

Little India At The JCC

The savory scent of samosas and Indian spices wafts through the doors as Indian troupes perform traditional dances, but this is not Calcutta, or even Manhattan's Curry Hill. This will be the scene at the JCC in Manhattan on the Upper West Side this Sunday, at an event marking India's independence from England in 1947.

Recent trends in yoga practice and Eastern religions have brought Indian culture to the fore, and this event is a chance for some Jews to learn about a foreign culture, and for the Bene Israel, the largest group of Indian Jews, to present their unique Jewish culture to the rest of New York.

Multiple shades and flavors of the American Jewish community will come together in celebration Sunday at 2 p.m., learning about the Jews of India in the process.

"Many compartmentalize Jews as being from Eastern Europe or nowhere," said Romiel Daniel, who is import director for an international apparel company based in New York and president of the Indian Jewish Congregation (ICJ) of USA, the Bene Israel umbrella group in America. "We formed the group to expose the rest of the Jewish community here to other Jewish communities ...

You need to know about the other cultures here. You can't just acknowledge the practices from back home."

While Daniel was growing up as a child in Mumbai, Hebrew and Jewish religion books were hard to find, so the chazan would teach children in their homes, emphasizing memorization. When he came to America in 1994, Daniel learned the unfamiliar Ashkenazi melodies and practices to fit in at synagogue and got his cantorial training from Yeshiva University.

The ICJ, formally established in 2005, meets a few times a year: to commemorate the High Holy Days, Simchat Torah, Chanukah and Purim in their traditional way.

This event is the latest example of the JCC's Jewish Multiculturalism series. The consuls general of India and Israel are scheduled to attend, and a Jewish or Israeli dance troupe is expected to perform. Previous multicultural programs have included a "Jews of India" lecture, led by Daniel, as well as programs on other

Jewish communities including Latinos and Ethiopians.

On Aug. 15, 1947, the time of Indian independence, the Bene Israel numbered 35,000 in India, according to Daniel. While they still outnumber the Cochín and Baghdadi Jews in India, many have moved to Israel and a small group came to America, with approximately 300 in



Holiday celebrations of Indian Jewish Congregation unify the 300 Indian Jews who live in the New York area.



Indian-born Romiel Daniel says Jews from his homeland often feel excluded here, "Jews being from Eastern Europe or nowhere."

the New York tri-state area.

Up next for the JCC and the Bene Israel community is a wedding showcase, set for January, to share the marriage rituals, including henna tattooing, that give their Jewish ceremony a distinctive Indian flair.

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