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### **A Conceptual Framework of Jewish Diaspora**

**Sunil Kumar Dwivedi**

PhD Research Scholar,

Department of English

Dr. R. M. L. Awadh University,

Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India

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#### **Abstract**

Man moves from one place to another in the search of comfort and prosperity. Such movement of people, voluntary or involuntary, is studied in the social sciences of literature under the head of Diaspora. The present study of Diaspora, has emerged with the multiplicity of histories, variety of culture, tradition, and a deep instinct for survival in the adapted country of the migrants. The present paper explores the conceptual framework of Jewish diaspora.

**Keywords-** Diaspora, Migration; Emigration, Immigration, Victimization, Expulsion, Dispersion, Adaptation, Cultural Crisis, Identity Crisis

As the etymological study of Diaspora indicates that the first and foremost concerning as well as the beginning of Diaspora is the Jewish Diaspora which can be detailed as the group of people belonging to the worldwide population through descent or conversion from the Jewish ancestry of the Hebrews in the Old Testament. The historical concept of the Jewish Diaspora began with the biblical narrative, when Joseph, the second and the youngest son of Jacob, was sold into slavery in Egypt and his entire family was destroyed, joining him there. This dispersion has been partly due to victimization and expulsions and partly to the creation of Jewish trade routes, which by the medieval period stretched from France to China. Since the recognition of Christianity, as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, there have been four major seismic shifts in the Jewish Diaspora, which have led to the formation of four major Diaspora centers, each of which lasted for centuries. These centers have been located in Babylon, Spain, Eastern Europe, and currently America. In the first three cases, a special name has emerged to describe the Jewish descendants from these centers: Mizrachis (Oriental Jews) for the Jews of the Arab, Muslim world; Sephardis (Spanish Jews) for medieval Spain; and Ashkenazi (lit. German Jews) for Eastern Europe. In each case, Jewish practices were influenced by the majority of community, and the issues of acculturation and integration came into the

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existence of playing its role in the different sects of Diaspora. These factors are relevant in general for migration of people into the various field of their struggle with their different titles.

The first Jewish Diaspora can be reported with 'The Babylonian Diaspora' which started with the defeat of the Jews of Judea and the destruction of their First Temple by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who enslaved the Israelite leadership and took them back to Babylon. The particular incident is reported to be occurred in 586 BCE. The incited pain of the loss of their motherland is well expressed in the words of Psalm 137, . . . However, the first exile of the Jews did not last long, as Cyrus, known as "the Great," defeated Babylonians in 550 BCE and allowed them to return to their motherland. In this way, by 515 BCE, they built their Second Temple, inaugurating the Second Jewish Commonwealth Period and for another 600 years period was celebrated as the Jewish Independence. And also it has been reported that even after the defeat of the two major Jewish rebellions against the Romans in 70 and 135 CE, the Jewish population was kept on substantial in the land of the Romans named as Palestina-Syria but after 135, the epicenter of Jewish diaspora moved to the Galilee. Very little is known about Babylonian Jewry during this period yet for the background of study, it is compulsory to be quoted with. Only some facts, as there were annual pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem for the festivals of Passover and Tabernacles, are sought for the growth of knowledge through the major sect of diasporic sensibility. The very study of the second Diaspora for the Jewish center emerged in Alexandria and Egypt.

Following the third Jewish Diaspora or Roman Revolt of ongoing religious and political tensions by Bar Kokhba, cut off the Romans in Jerusalem in 132–136CE, Judea renamed and merged into the Syria Palestina province. So by the fourth century CE, this community emerged as the center of Jewish thought and living standard. By the fifth century, the preponderance of Babylonian Jewry, is seen in the emergence of key Babylonian academies. In these academies, the scholars discussed rabbinic laws with its full effects and developed a concept known as the Babylonian Talmud. It is also found that Palestinian Talmud is more authoritative than the Jerusalem Talmud. The leading academies in Palestinian Talmud were located in Sura and Pumbedita. It is considered that the scholars from across the Jewish world would gather around the lake of Sura to discuss Jewish laws twice a Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and make legal decisions to which they call "Yarchei Kallah" means the 'month of learning' in English. It was reported that the rabbis known as the teachers of Torah, were appointed on the basis of their scholarship in the Pharisaic and Talmudic era, while Babylonian Jewry was led by the Exilarch, the leader of the Jewish community in Babylon, following the deportations of king Jeconiah and his court after the first fall of Jerusalem in 597 BCE. The Exilarch enjoyed the status of a prince being extremely wealthy and powerful. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century

## *The Creative Launcher*

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Muslims conquered the Babylonians and the position of the Jewish practices was going on without any special change. They were granted dhimmi status (the tolerated ones), and they had to pay both a poll tax and a land tax for their protection by the Muslim rulers. Theoretically, they had to be inferior to the Muslims, but the restrictions upon them were not being followed strictly. However, due to the land tax and other external factors, the Jews of Babylon transformed themselves into the traders and craftsmen rather than a total Jewry.

In the post-Talmudic period, from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, Jewish scholarship continued to develop their ideas, under the leadership of the Geonim or geniuses, the heads of the Babylonian Talmudic academies. The most prominent among such scholars was Saadia HaGaon, born in Egypt, but moved to Babylon and became so eminent that he was appointed as the head of the Sura Talmudic academy. Saadia translated the Bible into Arabic and came to be known as one of the first Jewish scholars who synthesized Greco- Arabic philosophy with the concept of Jewish thought. Then a conflict occurred between Saadia and the Exilarch, which compelled Saadia to be exiled but his reputation, also went with him which caused some problem for the Exilarch. Experiencing the problems of Saadi's exile, the exilarch recalled Saadia and re-established him as the head of the academy, indicating that the scholarship is more powerful than the hierarchy. Consequently, the rabbinical responses to legal questions developed a body of literature known as "Responsa." But by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Babylonian Jewry had begun to be destroyed into the hands of hierarchy. Even though a Jewish community continued to work on for its existence, but throughout the Arabic culture, these oriental Jews, known as Mizrachis, could not enjoy their privilege form even in the epicenter of the Jewish existence that's why their center had moved to Spain.

Historically, the records of Jews living in Spain are found from the time of the Roman Empire, which can be divided into three main periods – the Visigoth period, the Muslim period, and the Christian Reconquista (conquest) period. It is reported that each of these periods began well with their conceptual frameworks, but ended up in religious persecution. It was also recorded that the Visigoths conquered the Iberian Peninsula with the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Originally they were pagans but they converted into a form of Christianity known as Arianism. It rejected the concept of the Trinity and papal authority but the Jews were allowed to live in peace. This was not for a long time as in 586 CE, one of the Visigoth kings converted to Roman Catholicism insisted that the Jews must accept Christianity, or leave the place for their further life. This response provided a precedent for the Sephardi Jews to accept conversion rather than martyrdom in such choices. In response to the ultimatum of Roman Catholicism, many of them decided to be converted into Christianity, while some of them continued practicing their Judaism secretly,

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inaugurating a period of symbiosis between the cultures and traditions of Jews and Muslims. In 711, the Muslims under the Umayyad dynasty from Babylon conquered the Iberian Peninsula and they made Cordova as the center of power. It got very popularity among the people and had been described as “The Golden Age of Spain.” In this way, it is reported that Jewish played a very important role in the development of the diasporic sensibility in the rabbinic literature during this time. Abd-ar-Rahman III appointed Hasdai ibn Shaprut as his adviser in the tenth century, who purchased the library of the Academy of Sura, which was facing a period of decline, and brought it to Cordova. The place where the Jewish culture developed came to be known as Andalusia including many centers like Seville, Granada, Malaga, and Cádiz, except the Cordova. It is recorded that for the next two centuries Jewish community flourished well till the re-conquest of the Christians which led to the first Almoravides and later a more radical Muslim group, the Almohades, and the Berbers from North Africa, taking a control over Southern Spain. During this period, Jewish literature flourished in Spain and many of the Spanish Jews recorded a painful diasporic sensibility at the loss of their homeland in Israel. The best known piece of such type of literature would be exemplified in the other part of the thesis.

Then comes to the Spanish period of Jewish Diaspora in which we have found the leading scholar Moses Maimonides, known as Rabbi Moses- ben- Maimon the son of Maimon who is also known with the acronym RAMBAM. He was born just before the conquest of the Almohades, by the Muslims. He had been acknowledged of the incident how his family was forced to convert into Islam, before escaping to Fez in Morocco, which was also ruled over by Muslims of the Almohades. Then his family visited Palestine to settle in, but they had also to leave it because of the crusaders atrocities was running on them that’s why in the last they got settled in Fustat, near Cairo which was the quarter of Jewish community. Then, they felt comfortable for their living criteria of their social dignity. It is reported that when his younger brother died in a shipwreck, Maimonides tried his hand on the physician to help the caliphs. In this field also, he did his best and continued to express his hearted feelings before the people and came to be known as the leading Jewish scholar who maintained a major coding of Jewish law, called the ‘Mishneh Tora, taking a scientific as well as philosophical approach to assist Jews community who were doubting in the traditions of his ‘The Guide for the Perplexed’. His guidance became so popular among the people that his ‘Thirteen Principles of Faith’ are included in the Jewish prayer book. These pieces are considered as the foundation of the Jewish cultures and norms.

So the result of this Muslim persecution, compelled the Jewish community in Andalusia to welcome the Christian conquerors, who were also in the need of the Jewish people for their knowledge about the Arabic history because they wanted to resettle there from where the Muslims

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had been exiled away. The first warning of deterioration of Jewish culture came out in 1263, when the Barcelona Dispute occurred. When Nachmanides, a well known Jewish scholar was forced to deliver his speech on Judaism converted into a Christian, the king interrupted his debate before the conclusion of his speech and after it Nachmanides was attacked and being tortured that's why he left Spain and settled in Palestine. The situations for the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula got worsened when the riots forced Jewish community to convert into Christianity in 1391. Some of them adapted Christianity yet some of them kept on going to practice Judaism secretly and they came to be known with the derogatory term Marranos or "pigs." They are also called Anuism or the New Christians in Spanish, or the forced community in Hebrew. These New Christians created a sense of jealousy among the Old Christians that's why there came Blood Purity laws for the New Christians in Toledo so that the positions of the New Christians can be limited.

In 1469, the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand united Leon and Aragon, the two most powerful kingdoms in Spain. This marital unity, Initially, promised protection to the Jewish Community. The king appointed two leading figures of Jews – Isaac Abravanel and Abraham Seneor – to play their roles as his own advisers in his campaign against Muslim Granada. In 1480, the authority introduced the Inquisition Act, which aimed at heretics, rather than opening the Jews and this act created a threat among the New Christians because now any of them could be accused of 'Judaizing' and if they were accused of, they had to face the tortures of burning at the stake under the Inquisition otherwise they had to leave the land. In this way, the Jews were not targeted openly but indirectly, as they were being accused of converting Christians or assisting converses. Their views for Muslims in Granada were only to defeat them and compelled them to leave Spain or convert into real Christianity so in 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella issued the Edict of Expulsion, and gave only four months to the Jewish Community to follow the rules of leaving Spain or converting into Christianity. Accordingly, it is reported that near about 100,000 Jews in number left Spain and settled in Portugal where they formulated 10 % of the total number of Portuguese population. Once they were looking to be settled well their destination dominated them when in 1496 King Manuel of Portugal asked for the hands of Isabella and Ferdinand's daughter because they insisted that he would have to expel his Jewish population out of Portugal before their consent for marriage. Then Manuel issued an Edict of Expulsion but he was not willing to lose them because he knew that Jews were very experts to contribute in economic growth of the country. So, when they arrived in Lisbon, there were nothing to be sailed on, for them and because they were all forcibly converted to Christianity so they had no hesitation to practice the job in their practical life. However, the Portuguese Inquisition was introduced in 1536 yet there is the evidence that despite the risk of subjection, many New Christians

## *The Creative Launcher*

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kept on practicing Judaism secretly and they made contact through the trading networks in Amsterdam and Antwerp. They found situations favourable only, after 1600 when the Netherlands started practicing Calvinism where once again Jews started to practice their culture openly. Then a number of Sephardim escaped the Iberian Peninsula for Amsterdam and London.

The third major movement of Diasporic community of the Jews flourished in the Eastern Europe from the thirteen century onwards, when the Jews of the German Rhineland were invited by the Polish Kings to settle in their kingdoms. As a result of fact, a number of Jewish people had flourished in France from the 8<sup>th</sup> century under Charlemagne the Great and from the 10<sup>th</sup> century along with the Rhineland specially in the towns such as Cologne, Speer, Mainz, and Bonn. They came to be known as Ashkenazim, literally it was meant as German. After getting the support by the authority, they developed a rich Jewish learning centre exemplified by Rabbenu Gershom and Rabbi Solomon Isaac. Chronically, they are known with the acronym for “RASHI”. Even today they are considered as the greatest biblical commentators of that time. It is evidenced that they did their best for the growth of the country yet they suffered with several attacks during the First and Second Crusades in the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The invitations from the Polish kings offered them a possibility of escape to a more welcoming environment. In 1348-1349, the movement of Jews from Western Europe to Eastern Europe was fortified till the terrible plague known as the Black Death occurred in England. When it occurred, the Christians claimed Jews for causing the plague and the Jewish community suffered a lot from the terrible attacks across the Germanic speaking kingdoms and duchies.

The most important of the Polish kings was Casmir, who protected Jewish community and gave them right to organize themselves and in return they paid a communal tax to the authority. So a number of Jews came and settled in “Shtetls”, known as the small towns and private villages. Each Shtetl had a council which was called ‘Kehilla’. The council had twelve representatives with a leading figure. Historical records tell us that there was a united Jewish Council, known as the Council of Four Lands, which was formed in 1580. The council was responsible for each and every aspect of communal life. It had to help the poor as well as the sick people in the society. It had to nurture the orphans as well as the widows of the diasporic community through an extensive system of donation or charity. This Jewish council continued to work on, till the end of 1764. However, Polish Jewry became famous as a state within a state in the history of Jewry. During this period, Jewish community stretched its hands on scholastic views and flourished its own literature. Interesting and considering point was this that at a time when most of the people were illiterate in Poland, Jews were valued for their literacy. The children were studying the Hebrew, the Torah, and Talmud from the very

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beginning of their age. Their classes were run in the Heder or a literary room at their teachers' home. The students after the age of 13, who were weak at the economic standards, were given opportunity to continue their studies after in a Talmudic academies, or yeshivas, which were located in the advanced Jewish communities. Every day, they were hosted by the different families for their feedings. They would sleep in the synagogues. Sometimes they would try to make a short income by match making and selling it in the shtetls. This system came to be known as the "tag". The example of such centers in the Jewish community can be exemplified as, was in Krakow, with Rabbi Moshe Isserles who was known as the most important scholar in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. He was the scholar who responded to the codification of Jewish law called as Shulchan Aruch or a Prepared Table by the Italian scholar, Joseph Caro, who was Spanish by birth just before the expulsion from Spain. The great contribution of Isserles was this that he produced a unified code of Jewish law which was relevant for both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jewish traditions and it is now taken as the basis of Jewish law to the Jewish community. Every thing was going on well but it was disturbed in th mid-seventeenth century by the attacking attempt of the Cossacks to conquer the land. It was found that the serfs were co-operating them in this work. So they caught the Jews, suffering enormous losses in 1648–1649. The tragedy came to an end when Jewish community moved to Lithuania by the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But this movement was not enough for their tragedy because after it they suffered from great poverty and a spiritual loss. Consequently, the Talmudic academies removed the scholars of the lower classes and so they felt isolated from their Jewish culture. So there came an another movement known as the Hassidic movement started by the Baal Shem Tov or Besht who focused attention on the joys of Judaism, which were expected to practice for being a good Jew.

After his death, his movement was broken into many Chassidic sectors, leading their principles by their authorities of Rebbes. The Mitnagdim Movement started by Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman Kremer, shortly known as Gaon or Gernius of Vilna, opposed the Chassidic approaches, fearing the dominating principles of the Jewish intellectuality. This movement introduces more secular aspects as it would prefer to have translations into Hebrew, literal, mathematical and scientific knowledge about the various subjects. Very cleverly, Gaon criticised the Chassidim for its weak points, and appreciated its Talmudic scholarship. In this way a new period of the Enlightenment resulted in radical changes in Western Europe, with the gradual breaking down of the ghetto walls, which occurred especially after the French Revolution of 1789. However, it is reported that this movement of classical Christian anti-Judaism waned in Western Europe, anti-Semitism, based on racial characteristics flourished in Western Europe by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The situations of the Jewish people got worse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they were dominated by the tsarist Russia in Eastern

## *The Creative Launcher*

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Europe. In 1772, when Catherine the great won the Eastern Poland, the country was broken into two parts- Russia and Prussia. The queen did not like Jews so she passed a policy under which the Jews could not enter Russia proper and this policy was continued by her successors. The Jews were allowed to live within the boundaries of Baltic to the Black Sea. The position of the Jews was very typical when Nicholas I ruled over the country because used to conscript the Jewish boys into the Army forcibly from the very early age of twelve. When Alexander II came upto the throne of the country in 1860, he liberated slightly the Jews who were as the serfs but this was not for a long time because the king was murdered in 1881, by a group of radical students and one of them was a Jew. So once again the situations of the Jews deteriorated and they had to face a great massacre and government-sponsored attacks, and the new laws in 1882, forcing most of the Jews to move from their small shtetls into the larger towns. The result of this tsarist policy was that one third of the Jews should emigrate while another one third die of starvation, and the remaining one third should have to convert. The first was done but the second and the third could not be attained. It is seen that the perilous existence of Jews in Eastern Europe continued after World War I, and Polish Jewry experience was devastated totally with the Nazi Holocaust as the six million Jews were murdered in Europe during the Nazi Rule and it was estimated that three million Jews were from Poland.

The most recent Jewish Diaspora center is located in the United States of America. The first settlement of the Jews in the North America, is considered of the Dutch Sephardi Jews, fleeing persecution in the Portuguese and Spanish colonies of South America. However, by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 10,000 Jews were found living. Between 1830 and 1880, around 300,000 German Jewish people fled away to the United States, following the defeat of Napoleon and the failure of the 1830 and 1848 revolutions in Western Europe. And because the dispersed population got a favourable response that's why, from 1880 to 1924, over two million Russian Jews departed for American colonies. They called it the Goldene Medina or the Golden Country. A large number of the German Jews became hawkers and traders and earned a respected remuneration, they tended to spread out across the country, including the Californian gold fields after 1848. The East European Jews clustered in the East Coast in the major urban areas of New York, Chicago, and Boston. Having a great mass of the Jewish people, America closed her doors for the refugees.

The American Jews rapidly acculturated and moved up their socio-economic ladder, from working in the industries, to becoming professionals and businessmen, within a trans-generation. It is reported that after the Second World War, one third of New York's population was covered by the Jewish population and the other two thirds of the nation's economic center were being governed by the black community. Further it is also recorded that the Jewish population had been increased to the



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five million by the 1950s. With the destruction of European Jewry and the forced expulsions of the Mizrahi Jews from the Arab Muslim countries, America had been considered as the new Jewish Diaspora center. The key factors of all the different Jewish Diaspora centers have been the development of multicultural and multi-lingual concept of migration. The first historical multi-language of the Jewish community was reported as Aramaic, which was spoken by the people of across the Greek and Roman worlds. With the development of Islam or the Muslim conquests, Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian got prominence in the Jewish society, as Maimonides wrote his *The Guide for the Perplexed* or RAMBAM in Judeo-Arabic language. The work seeks to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Hebrew Bible theology in the context of Jewish Diaspora.

Another flourished language can be known as Ladino, a mixture of medieval Spanish, Hebrew, and Arabic languages, which developed the first in the Iberian Peninsula and later in the Balkans, while Yiddish, the mixture of medieval German, Slavic, and Hebrew language developed in Eastern Europe. The mixture of these different hybrid languages, representing the cultures of the Mizrahi, Sephardi, and Ashkenazi Jews, was this that they were always written in the Hebrew alphabets, as Hebrew remained the language of prayer and scholarship among the scholars about which it can be said that it kept the Jewish Diaspora together, throughout all the periods of the Diaspora. It can also be argued that no other ethnic or religious group has experienced such radical demographic changes over the history of its Diaspora or dispersion. The latest estimation of diaspora studies reported its readers that 40 % of the Jewish community lives in North America and more than 40 % in Israel. The declining of the Jewish population in the Arab countries is going on and there are only around 4000 Jews, remaining in the Arab countries, and the whole population of Europe is less than two million and it is also declining day by day.

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