

Jewish emigration in post-independence period

[Countries](#), [India](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of these issues, we interviewed Ms Sifra Lentin, who is a Mumbai-based writer and historian, and the Mumbai History Fellow at Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations. When asked about the mass emigration of the Jews post-Independence, she says, “ When you talk about the reasons why they (the Bene-Israels) migrated there were Zionist emissaries who came from 1930s onwards and visited all the communities.

The reason that they (the emissaries) came to India was basically to create awareness amongst the community about the Zionist movement for the establishment of the state of Israel or a state for the Jews, irrespective of which part of the world they came from, because as you know the kind of persecution the Jews have faced especially the Holocaust which was initiated by Hitler. But the fact is that when they came to communities like the Bene-Israels, they had never ever faced that kind of discrimination or persecution it was a stable community and as well as very well adjusted with the host community But these emissaries had more of an influence on the younger people who felt they could help build the state of Israel.

The emigration started actually in the 1940s with the younger people going there, not the people who were older or the people who were married had families and children here. But what happened is with the youngsters going, the parents started following them. We had a Jewish Agency here, which was established in Bombay, to enabled this migration to Israel. It wasn't that anyone was forced, they went out of choice, they went because their children had gone there and some of them who were not doing very well felt that they probably had better economic opportunities in Israel. Yes, they

were aware of Zionism, but they were not strongly Zionists.” She added that for some families it was not a single reason but a combination of reasons which led them to emigrate. For some it was “ being with their children and those who had young families felt probably that their children would have better opportunities there”.

Another reason she states is that “ those who were not doing economically that well the government in Israel was you know giving housing, they were giving Ulpan (a training course in Hebrew) were given all facilities to assimilate into the new state of Israel, so a lot of people actually took that as an opportunity to go.” However according to her, the reasons for the emigration of the Baghdadi is very different. The Baghdadis “ were a more smaller and anglicised community than the Bene-Israel, so once the Indian Independence was in the making as it were, they felt that in some way they had no future here, because the leaders of their community sold their businesses (like the Sassoon family) and had already shifted offices to London, so most of them were working in other Baghdadi businesses and mills and banks so they left because they felt they wouldn’t be able to fit in, in a post-Independence India.”

To summarize her point she says, “ The reasons for both communities are very different but the end result is that the bulk of both the communities did emigrate to Israel. Among the Baghdadis a lot of them went to London some went to Australia, some went to even the U. S. Now there is a movement among the Bene-Israelis where they are going westwards. They are going to the U. S. and there are smaller communities being formed in the other parts

of the world.” When asked whether the status quo of the minority status issue is in any way having an impact on the Jewish emigration from India, she says, “ No, there is no question of it, those who stayed behind will continue staying behind, the emigration has actually come down to a trickle, so I don’t think it’s not that significant anymore. The numbers will remain fairly stable now. And I don’t think having minority status or not having minority status will actually impact the population today.”