

# RELIGION IN MODERN RUSSIAN SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF JEWS IN RUSSIA



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**Abstract:** Religion re-emerged in Russia at the threshold of the formation of a democratic society. Religion in modern Russian society provides the most contradictory trends in terms of providing religious freedom that emerged towards the end of the Soviet era. On the one hand, all the religions were given the right to promote their teachings and on the other hand, Orthodox Church was striving to establish its superiority over the rest. Religious movements sprang up in different regions of Russia – Islam in Tatarstan, Caucasus, Dagestan; Buddhism in Kalmykia and Buryatia; Judaism in Eastern Caucasus; Shamanic communities in Siberia and Far-East were among others trying to restore their property and establish their cultural and spiritual values. The Law of the Russian Federation “On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations” (1997) gave recognition to traditional religions of Russia, including Judaism alongside Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Any discussion on traditional Russian culture would touch upon not only the political foundation but also the cultural core of the country. Given that it has been at the focal point of significant historical events, the religious situation in Russia is largely linked to historical and geopolitical situations. The proposed paper investigates the social position of Judaism and the regional specificities of the development of Jewish religious activities in Russian society.

**Key Words:** Religion, Religious minorities, Regional Approach, Judaism

Religious revival in Russia was accompanied by a rise in racial violence and extremism. As the report of the European Commission against racism and intolerance also pointed out, minorities like Chechens and other persons from the North Caucasus, Meskhetian Turks, Ingush refugees, Jews, and Gypsies are some of the main targets of racially motivated attacks (ECRI 2001: 14-20)<sup>1</sup>. In the year 2004, Putin

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1 <https://rm.coe.int/second-report-on-the-russian-federation/16808b5bae> Accessed on 22 September 2018 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Second Report on Russian Federation, Adopted on 16th March 2001

created Public Chamber<sup>2</sup>, a consultative body to serve as a bridge between the state and the civil society. This consultative body, the Public Chamber, observed that the presence of xenophobic and fascist activities is becoming a genuine problem and a serious threat in the Russian Society (Ibid). It noted that throughout recent years, extremist crime rates have been growing steadily. The statistics show that between 2004 and 2008, criminal proceedings related to inter-ethnic relations constantly soared (the numbers are 139, 152; 263; 356; to 400+ criminal proceedings on yearly basis from 2004 to 2008). The xenophobic attacks were reported to be 256 in the year 2008<sup>3</sup>(Public Chamber Report 2008: 67). A major concern was identified and raised that numerical count of crimes did not depict the growing cruelty of the crimes committed. Most of the crimes were committed by “well-organized” and “well-trained group of radical nationalists” (Ibid: 67). Another concern was that mostly youths were involved in such crimes. To recall, in January 2006 a 20-year-old man “assaulted worshippers at a Synagogue with a hunting knife”. Though he was sentenced to 13 years in prison with mandatory psychiatric treatment, he was not found guilty of racial hatred.

The question arises, whether the increase in violent activities was the result of religious revival, or it was the result of the nature of religious and cultural policies. The emergence of religious consciousness in the once atheist Russian society did portray contradictory trends that appeared in the multicultural Russian Federation (Balzer 2010). Religious awakening was accompanied by the loss of trust and faith in Communism, as it was not only a political or economic system but also a faith. However, religious revival was not a recent development, partial religious revival can be traced since 1953 after Stalin’s death when society faced a “crisis in Soviet ideology and in the spiritual body of the nation as well” (Glazov 1985: 115).

Rothkopf’s approach to ‘cultural conflict’ may contribute to understanding the nature of conflict accompanied by religious revival. He looks into the culture as a tool used by organizers of the society and politicians to impose and ensure order. According to him, cultural conflict based on historical animosity can be divided into three broad categories: religious warfare, ethnic conflict, and conflict between “cultural cousins”. These cultures may be similar to each other but are still different from each other, which are “used to justify conflict over issues of proximity” (Rothkopf 1997: 40). He also talks about quasi-cultural conflict, which is primarily ideological and not deep rooted in traditions, nonetheless, classifies the ‘Christian and Jew’ conflict as a religion-based conflict (Ibid). A detailed account of the Russian-Jew relationship by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his book “Two Hundred Years Together” projected their ‘painful mutual adaptation’ throughout different stages of history beginning from Imperial Russia (Solzhenitsyn; Gitelman 2001; Azizian 2003: 319). Hence, Russian-Jew differences require special attention and their relationship has to be analyzed not merely from an ‘ideological’ perspective, but also from the ‘psychological’ aspects attached to it (Akihieze 2013: 562). This paper looks into the social position of Jews and regional specificities of the development of Jewish religious activities in the Russian society.

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2 Report of the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation 2008 P.67 <https://www.oprf.ru/files/Dk-OPRF-2008.pdf>

3 <https://www.oprf.ru/files/Dk-OPRF-2008.pdf> p. 67

## Socio-political background of Russia

Though the role of the Russian Orthodox Church is enormous in shaping the cultural, political and economic distinctiveness of Russia, the presence of a large Islamic and many other religious practices and beliefs, equally contributed to shaping the current Russian uniqueness. Jews are much smaller in number compared to Orthodox Christians and Muslims but their contribution is consistent and significant in the “evolution or revolution” of the Russian society, outweighing the relatively modest size of the Jewry” (Gitelman 2001; Azizian 2003: 319; Tsekhanskaia 2010: 3). During World War II when the antisemitic rhetoric of Stalin was a little relaxed, Jews actively participated at the front as well as in military production (World Jewish Congress<sup>4</sup>). Consequently, apart from Christianity and a large Islamic presence in the country, there are many other religious practices and beliefs, equally dominant and traditional to Russian society.

The emergence of Russia as a secular and democratic country meant the liberation of various social spheres from the influence of traditional religions or the displacement of religious institutions from the life of the society. Nonetheless, with global socio-cultural transformations, the nature of religion’s relation with society also underwent change (Eremicheva 2005: 174–175). Religious ideology at this juncture, when Soviet ideology had lost its significance, was more associated with the “art of living” rather than anything else. The influx of new religious movements attracted a large number of followers. Traditional religious institutions were also not fully prepared to cope up with the socio-cultural changes and the outburst of enormous religious movements, religious institutions, and a sudden rise in the number of their followers. Russian sociologists explained the burst of religiosity as a reaction to freedom of society from the pressure of Soviet ideology, fragmented religious consciousness, and the chance to freely choose any religion or religious associations (Mchedlov 1999:103; Kuraev 1995: 61–70).

An additional trend in the activation of religion or religious institutions in Russia was to get aligned with some or the other political parties, especially democratic ones. Therefore, the issue is that these diverse religious institutions influence the formation of a democratic regime. Hence, for the success of democratic institutions, it becomes all the more crucial that the religious and cultural institutions are based on democratic principles (Bogachov 2014: 53). So, the question arises – were the newly emerged religious institutions in Russia based on democratic principles?

Nonetheless, the religious association of an individual at no point guaranteed their active participation in religious activities. As per official information, Catholic community in St. Petersburg is approximately 5000, however no more than 2000 actively attend services (Moravitsky 2010: 92). Analogous is the gap between the indicators of religious identification (69%) and indicators of engagement in religious practices (3%) in the contemporary society and the linked issue of the insignificant influence of religiosity on population values and behavior according to mass survey data (Emelyanov 2016: 176).

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4 [worldjewishcongress.org](http://worldjewishcongress.org), Accessed on 24th February 2019

## Understanding Religion

The word 'religion' first of all signifies a person's attachment to something sacred, constant. Thus, as per the contemporary definition "Religion" is characterized by a combination of three characteristics: religious teachings, religious practice and religious organization and they are all connected with the concept of faith. Simmel correlated religious feeling with other worldly being:

*"I do not think, that religious feelings and impulses are expressed only in religion; moreover, I believe, that they are found in multitude of connections, as a certain element operating under the most diverse circumstances."<sup>5</sup> (Simmel 1994:129). And finally, the most important: the significance of religion for feeling, i.e., reflected in the most intimate depths of soul, the action of ideas about the divine, completely independent of all assumptions about how these ideas arose (Simmel 1994:139).*

Hence, faith is the principle creative aspiration of humanity, which defines life, views, actions, imagination and feelings and allows for the possibility of sacrifice. At the same time being social phenomena, they constantly change with socio-cultural and ideological change. In the words of P. Sorokin: "Religion of a person is a social costume that can be removed and changed. If this costume were purely ideological, then such beliefs would change very often, because beliefs are generally changeable. But in religion, the crux of the matter is not in beliefs, not in one or another set of ideas, but in the sensory-emotional experiences of a person's faith" (Sorokin 1994: 164). He calls "beliefs, dogmas" only "a veil, an ideological justification or an expression of a person's emotions" and these emotions are formed under the influence of the social environment and are closely connected with it (Ibid).

Contrary to the earlier notion of religion as 'inherited', or a 'consequence of historical development', the post-Soviet Russian society gave freedom to individuals to choose their religious faith. As Telebaeva mentioned: "people's personal identification in relation to religion has changed significantly in all the post-Soviet states" (Telebaeva 2003: 101 quoted in Moravitskii 2010: 89).

At the time of the identity crisis of the 1990s in Russia, the process of conversion requires special attention, as it is closely associated with the concept of identity. The identity crisis and the influx of new religious movements made erstwhile Soviet citizens join one or the other religious group in a perplexed state. Among the many new religious movements, a few were the Church of the Last Covenant (Vissarions); White brotherhood (Usmalos); The Orthodox Church of the Mother of God etc. (Veronika V. 2004). It is an individual who establishes his/her own identity by leaving one religious group and joining another. Thus, it is a process of forming a religious identity under the influence of external circumstances and identifying oneself with a specific social group (Moravitsky 2010: 91). But, as characterized by Berger, "once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations," it was a significant process in terms of shaping and molding the future of the Russian society (Berger and Luckmann 1995: 279). Also, in the past societies had witnessed religious intolerance, for instance, as argued by Solzhenitsyn, religious intolerance or an attitude hostile to Jews was not specific to Russia in

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5 <https://studfiles.net/preview/878339/page:17/>

any way, but that same attitude prevailed in Europe for centuries. As per the Russian Imperial decree of Queen Elisabeth 1743: "Jews are forbidden to live anywhere in our realm <...> and in the future not allowed back in, unless it should be that one of them should confess our Greek-Christian religion" (Solzhenitsyn 2001: 12).

While analyzing the process of transformation of religious groups in the modern Russian society, Hervieu-Leger highlighted three main reasons for conversion of religion by an individual. "First of all, when an individual 'changes religion'; second, when an individual who has never belonged to a religious tradition joins some religion; and the third when an individual returns to his original religious community" (Quoted in Moravitsky 2005:105; Hervieu-Leger 1999: 121–124). In case of Russia, the concern was not as much related to joining new religious groups but to claim its traditional and dominant status.

## Transition of Church State Relationship

"Religion is what state permits to believe, superstitions is what it forbids to believe" – Hobbes in state of Affairs (Sorokin 1994: 162).

The present-day religious revival in Russia began with the meeting of General Secretary of CPSU Mikhail Gorbachev and Patriarch Pimen of Moscow in 1988. This meeting not only dramatically changed the Church-State relationship but also granted the status of a legitimate public institution to the Russian Orthodox Church, ending the policy of 'state atheism' (Marsh, 2005: 545; Bourdeaux, 2000: 9). Since then, the beginning of spiritual and religious revival has been complicated. The main reasons explaining this complication include, first of all, the rapidly changing socio-political and cultural situation in the country and secondly, big distinctions between the relative positions of different religions. So, religion in Russia, as ideology and institution, continues to play a very important role, and it is difficult to understand.

Religious cold war is noteworthy in regions such as Crimea, Tatarstan, and Kazan. The center of attention has been on two major religions, Orthodoxy and Islam as it is the second largest religious group in Russia and it has a decisive say in the society and politics of the state. Another minority religion is Judaism, which is one of the traditional religious minority groups and it is facing challenges in the restoration process. This paper focuses on the process of revival of Judaism in the modern Russian Society.

## Constitutional Provisions

The Law of the Russian Federation 1990 "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations" provided equal freedom to all religious practices and beliefs. The liberation of religious institutions from state control to propagate their religious ideologies was a major step of the Russian Government (Bourdeaux, 1995), although several amendments to this Law were introduced during the course of time. The Law adopted in 1997 "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations" reiterated an individual's freedom to follow any "faith" of his choice. Nonetheless, some of its provisions did restrict rights of certain religious groups and

discriminate in practice, recognizing the superiority of Russian Orthodox Church over the “other traditional” religious organizations. Under this Law, Judaism was declared to be an “integral part of the historical heritage of the people of Russia”. Hence, Judaism acquired the status of a traditional religion of the country along with the Christianity, Islam and Buddhism.

After providing complete freedom to propagate religious ideologies in 1990, the imposition of limitations under the 1997 Law was severely criticized and created a furor among various religious institutions. Among the most cited restrictions imposed on ‘other religious groups’ include the compulsion of their existence within Russian territory for a minimum of 15 years in order to get registered as a religious organization. However, the requirement for religious organizations to provide information about their continued activities on an annual basis was removed.

## Judaism in Russia

Revival of Judaism at the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century Russia is considered to be “a visible renaissance of Jewish life in Russia” due to a drastic increase in the size of the Jewish population in Moscow. However, it does not imply that there have been no incidents of antisemitism. The question is: once superiority is legally granted to the Orthodox Church and a legal status to Judaism and other traditional religions, what could have been the reasons for continued tensions and antisemitism between the groups.

Though there are differences in the number of Jews in Russia, in 2003 there were approximately 400,000 to 700,000 Jews in Russia. Arguments have been made that the “upsurge of antisemitism is a backlash against the sudden increase in Jewish” population (Dresen 1999: 32).

An amendment proposed in February 2006 in the Russian law on freedom of conscience enabled the authorities to close down a religious association more easily. Federal Registration Services (FRS) were permitted to inspect religious associations and religious texts and, even at the slightest suspicion of extremism, they could get the association banned by the court. It raised concern among Jews, especially the manner of inspection of translation of Shulkhan Arukh dealing with the Jewish way of life, was considered offensive. The same was not of concern for Orthodox Christianity, but Muslim, Jewish and Krishna organizations felt that the 2006 amendment could be instrumental in suppression of freedom of belief (Dresen 2008: 31).

## History of Judaism

The Jews marked their presence in the Russian territory beginning from the 7th–14th centuries CE. But they became Russian subjects with the partition of Poland between 1772 and 1795 when a large territory became a part of the Russian Empire with a Jewish population of approximately 200,000 Jews residing in the cities and villages of Belo-Russia (Solzhenitsyn 2001: 13; Vasilev, Safronov 2004: 502; Azizian 2003: 319; Gitelman 2001). They could not be shifted out because of their remarkable role in the economic life of the region. Most of these people belonged to the bourgeois and trading class paying heavy taxes.

The whole Jewish life was guided by Kahal, which had developed from the communal life of Jews and the Rabbis (Solzhenitsyn 2001: 14). The self-regulatory and administrative body "Kahal" (Kehilot) was an autonomous organization of the leadership of the Jewish congregations in Poland, which used to work like a 'provincial office including collecting money from its members'. "Kahal" used to issue passports to its members, collect taxes, it regulated Jewish commerce, and approved purchase and resale, therefore movement was restricted without prior permission of Kahal (Solzhenitsyn 2001: 14; Vasilev, Safronov 2004: 502).

It was under Queen Catherine II that the Jews got the right to actively participate in the elections as they belonged to an economically influential class. However, soon they started settling down in different cities and gave tough competition to Russian trading communities. This led to the issuance of special orders of the Queen in 1791 curbing trading rights only in Belo-Russia and Novo-rossiiski region (Safronov 2004: 502–503). Rules of "permanent residence" were brought in, which were applicable only to Jews and to no other nationalities in Russia and were the beginning of discrimination against Jews (Kazlov 2000: 143; Safronov 2004: 502–503).

Russia acquired new territories with the second and third breakup of Poland in 1793 and 1795, making more Jewish territories from Lithuania, Podolia, and Volhynia a part of Russia (Safronov 2004:503). The approximate number of Jews overall was reported to be almost a million by the end of the 18th century (Solzhenitsyn: 22; Safronov 2004: 503; Kazlov 2010: 164).

However, movements of Jews were restricted and the taxes imposed on them were double the taxes levied on Christians (Safronov 2004: 503). The discriminatory policies continued against Jews. Although a special committee was formed to regulate their well-being by Alexander I with the aim of listening to their opinions, it was not given due consideration (Vasilev, Safronov 2004: 503). The other major discriminatory policies included a ban on construction of Synagogues (1835); levying special tax on wearing the traditional Jewish dress (1844); education of Jewish youth (1847) which was contradicting traditional Jewish norms. Further reforms introduced by Alexander II significantly contributed in shaping the political, social and economic backdrop for radicalization of Russian Jews (Akihieze 2013: 562).

## Jews under the USSR

By 1917 prominent leaders of Jewish origin such as Trotsky, Sverdlov, and Kamenev actively participated with Bolsheviks. Jews could "occupy posts that they could only dream about prior to 1917" (Azizian 2003: 320). Soviet Archives accessed in the 90s point towards an extensive Jewish influence in the formation of the Soviet Government, even Lenin had "some Jewish ancestry" (Ibid). Prosecution of Jews in the USSR began with Stalin coming to power. The rule of 20th March 1917 "Cancellation of Religious and National Restrictions" played a decisive role in the life of Russian Jews. The members of the Jewish Communist Party of the country actively participated in the implementation of the atheist policy of the USSR, which was directed against all confessions including Judaism.

There was no "popular antisemitism" in the internal regions of Russia and though it was confined to the Pale of Settlement (Solzhenitsyn: 125), they were allowed to move within Russian

provinces for a specified duration with a special provincial passport, just after a few months resentment against Jews had suddenly flared up amongst the masses of people and spread over Russia (Vikhnovich 2014: 72). Civil War broke out in Southern and Western provinces of Russia where Jews population was high. Jews suffered not only because of pogrom and civil war but also due to undermining of the bases of Jewish management (Safronov 2004: 513). Mass arrests were made in 1919 and teaching of Hebrew was banned in schools and declared "the language of reaction and counter-revolution" (Solzhenitsyn: 225; Vikhnovich 2014). The Jewish Historical-Ethnographical Society, founded in 1920, which was later abolished in 1929, published the "History of anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia" in two volumes.

By 1941 there were approximately 4,965,000 Jews residing in the Soviet Union, however during the Second World War nearly 50% Jews lost their life. Their number was recorded at 875,000 within the Russian Federation according to the 1959 census. The period for struggle of Jews did not get over here. The period from 1967 to 1985 was full of struggle for Jews in the Soviet Union.

As noted by Solzhenitsyn, Jewish theatre did not reopen until 1966, however, the publication of books by Jewish authors, who were executed in Stalin's times, was resumed in Yiddish and Russian and one could even hear Jewish tunes on the broadcasts of the All-Union Radio (Solzhenitsyn: 354). Jewish authors were writing in Yiddish and also worked as Russian language journalists and translators (Ibid) (Solzhenitsyn: 356–357)

Anti-Israeli attitude of Soviet authorities as their external policy and anti-Semitism as internal played a crucial role in the development of the Jewish National Movement<sup>6</sup> after the Six Days war in 1967. The victory of the Israeli army led to the awakening of national consciousness in ideologically assimilated Jews of Soviet Union (Satanovsky 1996). Growth in antisemitism from authorities, as well as broad sections of the population made it impossible for Jews to reside in the Soviet Union (Satanovsky 1996). This united the Jews residing in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Tbilisi and Riga and made their visits to synagogues more frequent. A higher number of Jews applied for permission to leave the country, though there were possibilities of not getting the permission. In 1968, only 231 people could leave the country. Denial of permission to leave the country led to protests. Instances of refusal to accept Soviet citizenship by a Moscow student also occurred which was submitted to the Presidium of Supreme Soviet followed by another incident in 1969, when a Georgian Jews family sought help of United Nations to leave the country (Satanovsky 1996). Only after a lot of joint efforts the number of Jews who could leave the country rose constantly with time: 3033 in 1969; 31681 in 1972; 34722 in 1973; 51333 in 1979 (Ibid). Their protest continued and Zionist groups in various cities became active and a Zionist organization was formed in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov and Riga, which initially did not have any support from outside the country. During this period the number of 'Samizdat' Jewish magazines increased. The third issue of the Jewish magazine "Eton"<sup>7</sup> was confiscated and further publication was stopped. Another magazine "Jews in Russia" came up in 1972, focusing

6 For detailed information refer to the Electronic Jews Encyclopedia. The information on Soviet Jews was accessed from the Electronic Jews Encyclopedia website on 21st September 2018. <http://eleven.co.il/jews-of-russia/history-in-ussr/15420/>

7 Samizdat <http://eleven.co.il/jews-of-russia/and-soviet-society/13674/>



on different aspects of Jews in the Soviet Union; “Our Hebrew” devoted to problems of Hebrew in the Soviet Union<sup>8</sup> came up in 1978.

However, beginning of 80s took a different turn. Movement of Soviet Jews to Israel got restricted. One of the editors of the magazine “Jews in the USSR”, Brailovsky was convicted for five years. Though activist Jews continued their protest. However, the restructuring, which had begun in 1985 and the mass emigration led to a decrease in the intellectual level of active workers of religious revival.

## Post-Soviet Russia – Challenges for Restoration of Jewish Identity

Dramatic socio-cultural changes during the perestroika period caused a major shift in the overall life of the Russian society including that of Jews. The revival of the Jewish community has been challenging not only because of “the difference in approaches to the process but also because even desirability of such a reconstruction itself is open to discussion” (Chervyakov, Gitelman & Shapiro 2003: 61). Approximately 83.6% Jewish population out of 1,450,000 people recognized Russian as their native language (Vikhnovich 2014). While discussing the social roots of national conflict, Ryvkina points out the “absence of real democracy in the Russian society<sup>9</sup>” (Ryvkin 2005: 17–27). The argument is substantiated by answers given by Jews on the questions concerning Jews – 34% agreed that there is a growth of aggressive Russian nationalism, and 42% felt that the majority of the population of Russia treats Jews worse than other nations, with hostility (Ryvkin 2005: 17–27). Despite this as per another opinion of Professor Yukhneva, an ethnographer, one can talk about “the formation of a special community – Russian Jews”. Similar arguments have been raised that: “Jewish self-awareness is not universal but is quite different in different former Soviet Union countries” (Chervyakov, Gitelman & Shapiro 2003: 61; Vikhnovich 2014). According to a survey conducted in 1997–1998, 60.5% of pure Jews or partially of Jew origin people considered themselves to be both Jewish and Russian at the same time and 41.3% unequivocally identified themselves as “Russian Jews” or simply “Russian” (Vikhnovich 2014; Chervyakov, Gitelman & Shapiro 2000: 66–67). Nonetheless, it is of significance that immediately after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the Russian Jewish population declined drastically as a large number of Jews shifted primarily to Israel and the US (World Jewish Congress). The aim of the dissolution of state-sponsored antisemitism and the introduction of liberalization policies, religious freedom and equality of rights for ethnic minorities was to relax the restrictions posed on Jews (Tolts 2017). As observed by Mark Tolts, the number of people emigrating immediately post-collapse was gradually reducing but even this rate was higher in comparison to the mass emigration of Jews from the Russian Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries (Ibid).

Emigration of Jews and their family members from the USSR & Russia (1990–2009), (thousand persons)

8 Soviet Union - Jews in Soviet Union <http://eleven.co.il/jews-of-russia/history-in-ussr/15420/>

9 R. Ryvkina (Fully published in: How Jews Live in Russia. A Sociological Analysis of Changes. M., 2005, p. 17–27)

years	Total	Including			Israel's Share, %
		Israel	USA	Germany	
1970-1988	291	165	126		57
1990	205	185.2	6.5	8.5	90
1991	195	147.8	35.2	8.0	76
1995	114	64.8	21.7	15.2	57
1996	106	59.0	19.5	16.0	56
1999	99	66.8	6.3	18.2	67
2000	79	50.8	5.9	16.5	64
2005	18	9.4	0.9	6.0	52
2009	9	6.8	0.2	1.1	76

Source: Tolts Mark (2012), "The Post-Soviet Jewish Diaspora: Latest Assessment"

Jews occupying higher positions in the country was not limited to the formation period of USSR, but it is also there in the modern Russian society. Persons of Jewish origin, like Mikhail Fradkov (2004–2007), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (2000–2011), Abrikosov Aleksei (1991), Klebanov Ilya (2003–2011) served in the high offices of the State in various capacities. Their active participation is not restricted to official positions only but their acceptance in Russian society can be substantiated based on the data related to inter-ethnic marriage Russians being in majority. Earlier survey report of 1988 highlighted 73.2% of Jewish men and 62.8% of women entered into inter-ethnic marriages in the RSFSR, which corresponds to another age wise survey conducted in 1997–98.

#### Ethnicity of Spouses of "Pure Jews" in relation to age, Russia 1997–98

	16–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+
Jewish	42.9	39.3	42.2	56.0	58.0	70.5
Partly Jewish	14.3	13.1	17.6	12.0	10.7	6.3
No Jewish roots	42.9	47.5	40.2	32.0	31.3	23.2

Source: Chervyakov, Gitelman & Shapiro 2003: 64

Apart from this the notion of being a Jew among Russian Jews had more to do with the "knowledge of history and culture" rather than just following the Jewish religion (Cervyakov, Gitelman & Shapiro 2003: 61). Russian Jews preferred regular school over the traditional Jewish school. All this indicates that the majority of Russian Jews feel closer to characteristics acquired by Russian culture and consider Russia to be their homeland. In a paper published in "Demoscope weekly"<sup>10</sup> R. V. Ryvkina observed on 'changes in the national identity of the Jews of Russia in 1995-2004' that the changes in self-assessment of national identity are ambiguous and the proportion of those who consider themselves to be Russians have increased. (Ryvkin 2007: 303-304; 2005: 576). Now that there is no state antisemitism, the Jewish questions still

10 Ryvkina R. V., How the Jews live in Russia, (Excerpts from the book), No. 303-304, October 2007, <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2007/0303/analit04.php>

remain. It only demonstrates that the Russian society is separated from the model of civil society and the rule of law declared in the Constitution. (Ryvkina 2006<sup>11</sup>)

## Conclusion

The above discussion highlights that the Jews community in Russia consists of orthodox and liberal Jews. The 'snowball' survey has projected the need for a fresh follow-up survey to ascertain the clear number of Jews in the modern Russian society. The categorization of Russian Jews, their belief, mix-marriages shows that they have got culturally assimilated into larger Russian society. Although these individuals have full respect for and take pride in their Jewish heritage, they often find themselves distanced from Orthodox Jews. The question remains whether Jews consider it a threat to be in Russia or whether it is only media projection making the situation look worse.

Solzhenitsyn quoted a Jew, who lived in Soviet Russia and later immigrated to Israel: "We, the Jews who grew up in Russia, are a weird cross – the Russian Jew ... Others say we are Jews by nationality and Russians by culture. Yet is it possible to change your culture and nationality like a garment <...>? <...> My national identity is expressed in my culture. My culture coalesced with my nationality. Please separate one from another. I am also curious which cells of my soul are of the Russian color and which are of the Jewish one ..." (Solzhenitsyn: 430). As rightly pointed out by Gitelman, Russian Jews have been locked into a tempestuous, intense relationship producing great enthusiasm and profound disappointments as well as enormous Jewish ambivalence toward their (Russian Empire) homeland" (Gruber 2011: 119; Gitelman 2001: xi, xiii).

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