National Home meant the dilution of the pre-eminence of the native Arabs or their total or partial displacement. This, in short, is the basic issue.

How does one reconcile the 'historical claims' of the Jews in the Diaspora and the 'natural claims' of the native Arabs? In other words, it is a question of two rival nationalisms fighting over the same piece of territory. Compromise, therefore, became inevitable. The UN arrived at this compromise through its Majority Partition Plan. Partition was not an ideal solution and the proponents of the idea were aware of it. It was only a compromise between the two extreme demands.

With the emergence of Israel, the nationalist aspirations of the Jews have been realized. At the same time failure to create an Arab state in Palestine, deprived the nationalist aspirations of the other nation. A number of factors have led to this unfortunate state of affairs, and Israel's policy towards the Palestinians is one of them. Peace in the region would remain elusive unless the legitimate nationalist aspirations of the Palestinians are fulfilled. The real solution lies in the formation of a Palestine State along with Israel and not in lieu of Israel.

It is with this basic understanding, I have approached the subject of India and Israel.
Israel draws an unusually large attention in India. Neither the absence of formal relations nor the presence of only a microscopic Jewish population seem to have diminished Indian interest in Israel. Yet, one finds that a number of myths have been allowed to go unchallenged. On close scrutiny the views of a number of Indian leaders sound less plausible. Mahatma Gandhi exhibited his high idealism on the question of Jewish non-violence against Hitler. On the other hand, he took a 'pragmatic' position regarding the Arab violence against the Jews. When Nehru pleaded with Bose for opening India for the Jewish refugees, there was no idealism in the former's plea. The refugees offered him a cheap source of labour. India's representative in the UNSCOP would denounce any link between religion and politics in Palestine and yet succumb to the temptation of migrating to Pakistan, a nation created on the very same principle. One could underscore the Zionist bias of the Guatemalan delegate in the UNSCOP and yet remain indifferent towards the pro-Arab bias of the Indian representatives. Its silence on the Holocaust did not in any way prevent the Indian National Congress from highlighting the violent means employed by the Zionists in attaining their aims.

In this somewhat uncomfortable situation the easier course would have been to follow the maxim
'India can do no wrong'. Yet Bernard Lewis resolved my dilemma. In The Jews of Islam he writes:

I recall reading a delightful little pamphlet proving that the Islamic caliphate was superior to the American presidency. This was done by the simple device of defining the caliphate in terms of theological and juridical treatises and the presidency in terms of the latest scandals from Washington. It would of course be equally easy, if anyone thought it worth the trouble, to demonstrate the reverse by the same method -- by defining the presidency in terms of the constitution, and the caliphate in terms of gossip from medieval Baghdad, which is not lacking in the sources at our disposal.

This kind of comparison, however common, is not very helpful. It may be emotionally satisfying, but it is intellectually dishonest to compare one's theory with the other's practice. It is equally misleading to compare one's best with the other's worst....

In other words, India's idealistic pronouncements could not be compared with Israel's practice of realpolitik or vice-versa. This became my guiding principle.

One major problem, however, remained: the problem of evidence. The thirty-year-rule is not strictly implemented in India and as a result, a very large segment of official documents has not been made available even after the lapse of thirty years. Memoirs, biographies and personal interviews were of limited value. Hence I had to depend heavily on the Israeli archival material. Even though its foreign policy documents for 1950s are available, I was at a serious disadvantage; my non-familiarity with Hebrew,
Therefore, I had to rely on Israeli documents available in English.

It is said that pragmatism prompts nations to act in their self-interest. India is no exception. In the course of my study I had often doubted the wisdom of adopting a critical approach to India's position on various issues concerning Israel. In solving this major dilemma, I was fortunate to have the unstinted guidance of Prof. M.S. Agwani. While maintaining his critical examination of many of my views, as an academic, he allowed me freedom to develop my argument. On a few occasions I disagreed with his views. Only those who worked with him, can really understand his commitment to academic values. His critical comments have helped me in developing my argument more tightly and cogently. However, he cannot be held responsible for any of my omissions and commissions.

The Jews of Islam opened my eyes, broadened my horizons and gave words to my thoughts and I am deeply indebted to Prof. Bernard Lewis.

My interest in this subject was initially kindled by Dr. Subramaniam Swamy's article on India and Israel in Sunday in November 1982. It has been a long journey since then.

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