



IDENTITY ISSUES AND JEWS IN RUSSIA

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Abstract: *The difficulties of Jewish identity in Russia have a long and complicated history. Jews in Russia have encountered numerous hardships, including periods of tolerance and discrimination. For generations, Jews have lived on the region of modern-day Russia. They have a rich cultural and religious background, with Judaism playing an important role in shaping their identity. Throughout history, however, Jews in Russia have experienced persecution, pogroms, and limits on their rights and prospects. For Jews in Russia, the subject of identity frequently involves a fight between assimilation and preservation of their Jewish heritage.*

Some Jews have decided to integrate into Russian society by learning the Russian language, culture, and traditions. Others have attempted to keep their Jewish identity through upholding religious practices, cultural norms, and a sense of Jewish communal membership. It is crucial to emphasize that the lives and viewpoints of Jews in Russia vary, and generalizations may not convey the community's diversity and individual experiences. In Russia, Jewish identity difficulties represent a complex interaction of historical, cultural, religious, and societal influences that continue to impact their sense of self and belonging in Russian culture.

This paper tries to investigate the historical, cultural and identical facets of the Jewish community from the pre-Soviet era to the Soviet and finally to the contemporary times. The paper will also explore anti-Jewish sentiments or Anti-Semitism and propaganda in the said periods, Jews relations with Christians, Soviet policies vis-à-vis the Jews and their movement across continents in search of safe havens.

Keywords: *Jews, Anti-Semitism, Soviet, Assimilation, Preservation, Identity, culture*

Introduction:

The Soviet constitution or the Soviet national policy has been unequivocal in its long-avowed stance against any laws or regulations that allow public or internal violence or discrimination against individuals of any kind of minority. Equality between different social groups in the Soviet Union has always been the rule. There were several deliberate instances of discrimination that have occurred among many non-Russian groups, the Crimean Tatars, Georgians, Chechens, Armenians and others. Nonetheless, discrimination was not significant against the Soviets, since the time of Alexander I.



These were all controversial historical facts in Czarist Russia with a long history of religious and legal discrimination in Russia. While post war Soviet anti-Jewish politics assumes the character of forced assimilation, it is not true that this is the only form of anti-Jewish discrimination. The hatred propaganda dominated the USSR, and the Jews were forced to live in the quiet neighbourhood.

In the face of centuries of violent persecution against the Jews, they continued to be a significant and substantial minority in Soviet society. The accurate figure of Jews in the Soviet Union in 1945 was unknown, but it was nearly 2 million. The Jews comprised 2% of the total Russian population which consists of 136 million people after the war. From 1950s to 1970s, the Jewish population grew steadily. The 1959 census reported “2,268,000 million Jews in the USSR. Two years later, in the 1961 census the Jewish population was 2,468,000, and a few years later, approximately 2,151,000 were reported according to the census.” Till the beginning of the 20th century, Russian Jews primarily resided in the rural areas, mostly within the Jewish communities. By the 20th century, however, at least 2% of the population of Jews resided in the main cities of USSR like Kiev, Moscow, Leningrad, Minsk, Riga, Tashkent, Novosibirsk, Baku, Vilna, Kharkov, Tbilisi, Riga, Odessa, and Lvov.

Their influence on the development, expansion and cultural advancement of these cities has been noteworthy. Prior to the war, 61% worked as artists or skilled professionals and only 30% of the Jews were engaged in mere manual work. The existence and influence of the Jewish post Soviet society was more appealing to Jews. Nearly 50% of the solicitors in Kharkov and Leningrad were Jews and 10 percent of Jews were in the “Soviet Academy of Science” and in 34% of “Soviet film industry”. Despite their contributions and donations to the Soviet community, the Jews did not enjoy true liberty or equality in the Soviet Union. Before and after the war, the Soviets abandoned their religious practices in accordance with “Russian” norms and culture, stopped talking and dissuaded any participating groups in support of the self-determination of the Jewish community or the Zionist doctrines. Moreover, the Jews needed the appropriate political representation in the Soviet government, which was never recognized as an identifiable social and ethnic group. The consequence was, the Soviets Jews were totally deprived of any remarkable political representation in the USSR all the way throughout the 20th century.

In the Union of Socialist Soviet Republic, the number of Jews population is 2,600,945, the latest figures according to the census. Since the last census in Russia since 1897, the Jewish population has grown to less than 4 %. In the same period the normal population growth was 40 %. The minor upsurge in the Jewish population is attributed here to the fact that many Russian Jews have migrated during the time to America and Palestine. According to the Nationalities Policy of 2011 it is claimed that “in the period between 1897 and 1923, 55000 Jews left Russia for America, 18,000 for Palestine and 31,000 for several other republics” (Nationalities Policy Under Stalin, 2011). These numbers do not comprise Poland's Jewish population, Lithuania and other states which were earlier the part of the Russian Empire and at present are the autonomous republics.

The Jews constituting the Diaspora, whether in Europe, North Africa or elsewhere in the world during the Middle Ages, were looked upon by the local population as members of a different people or “race”. Not necessarily because the Jews themselves were so racially homogeneous, but almost certainly they became more mixed over time due to conversions and other interactions with the local populations which were homogenous.

Finally, several re-definitions appeared in the twentieth century. The rise of anti-Nazi resistance meant both the Jews as a "Semitic race", and the rise of the Zionism that led to the Jewish national-state renaissance, raising the main question what a Jew is or isn't. Today, it has been found that the identity of Israeli Jews (even immigrants) is essentially linked to Israeli citizenship. To the Jews (ultra-orthodox) for whom any separation between hooded people and religion is a completely



foreign concept, some are assimilated as "classical" reformed Jews, for whom ethnicity is no longer a basic component of their Jewish identity and "secular" non-religious Jews, who may be atheist, but still manage to remain committed and associated with Jewish social life.

Anti-Jewish Discrimination and Propaganda:

The appropriate way to explain the Jewish problem in the Soviet Union is the difference between anti-Semitism, i.e. anti-Jewish propaganda, and the policy of discrimination on one side and the policy of enforced accommodation on the other. Despite the official principle of equality of rights for all citizens, there is a clear approach to anti-Semitism in various sectors of the USSR. It remained in many countries before the last war and some of these types of cases can still be seen. However, the difference, as noted earlier, is violently rejected by the USSR, as evidenced from many facts and statistics. The abolition of Jews from the public service and the representative bodies of the state, which represents a drastic change over a generation, should be taken into account primarily. There was a large number of Jews in the Soviet administration and in the diplomatic service immediately after the introduction of the new era and many years later thereafter. (Hays, 2011)

It began to decline in the 1930s. In the elections for the Supreme Soviet of the different republics in 1938 the percentage of Jews among the elected, taking all the republics together, was even higher than their share in the population. But the circumstances were different in several individual democracies, such as Ukraine, where 4.9 percent were Jews, but their share in the Supreme Soviet fell to less than one percent. (Garbuzov, 2005) Since the members were mostly designated, this may be considered as a proof of a clear policy of discrimination. Jews are excluded from the USSR's diplomatic service, which they once represented most prominently. None of the Jewish ambassadors is present today and no Jews have been recruited into diplomat training schools. In the field of trade, Foreign Service the Jews have had great abilities but they are denied. The same applies to military service, where Jews are also debarred from leadership positions. From the end of the Second World War to 1953, over 300 high-ranking Jewish Army officers retired, including 63 generals. Today there are only a few Jews left in such positions and no Jews is introduced to military academics (F.F, 1958).

Thus, Jews are deprived of their national identity by eradicating Yiddish's Glossy language and culture, and denigrating the Jewish religion, which has been continuing since the founding of the Soviet regime. In addition to the campaign of enmity and abuse, its exceptional feature is the closure of synagogues, the deprivation of Jews of their religious leadership, and preventing them from performance of their religious duties.

Jewish-Christians Relations:

The Jew- Christian relations were strained in the 19th century and often failed due to public controversies. Christian churches, especially the Roman Catholics, were the hardest supporters of the old order; they identified the Jews as the main beneficiaries of the French Revolution and the vehicles of liberal, secular, anti-revolutionary and revolutionary theories. The controversy between Russians and Orthodox Church in Russia has released the most public and extreme manifestation of religious anti-Semitism. In Church's view, the Jews sought to undermine the tsar, the foundations of Russian Orthodox and Russian society. In 1881-82 the role Jews and the violent incidents of 1905 were forgiven and simultaneously provoked by the Church and the tsarist authorities. (Stefon, 2012).

In the 15th century, the Russian Orthodox Church became a self-controlled organization. Prior to that the heads of the Russian Orthodox Church were called Metropolitans, and these Metropolitans were elected by the Patriarch from Constantinople. Hence, the Russian Orthodox



Church has played a key role for over 500 years.

Russian Orthodox churches were liberated from the intervention of politics. The Russian Orthodox Church had a long- lasting system of governance due to its independent structure and strong political influence. The Russian Orthodox Church occupies about one-third of the Russian territory. Regarding liberation and sovereignty, the church enjoyed freedom in religious affairs towards which state policies were also effectively inclined being influenced by the Orthodox Church. However, the religious sovereignty of the Church ensured not only freedom but also influenced state policies during Kiev's Russia which could last until the Great Peter's Rule.

The reforms introduced by Alexei Ramanov in collaboration with Patriarch Nikon in the 17th century influenced all aspects of divine services and the Charter of the Russian Orthodox Church. These reforms continued until Peter the Great, which changed many canonical rules, spiritual institutions, church governance practices, and many written and unwritten traditions. Almost every facet of the religious and cultural life of the Russian people has changed. The relationship between the state and the church deteriorated and the will of the emperor became God's will. However, these reforms were considered a complete disaster of religious and cultural heritage, leading to the adoption of Christianity in Russia.

In the Soviet era, the Russian state was declared an atheist, Russia's newly elected Communist authority separated the church from the state adopted by the first decree in January 1918. In the first few years of the Soviet rule, the Russian Orthodox Church was a major target of state anti-religious policy because the Russian Orthodox Church was closely related to the Russian Monarchy in the Czarist Empire. Consequently, all religious organizations were put under the policy of radical atheism.

The Chapter of Defense:

The simplest and perhaps the most decent way of self-defense was practically impossible under the totalitarian regime which reacted violently to any kind of effort towards this. Enraged masses of Soviet Jews due to the policy of discrimination and forced "integration" against them, they reacted with increased religious feelings and greater interest in their affairs. Despite these reactions very little was done to redress their grievances instead, a pall of intimidating atmosphere of terror enveloped the Jews with threats of insecurity hanging over them. (Levi, 2007). This fear was intensified by recent arrests and deportations to Siberia, the leaders of Jewish communities in Moscow and Leningrad, who were sentenced to twelve years in jail. For an indefinite period of time unanticipated threats and intimidations subdued them into an iron discipline within the communist movement. Notwithstanding this, the first who transmitted the dreadful mystery that endangered the authors of the Yaddish in USSR was strongly opposed by the Jewish Communists in Poland. Thus, the Soviet jury protected against this attack by other nations.

The primary concern of the protection of Soviet Jews against the hostile policy of the authorities should be borne by the representative bodies of the Jewish people and the Jewish public opinion who overwhelmingly supported their cause (Jr., 2005). There is hardly a Jewish institution in the world that has not raised voice in the opposition, including the "World Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith and the Jewish Labor Party" in the United States. Publishing information about the Jewish situation in the Soviet Union and the proper form of contacting the Soviets and trying to get the sympathy and support of the general public at the same time are some issues. (Pittsburgh, 1938).

Soviet Migration Policy:

Several features of the Soviet immigration system were contradictory between 1948 and the mid-



1980s. They strengthened the "comradeship", "solidarity" and "unification", and they certainly contradicted the main principles of the country. The Communist Party has always focused to build a more "approachable" government having its fundamental philosophy to eradicate the suffering of the people who are oppressed worldwide. It has not shown any compassion for the struggles between its 2-3 million inhabitants. While the Soviet Government continued to severely persecute Jews for forming "social interest, it was more confusing a fact for their failure to integrate into the Soviet community" that would nonetheless make considerable efforts to confine their capability to evacuate their country. The idea of Soviet immigration may be very simple to assume that the decision of the deeply rooted anti-Semitism of the Russian people may be put to an end. Jewish settlement is a symbol of tyranny and repression within the Soviet regime.

Soviet émigrés have saved their own practice of Jewish identity and have the opportunity to rethink themselves in a given environment. They considered the Jewish community a racial group. More than 93 percent of shareholders have indicated themselves as Jews and 7 percent of religion. "Many of those identified by the Jews indicated that religion was not a religion. Over all, their identity has little religious, cultural or traditional factor, but some have become religious, serene and enriched their understanding of Jewish traditions. (Vinogradov, 2011).

The Soviet Jewish migration policy was not recognized in the first three years after the end of the war. Article 129 of the 1936 USSR Constitution" explicitly provides shelter to "foreign citizens maltreated for safeguarding the interests of working people, or for scientific activities, of for scuffling for national liberation". But it did not apply to the right to immigrate for Soviet citizens. Although immigration was not explicitly specified by the Stalinist government between 1945 and 1947, it was not explicitly banned or blamed. Immediately after the war, these years have strongly resumed the Jewish identity within the Soviet Union. Jewish activists such as Solomon Mikhoels and Shmuel Yaffe are the influential public figure who allowed thousands of Jews to leave the country. These first Jewish migrations were called "briha", Hebrew term for escape. It is not completely evident why the Soviet government did not initiate any serious effort to stop these first migrants. (Garbuzov, 2005).

Secondly, it has been observed from the study of the USSR migration policy over the years, that a series of unrecorded and practically unobtrusive laws and procedures can distress the existence of millions of people. Finally, it can be understood that the government can diminish (or even eradicate) the group's ability to achieve equality and religious and cultural liberty and substantively weaken the group's efforts for itself by checking the liberty of immigration of a specific societal alliance (Garbuzov, 2005).

Immigration to US and Israel: "ALIYAH"

The largest Jewish exodus from the Soviet Union allowed the Soviet government to leave them in 1989. In that year, 71,000 Soviet Jews left the USSR. Since the Soviet Union has carried out a resilient anti-Israeli propaganda campaign for many decades (since the creation of Israel), most immigrants did not want to go to Israel because they knew less about it, in fact, 12,117 decided to go to Israel, while 71,000 Soviet Jews immigrants choose to go to the United States. Another factor that influenced the number of Jews to immigrate to Israel is the fact that in the late 1970s, Zionism's lawyers had left the country for Israel. Instead, many Soviet Jews migrated to the United States, notably to California.

The enormous numbers about 1.5 million, who left the last wave for resettlement in Israel and the United States (US), are equally excellent in talking about the relocation of Soviet and post-war Jewish settlement. As one can imagine the factors and prospects that could influence a coherent conclusion about this migration are myriad. Through a number of analyzes of these conditions, the



research intends to learn more about their integrity and understanding of the Soviet Jews in the United States and Israel through comparative consideration. The US and Israel are two relatively new liberal groups of democratic states with elections, freedom of speech and freedom of religion, freedom of considerable women and gay rights, and European ideals of rationalism and institutionalism.

The impact of party-political discernment on immigration has increased the number of immigrants after each new wave. In the record of the Nationalities policies “Immigration from Russia increased so much after the expulsion from Moscow in 1891. Some 111,000 Jews entered the United States, and in 1892, 137,000, as against 50,000-60,000 in previous years. In the worst pogrom year, from 1905 to 1906, more than 200,000 Jews emigrated from Russia, United States (154,000), Argentina (13,500), Canada (7000), Palestine (3500) and the remaining Jews to South America and several West and Central European nations. Between 1881 and 1914 roughly 350,000 Jews left Galicia. Member of other nationalities, especially from southern and eastern Europe, were migrated to the United States and other countries during this period, despite Jewish immigrants are different in size and nature.” (Nationalities Policy Under Stalin, 2011).

In accordance with the report of Nationality Policies, “between 1881 and 1914, more than 2.5 million Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe to other countries (about 80,000); Of these, about two million people reached the United States, some 300,000 people went to foreign countries (including Palestine), while some 350,000 people left for Western Europe. During the First World War nearly in the first 15 years of the twentieth century on an average of 17.3 per 1000 Jews migrated from Russia each year, Romania (19.6) and 9.6 from Galicia; This fraction is much higher than the average for the non-Jewish population.” (Nationalities Policy Under Stalin, 2011). The basic traits of Jewish settlement were the relocation of entire families. The number of children in immigrant Jews in the United States was twice the average, which indicates a fact of complete abolition. In fact, in the last few years prior to the First World War, the immigrants Jews returned to their countries were only 5.75 percent, while immigrants from another group who returned were about one third. Almost half the Jewish émigrés had no well-defined livelihood without a stable source of income as relatively to the other 25% of immigrants, but the rest about two-thirds were artisans mainly traitors in comparison to one-fifth typical émigrés. (Ettinger, 2018)

There are four major waves of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Beginning in 1881 and continued throughout the Russian Revolution until 1922. It was the largest immigrant in the Russian Jewish community which played a comprehensive role in the creation of the early Jewish inhabitants both in Palestine and the US. Nonetheless immigration was barred because the new Soviet system faced the supreme tenets of the socialist society.

Twenty years later, the second wave of immigration took place. Expatriation was illegitimate, and second-wave migrants have incorporated refugees and Red Army defectors after their service in World War II (WWII). Legal immigration was likely to become probable who returned to Jews after thirty years, in actual restricted conditions. It was recognized as the third wave of colonization with broader variations with approved visas between 1967 and 1982. It was introduced after the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War (1967 War), which triggered pride and nationalist public expression in Soviet Jews. This is a significant fraud against the Soviet kingdom, so in the underprivileged conditions, mainly in the pursuit of family reunification, a limited number of Jews were assigned exit visas. Nonetheless, after 1987, the immigration rate of the fourth wave ignored all previous waves.

Aliya was the massive emigration of Soviet Jews in the 1970s to Israel after the lifting of the ban on Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union. Aliya in Hebrew means “ascent or going up”. Aliyah is



the emigration of Jews from the diaspora to the land of Israel. It is also defined as “the act of evolution or elevation” that is to Jerusalem “making Aliya” moving to the land of Israel which is one of the most fundamental principles of Zionism. The reverse action, migration from the Land of Israel, is denoted in Hebrew as Yerida as “descent”.

Ethno-Cultural diversity

Ethno-cultural diversity has major characteristics in the big and varied country like Russia. Analyzing this phenomenon and their impact on financial performance and social policy is significant and pertinent for comprehending drivers and restraints of regional economic progress in Russia, but still not methodically considered in the Russian linguistic and international literature. (Limonov & Nasena, 2016)

According to the “All-Russia Censuses for 2002 and 2010 Federal State Statistics Service” cultural diversity in modern Russia rests on the configuration of ethnic and cultural sites, which at times found in the distant past, that replicates recent migrations. The diversity of Russia's territorial features of the population of cities and regions are not only internationally driven but also by internal immigration.

Ethnic integration occurred throughout the history of the Russian state, but many Russian people continued to recognize their identity. International immigration with the data of the Russian ethnic diversity and the data available to other countries show that the Russian empire is racially diverse, while modern Russia is part of the erstwhile nation where Russians are a dominant country belonging to a group of nations with intermediate degrees of ethnic diversity and international immigrants. The “Jewish Autonomous Region” was established as an artificial republic. With the liberalization of historical conditions, it finally lost its nominal nationality, and many are now Russian population. (Limonov & Nasena, 2016).

In 1971, the Russian government equated with equal numbers of Jews with non-Jews in the reunited provinces. In that era, the Russian citizens, known as “estate subjects”, are farmers and low, middle class artists and merchants, did not have the privilege to establish themselves or have the right to movement in today's world. Everybody is “ascribed” to the local “community” and carried out the occupied and their related items. In addition to this decree, “Jewish pale” was initially called “pale of Settlement”, yet this was not a reasonable measure, but the constraints of the revolution of 1917 were lasted so long.

Since the “Pale” was beyond the limits there are a number of methods that do not get into conflict with the draconian law, but it “has caused discontent among all Jews, and remains a substantial part of the Russian society. The limits of “Jewish light” did not apply to the Jewish subordinates: those who do not have Judaic faith (not Orthodox only); the merchants of the first league (i.e., good for the Jews); those who have completed higher education, such as dentists, doctors, attorneys, pharmacists, mechanics, distillers, and beer manufacturers, were “in common with all experts and artists” in the decree.

In contrast, the limits of “Jewish pale” were not applicable to “merchant or sales agents” who worked for the first league with Jewish merchants. Due to the existence of many exemptions and the skilled use of the Jews did not have the largest union colony in the early 20th century, despite a big city in Russia. In these colonies, as it is known, there were not so many deprived Jews, as happened in “Jew’s pale”. Even though the “pale” was kept unrevoked, more educated Jews did not question the religion. They believe that the transformation of religion is an important practice, and it is free from all the limitations, including the “Jewish pale” limits. That is why the Jews have converted their religion to some Christians, and Orthodox faith. In many cases, they have taken the Protestant branches of the Christian faith. Many Jews are also included in the environment of highly reserved



officials. In other words, it is merely changing their religion to Christians once. (Emmons, 1997).

The Soviet government continued to refute any serious problem with regard to Jewish status in the Soviet Union in spite of the considerable rise in Jewish activism and expression. Khrushchev publicly condemned all the allegations of the “Russian Jewish Committee”, stating there was no anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union and there was no limit to Jewish culture and that all ethnic groups of the Soviet Union “live in peace and intimacy

International publications such as Jewish novels, histories, prayer books, bibles, Hebrew textbooks, and newspapers are disrupted and confiscated, and any person, if found in such possession or reusing of such items, could be penalized and incarcerated. In fact, almost all distances between Soviet Jews and the states of Israel were carried out by the “Dutch Consul”, who suggested Israel's interests in the USSR from the mid-1960s. The Soviets did not recognize and identify the appeal of immigration to Israel as an acceptable and legally acceptable option for the Soviet Union. Although the migration was not explicitly illegitimate, the administration made every effort to deter the Soviet Union from ever perusing this choice. (Salitan, 1992)

In the words of a historian, the Jewish ambience in the Soviet Union between 1948 and 1953 was compared to “the cultural desert”. This period is not only the closure of all “Hebrew” literature and the termination of Jewish theaters, but in the Soviet Union, virtually every organization escalated discrimination against Jews. Between 1948 and 1953, Soviet Jews were consistently being expurgated, suppressed, and detained, however at the same time they were denied the opportunity to flee the nation. (Morozov, 1999).

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