Dear Readers:

Welcome to the second India Issue of Asian Jewish Life (Issue 14). Early on in the process of working on this issue, it became clear to me that a third India Issue will need to follow shortly. There is such a tremendous wealth of information available on Jewish India and so many talented academics and researchers focused on the field of Indo-Judaic Studies.

We have included a great piece by Dr. Shalva Weil entitled The Legacy of David Sassoon: Building a Community Bridge. This article explores Weil's understanding of David Sassoon’s role in the rapprochement of the Bene Israel and the Baghdadi communities.

Also, though much of this issue is a celebration of Jewish life in India, we have included Navras Jaat Aafreedi’s rather sobering explanation for the rise of Nazism and Hitler-worship in India, entitled The Paradox of the Popularity of Hitler in India. This piece is an important exploration of this seemingly recent phenomena in India.

On the lighter side, we have a great fictional piece by Sophie Judah, A Cup of Tea. This is actually a chapter from a larger, yet unpublished work, Tales of Grandpa Eli, also featured in Issue 13. A Cup of Tea is, in a rather appropriately timed fashion, set during Passover.

Also taking on the topic of Passover, Nissim Moses details some traditions unique to the Bene Israel in This Year in India: Celebration of Passover in the Bene Israel Tradition.

Returning to the literary side of things, we have an inspiring interview by Books Editor Susan Blumberg-Kason. Susan sits down with memoir author Jenny Feldon to discuss her book, Karma Gone Bad: How I Learned to Love Mangos, Bollywood and Water Buffalo.

Susan also reviewed two middle grade multicultural novels about girls with both Jewish and Indian roots. My Basmati Bat Mitzvah by Paula J. Freedman and The Whole Story of Half a Girl by Veera Hiranandani are both recommended reads.

Also exploring themes of multiculturalism and identity is artist Siona Benjamin. I had the pleasure of speaking with Siona about her new exhibition Faces: Weaving Indian Jewish Narratives and talking about identity with her. I was even lucky enough to be in New York to catch her exhibition at the Flomenhaft Gallery. Siona’s work, “Fereshtini”, from an earlier collection, Finding Home, is featured on the cover of this issue.

Also looking at the beauty of Jewish culture from Cochin, we have Bala Menon who has contributed recipes from Spice & Kosher - Exotic Cuisine of the Cochin Jews by Essie Sassoon, Bala Menon and Kenny Salem. Spice & Kosher though is much more than a cookbook; it is a walk through history and a snapshot of Jewish life.

Michael Bender also walks through Cochin and talks about how Cochin, known as ‘G-d’s Own Country’, touched him in The Beauty of Traversing Cochin.

Last, but most definitely not least, we have our Best of Asian Jewish Life feature. This feature first looks at the volunteer experience in the Jewish community of India of one young woman, Leah Robinson. Leah’s personal piece is entitled A Lesson on Strength in Small Numbers. In this feature we detail three opportunities available through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to volunteer in India, like Leah.

Thank you again for reading!

Chag kasher v’same’ach. Have a kosher and happy Passover from all of us at Asian Jewish Life.

Erica Lyons
Editor-in-Chief

Asian Jewish Life is a registered charity in Hong Kong. AJL is also under the fiscal sponsorship of the Center for Jewish Culture and Creativity, a qualified US 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

Editor-in-Chief
Erica Lyons

Copy Editors
Joan Marion & Fran Nesson

Books Editor
Susan Blumberg-Kason

Photography Editor
Allison Heiliczer

Designer
Terry Chow

Board of Directors
Eli Bitan, Bruce Einhorn, Peter Kaminsky, Amy Mines, David Zweig