

INDIA AND ISRAEL:

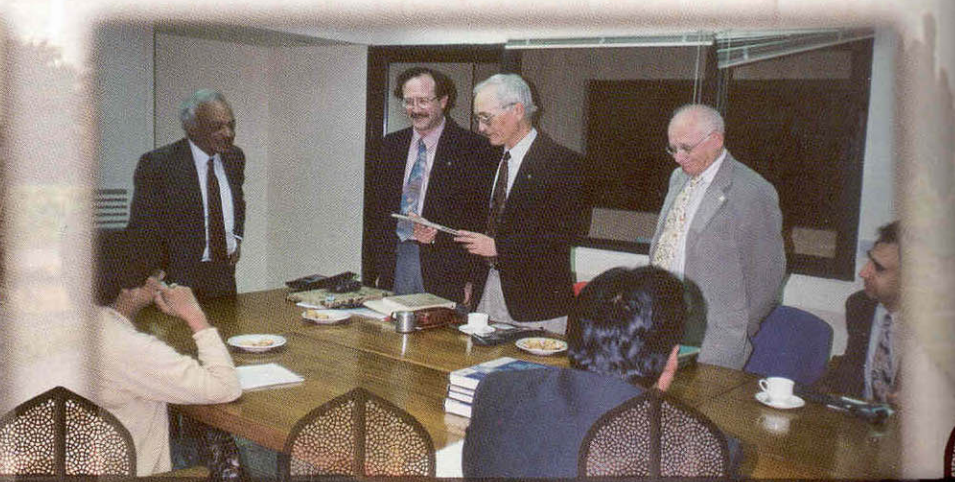
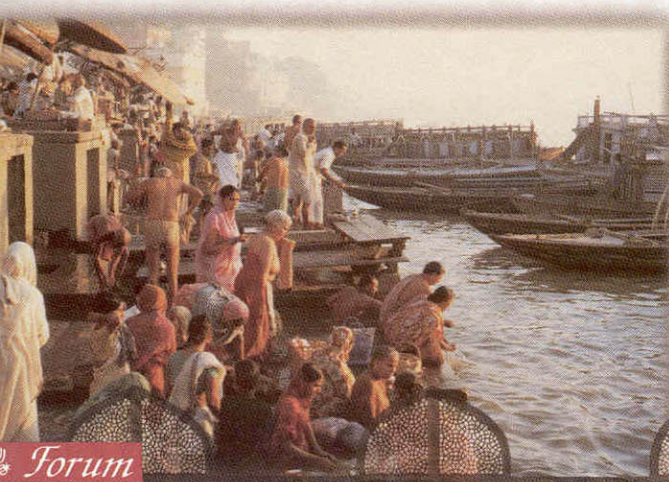
Almost exactly one thousand years ago, the Hindu ruler of Malabar presented a copper tablet to Yosef Rabban, the leader of the Jewish community of Shinkali (Cranganore) on the southwestern tip of the Indian subcontinent. Still prized by the Cochin Jewish community, the tablet symbolizes the long-standing flourishing Jewish trading relationships and settlements on the west coast of India. Unlike the temporary flood of Spanish-Portuguese Jewish immigrants to Portuguese Goa, who escaped religious persecution at home only to face a local inquisition in 1560, Jewish settlements at Cochin and elsewhere found a warm welcome under local Indian rulers. They were protected, allowed freedom of worship and were granted considerable communal autonomy. In general, the tolerant spirit that pervaded the highly multicultural Indian subcontinent was conducive to Jewish life, prosperity and contributions to the rich fabric of Indian society.

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Although India is one of the world's largest and most populous countries, and Israel is one of the smallest, their modern history shows several interesting parallels. Both were under British control and both achieved independence in 1948, although they both had to fight major wars to achieve a fragile, but lasting peace with their neighbors. Both represented major ancient cultures with a tradition that highly valued learning; and both looked to modern science and technology and the development of their human intellectual resources as a driving force for transforming their economies. Both have been largely successful.

Scientific relationships between individual Israeli and Indian scientists have since blossomed into a formal binational Agreement for Scientific Cooperation in the Exact Sciences between the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the Indian National Academy of Sciences. The agreement was signed by a high-ranking Indian delegation during its visit to Israel in 1993. Interest in cooperation in the Life Sciences has also continued to grow, and was boosted by a 1997 delegation of four senior Israeli scientists, who visited India to discuss potential joint research projects related to the International Human Genome Program.

In 1998, the President of the Israel Academy, Professor Jacob Ziv, headed a high-level delegation to India (see below) which discussed ideas for expanding the Agreement and holding joint Indian-Israeli workshops in areas where scientific ties already exist. The delegation also visited and was warmly received at many important Indian laboratories and government offices. Two specific workshop topics were further discussed and confirmed in a June 1998 letter from Indian Academy President Dr. S. Varadarajan. They were seen as one way of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the independence of both countries.



AN OLD-NEW PARTNERSHIP

A joint Indian-Israel seminar on "Current Trends in Condensed Matter Physics and Statistical Mechanics", organized by Prof. T. V. Ramakrishnan and Prof. Y. Imri, was held in New Delhi in January 1999. Prof. S. Dattagupta, Foreign Secretary of the Indian Academy, also served as the Secretary of the Indian Organizing Committee. Topics included soft condensed matter, mesoscopic phenomena, quantum chaos, and nonequilibrium statistical mechanics. Some 20-25 senior participants from each side attended.

The Israel Academy also has close ties with the Indian University Grants Commission, with whom it signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 1994. During the Academy's 1997 visit, the idea of joint meetings was discussed, and plans are underway for a ten-person trilateral (Israel/USA/India) workshop on Framing: Narrative, Metaphysics and Perception. Indian literature is famous for its abundance of "frame narratives" in which an outer story serves as a frame in which other stories are embedded. Frames may proceed inward, layer after layer, or they may overlap or shift in complex ways. Thus, although Vyasa supposedly composed the Mahabharata, according to its own account it reaches us via a Suta storyteller in the Naimisa Forest who heard what Vaisampayana, Vyasa's student, once told King Janamejaya. The monumental epic itself is studded with stories within stories, whose frames can descend and be superimposed at a dizzying pace. Similarly, in the Ramayana, Hanuman tells Sita the story of her own life; and -- switching to a Western example -- the disguised Odysseus sings his own story within the Odyssey.

Individual exchanges and contacts between Indian scholars also continue. For example, Prof. K. L. Chopra of the Indian Institute of Technology spent two weeks visiting Israeli colleagues in October 1998. Another Indian Academy delegation, headed by Vice President M. S. Valiathan, visited Israel in the Fall of 1998 (see below), reciprocating Prof. Ziv's previous visit. The group spent an intensive four days visiting laboratories and senior officials at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and the Weizmann Institute of Science.

The positive atmosphere generated by these visits and joint activities was well summarized by Vice President Valiathan, who wrote, "I hope that our Academies will facilitate Indo-Israeli cooperation in science, which I am convinced is poised for rapid growth." Similarly, the Israel Academy's Head of Foreign Relations, Bob Lapidot, notes that "we are quite excited by the increased joint scientific activity between our countries and look forward to ever closer ties."



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