the body through food).

Judaism reckons the new year which might be getting celebrated by many cultures, they punctuate and emphasize, the cycling of time. These religious festivals illustrates the importance of the social factors in religious experiences. Food in Jewish life is a cultural expression and at the sametime realization of emotions and ideas in cultural activities and forms as the process of human identity. a specific ritualistic norms in this case is an identity for the Jews. The regular feasts and fasts are based on a 354, day lunar calendar adjusted from time to time to coincide with the seasons of the calendar year by means of a leap year of 13 months. More significant than the innovation of the new festivals has been the imposition of new meanings.

Indian Judaic traditions is it different? To answer this Nathan Katz writes there is definitely a separate identity in Jewish ritualistic food and feasts in India.

Levi Strauss focused on the mental constructs that human being brings to food and eating³⁰.

Judaism it is said is a 'minimum of revelation and maximum of interpretation, working within a traditional framework, Heschel (year) notes that all major

world religions emphasizes sacred spaces Judaism however on sanctification of time in a unique manner. Abraham Joshua Heschel (refer) further focuses on the principle of sacred time by addressing the fasts and feasts of Jewish traditions throughout the cycle of Jewish life. There are Jewish traditions in which the dietary laws matters to foremost importance Nathan Katz (year) describes the dietary laws to be chief function but in the medieval Jews. The Talmud forbids Jews from partaking in the bread, wine, oil, milk and cheese of their gentile neighbour. However, the purpose of Talmudic prohibitions was largely to ensure the social cohesion of the Jewish community.³¹

The Indian Jews comprises of Baghdadis, Bene Israelis, and Cochinites, Joan G Roland, (1995) makes a historical analysis that Indian Jewish identity under in words century British India, but this ethnic identity is unique with their food habits, and dietary laws. Jews presence in India and their position dates to antiquity. If questioned what makes a Jew is it the citizenship, or the policy, the orthodox norms of life or the strictures of food and dietary laws, it is the food and dietary laws that makes the Jew apart from others, which defines and describes them through their Judaic religious beliefs, holidays and rituals. But do these beliefs and practices distinguish all Jews from non-Jews, to be a Indian Jew does not merely mean that one has to be either one from three groups ie Baghdadi s Cochinites, or the Bene Israeli but certainly have a stand point as Jews following the religion and culturesays Esther David (refer). Jewish identity is ethnic because Jews share cultural traits rather than physical features or uniform religious beliefs.³² The level of cultural identity though differs at times, it is said that at times the Jewish identity and participation in the Jewish religion are not same. Nathan Katz (2007) confirms that each of the factions/ groups in the Indian Jewish community has their own core traits, features which are unique and the Indian Jewish community has a separate space in terms of food.

Judaism has ample indigenous resources that could easily be assimilated to Brahmanical purity, ascetic symbol including – A hereditary, priesthood of *kohanim*, paralleling the Brahmans. Secondly, a fastidious system of the laws of *Kosher*, kashruth, or dietary regulations. Thirdly, Complex laws governing family purity. Fourthly, Ascetic tendencies in certain holidays, especially *Passover* and *Yom Kippur*³³

Nathan Katz (2007) comments in reference to the ritual enactments of the Cochin Jews, thus Judaism is a adaptation to various culture and has gone through and beyond many a changes, Nathan Katz specifies that Jewish tradition is multi-dimensional but unlike other world religions Judaism is extremely complex and unique is their diasporization depending upon the Jewish settlement in that region and the host culture,

In Protestant America for example Judaism 's prophetic threads have been brought to the foreground[...] in Hindu India however it is the Jewish priestly ascetic and noble kingly threads that have been emphasized and the fiery ethical imperatives of the prophets have been less central. Give page numbers

He further adds that

Jewish traditions connected with these two symbols complexes while at the same incorporating comparable elements from Hindu tradition. Give page numbers

Indian Jewish identities are conditioned by the past, the past of the community and the individual members of the community. When asked to say who they are a group or like an individual each one has a story that weaves the past with what? Present?, where rituals, norms is a essential part. The Indian Jewish identity was shaped by a culture, with two traditional sources of status, the royal and the ascetic reflecting the dominant position of the nobility and the hereditary. Religious observances and community identity suffer from the lack of a critical mass which sustains Jewish communal life. Thus, the food, in rituals, and the feasts being a part of the Indian as well as Jewish descent had a double influence, being considered a caste within India's regional hierarchies, as jati a cognate of the latin *genus*³⁴ India's Jews were a blood descent from Israel, the biological categories of Jewish and Hindu culture both overlapped at times, establishing a comfortable identity among groups, who likewise assumed their own identity. Hence, each of the factions of the community, in the Indian Jews like the Cochinitims or the Baghdadi s or Bene Israelis each one has their own identifying religious customs which have similarity with local customs at the sametime it is Jewish in ritualistic norms, Ranabir Chakrabarti (year) while discussing about the Indo Judaic trade contacts CE 1300, writes,

Jewish and Indian societies both being steeped in tradition, it is worthwhile to begin by looking into the attitude towards trade and traders in Indic and Judaic society during the early phase. Though Indian Economy, is strongly oriented towards agriculture, trade was an important ingredient in the agrarian material mileu of early India.³⁵

The Jewish food, festival and feasts is related with the calendar the seasonal calendar there was also the influence of Indian tradition as well. At the sametime the food as it is linked with the festivals and feasts in daily mundane days the Jewish food has grown with the settlements of the community.

While studying the various aspects of Jewish food in India, I discovered some parallels. Most Jews came to India fleeing from persecution in Israel. They travelled by sea using different routes and settled in various regions³⁶.

Most holiday of Hanukkah is a ritual celebration. It is linked to the Biblical section narration where the fried pastries, of Hanukkah, are sufficed by the

latkes, fried potato pancakes. Flower Sillaman a Baghdadi Jew from Kolkata who wrote many food blogs and ran a restaurant, mentions *Aloo Makallah*, is served in the central Europe and Eastern parts where the community is found. In the equivalent traditional cuisines, the fried buns, served with honey, is a typical of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean celebrations. Thus, Indian Jewish cuisines is a conglomeration of traditional and modern motifs, keeping the strictures of ritualism. In the Maharastrian side and the Konkon especially Purim include the baking of multiple pastries, a playful reminder of the defeat of human and thus the Ashkenizims are serving *hamantashen*, or human hats, poppy seed filled triangular pastries. Another important observation and ritual is the Passover. This observance has its own ways and dictums, the Passover food requires restrictions, most of the Passover pastries and carbohydrates dishes are prepared with matzo. Ashkenizie Jews traditionally serve matzo balls boiled in chicken soup ie fried egg coated with matzo pancakes. At the same time for *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) comprises of heavily sweetened dish the sweet carrot and raisin stew or the honey cake symbolical for the usherances of sweetened new year.

The ritual enactment has been perceived and performed in their own terms according to the cultural tradition by three major sects of the Indian Jewish community and the Mizos and the Manipur Jews of India. Nathan Katz (Refer) in discussing about the rituals followed by the Cochin Jews says, in virtually every country the Jews have lived they have adopted additional observances, thus in the Konkon areas and towards the Jew town Kochi one finds rigid enactments. Here the Hindu Brahmanical tradition is dominant, hence the Cochin Jews are seen observing parallel traditions. Judaism and Hinduism, thus in their Passover observances a form of ascetism is seen which is also observed in the Kerala caste system, Nathan katz cites the example of Victor Turner (1977) holds that a marginal position affords fresh and enlivening perspectives on familiar structures, with respect to Passover the interstitial position of the Cochin Jews forces us to reconsider the meanings usually associated with observances, in comparison to the other Jews scattered in other parts of India Nathan Katz (refer) claim in his writings that the Cochin Jews are the marginal, ones and as India s most microscopic minority as cultural and commercial bridge between East and West. Here in the Seder plate contains among other symbolic foods, unleavened bread Matzah the bread broken in two division symbolizes the division of the Kohanim or priests and the Leviyim or scribes and Israelites or commoners. Recalling the Cochin days and the self-infliction of pain may be psychological reminiscences Nathan Katz (2017) the

ascetic self-infliction of pain has both psychological as well as physical.³⁷(give page number here and not in endnote).

Seclusion and isolation are common ascetic practices and an intriguing variant was formed among the Cochin Jews, by nature gregarious they became increasingly isolated[...] Cochin Jews generally enjoy sharing food and conversation with their Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslim and Parsis, but not during Passover the Cochin Jews believed that the only way to be pure. The Jews of India says Esther David (refer) says have many Indian influences in their influences and their lifestyles such as food, habit, dress. Jewellery and even cultural practices like *mehendi* or henna ceremonies during weddings. In the rituals itself lot of confluence of other communities is seen like the use of spices like cardamom. Cloves or bayleaf or coconut or the usage of betel or *pan* leaves which is in Konkon, South Indian, Mahrastrian or Gujrati influence. Again use of poppy seeds in aloo *Makallah* is a Bengali influence (refer). The festivals of the community is celebrated from September to August with the ending winter season December, the festivals, Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Festivals of Tree s Purim, Passover , *Sabbath* starts from Friday evenings with rituals and food and end on Saturdays nights, thus food made should last till Saturday. Though the main regional festivals and its ritualities remains, but a influence of the same is in ritual habits observes Nathan Katz though there might be some local influence but the core Jewish laws and dietary patterns remains same. For eg, *Passover* and *Sabbath* remains same but the food in it at times has certain regional presence though keeping the *Kosher* food as same. Esther David(year) belonging from the Bene Israel Jewish community of India in her book *Bene Appetit. The Cuisine of Indian Jew* writes

I travelled to the seven main centres where Indian Jews live in different Indian cities and states I discovered how Indian Jews have preserved their food habits in a multi cultural country like India which has diverse cuisines (give page numbers here)³⁸.

Dietary laws that the Jews follow, Indian Jews too follow the dietary pattern of Kosher but have derived ways and means of using the correct regional ingredients to abide this law. Flower Sillaman the last of the custodian of the Calcutta Baghdadi Jewish community and its traditional recipes says that Judaism has great similarities with Hinduism so far as its antiquity and dietary specifications is concerned. To add here that Jewish community is ethnic minority community in India and the core thought of ethnicity refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people that set them apart from others.³⁹ As the ethnic groups see themselves as culturally distinct from other groups in a society, different characteristics, may serve to

distinguish ethnic groups from one another. For many, ethnicity is central to individual and group ethnicity but its significance can vary among individuals, members of minority groups tend to see themselves as people apart from the majority. The strict dietary law referred to above is of not mixing dairy product with meat dishes. Indian Jews also have fish with scales pork is a taboo they prefer to end their meal with fruit or betel leaf and betel nut, and as a substitute to dairy product they use milk to make curries, sweets and other recipe.⁴⁰ Esther David (year) further says in her work that it is impossible to write about Jewish food without mentioning the laws of Kosher, which include slaughter of animals in a specific manner. In a personal interview with Esther David, she says that the Indian Jews followed all religious rituals but in their own terms. Indian Jews have thorough knowledge about the animals about what they are ordained to eat, there is always a Jewish elder known as shohet in each community who knows the law of kosher to slaughter animals as Kosher meat is not easily available in India (pg number). Another argument suffices that the communities or ethnic communities who migrate often carry with them elements of the diet and the eating habits of the homeland, the mobility of the particular community and its dietary patterns also maps their culture.

The Indian Jewish Community comprising of the Bene Israelis, Cochinitims, and the Baghdadi s has arrived in India from different parts of the world some decades and some like Baghdadi s during the pre-colonial times of the reign of British East India company in India. If the dietary laws have strictures on the eating habits and food then fasting also has a importance in their life. The phenomenon of fasting variegated history of Judaism and has its roots in the biblical text. Though it is not entirely clear the reason of the practice of such abstinence from food, it is assumed that in ancient Israel such abstaining from food and drink on both the individual and community level was considered an act of piety this fasts were very much confined to the rabbis and to those who thought to do so. Well, the Jewish food history is characterized by their many migrations and their status, as a minority group. From this view it is diverse as Jewish culture and as their community experiences. Have been as Jews, to multiple cultures and populations. The Jewish food and its specificity lies in its operation both symbolically and physically⁴¹. At the core of all Jewish festivals and its chronological tables lies the tradition for eg the sanctified bread or *Challah* lies in central to all Jewish feast and festivals. Ashkenizic typically the *gefilte* fish cooked in typical Jewish way the Yiddish stuffed fish in 2022 on the ninth day of the month of July under the supervision of David Ashkenizie and Sydney Bannerji both Baghdadian Jews belonging to

the Jewish community of Kolkata in the Maghen David synagogue with a small gathering if not all but with the symbolic food like gefelte fish the challah bread Rabbi Y Diek from Israel and Rabbi Goldsmidt from UK and members of the Kolkata Jewish community gathered along with music concluded the Sabbath prayers. Reading of the *Sefer Torah* something that added to the rejoice after a long passage of time when due to paucity of active members and Covid Pandemics it was difficult to conduct prayers. The Nahoum Bakery though in its mellow days actively thrives when such occasions, prayer service or festivities occur in the synagogues in Kolkata says Jagadish the Manager of Nahoums. when interviewed Sydney Bannerji whose mother is a Jew and Father a Pilot and Bengali brahmin says that arrangements are on the way for a Kosher certification which is done for India made food exported for Jewish Jewish people in other countries.

The *Shavnot* is marked taking in honey as a ritualistic food with dairy food this is a festival of the Torah. In this section Baklava cakes are quite typical of the festival, the Nahoum Bakery in Kolkata still has their shelf filled with *Bakhlawa(s)* Jagadish Babu (who is he) serving the shop, managing it for years now almost another common name to the Jewish Community of Kolkata says that the Jewish items is famous with the other communities in Calcutta even the Christians during Christmas in December. Culture and its diverse ways has not segregated but actually brought the community together and also becomes instrumental in harbouring to the needs of however a dwindling community but still a thriving one. Jews in Bengal i.e. Kolkata, feel that the greatest obstacle to the plans but small prayer services along with food and music and prayer services actually works as a binding force says Mithana, fifty year old teacher and a active member of the Jewish community of Kolkata.

The community in Kolkata trying to work out an arrangement with an American Jewish company that gets the Kosher certification done for India made food exported for Jewish people in other countries. The certification has to be done by Rabbis who come down from abroad.⁴² Though there are conflicts within the community regarding many a issues of authorship but when its culture, food and festival and the restoration of it the Jewish communities of Pune or Kolkata all come together, strengthening the identities reaffirming the bonhominess of the community, mobilising the stagnations. Though there are boundaries like the Bene Israeli s of Mumbai, Ahmedabad or Pune has their own identifying ways at the sametime, Cochinims, modulates, controls shapes the culture according to their geographical habitat. Baghdadi Jewish food originally belonging from the Iraqi origin had Arab elements, but in India

Muslim cooks employed in Jewish homes introduces to the Baghdadi inmates the spices at the sametime in Kochi and Malabar the Jews were gushed into the spices there the story was bit different as the Jews came as traders of spices and silks as the British. The Baghdadi Jewish cuisine is distinct from other communities.

Judaism is said to be based on Torah but an usual distinct feature is found in Bene Israel the belief in Prophet Elijah ie Eliyahu Hannabi who is known to be a biblical hero is the beloved folk hero of the Bene Israel Jews of India. The *malida* ceremony is used here as ceremonial celebration after prayers to Prophet Elijah for wish fulfilment. The food of the Bene Israels include dal, rice, chappattis like normal Indian food in fish the Bene Israelis prefer pomfret or Bombay Duck these are obviously sea borne fishes and found it easily to procure and cook. Ronith Dwiker, 48 married to a Maharastrian but follows her dietary pattern of Jewish law in the Jewish cuisines says coconut milk is easily available so in *mallida* coconut crushes or the milk is used to make sweet dishes, Sarah Cohen from Kochi says while eating her lunch that rice is her favourite dish and fish prepared in Konkoni way is something that she loves, though her meat comes from Mumbai which is cut and prepared in a kosher way. Barbara C Johnson 's study (year) analyses the role played by community parties or *pestha* in maintaining group identity by Paradesi Cochin Jews in Israel, Johnson skillfully analyses the profound identity change from being a Jew in India to being a Paradesi Cochin in Israel. Sarah says the use of tamarind in curry was something common in kerala cuisines and she too like the other Jewish homes in Jew Town continued. Mixing of berries, spices in the fish and making a curry is something common in Kochi, kitchen. The westerner invariably misapprehends the Cochin Jew's identity as the visitors to Jew Town are most often either Western Jews with little appreciation of India, or Indians with little knowledge of Jewishness as the Cochin identity couldnot be deciphered as totally Jewish or fully Indian. Nathan Katz (year) writes that the Indianness and Jewishness are not neatly bounded fields of study but rather together they form a seamless universe of meanings, customs, aesthetic and rituals, thus if one observes the cooking patterns, food and rituals have a distinct identity of their own. It is said that especially in places of kerala like Paravuur, Chedamangalam and places near it where both Syrian Christians, Nambudiri Brahmans, the Nayyars and the Jews altogether exist.

On the one hand they have appropriated certain Brahmanical symbols of purity in their unique Passover observances, on the other hand Nayyars and their ways have been observed especially in the ritualistic patterns and symbols of purity have been

noticed in the Simchat Torah⁴³ observances and marriage customs. (give reference with page numbers here)⁴⁴.

In the Cochin Jews observances of Kasruth existence of a strict pattern and dietary law is observed

The presence of meat in their diet resembles low caste practices . However meat is eaten only in the home which is the only place where *Kosher* meat is available. In public the Cochin Jews frequent Brahman vegetarian restaurants which meet the strictest requirements of *Kashruth* while at the same time reinforcing their social position⁴⁵.

The Cochin Jews have adapted many Hindu practices and has syncretic religious patterns, their ritual use of Hebrew paralleling Hindu use of Sanskrit the strict dietary restrictions of Kashruth removal of footwear in the synagogues are some of them. According to halacha preparation for Pesach pronounced Pesach in Cochin should begin in thirty days before the festival which is to say that they should begin thirty days before the festivals. Pesach work remembers Sarah Cohen, a strenuous work of constantly keeping the kitchen clean and pure and at the sametime working in a heated temperature the purity and the cleanliness. Again there are similar features which can be seen while observing the Jews of other states. Such removal of footwears in not in Baghdadi synagogues of Kolkata or Bene Israel synagogues in Maharashtra or Gujrat. Though at times there are conflicts within the community regarding many a issues of authorship but when its culture, food and festival and the restoration of it the Jewish communities of Pune or Kolkata all come together, strengthening the identities re-affirming the bonhominess of the community, mobilising the stagnations.

In this Sabbath prayers the food happens to be typically Baghdadi food with Challah bread, *gefelte* fish, and meat. Nahoum one of the oldest bakeries of Kolkata a testimony of Jewish food and Baghdadi Jews still sells Baghdadi delicacies though the customers are less observes Jagadish Haldar but the attraction and demand of the *bakhlava*, coconut and cheese samosas, *challa* bread, caca rings , macaroons, bronie, jam tarts, date babas even in the after prayer services the ritualistic food in the synagogue. Flower Sillaman (year), food expert and author of cook books says— where is it?

Jewish food is special because Jews just cannot eat anything and everything, the Kosher food has to abide by strict dietary loss which not only lay down what is forbidden but also the process of cooking the ingredients and the kitchen specifications, Kosher, for eg, doesnot permit meat to be mixed with milk products or milk so, she observes that Judaism has a great similarities with Hinduism so far as its antiquity and dietary specifications is concerned.

Sillaman also thinks that the strict measures and rigidities of Kosher and the maintenance of it might have become difficult to follow as most followers of both religions have drifted away from these guide lines. As is customary in South India the meal itself is based on large amount of rice, cooked for special occasions with spices as a pillau as in festive meals meat and rice is essential. Typical for party menu features at least one fish or fish curry several different chicken curries is important. Typically some Indian Jewish cooking like the Baghdadi style *kubba* dumpling of curry borrowed from Calcutta and Bombay universally Jewish restrictions of *Kashrut*.

Flower specifies the typical Jewish feast that include *beet khatta* with *Koobah* that is the beet soup, with chicken and vegetable balls followed by Jewish roast chicken which is different from the European roast in the kind of marinades and spices, mutton ingree a layered meat dish baked with brinjals, tomatoes and potatoes. Flower Sillaman also mentions the aloo *makallah* a special potato fry typical Jewish food, *hulba* a chutney of fenugreek and cucumber zaiata. Nathan Katz (year) observes that the *Pesah work* to the Cochin Community is so important that it was a common belief if the women made even the slightest mistake in Passover preparation the lives of their husband, family and children would be at stake.⁴⁶ Each faction has certain specificities with food the cultural continuities embodied in food particular brings out a different understanding of the place, region and habitat. Jewish identity is not merely a defense mechanism against a hostile world writes Nathan Katz the Jews of India if demonstrates an atmosphere of amity then the food and ritualistic processes in India is a symbol of that unified structure.

Conclusion

Food is often acknowledged as a camaraderie of life a quintessential symbol of the ethnic identity, for the Jews the food is the connectivity to religion and purity of the community. The Jewish settlements to different regions led to the adaptation of the local food habits and mannerisms but *kosher* was always kept in mind, it is observed that they amalgamated into the local communities and adapted the local language and culinary influences which makes the Indian Jews unique. Though all maintain dietary laws for eg sweets with coconut milk becomes a prominence in the food of the Jews of India as Kosher meat is not always available many of them follow a vegetarian diet. The archive of Jewish food and its rituals has a story and the story takes us into the paths of Jewish history. There are five factions in the Jewish community in India and each of them are different but surprisingly united with food heritage. Jewish

identity is important as about continuity with the Jewish world, Judaic and Indic cultures both amalgamated in the Jews of India. Food of the Indian Jews speaks about that culture which is ethnic, traditional yet contemporary, *khakra thepla* if percolated in the community then the Challah bread or latkes is still the favourite among the youth says Elizabeth of Ahmedabad who is the Principal of one of the schools in Ahmedabad.

Bengali savouries of delicious fish curries if has entered in Baghdadi homes in Kolkata at the sametime ritualic food has not been discarded, Eziekel Malekar who heads the Jewish community in Delhi a Bene Israel and take care of the synagogue making interfaith programmes says strict Kosher is maintained even with ravages of time new ideas are welcoming but the Jewish norms are celebrated even if the community has dwindled. Challah, Rugelach, Kugel, *Apricot Himantaschen*⁴⁷, Jelly donuts, *Sufganiyah* is some that Flower Sillaman relished and thinks it to be the core Jewish food still appreciated and loved among the young ones. The capacity of food to bespeak identity is an beautiful example that Judaism excels, Jewish identity is built with food practices thus food is endured as one of the most powerful symbols through which Jewish people construct their identities.

Now this process of identity formation through food consumption a phenomenon by means of which social distinctiveness are created and distinct communities are enacted and maintained is epitomized in Judaism in the case of Jewish identity the tremendously powerful influence of food can be traced back to the profusion of food taboos., and the Jews especially have the most ritualistic ways, no ethnic group has more ritual food ways and taboos than the Jews⁴⁸. Social customs and food habits are important in the case of the Jews when they arrived in India at different periods of time food remained the central point of the Jewish identity in particular is the kosher food persisted as a meaningful signifier of identity for Indian Jews regardless of their adherence to the laws of kashrut at times. Using the words of Kalff in explaining Jewish identity in America cites that Jewish practices and involvements in jewish life it is essential to examine the subjective inner experience of being *Jewish*. Thus. food in rituals, or daily in Jewish India assumes the role of an identity marker cross culturally this can be the most attributed fact that is fundamentally indispensable to human survival. The same can be explained through role of food in the Judaic culture ie in the arena of Judaism the coupling of food practices and Jewish identity this antiquity can be ascribed to the status bestowed upon food by the Hebrew Bible and the dietary laws in India through passages of time cultural, social changes local and regional religious patterns and habitat

have produced to a new avenue of Judaic culture in India where food is the symbolic whole and the macrocosmic part of the Indian Jews' identity making a frontline of identity creation. Esther David notes in her book *Bene Appetit The Cuisines of the Indian Jews*, that the Indian Jews has regional influences but the staple diet is rice and fish, though they observe the dietary laws in the Jewish religion fish is a symbol of protection, good luck, fertility and abundance, even if the Indian Jews live in a geographically diverse areas different landscapes with various food preferences⁴⁹. In the *Studies of Jewish Identity*, Nathan Katz says

When we delve into the cultural mechanism by which India's diverse Jewish community came to define themselves and how they are defined by others we explore the very conditions by which a group's identity is established and maintained how it responds to changing conditions and how it anticipates and structures a future⁵⁰.

Indian Jewish identity, where culture plays a big role in this ethnic group, food, feast and festivals shape the sense of selfhood, when we see or understand the food strategies, cuisines of the community here and the jews within it, it seems that they are creating a space for themselves. To quote certain statements from Katz's book *Studies in Indian Jewish Identity*,

[...] in describing themselves, neighbours traditional categories abound thus some of India's regional hierarchies [...] the biological categories of Jewish and Hindu culture overlapped at times, establishing a comfortable s or in being described by their Hindu, Muslim or Christian⁵¹.

The Jews in India has been living here since ages and each of the factions placed in different geographical locations has different time period and history of settlement thus living in that location with regional culture and or the communities must have been a influence but in the case of the Indian Jewish communities they did not give up or has never shredded their core Jewish culture, habitt ritualistic processes, the norms as the purity and the authenticity of the Jews lies in its food purity/ kosher. Thus, India's Jews and their interactions with their neighbours became significant in shaping their identity as Indian Jewish Community. At the sametime there are conflicting images within the community itself, for eg. The Baghdadi Jews of Bombay, had affinity with European image and status, on the other hand the Bene Israel were the closest to the Indian ways of habitat, the Sephardims writes Nathan Katz, who came to Cochin, during Sixteenth century discrimination made by the Jews against other Jews⁵². Esther David in her *Bene Appetit* writes,

The Bnei Meneshe Jews in Mizoram follow much the same rituals as their kin in Manipur, community dinners are not held at a prayer hall or synagogue[.] they celebrate festivals with fish, rice dal and potatoes they have a preference for sunflower oil.

Thus, there are dissimilarities in food pattern and at times there are cultural differences within the faction, for eg, there is no idol worship in the Judaism but Bene Israels, Jews of Western India have taken the liberty of worshipping Prophet Elijah, whose pictures are visible in Bene Israel homes. Ways and mannerisms are different but the ritualistic pattern is maintained. Poha or flaked rice has a strong influence on Indian Jewish food and is an important platter of *malida* services. Again each but the strict dietary laws of Kosher are followed by all. Instead of milk, the coconut milk is used, if Kosher meat is unavailable then Indian Jewish members eat vegetarian food. A strange ethnicity is created here and a sharp distinction of we and other is crafted within the community also, yet all are bonded together in strict dietary laws of Judaism. The cuisines at times speaks of their struggle, strife and past for eg Karpas and Maroor, is a reminder of the days of hardship and misery, Jews suffered when they were slaves in Egypt Karpas and Maroor is washed Parseley salad leaves placed in the platter with lemon juice. *Limbu Cha Ras*, it might sound lemon juice but the ritual of placing lemon juice in the Passover platter symbolizes the tears shed by the Jews in Egypt. One faction of Jews also believes that spring and usherance of life is all about this ritual. Boiled egg with its shell roasted on an open fire symbolizes cycle of life when placed in the seder platter. The cuisines are stories each cuisine links to a tale of life, the lives that the Jews have left, lived, adopted and settlement stories, even the ingredients connotes rituals, legends and life experiences of the Indian Jewish community. The similarities and the differences between the Jewish communities of other parts of the world and the Indian Jewish community is in the cuisines though the rituals and norms are all same. Barbara C Johnson writes that food is often acknowledged as a quintessential symbol of ethnic identity, she notes in reference to Cochin Jews and their food for Peshta which evokes a vivid sensory continuity with India⁵³

Notes

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17. *ibid*
18. Studies in Indian Jewish Identity,; For any good occasions they call us' Nathan Katz. Manohar Publications 1995. Pp58
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21. The concept of *Kosher* is embedded in the dietary laws the dietary laws derive from Levitus and Deutronomy and were codified which contains the Mishnah now in Levitus and Deutronomy contain certain unambiguous statements and instructions and ordains rules that as to which animals one should eat and which were impure
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23. You may eat any animal that has hooves divided into two parts that chews the cud. (Deut. 14-6) *ibid*. pp15
24. anon

25. Nathan Katz interview through emails, the queries that he answered.
26. Interview of the Rabbi in Maghen David Synagogue.
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