

# Representation of anti-semitism in 'fiddler on the roof'

Sociology, Identity



“ You’re an honest, decent person. Even though you’re a Jew.” – Constable

In ‘ Fiddler on the roof’ the Jews become victims of rising anti-Semitism in Russia. Tevye and the Jews live life to themselves, with very little contact outside of the shtetl. To quote Tevye; “ we don’t bother them and so far, they don’t bother us, we live in simple peace and harmony”. The relationship between non-Jews and Jews is relatively peaceful. We witness this in the play, through the respect between the constable and Tevye. “ You are an honest, decent person. Even though you are a Jew”, this quote has direct correspondence to the uproar of anti-Semitic and stereotypical environment Russia was becoming. Despite the counselors understanding and respect for Tevye, he still labels him as a Jew, as if to say being honest and decent are not qualities possessed by Jewish people. At the end of Fiddler on the roof the Jews read about some of the vicious attacks in a nearby village, and are instructed to leave their homes. They responded by packing their bags and fleeing despite their wishes to stay. Tevye and his family decided to meet other family members in America, which is what a number of Jews in Russia would have done.

In the late 19th century, leading into the beginning of the 20th, Jews faced terrible anti-Semitism and assimilation. The beginning of this phenomenon started more or less with Tsar Nicholas who aimed to destroy all aspects of Judaism. He acted on this by forcing all Jewish men to join the army, and placed a specific extra tax on all Jews. He attempted to assimilate Jews with Russian culture, setting up specific schools for Jews. But it got brutal in the time of Tsar Alexander III, when the pogroms began. Jewish Shtetls were torn

apart, and mass persecution occurred. Along with this the Jews were also expelled from their homes, as seen in Fiddler on the Roof. Majority of Jews reacted by fleeing Russia in search for safety, often migrating to Israel, America or other parts of Europe. The concept of Zionism got a lot of uproar in this period.

Anti-Semitism is certainly not unheard of for Jews, and me and my family have experienced this as many Jews. In Fiddler on the roof, the Jews get expelled for being Jewish, except I have not experienced anti-Semitism to this extent in my life. Once, at a sporting match, the other team made rude comments saying we will be easy to beat, " because we are Jews". This is the only discrimination I have faced. Living in Australia in the present, this was certainly a shock to me. However, my story is so minor, when I hear the terrible stories of my great grandma's experiences in the holocaust. My great-grandma had her entire family persecuted, just for being Jewish. She knew nobody in the post-war world. After suffering this, she reacted by travelling as far away from Europe as she possibly could, resorting to Australia. I am very grateful for the country and age I live in, and how I feel safe to share my Jewish identity.