Comparing the Origins and Developments of Indian and Israeli Nationalist Movements

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Abstract: The writer seeks to frame the discussion of India's and Israel's shared historical trajectories with scholarship that analyzes the comparison of the origins and developments of Indian and Israeli nationalist movements. Scholarship in this field centers on four main areas of focus: the role of independence movements, the issues involved in land consolidation, the development of governance structures, and the post-independence relationship between India and Israel. Most of the contributions to the literature in this field had been undertaken by scholars in Pakistan, India, or Israel, with few Western scholars taking any interest in the evolution of this changing relationship. Furthermore, the existing discussion has centered on narrow topics, such as the relationship between India and Israel in the realm of wider global issues; for example, the two countries' nuclear programs, military relationships, and responses to terrorist threats. In this paper, the author analyzes the similar historical trajectories of India and Israel in the context of the aforementioned four areas of focus and also outlines potential avenues for future research in this field.

Introduction:

"Their cosmopolitan founding fathers – [Jawaharlal] Nehru and [Mohandas] Gandhi, [David] Ben-Gurion and [Chaim] Weizmann – and egalitarian ideals helped give the new nation-states, created within months of each other, their glow of heroic virtue. It mattered little during their early years that both countries were borne of...nationalist opportunism, of clumsy partition, war and ethnic cleansing."[1]

-Indian essayist Pankaj Mishra

Given the similarities in their respective independence movements, this scholarship offers fertile territory for the field of comparative history. Scholarship on the origins and developments of Indian and Israeli nationalist movements combines around four main themes: the role of political leaders in furthering independence movements, the issues involved in land consolidation, the development of structures of political representation in government, and the post-independence relationship between India and Israel. Given that both countries' nationalist movements stemmed from relationships with British colonialism, the growing economic and defense ties between the two countries—estimated at over $4.4 billion in 2013—as well as the placement and growth of democratic structures in both countries, one might be apt to trace the foundations of the India-Israel dynamic to a shared historical trajectory. Yet despite some common threads—opposition to British colonialism, independence through partition, and political leadership at statehood— a plethora of differences between the two case studies exist. A comparative examination of these distinctions becomes necessary in order to understand both the similar and different historical trajectories of the India-Israel relationship.

An appropriate discussion of the field of comparative history comes from American historian Raymond Grew, who notes:

> Comparison is most enlightening when…attention is paid to the intricate relationships between the elements compared and the particular societies in which they are located…The search is for patterns of behavior and circumscribed hypotheses, and it is as likely to result in the recognition of unexpected connections between aspects of society previously thought to be unrelated as in general theory.[2]

The goal of this scholarship will follow Grew's methodology, comparing the origins of nationalism in

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[1]Mishra, Pankaj. "Purification Rites." P U L S E. March 29, 2009. Accessed December 10, 2014. http://pulsemedia.org/2009/03/29/purification-rites/.

[2]Grew, Raymond. "The Case for Comparing Histories." *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (1980): 773.

India and Israel, how these origins influence the relationships between India and Israel, and, drawing from Grew, illuminating any "unexpected connections" that scholars may have overlooked or otherwise assumed were "unrelated" in the dynamic.

A survey of the existing literature on the India-Israel relationship mostly chronicles the post-1992 period, which was followed normalization of diplomatic ties between the two countries. Agricultural and energy trade networks have significant influence on the linkages between India and Israel (given the respective importance of both for each country), yet the existing scholarship often yields limited or no discussion on these crucial post-independence relationships. Moreover, scholars have had limited discussions about comparing both countries' parliamentary systems, particularly in terms of the coalition-building efforts necessary for minority groups to articulate their voices in the political process. A comparative study discussing how the origins and development of Indian and Israeli nationalist movements have had an influence on successful independence movements, land consolidation struggles, political representation in governance structures, and post-independence economic and military relationships would fill the gaps in existing literature and contribute to a broader explanation of the evolving dynamics between India and Israel.

Comparing Nationalist Movements:

Historians and political scientists have observed many similarities between Indian and Israeli nationalist movements—a shared opposition to British colonialism, the use of partition as a means of for achieving independence, and the development of political leadership at the beginnings of statehood. With regard to nationalist movements, Arthur G. Rubinoff, a University of Toronto political scientist, observes that Jewish nationalism in Palestine and Muslim nationalism on the Subcontinent both pursued independence [from British colonialism] through partition as the only means that a minority could secure its national identity.[3] These partition movements stirred prolonged confrontations with neighbors that still affect both countries to this day: persisting border claims on India's northwest frontier still influence India's geopolitical relations with its neighbors. In addition, Israel has sought territorial claims in the Sinai

Peninsula and Gaza Strip with Egypt, the Golan Heights on its border with Syria, and the West Bank with Jordan for population and security purposes.[4] Aside from these unresolved conflicts over territory, another similarity between the Indian and Israeli independence movements lies in what Swedish political scientists Ulrika Möller and Isabell Schierenbeck termed "political leadership at nascent statehood." Referencing the India-Israel comparison, they noted that "[t]he key political leader in all cases – Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, David Ben-Gurion and Yasir Arafat – *both* mobilized and orchestrated the national struggle for independence *and* was the decisive political decision-maker at nascent statehood" in symbolic (heritage/destiny) strategic (bargain/restrain), and relational (informal/formal) terms.[5] Moreover, the "continuity of their political leadership over time" allows examination of both countries for the purpose of understanding the pivotal roles these leaders played in their respective independence movements.[6]

Aside from these similarities, the Indian and Israeli independence movements differ in the levels of violence involved in achieving statehood, minority rights in the newly created state, and the overall self-conception of statehood. Though the Indian case had prominent non-violent characteristics—perhaps best exemplified through Gandhi's support of civil disobedience as a mechanism for achieving independence—Israeli political scientist Ayelet Harel-Shalev notes the violent partition process and violent competition, particularly between Hindus and Muslims.[7] In the Israeli independence case, various paramilitary organizations, including the Haganah and Irgun, were formed for the purpose of Israeli independence efforts. Regarding minority rights in both newly created states, Harel-Shalev distinguishes the Indian case from the Israeli by asserting, "India's Muslim minority has more rights than the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel."[8] Within political society, Harel-Shalev further illustrates the differences among the Indian and Israeli cases by noting that "in Israel, the Arab minority was in fact perceived as a fifth column, and it has been identified as a national minority. In contrast, the Muslim minority in India pushes for religious and cultural autonomy and the enactment of affirmative action based on religion, without demanding recognition as a nationality minority."[9] Additionally, the distinct

[3]Rubinoff, Arthur G. "Normalization of India-Israel Relations: Stillborn for Forty Years." *Asian Survey* 35, no. 5 (1995): 489.

[4]Ibid.
[5]Möller, Ulrika, and Isabell Schierenbeck. "Chapter 2: Situating the Study." In *Political Leadership, Nascent Statehood and Democracy: A Comparative Study*, 14-16. London: Routledge, 2014.

[6]Ibid.

[7]"Chapter 6: The Complexity of Majority-Minority Relations in Deeply Divided Democracies." In *Plurality and Citizenship in Israel: Moving beyond the Jewish/Palestinian Civil Divide*, edited by Dan Avnon and Yotam Benziman, by Ayelet Harel-Shalev, 96. London: Routledge, 2010.

[8]Ibid, 105.

[9]Ibid.

independence movements in each country led to differing conceptions of statehood. The essential difference includes the fact that India is a secular democratic state whereas Israel is an ethnic democracy with what Harel-Shalev refers to as "differentiated citizenship discourses" because Israel is "first … the state of the Jewish people."[10] This difference has led to Israel enabling minorities to integrate into society as individuals of their own collective identities (Bedouins, Christians, et cetera), with a special recognition of the Arab minority as an ethnic and linguistic minority with limited collective rights, including independent schooling and having Arabic as a national language. However, the Arab minority in Israel—unlike the Muslim minority in India, a state which does not explicitly define itself as a religious state—is not a part of the definition of the Israeli state, and is seeing the reemergence of attempts to exclude it further from an Israeli identity that is being defined as both Jewish, and Zionist.[11]

Land Consolidation Efforts:

One of the more difficult issues involved in a comparative history of the Indian and Israeli nationalist movements—simply due to the dearth of literature comparing the two case studies on this issue—continues to be land consolidation efforts. Both countries have similar characteristics in this regard, in that intercommunal strife during both countries' respective independence periods catalyzed the flight of refugees, leading to persisting land disputes on frontier or periphery regions. Although the land consolidation issue involved the movement of refugees, in the Indian case study, the land consolidation focused on establishing separate states, with a Pakistani state created for Muslims and an Indian state created with a Hindu majority. In the Israeli case study, massive population exchanges occurred, but Arab refugees in the case of Israel did not have a 'state' from which to emigrate, creating a long-term regional refugee situation.

In both countries, one similarity includes continuing land disputes on the peripheries of both India and Israel. In Israel, land conflicts within the Sinai Peninsula have been mostly resolved and Israel has unilaterally withdrawn from the Gaza Strip, but settlements continue to expand within the West Bank and the Golan Heights, a result of growing demographics partially caused by both the Law of Return, which allows Jews from around the world to immigrate to Israel, as well as natural population growth. With regard to India, a 2012 article in The Economist argued that "disputed borders are both a cause and a symptom of tensions

between big [neighbors] in South Asia," as pressures "between India and China flare on occasion, especially along India's far northeastern and northwestern borders." Further complicating the situation in India, the article notes that when the British colonialists "withdrew from India, [they] left a dangerous legacy of carelessly or arbitrarily drawn borders," further complicated by the mountainous topographies around India's borders. Ultimately, both cases feature failures to agree and demarcate precise borders, ensuring that future disagreements would continue to flare up.

Development of Governance Structures:

The development of governance structures proves to be one of the areas where both countries' independence movements have influenced their similar historical trajectories. While both countries have similarities—including the persistence of democratic institutions—such common threads cannot be analyzed without examining the status of minorities because these countries are democratic states with egalitarian ideals. Although both countries utilize a parliamentary system of government, they also possess governance structures that reflect their states' attempts to accommodate large minority groups in the political process. India's federalism and a secular democracy provides a sharp contrast to the Israeli unitary structure which is defined as having both "Jewish and democratic" orientations. [12] Both countries provide collective rights for minorities, but the comparison can become difficult when analyzing the spectrum of rights for minorities in both countries. In one respect, the wide spectrum of sectarian groups within both countries' populations, along with the shared legacy of the British parliamentary system of government have influenced the numerous political parties that have emerged in both countries. The result is a necessity of parliamentary coalition-building in order to govern, among other reasons. In Israel, candidates affiliated with political parties vying for seats in the parliament, known as the Knesset, must meet the electoral threshold of 3.25% of the vote, with no single party in Israeli history ever achieving and sustaining an outright governable majority. [13] In contrast, India's parliamentary structure possesses no electoral threshold, which, along with India's large population and natural diversity, have contributed to the growth of a party structure that allowed parties—such as the Congress Party—to reach across sectarian divides and maintain a viable coalition in Indian politics for several decades. [14]

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[10]Ibid, 104.

[11]Ibid, 106.

[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

Post-Independence Economic and Military Relationships:

The post-independence relationship between India and Israel has evolved from a tricky balance of India hedging its own national interests in recognizing Israel, but not establishing formal ties to what Pakistani international relations scholar Mahwish Hafeez calls a "common national psyche," which makes India and Israel "natural allies."[15] This "common national psyche" stemmed from economic relationships through agriculture, as well as military relationships through increased defense trade. India initially opposed United Nations membership for Israel in 1949, but in September 1950, after Israel had been in existence for two years and been participating in the United Nations, the Indian government accorded recognition but deferred the process of normalizing relations so as not to offend domestic its own Muslim population and neighboring Muslim-majority states.[16] Political scientist Arthur G. Rubinoff numbered India's Muslims at over 11% of the country's population, making Indian politicians—especially those on dominant Congress Party tickets—considerate of Muslim attitudes towards Israel in the formulation of Indian foreign policy issues during the first few decades of the post-independence period.[17] After Israel, Britain, and France invaded Egypt during the Suez Crisis of 1956, India interpreted this move as the reimposition of European colonialism in the Afro-Asian World, and shifted its attitude towards Israel from "neglect" of Israel in the international arena to "antagonism" for Israel's military actions.[18] After Nehru's death in 1964, his successors compensated for India's relationship with Israel by allowing bilateral relations to deteriorate, leading to reduced diplomatic ties between the two nations.[19] However, India's wars with Pakistan added a twist to the India-Israel relationship, as Israel secretly supplied India with arms, provided intelligence, and delivered military support to India during its 1965 and 1972 wars with Pakistan. This paved the way for enhanced relations and in 1977, Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan went to India for covert talks to establish formal diplomatic relations.[20] After

Israel's invasion and occupation of Lebanon in 1982, Indian Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi perceived Israel as a "relentlessly expansionist" government and downgraded the Israeli mission in Bombay.[21] After her son Rajiv succeeded to the prime ministership following her assassination, Indian hostility towards Israel increased, but his defeat in the 1989 elections led to the accession of P.V. Narasimha Rao's Congress government to restart the process of normalization after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Arab governments, many of whom had friendly relations with India—especially considering India's need for swift passage of its relatively large amount of trade through the Suez Canal—were no longer able to exert significant influence on India's relations with Israel due to the depressed price of crude oil during the 1980s. In the words of international relations scholars Rajan Menon and Swati Pandey, this event signaled the end of India's "tortured formulation" of a relationship with Israel. In terms of the aforementioned "common national psyche," Hafeez notes that both countries had been extending their respective roles in Muslim lands, both saw themselves as democracies surrounding by hostile and implacable adversaries, and both had shared histories of having struggled under British imperialism. Moreover, both countries have seen their relationship grow in recent decades as a mechanism of countering Pakistani influence, particularly Pakistan's growing nuclear program, with then-Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon proposing in 1983 that both Israel and India "act jointly to destroy" Pakistan's "budding nuclear capability" and Indian scientists visiting Israel one year later "to discuss their apprehensions over the Pakistani nuclear program."[26]

Existing literature details the growing billion-dollar trade relations between India and Israel as one example of the positive relationship between the two countries, but some elements of those trade relations can serve as examples of American historian Raymond Grew's "unexpected connections" of comparative history, including agriculture. In terms of the agricultural links between the two countries, few scholars discuss any relationship between India and Israel regarding the

[15]Hafeez, Mahwish. "India-Israel Relations." *Strategic Studies* 29, no. 4 (2009): 65.

[16]Abadi, Jacob. "Israeli-Indian Relations: Futile Attempts at Rapprochment." *Journal of Third World Studies* 8, no. 2 (1991): 161.
For more information, see: Kumaraswamy, P.R. "India's Recognition of Israel, September 1950." *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1995): 124-38.

[17]"Chapter 11: India, Israel, and the US Factor." In *U.S.-Israeli Relations in a New Era: Issues and Challenges after 9/11*, edited by

Eytan Gilboa and Efraim Inbar, by Cherian Samuel. London: Routledge, 2009.

[18]Rubinoff, Arthur G. "Normalization of India-Israel Relations: Stillborn for Forty Years." *Asian Survey* 35, no. 5 (1995): 487.

[19] Ibid.
[20]"Chapter 11: India, Israel, and the US Factor." In U.S.-Israeli Relations in a New Era: Issues and Challenges after 9/11, edited by Eytan Gilboa and Efraim Inbar, by Cherian Samuel. London: Routledge, 2009.

[21] Ibid.

former's Green Revolution in the 1960s, a turning point for India's agriculture. Despite this fact, one modern development in the relationship is the creation of a "second" Green Revolution (transitioning from producing sustainable agriculture in the "first" Green Revolution to diversifying the food basket in the "second" Green Revolution) as an example of a flourishing post-independence link. A recent Jerusalem Post editorial detailed the growing Israel-India cooperation in agriculture and water technology through both government-sponsored initiatives and private business deals.[22] This is significant as a shared interest because of the similarities in geography and agriculture between Israel and India. In 2014, Israeli and Indian government institutions jointly launched an online network that provides real-time communications between Indian farmers and Israeli agricultural technology experts, and Israel is in the process of setting up 28 agricultural training centers throughout India.[23] Israeli universities have teamed with ten Indian "agricultural centers of excellence" to increase crop yields by enhancing crop "micro-irrigation" techniques. Given India's growing need to feed over a billion people, one of the growing areas of cooperation in the India-Israel relationship will certainly be agriculture.[24]

The evolution of coalition-building in the Indian and Israeli parliamentary systems – often termed national unity governments – remains an under-discussed topic in scholarship despite its centrality to both countries' modern political systems. Given the diversity of the minority groups in both countries, one might better understand the presence of over a dozen parties with seats (and eight additional parties vying for seats in upcoming elections) in the 120-member Israeli Knesset, with each party essentially acting as a voice in government for various sectarian groups. Of particular importance is how the parallel history of both countries influenced the development and necessity of "national unity" governments as a mechanism of dealing with diverse factions and minority groups. In India's federalist structure, there are 6 national parties, 36 state parties, and 219 regional parties with some representation in either house of the Indian Parliament.[25] Broadly speaking, this diversity in political representation in national legislatures has given both countries a variety of challenges in dealing

with minority group representation, with "major" parties having to accommodate sometimes the smallest of

minority parties in order to achieve a governable majority—particularly in the Israeli case study. However, despite this range of political parties in both India and Israel, the Congress Party in India has prevailed as reaching across sectarian divides throughout several decades of India's post-independence era. Few parallels exist in the comparatively smaller Israeli political milieu, although scholars would certainly be apt to explore this issue more fully in separate scholarship.

Conclusion:

One growing trend in the literature is scholarship on the responses to both India and Israel to external and internal terrorist threats as well as defense and security collaborations between the two countries. Given the discussion of a "common national psyche" between Israel and India, especially regarding the collective threats they have faced in recent years, one could justify a comparative historical study on this aspect alone. As Pakistani scholar Sanam Noor notes, "the fact that both India and Israel are facing insurgencies at home (Kashmir and Palestine) offers common ground for their cooperation in counter-insurgency tactics."[26] Moreover, existing literature documents the decades-long military relationship between India and Israel, one that preceded the establishment of formal diplomatic ties in 1992. In times of war, Israel has been extremely helpful to India by lending logistical support to India during the latter's wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1972. There is also evidence of Israeli assistance to India during the 1999 Kargil war between India and Pakistan, with the former Israeli ambassador to India, Yehoyada Haim, admitting that Israel had assisted India by providing remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs), which proved to be helpful for the Indians operating in the difficult terrain of Kargil.[27] This strategic defense relationship continued in the decades following India's conflicts in the 1990s, as Indian international relations scholar P.R. Kumaraswamy observed: "by [the] early 21st century Israel had become India's second largest arms supplier and India, the largest export destination for Israeli arms."[28] Israel and India do

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[22]Beck, Noah. "India and Israel's Strategic Ties." *The Jerusalem Post*, August 21, 2013. Accessed December 9, 2014.

[23]"The Indo-Israeli Agriculture Project." MASHAV: Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation. September 1, 2013. Accessed December 9, 2014.

[24]Uniyal, Vijeta. "India-Israel Agriculture Cooperation: The Quiet Revolution." The Times of Israel. March 26, 2014. Accessed December 10, 2014.

[25]"Political Parties in India." Elections in India. December 1, 2014. Accessed December 10, 2014. http://www.elections.in/political-parties-in-india/.

[26]Noor, Sanam. "Indo-Israel Relations: Repercussions for Pakistan." *Pakistan Horizon* 57, no. 3 (2004): 93.

[27]Ibid, 97.

[28]"Chapter 16: Contextualising Israel in India's Middle East Policy." In *India and West Asia in the Era of Globalisation*, edited by Anwar

not necessarily have common adversaries, but because of their similarities in fighting terrorism within their respective borders and peripheries, they cooperate in the defense trade. Areas like counterterrorism, border management, early warning systems, small arms, ammunition, missiles and missile systems began to dominate the Indo-Israeli security agenda, with military-security ties emerging as the most prominent and hence widely talked about dimension of the bilateral relations.[29] Given that both countries also share significant concerns about Pakistan's nuclear program and Pakistan's role in combatting terrorism, scholars would be justified in exploring the India-Israel dynamic in terms of responses to terrorist threats as well as defense and security collaborations.

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[29]Ibid.

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