

JEWES IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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A new era in the Jewish history in Russia is marked by the disintegration of Soviet Union. Russian Jews earlier in the pre-Soviet period had to migrate to other regions as they faced discrimination. However, after the Soviet formation all the Jewish discriminatory laws were abolished, but as Soviets were against any religion, they tried to restrain Judaism. This suppression led to the mass migrations of Jews to America and Palestine. It was noted that from 1897 till the soviet fall Jews population rate reduced as compared to the general population. In numbers, 18000 Jews migrated to Palestine, 55000 left for America, and 31000 shifted to other countries (this data is not inclusive of some Post-Soviet Baltic countries). Many Jews were still left behind in the Soviet Union despite the mass emigration. According to the statistics, the Jews who still lived in the Soviet Union were about 400,000 to 1,000,000. (Shneer, 2016)

In the Post-Soviet era, Jews of Russia gained freedom from the years of suppression. The post-communist Jews were free to choose their residence and occupation; they were free to put forth their opinion and construct their life on Jewish terms. In Russian after the Soviet disintegration, the main cities such as Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev were considered as the eventual centres of the Jewish population by some scholars. Even in the post-Soviet period, more than a million Russian Jews migrated to other countries. However, more than a million continued to live in Russia. (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 1928)

Regardless of the Soviet repressive measures towards Jews, they retained their culture and identity throughout the Soviet era. Jews had to speak Russian and not the Yiddish language in the Soviet Union; not only the language change but Soviet changed most of the cultural aspects of Jewish to contain the religious way of life of Jews. Soviet could retain their Jewish identity through food habits, literature, humour and social and cultural patterns. Gradually by 1967, Soviet Jews transformed themselves into most avid Jews in the world. They maintained relations with Israel to advance their 'Hebrew culture' and 'Jewish Nationalism'. Besides this, Jews preserved their culture secretly; for instance, by building underground prayer halls. Chabad (also popularly known as a Hasidic movement), is a movement that promotes orthodox Jewish ideology, could never be abolished form Jewish life despite severe repressions of Soviet Union. (Shneer, 2016)

The Russian Jews were of recent origins as they were very fewer Jews settled in Russia by the 19th century; and most of the Jews in this period were settled in Present day Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland and Moldova. These counties were collectively known as "pale of residence". The residents of the "pale of residence" gradually settled in Russia in the Soviet era. They migrated in large numbers to major cities in

Russia in the initial period of Soviet Union as they provided better economic and educational opportunities than their resident countries. As the numbers of Jews increased in the Soviet Union, it recognised Jewish group as a national group; this Jewish group were allowed to practice their culture and establish educational institutions in the initial stage of Soviet Union. The freedom Jews enjoyed was curbed during the Stalin period. Although the Soviet Union from the initial times discouraged religion and religious way of life, Stalin was a strong hand in this process and carried out Jewish repressive measures to a large extent. Stalin stopped allowing Jewish schools or educational institutions; and religious gatherings or organisations. (European Jewish Congress, 2012)

However, Stalin had to reduce the repressive measures during the World War II as Jews played a major role on the part of Soviet Union in the war. Jews took an active part in both the front and military levels; they were a major part of the military. Most of the Jews who fought for the Soviet died in the holocaust, while the main land residents survived the war. Even after the wide Jewish contribution to the Soviet Union in the World war, the repressive measures towards the Jewish culture renewed in the aftermath of war. Stalin's death in 1953 saw the reduction in the suppression of Jews. Soon, many Jewish prisoners in detention camps were released. Even though the condition of Jewish people enhanced, they were still deliberately suppressed. The state sponsored Judaism suppression activities possessed anti-Jewish propaganda. Jewish educational institutes and religious groupings were still denied in the Soviet Union. The Jews, who revolted and tried to establish Jewish schools or religious institutions were detained, jailed and were denied to go out of the country; these agitators were called "Refuseniks". Due to the international demand, the emigration restrictions were decreased. However, restrictions were re-imposed in the 1980's. The emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev to power and his introduction of the policies of perestroika and glasnost improved the conditions of Jews in the Soviet Union as any kind of restrictions were lifted by the policies. (European Jewish Congress, 2012)

Most of the successor states, as well as Russia, view Jews as a 'nationality'; they also have a considerate status for expressing their political opinions. Jews were not just identified as religious groups as Judaism faced a backlash during the intolerant Stalin period. Jews suffered so much of suppression that most of the religious were no the more in practice and even many Jews lost most of their knowledge about Judaism. However, the renaissance of Jewish culture has actively started in Post-Soviet Russia and Jews became apparent and effective minorities. A wide range of Jewish political and religious heads extended their support to the democratisation policy and other reforms of Gorbachev; later they also supported Yeltsin unanimously during the political crisis of 1993. The long suppressive era and discriminations contributed to their pro-democratic ideology. However, Brodsky asserts that Jews in Russia still have a certain level of risk to their lives, in both the cases where a Jew is an activist or a non-activist. In other words, activist or rebel Jews are at a high risk to be killed, while the non-agitators who are not related to any Jewish cultural or political associations and doesn't even have much knowledge about Judaism are also persecuted. As

mentioned by Brodsky Jews killings are mostly based on their nationality. (Russian Federation The Status of Jews in the Post-Soviet Era, 1994)

The growth of Jewish Life in Russia

The growth of Jews in Russia can be traced back to the 19th century. Initially, there were very few Jews in Russia; they lived in small and isolated communities and mostly in the rural villages. These Jews were mostly based on the agriculture for their monetary needs. Constantly the number of Jews increased and marked their presence in Russia even during the Soviet era. The reasons behind the increase in the number of Jews in Russia were the migration of Jews from other parts to the Soviet Union and Slight growth in the birth rate and decrease in the death rate and infant mortality rates. Young marriages also contributed to the increased Jewish population in Russia during the Soviet period. Another important factor that contributed to the heightened Jewish population was due to the urbanisation and industrialisation in Eastern Europe. Urbanisation was the main factor that drove Jews to urban Russia as for them urbanisation was improved economic and welfare opportunity, and it also was an alternative to shift from the farming occupation. Jewish people also viewed Urbanisation as a source of their improved lifestyle and skills. The shift of the Jewish population from rural to urban setups started in the 19th century itself and increased towards the initial era of Soviet Union. Jews were more attracted to the urbanisation than the other non-Jewish counterparts; this is the reason Jewish population than any other nationality has increased in numbers in Soviet Russia. (Wein)

The Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *Glasnost*, allowed Jews to build their identity openly on the terms of ethnicity and religion. They prioritised reading newspapers in Jewish language or Jewish published newspapers; they mostly communicated with others Jews rather than with the general population and even started practicing more conventional Jewish traditions and beliefs. In the final years of the Soviet Union, there were 55 distinctive magazines, newspapers and other publications. Jewish educational institutions and religious establishments started forming during this period. (Shneer, 2016)

In the years after the Soviet fall, the capital region of Russia became a centre of increased Jewish schools, higher education institutes, religious gatherings and formation of other cultural and social associations. Russia accommodated two Jewish community centres and the third one under construction. Moscow also witnessed four yeshivas, four religious day schools and four Jewish teacher's seminaries. Most gradually became the largest Jewish centre with 200,000 Jews in the whole of Europe. In the last decade, Russia had an increased number of Jewish institutions and publications. Specialists consider that by mid-2000's Russian Jews were marked their own identity in the global space. Russia hosts international Jewish festivals; it also hosts many synagogues (Jewish prayer house) and orthodox and progressive rabbis (teacher of Judaism). Dozens of Jewish literature could be found in Russian bookstores. (Shneer, 2016)

Among the all other Jewish institutions or Jewish cultural actors, Chabad plays a lead role in establishing the Jewish identity. The presence of Chabad is controversial in Russia as it promotes fundamental Jewish

ideology. Almost a hundred of Russian cities have prominent Chabad movements. Chabad as a movement or organisation in Russia is also extended to the schools established by Jews; this could also be seen in the household discussions, daily life style, public and private institutions and other organisations. Most people in Russia disapprove this institution citing that it uses its political connections to broaden its influence on the Russian Jews. Although, Jews contribution to the booming Russian economy was notable; which makes Russia provide for a Jewish friendly environment. Russia has increasingly become a place where the Jewish community desire to settle. (Shneer, 2016)

While most of the Jews settled in Russian, many of the Russian Jews migrated to other countries especially to Israel, Germany and United States in search of improved monetary conveniences. From 1989 to 2003 Russia witnessed the migration of approximately 930,000 Jews to Israel and 378,000 to the United States and 200,000 to Germany. The first Jewish migration from the Soviet Union to Israel was during the 1970's; the Soviet Jewish migrants to Israel were the activists who voiced for Jewish ideology during this time. By 1990's this migration numbers increased and reached one million and the migration also became divergent. But as America restricted the immigration of Soviet Jews in the 1990's, most these Jews chose to go to Israel as it provided many opportunities in its immigration policy and considered them as repatriates. The migration process to Israel even continued after the Soviet fall. The process of returning to home is called "aliyah", according to which people who have Jewish roots but are citizens of some other countries were given citizenship on their return. In case of the Russian Jews, those migrated to Israel were termed as "the Russians"; these Russians influenced Israel society as much as Israel influenced their ideas. The Russian language was used as 'de facto' language of Israel. Russian radio channels, newspapers, television programmes, movies and theatres were very popular among the Israeli population. Jews from Russia also formed their own political parties to represent their issues like the issue where educated Jews had to choose 'low-status' jobs because of the socio-economic structure of Israel; and to advocate their opinions. The increased population of Russian Jews in Israel gradually gave them a convenient status in Israel. Israel developed a strong bond with Russia, a place which hosted millions of Jews. Israel and Russia share intense relations in the social, cultural, economic and political spaces. (Shneer, 2016)

New York City is the predominant cities in the United States which hosted most of the Russian Jews. New York is known as the largest Russian Urban Jewish population hosting centre. Brighton beach in New York is the leading settlement of Russian Jews. Constantly the growing population of Russian Jews led to their settlements in other areas of New York and other places in America. Russian Jews have their occupancy in other areas in America and have established many clubs and organisations, and they also cultivated ties with already prevailing Jewish organisations. 25 percent of America's demography is of Russian Jews and have an impact on the decision making of the USA regarding the Jewish population. (Shneer, 2016)

The Jewish community in Germany has been the fastest growing community in the world in the past two decades. After unification, Germany provided easy access to residency and variety of social benefits to post-Soviet Jews during 1990-91. The Russian speaking Germans, today, form a majority of German Jews.

Although initially they were given importance initially, they are today considered as a threat to the very German Jewish establishment. This post-Soviet Russian speaking Jews are not a part of the state-sponsored Jewish community which is called the 'Gemeinde'. Russian Jews are less traditional when compared with German Jewish community; however, it is quite evident that the Jewish migrants from Russia have transformed Jewry throughout Europe. The fall of Tsars has generated a global migration of Russian Jews across the world that has had a profound impact in the regions where they have settled. (Shneer, 2016)

Jewish demographic rate in Russia is lowering due to their settlement in small households and also due to the killings and assaults against them. Recently the rate of lowering population reduced due to the efforts of the country to reduce the religious discriminations and increase ethnic equality; many of the Jews returned from Germany (Pergola, 2002). There are small amounts of Bukharan Jews, Central Asian Jews, Georgian Jews, Caucasian Mountain Jews and Crimean Jews are also present in Russia (Jews in Russia, 2018). Another issue influencing the Jewish demographic rate is the heightening intermarriages of the Jewish community. It is recorded that 90 percentage of the Jewish children are out of intermarriages; Jews usually prefer 2 to 3 children. As Jews prefer urban areas for their living, they prefer settling in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities which at least have a population of 1million and are urbanised. One such region is the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, situated in the Russian Far East region; by the census of 2002, the population in this oblast was 2,327. (Pergola, 2002)

Identity politics of Jews

Ethnicity and religion are important parts of the Jewish identity. Judaism is recognised as one of the prominent religions in Russia. By 2002, the Jewish people occupied 0.16 percentage of the total Russian demography. Russian Jews are mostly secular; they recognise themselves with their nationality rather than their religion (Ro'i, 2010). However, religion also is a significant part of their identity as the interest of the Jewish community to practice their traditional culture is increasing; and religion was the main determinant of their traditional ideology. Lubavitch movement has fuelled the religious identity of Jews by building more synagogues and other religious establishments, also encouraging other Jews to visit them frequently. To influence the Jewish children to become supporters of Jewish movements, Chabad movement setup Jewish Kindergartens and schools. Besides the increasing traditional Jewish identity, most of the Russian Jews have relatives in Israel who constantly influence Jews in Russia. (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 2005)

There are many Jewish institutions all over the Post-Soviet territory and especially in Russia; the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS is one such central institution which is headed by Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar (Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS, 2016). Russian Jews are linguistically distinguished into two. The words mean Jew in English but are distinguished in the Russian language. The word "еврей" (yevrey), which is Hebrew in English, is used to represents the Jewish ethnic people. The other word "иудей" (iudey) stands for the followers of Judaism irrespective of their ethnical Jewish identity. The term 'иудей' is not in much use in the contemporary times and is replaced by the equivalent term "иудаист"

which means Judaist in English. According to the survey of 2012, ‘евреи’ made 32.2 percentage of the Jewish population. Another version of the word Jew is “жид” (Zyd), which was borrowed from the Polish word for Jew, ‘Żyd’. The word ‘жид’ is usually used in widely used in Russia. (Draiman, 2016)

Despite the strong presence of Jews in Russia, anti-Semitism sponsored by the Soviet Union continued to exist in the post-Soviet Russia. One of the accepted expressions of prejudice is ‘antisemitism’; this bigotry towards Jews is also reflected in the views of politicians and prominent figures of the society. In spite of the state sponsored provisions against the discriminations based on ethnicity or religion (Art 282), anti-Semitic groups continue to exist in Russia and all over the post-Soviet countries. The increased number of anti-Semitic groups by 2002, made the leading newspaper ‘pravda’ mention about these expanding anti-Semitic neo-Nazi groups naming "Anti-Semitism is booming in Russia" in 2002. (Jewish History, 2008)

This furthered when fifteen members of Duma, in 2005, asserted that all the Jewish institutions and Judaism should be outlawed. Indeed 500 eminent figures, inclusive of 20 members from the Rodina party asked strongly for an investigation into the ancient Jewish texts as they believed that they contained anti-Russian ideas; they also appealed for the ban of Jews and Judaism. Because of the pressure of the prominent members of the society, an investigation was launched but had to be abandoned later because of international intervention in the matter. (Verkhovsky, 2006)

However, in the later stage of 2000’s, anti-Semitism rate in Russia turned downwards and is constantly reducing since then. The Russian government is driven by President Vladimir Putin clearly obstructed anti-Semitism even when some prominent groups and movements in Russia were anti-Semitic (Borshchevskaya, 2018). Conventional and new anti-Semitic information was repeatedly published in Russia. Most of the anti-Semitic activities were considered to be directed by the nationalists and extremists and also by the Islamic groups. All the anti-Semitic activities targeted Jewish synagogues, community centres and cemeteries. An instance of the assaults against Jews could be noted as the attack on the Perm’s Jewish community centres, also assaults in a Jewish nursery school in Volgograd in 2013. (Russian Protestors demand ban on Chabad Movement , 2016)

The assaults on Jews could be seen as earlier as in 1999 attack on ‘Bolshaya Bronnaya Synagogue’ and in 2006 where many Jews were abused in Moscow; an anti-Jewish man killed nine people in the ‘Bolshaya Bronnaya Synagogue’ (Antisemitism, 2018). The violence on Jewish people in Russia by the orthodox Islamist bands used to be very less but is gradually increasing, especially in the Muslim dominated places. Abuse on the Rabbi of Derbent, also in 2013 was considered an attack by the Islamic anti-Jewish person; these attacks inculcated fear among the Jewish community regarding the future hate attacks (Russia: Terrorists likely behind rabbi's shootings, 2013). The fear in Jews was sponsored by the verbal anti-Jewish abuses by Russian activists and writers against the Russian gay lobbyists after the anti-gay law passed in 2013 in Russia. “Pussy riot” incident increased the hate against Jews among the other religious groups,

especially among the Russian Orthodox Christians as they perceived the incident as an attack of Jews on Christians as Israel Shamir asserted. (Maida, 2017)

But gradually Jews started asserting their identity in Russia with the support of the governmental policies in favour of them. A programme “Eurostars young adults” suggests the improved activity of Jews; this group supported the establishment of Jewish educational programmes and sponsored social activities across most of the metropolitan cities in Russia. Some scholars define the increasing Jewish activity in Russia as “Jewish renaissance in Russia”. (EuroStars, 2012)

Jews on the Move

In the initial years of the 19th century, a third matter occurred which is known as the mass Jews emigrations from one place to another place. The Jews started moving within Russia, Poland and the region of Austro-Hungarian Empire. Because of such emigration Jews population experienced shifts in Germany, Poland and Austro-Hungarian border especially from the Eastern part of Austro-Hungarian border into Poland. In addition, Jews of Eastern Europe started moving to Southern Russia and parts of Ukraine. Then one of the largest Jews settlements in northern Lithuania and northern Poland began to move south mainly to the port of Odessa and the Black Sea. Later Jews experienced migration from Galicia and southern part of Poland to Hungary and Romania. Because of such migration Jews populations increased tenfold there. (Wein)

As a part of such emigration, the Chassidic Movement occurred and spread to the areas of Europe where it had not existed before. In the initials years of the 1840s the United States experienced a low level of emigration and by the time of the historic American Civil War number of Jews reached around 50000 in New York city. In New York, the basis of the life of Jews was founded upon German Jews mainly because German Jews came first and Jews from Eastern Europe began to settle almost thereafter. Such wave of great migration continued in the 1880s until the First World War, and as a consequence, it brought millions of Jews to the shores of the United States. (Wein)

Talking about Jews migration within Europe it has been seen that a great number of Jews particularly Lithuanian Jews moved to England. Lithuanian Jews also moved to South Africa in great numbers which were an exotic place for them. It was South Africa where in the 1850s and 1860s the Bore Republic was established and there already had strong and significant Jews representation. According to the source at the time of the Boer War and at the end of the 19th Century there were around 75,000 Jews in the same country. Jews migration continued, and it moved to France. More than 25,000 Jews from Eastern Europe settled in Paris by 1850s. For the first time Jews moved to the cities like Vienna, Budapest and Berlin and as a consequence, these cities experience a sizeable increase of Jews populations. All of these developments: the movement, the population explosion, the urbanization, the Industrial Revolution, increasing numbers of factories and many types of labour supported to unbalance the Jews populations. Such development

brought several elements of chaos in the life of Jews. The old environment and living places of the Jews were going and never to come back again. For Jews, the new places and the environment were unpredictable, frightening and different. The settlement and world of Jews in such places was not only without preparation but also without protection. The Jews life in such places was not an easy way. (Wein)

Different Ethnic Groups in Russia

According to the census of Russia in 2010 there were more than 190 ethnic groups in Russia. Among these ethnic groups, Russians share more than three-fourths of the total population of the Russian Federation. The Russian ethnic group dominates virtually all parts of the country except the region: North Caucasus and the middle Volga. According to the CIA World: Russian shares 77.7 percent, Tatar has 3.7 percent of the total population, Ukrainian 1.4 percent, Bashkir 1.1 percent, Chechens 1 percent, Chuvash 1 percent and others 10.2 percent. There is a sizeable share of the unspecified population with 3.9 percent of total population. So far as the language in Russia is concerned Russia is the official language, and it is spoken by 96.3 percent of the total population, the other languages are German 1.5 percent, Tatar 3 percent, Chechen 1 percent and others 10.3 percent. According to the Russian census of 2010 around 100 other languages are spoken in Russia. In terms of estimated practicing worshiper's Russian Orthodox shares 10-15%, Muslims 10-15 % and other Christian 2% by 2006. Russia as a legacy of more than seven decades of Soviet rule has large populations of non-practicing non-believers and believers. According to the Russian census of 2002 Russian shares 80 percent of the total population and other ethnic groups: Ukrainian, Tatars, Chuvash, Bashkirs and Armenian accounted for around one million residents. Going back to the 1989 Russian census, Russian had 81.5 percent of the total population and followed by Tatars 3.8 percent, Ukrainian 3.0 percent, Chuvash 1.2 percent, Bashkir 0.9 percent, Belarusian 0.8 percent and the other shares 8.1 percent. (Hays J. , Minorities and Ethnic Diversity in Russia, 2008)

The Russian Federation still remains a mixture of many varying ethnic groups and cultures. And it is the fact that the differentiation among ethnic groups and cultures has been increased since the fall of the Soviet Union. Russian central government has encouraged both political and cultural autonomy by understanding differentiation among groups, although Russian ethnic groups consists 80 percent of the population and around 75 percent of the religious believers of the country belongs from Russian Orthodox. Several minority ethnic groups in the Russian Federation maintain their ethnic traditions and continue with their languages. The demand for political and economic autonomy from these ethnic groups is partially based on their ethnic differences. It was around 24 million population of the total population of the all 21 ethnic Republics. These ethnic Republics were designed for one or many of the minority ethnic groups in the federation. Only in eight out of 21 ethnic Republics had the population of titular groups (Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachayevo-Cherkessia) larger than Russian ethnic populations while Russian ethnic population constitute more than half of the total population in other 9 republics. The Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region in the West Siberian Plain as other ethnic jurisdiction has a sizeable population of more than 1 million. However, two-third of the population of the self-governing region is Russian

immigrants and the Khanty-Mansi, the tribes on which the region is named comprises not more than two percent of the total population. In the last decades of the 20th Century, Islam became the second leading body of religious followers in Russian Federation and has upgraded its position amongst countless of other ethnic clusters. During the same period, the “Russian Orthodox Church also experienced a renaissance after from Soviet repression.” The situation of Orthodox Churches improved and it followed by expanding in the church’s membership. (Hays J. , 2008)

Engagement in World Civilization

Through conversion and migration, the Jewish communities eventually expanded in numbers in “Mediterranean region, Central Asia, and eastern and western Europe.” Jews were found in small numbers in Indian and China for centuries. However, with the exclusion of East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, Jews could be found in almost all parts of the world. Throughout history, Jews have played a prominent role in trade and communication. For centuries, “Jewish communities have been found from the Atlantic coast of Europe through the Mediterranean and into Asia and from Iberia through North Africa and the Middle East.” (Jews, 1996)

During the high middle Ages, the nation-state forming process led to an exodus of Jewish communities out of Western Europe. They migrated to various parts of “Eastern Europe” which were then occupied by Christian aristocracy, country-dwellers, and clerics. Due to forced conversions and persecutions for more than a century, Jews were finally expelled from Iberia by the expiration of 15th Century. While this ended centuries of fruitful and conflicted multi religious contact that had produced Jewish luminaries such as Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092–1167), and Solomon Ibn Gabirol (c. 1021–1058), it also gave rise to new, flourishing, and influential communities across the Ottoman Empire, as Sephardim and speaking the Judeo-Spanish language of Ladino. However, the 19th Century saw a dramatic rise of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe which shifted the “centre of gravity” of Jewish communities in the modern period (Jews, 1996).

Threats and Solutions to Existence in Modernity

Today, plenty of factors like the growth of Enlightenment ideologies and democratic citizenship of freedom of conscience individual autonomy have presented challenges as well as opportunities for Jews and Jewishness. Distinguishing legitimacy for Jews, for both limitations and protections began to dissolve. During the French Revolution of 1789 the ‘National Assembly’ signalled the abolition of ‘autonomous’ communities of Jews with the famed slogan, “To the Jews as a nation, nothing; to Jews as individuals, everything.” During the modernization process in Germany, “Jews were prominent in literature, science, and the arts, though they continued to suffer social and institutional discrimination.” In Russia, in the guise of modernization, as mentioned by scholars in the article ‘Jews’, the “Jewish communities faced a bewildering and inconsistent sequence and an array of liberalizing gestures, restrictions on settlement and occupations, and forced assimilation. Individual Jews and Jewish movements played a prominent role in

socialist and revolutionary efforts to overthrow the Czarist regime (notably the Jewish Workers' Bund in Russia, Poland, and Lithuania)." The Jewish community used to be the "full participants in colonial, democratic, and capitalist ventures in the New World, and the United States became a centre of Jewish population and creativity." (Jews, 1996)

According to the article, "charged by the dramatic encounter between traditional Jewish communities and the new bourgeois sphere, many Jewish thinkers like Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Émile Durkheim excelled in the reflexive articulation of modernity's self-understanding." On the other hand, Jewish artists, musicians, scientists and writers similarly made a significant improvement to modern culture. The Jewish enlightenment or the Haskalah as it is called gave way to new, secular Hebrew literature and modern Yiddish literature. These literatures have survived for generations as an annotation on both the confines of tradition and on the often hollow pretences of the new. (Jews, 1996)

With all these accomplishments, Jewishness was often viewed as problematic for Western modernism. Whether it was due to their impending devotion and capability for seeing them as equivalent citizens or due to the fact that the nation-states were grounded on assumption of their constituents' shared Christian heritage was in question. This resulted in Jews peculiar "modern nationalist movement" which took shape in the process of persuading Jews to travel and settle in Palestine and establish a sovereign Jewish state. This crystallized into Zionism. Zionism has, in turn, a complex relationship with traditional Jewishness. It rejects the diasporic forms of Jewish life as neurotic substitutions, at the same time rallying the memories and aspiration for the vanished motherland that have fostered Jewish feelings in exile. (Jews, 1996)

Jews throughout the West were engaged politically in liberal and socialist struggles that in turn have fuelled the "modern anti-Semitic movement." Anti-Semitism resulted from the rapid social and economic transformation that was, in contrary, boosted by "modern theories of biologically determined and hence immutable racial characteristics." In the 1930s, at a time when Western economy and society were repelling workers' revolutions and coping from the shattering interruption to the capitalist economy, Jews were considered a curse to the imagined Aryan race and were slaughtered. In the course of the Second World War, a call to expel Jews from the country was turned to eliminate them from the face of the Earth which eventually turned into an active program of genocide. A count of approximately 18,000,000 Jews at the commencement of the war came down to a third of the number by the end of the war. (Jews, 1996)

The present situation of Jews in Russia

"Genocide, assimilation, migration and nation-building" are changing the map of the Jewish dramatically. The Jews of the world are now far not much widely distributed than they formerly were. Though, the State of Israel unequivocally describes itself as a Jewish state has a substantial Arab Minority. Also, its populace contains a number of immigrants whose "Jewish" position according to religious law is disputed. "Israel and its Jewish population still continue to face issues of political and cultural integration into the Middle East." (Jews, 1996)

After Israel, the United States inhibits the world's largest Jewish population. Most Importantly American Jews are usually considered thriving and assimilated. Markers of Jewish identity and culture are freely existent and distinguished in media and widely held culture. High rates of intermarriages among moderately affiliated Jews are worrying those concerned about Jewish continuity. There is an surprising array of choices for manifestation of religious Judaism, for the clear connection of Jewishness to the rest of non-majoritarian identities, and for the safeguarding and “reinvention of secular Jewish culture.” Meanwhile, orthodox religious societies have adored resurrection, “experiencing high birth rates and close to universal retention of young people within their communities.” (Jews, 1996)

“Other than Israel and the United States, France has the largest Jewish population, largely comprising North African immigrants and their descendants. French Jewry today stands as a test case for the continued viability of Jewish and indeed of minority communities more generally in contemporary Western Europe.” Some see its future as clouded by the appearance of a “new anti-Semitism”. Substantial Jewish populations also are residing in the countries of former “Soviet Union, in Canada, in the United Kingdom and in the Latin American country Argentina.” (Jews, 1996)

Promotion of Culture

Cultural and educational sectors are the once that Russian Jews mostly focused on for their overall development in the region; they took all measures to establish their traditions through cultural and educational sectors. Foreign Jewish institutions also involved themselves in the Russian Jew's efforts to develop their culture and education system. With the international Jewish community's help, many educational academies were built; which mainly constituted four Universities that included a wide range of subjects related to Jewish culture. Newspapers published by Jews started appearing in Russian dialect in the main cities of Russia. (European Jewish Congress, 2012)

The “Society for the Promotion of Culture” amongst the Jews of Russia (called in Russian as Obshchestva dlia Rasprostraneniia Prosveshcheniia Mezhdru Evreiami v Rossii; OPE) which is an educational and civic association was instituted in 1863 during a period of liberalization. It aims at the “acculturation of Jews in the Pale of Settlement.” It continued to be active until it was forced to close in 1929 as per the Bolshevik government's program to quash all independent political and cultural institutions. In its different phases of programming, OPE reflected the internal state of the Jewish community in Russia while it was adjusting to its changing relations with the Russian government. Its activities were aimed to ensure that Jews fulfilled the government's own categorization of the necessary Jewish way of life. To be specific, Jews were considered to be of use to the state if they worked as merchants (increased tax returns to the government), artisans, farmers, or held university degrees. Other significant activities of OPE included providing opportunities for Jews to learn the Russian language, imparting knowledge on secular subjects, and also helped Jews attend Russian schools. Its organizers hoped to achieve their aims by exploiting their well-

established contacts with government officials. These cultural goals were not divorced from the desire to win increased rights for Jews. (Horowitz, 2010)

OPE lost some of its influence between 1906 and 1914, though it was a time during which the government permitted Jewish cultural institutions to thrive. In a time when it was illegal to establish independent Jewish organizations, this organization had served as an umbrella under which educational reform, historical studies, and political activities of Jews, used to take place. The activities also included religious discussions. When the autonomous organizations got the right to exist, many of the OPE commissions turned into full-fledged organizations in their own ways. Thus the Jewish Literary Society and Historical-Ethnographic Society and the Jewish Literary Society got established in 1907. Saint Petersburg alone witnessed the growth of many philanthropic societies that helped Jewish teachers, elementary students, and artisans. There were other organizations that aided the indigent in securing inexpensive apartments. Though OPE lost its prominence, its importance lies in the fact that it paved the way for the majority of the new institutions. (Horowitz, 2010)

The attempt to acculturate Russia's Jews was a great success: as it resulted in the integration of Jews in Soviet Russia became entirely integrated. That is, they spoke Russian fluently, intermarried, and even became masters of Russian culture. It must be stated that OPE did not fight for blind integration instead for collective Jewish national identity. However, National Identity was prohibited under Soviet rule. After more than sixty years of its contribution towards the modernization and cultural maturity of Russian Jewry, OPE did not end its life. It continued its cultural and political initiatives even beyond the borders of the Soviet Union and is seen in North America, Europe, and Israel. (Horowitz, 2010)

The Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, was an intellectual movement in Europe that lasted from approximately the 1770s to the 1880s. Though inspired by the European Enlightenment, Haskalah had a Jewish character. Haskalah comes from the Hebrew word *sekhel*, which means "reason" or "intellect". Rationality was the basis of this movement. Its activities included encouraging Jews to study secular subjects, to help them learn both the European and Hebrew languages, and also to engage in fields such as agriculture, science, arts and crafts. The *maskilim* (as followers of the Haskalah were called) tried to assimilate into European society through their dressing style, language, manners and by cultivating loyalty to the ruling power. The Haskalah is said to influence the creation of both the Reform and Zionist movements. (Schoenberg, 1998)

Jewish life changed radically with the advent of the Haskalah, or Jewish enlightenment, in western Europe during the 18th century. Beginning with the German thinker Moses Mendelssohn, the movement spread rapidly throughout the continent, albeit with a very distinct geographical distinction. The *maskilim*, as the adherents of the Haskalah were called, were all concerned with one basic task: how to achieve the legal and social emancipation of Jews, giving those equal rights and freedom of movement in all areas of cultural and economic life. (Abramson, 2003)

The maskilim of Western Europe sought to do this by reforming Jewish practice (the forerunners of the Reform and Conservative movements were created by German maskilim in the first four decades of the 19th century), often slavishly imitating Church practices in an attempt to make Judaism, and by extension Jews, more acceptable to German sensibilities. Western European maskilim urged Jews to abandon Yiddish, the patois based on medieval German, in favour of the vernacular language, along with other changes. As they achieved positive results – emancipation in France came soon after the Revolution, and was later confirmed by Napoleon; Germany took longer, but the cause showed incremental progress throughout the 19th century; many maskilim even went so far as to convert to Christianity. (Abramson, 2003)

Russian Jews culture was articulated in a varied of languages, especially in Russian, Hebrew and Yiddish languages. Jewish cultural expressions and practices in the pre-revolutionary period were essentially within the religious setting. The constant secularization of Jews, generally of all religions in the Russian Empire resulted in the increased growth of Jewish cultural expressions publicly through art and literature. Soviets had to increase their efforts for secularisation because of the Jews promotion of their culture through arts and literature; for which Soviets promoted Yiddish culture as an expression of Jews, discriminating the Hebrew culture. State sponsored experimentation with Yiddish culture was clearly visible during the initial stage of Soviet Union. Taking advantage of the new opportunities afforded them in the Soviet Union, many Jewish cultural producers also turned to Russian-language culture, playing important roles in the formation of pan-national Soviet culture. After the Second World War, the Soviet State strong handled all the cultural activities of Jews. Most of the state supported Yiddish cultural activists were performed during this period. The Jewish culture re-emerged after the Soviet fall. The re-emergence of the Jewish culture could be prominently noticed in today's Belarus Ukraine, Moldova and Lithuania. (Veidlinger, 2016)

It was regarded that Russia might not go along with the predominantly ethnic pattern of Jewish identity. If the identities coincide, there might be a chance that the Jewish assimilation will increase and they may even disappear from the nation. This is one possible development, but in Russia, we are dealing with a national identification of society. Since for Russians a Jew is an indication of nationality or even race, rather than religion, half-Jews will be regarded as Jews by their gentile neighbours. Thus the Jewish identity will not just disappear, any more than it disappeared in early 20th century Germany, where the Jews identified themselves ethnically as Germans. A more probable scenario is a change in the pattern of identity. The bearers of the Soviet-type model will diminish, and the ensuing generation will develop new guidelines for a non-prescribed and non-registered identity. In between keeping in mind the identity encounters between the Russian ethnicity and Jewish ethnicity, it could be considered that a compromise could be drawn between the two ethnicities and a kind of Russian Judaism could be developed with liberal ideology. Another effect of the collision would be the strengthening of elitism among the Jews with regard to their traditions and culture; this has already become apparent in the country. The Jews who believe them to be

elites provides the others Jews with the opportunity to migrate to Israel or to avail protection from the world Jewish community. (Chlenov, 2002)

Community

There are two major organizations of Russian Jewry. One is the federation of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Russia (Va'ad), and the other is the Russian-Jews Congress. For both of the organizations, anti-Semitism has been a cause of concerns. Although in the post-Soviet era the Russian leaders have officially condemned the incident. During the anti-Semitism, the Soviet government has taken no concrete action to control or crack down on anti-Semitism publications and organizations. (European Jewish Congress, 2012)

It is the union of Jews Religious Communities which is more responsible for maintaining and propagating Orthodox religious life. In each major cities and towns where Jews have sizeable populations and number of rabbis they have built many synagogues and almost recruited and financed from abroad. In certain localities of Jews, Chabad movement is active. Both the reform and conservative movements have introduced such denomination of Judaism to the Russian scene. Recently over ten reform congregation have been established, and for the first time native Russian rabbis have taken up their pulpits. In order to practice Judaism Jews, have all the facilities available: food, meat, wine, Matzot. The majority of Russian Jewry is secular and takes its Jews identity in cultural and ethno-national terms. (European Jewish Congress, 2012)

Choral Synagogue is the most important Jews site in Moscow located near the Bolshoy Spasoglinischevsky road (former Arkhipove Street) dates back to 1891. During the Soviet times especially on important holidays, Jews used to gather in front of the building as a means of protest. Today the building has become the focus of Jews religious life in Moscow. St. Petersburg's Moorish-style choral synagogue is another important religious place for Russian Jews dates back to 1893. In the state museums of Russia, there are an impressive collection of works by Chagall and other Jews artists. Permanent exhibition of Jews culture in the Jewish Autonomy Oblast can be seen in the historical museum of Birobidzhan. (European Jewish Congress, 2012)

Rebirth of Jewish Culture

The collapse of the Soviet Union is considered as a rebirth for Jews and brought many positive developments in their culture and life. In the initial years of the 1990s, the Russian Jews started showing their growing interest in learning about their religious heritage. One of major development in this field was the publication of a Russian translation of a volume of the Talmud in 1996. It was first such publication since before the Bolshevik Revolution. The publication marks the start of a series of Talmudic translations with the aim to provide information and religious teaching to Russian Jews who until 1996 had been available in Russia (Source: Library of Congress, July 1996).

In 1992 the circulation of monthly Jews magazine was around 3000 copies which increased to 50000 copies in 1995. During the same period, Moscow experienced a huge improvement in Jews conditions and their cultural life. In Moscow alone, three Universities, seven Jews School, Jewish Community Centre came into existence only within a few years. The last decades of the 20th Century also experienced a massive increase in Jews organizations.

In 1996, the foundation was laid for a new synagogue in Moscow, the first in the capital city: Moscow since the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. On this occasion, David Lerner, a British educator, told Time magazine, "Six years ago, Jews were still being beaten up in Minsk. Now there are three religious congregations, the Sabbath school, a youth movement and a volunteer welfare organization. Many Jews in the Russian Federation are willing to identify themselves as Jews openly. Jews have played a prominent role in the economy of the post-Soviet Russia in a way that far exceeds their numbers. In Moscow, the number of Jews has actually increased as a consequence of the migration of Jews from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Concerts of Yiddish songs have drawn sold out audiences. Observant Jews openly pray. By the mid-2000s, the climate for Jews was regarded as warm enough that many Jews who migrated to Israel returned. As a whole, though Jews in Russia remained a non-religious lot and many were married to non-Jews. (Hays J. , 2013)

About 80% of the population of contemporary Russia are Russians. The remaining 20% are members of more than 180 other nationalities. The fact is that in spite of the processes of ethnic assimilation throughout Russian history, many ethnic groups still retain their cultural identities. Cultural diversity in contemporary Russian society is determined by the historically rooted structure of ethnic and cultural space, and recent international and interregional migration. Although there is in general no relationship in Russia between ethnic heterogeneity and regional economic growth and convergence, there is an association between migration-induced diversity and growth, and there are regionally differentiated impacts of diversity on productivity. Regional spending on education and ethnic heterogeneity are inversely related. (Limonov, 2016)

Soviet Jewish national identity, like in Western Europe and America is the product of the historical processes resulting from interactions between Jews and non-Jews in the modern period. The redefinition of Jews as a national group was not entirely forced on them by the Soviet government. In many cases Jewish communities and their leaders welcomed it and contributed to its formation; this is especially seen in the early years of Bolshevik rule where there was a creation of Soviet Yiddish culture. After World War II Yiddish culture declined, but it had been created within a national form that persisted while emptied of its religious and cultural Jewish content. The label of the Jews as a nationality became a pervasive and constant factor in the lives of Soviet Jews in the years after World War II. They knew very little about Jewish religion and culture, but they continued to be identified as Jews by nationality through their official documents. (Vinogradov, 2010)

The view of the Jewish people as a nationality that Soviet Jews subscribe to may conflict with the perceptions of American Jews, many of whom emigrated from the same territory earlier and have never experienced the USSR. American Jews have a primarily religious Jewish identity, while many of the Soviet immigrants consider themselves Jews without a Jewish religion identity is constructed and dynamic; it evolves through historical processes. Soviet Jewish ethnic identity is neither “real” nor “artificial” from a narrow approach to the question of identity; while it is true that the ethnic identity was created through historical circumstances, especially by Soviet nationality policy. In fact, there is no Identity which is not historically created. The creation of Soviet Jewish identity does not make it an illusion. To Soviet Jews, it is meaningful and legitimate.

Keywords: Russian Jewry, Post-Soviet Russia, Soviet Jewish history, Migration of Jews Jewish identity, Antisemitism in Russia, Identity politics, Assimilation and integration, Perestroika and Glasnost

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