

## Indian Jewish Association endeavours to build religious bridges

■ Shruti Ganapathy

"About 20 years ago, a group of leading Indians, primarily Hindus, and Jews came together to discuss how they could institutionalise their personal friendships and shared values. Out of that emerged the Indian Jewish Association, UK which seeks to bring together Jews, Hindus and Sikhs", said Mike Whine, Director of Government and International Affairs of the Community Security Trust (CST).

The Association endeavours to bring together leaders and members of the Indian and British Jewish communities in Britain. Their programme of activities include cultural and social events, matters of common concern such as human rights and anti-racism legislation. Members have also attended each other's religious festivals.

Mr. Whine said: "We are three long established religious communities living in England wanting to preserve their strong and enduring cultural lives. There is a need to defend these in a society that is rapidly becoming secular."

When Indians came to Britain, mainly from East Africa, they did not get a very warm reception. The Jews proved to be most welcoming. Prominent Hindus and Sikhs have time and again said that when they arrived in Britain, the only jobs they could find were with Jewish companies.

The Association was founded by Aubrey Rose CBE and the late Pranlal Sheth CBE, who had both been the Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Racial

towards India. In India, Jews have flourished both before and under the Raj, and afterwards on independence."

The Jewish community in India goes back almost 2000 years. However, most currently residing in the country had ancestors migrating to India in the 16th, 17th and 18th century mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Politically speaking, India and Israel have a strong and growing relationship. There is enormous growth of bilateral trade between the two nations. Israel is also the leading supplier of defence arms and agronomic advice to India. However, these two countries had not established a diplomatic relationship until the last 20 years.

The Indian Jewish Association also has strong connections with the American Jewish communities and the institutions of the Jewish community in India (particularly Mumbai and Kolkata) has been strengthened with American aid.

A new venture is the Gandhi-Einstein Foundation. The Association is trying to establish a series of guest lectures in renowned Indian universities about Jews and their heritage. Fundraising dinners hosted in London by the former Indian High Commissioner, and in New Delhi by persons prominent in the media and public life have managed to help raise enough to start sending lecturers. However, there still is not enough money to establish a permanent university chair in India, and this is the long term aim.

Equality, with the aim of capitalising on long-standing friendships between members of both communities.

He added: "It is also important to us that India is the only place where Jews never suffered from antisemitism. Therefore, most Jews have a positive attitude

Mr. Whine concluded: "Indian Jews are Indians who have been there for a long time and have preserved their identity. That is because unlike other religions, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists don't seek converts. The faiths teach to live, let live and respect other faiths."