

the rivers of babylon

LIVE IN INDIA!



REMEMBERED RHYTHMS

CD SERIES

REMEMBERED RHYTHMS

RIVERS OF BABYLON LIVE IN INDIA

All music recorded in India during February 2005 as part of the Remembered Rhythms Festival of diaspora and the music of India.

Celebrating the diverse diasporic cultures and music within India and of the Indian diaspora abroad, this festival brought three groups of performers to the cities of Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Chennai, Pune, Hyderabad and Mumbai.

From Trinidad came D'Bhuyaa Saaj performing music of the East Indian community of the Caribbean. Sidi Goma performed music of the Sidi African community of Gujarat. Rivers of Babylon performed music of the Iraqi Jewish and Bene Israeli communities of India.

This CD features live recordings of Iraqi Jewish and Bene Israeli music performed by the London based group Rivers of Babylon.

The festival was conceived and organised by the Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology of the American Institute of Indian Studies with support from the Ford Foundation.



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MEMBERS OF RIVERS OF
BABYLON IN THE
REMEMBERED RHYTHMS
TOUR OF INDIA:

SARA MANASSEH LEADER, VOCALS, *DUMBUK* (DRUM)

AHMED ABD ALRAHMAN 'OUD (MIDDLE-EASTERN LUTE)

SOLOMON ELIAS MANDOLIN (PUNE AND MUMBAI

CONCERTS, ONLY)

ABE HAYEEM VOCALS, TAMBOURINE

SAEED NATHAN DRUZE, BEDUIN AND INDIAN PIPES,

SBA'TEN (FINGER CLICKS)

PETER SHADE ACCORDION

BARRY SOLOMON OBOE, COR ANGLAIS, VOCALS

EDWARD SOLOMON VOCALS

PAMELA SOLOMON VOCALS

SOLLY SOLOMON VOCALS

SUSAN VERNEY VIOLIN

JEWISH DIASPORA IN INDIA

Historically, there have been three established communities of Jews in India – the Cochin Jews, the Bene Israel (lit. “Children of Israel”), and the Baghdad Jews.

The largest, and possibly the oldest of these three communities is the Bene Israel. According to legend this group first settled in the Konkan coast of Maharashtra as long ago as 175 BCE after their ship sank, taking all their religious books and belongings with it. Despite this loss and centuries of no links with other Jewish communities, they maintained the Jewish Sabbath, dietary laws, and many festivals. Long interaction with surrounding communities led them to adopt Marathi and local ways of life.

The smallest community of Jews in India are the Jews of Cochin in Kerala. Though their ancestors are thought to have arrived in the tenth century BCE, during King Solomon's time, the earliest evidence of Jews in Kerala dates from at least 1000 CE. The initial group of Jews, known as “Malabari Jews,” were joined by a number of European Jews known as “Pardesi” Jews in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The most recent Jewish group to settle in India were the Baghdadian (or Baghdadi) Jews. Beginning in the eighteenth century Jewish merchants from the Middle East and Central Asia settled in India, in the growing cities of British India principally Bombay, Calcutta and Poona. While mainly from Baghdad and thus known as Baghdadian, Babylonian or Iraqi Jews this community includes Jews from Basra and Amara, Syria, Aden, Iran, Bukhara, Afghanistan and other places in Central Asia.

Today the Jewish communities of India have all but disappeared as most of their members have resettled mainly in Israel, the U.K., North America and Australia. Rivers of Babylon comes to us from London and thus represents a triple diaspora – the original Jewish Diaspora in Iraq, a second diaspora in India, and now a third diaspora in Britain.

MUSIC OF THE JEWS OF INDIA

In the orthodox Jewish tradition, religious music is primarily vocal and not accompanied by musical instruments on Sabbaths and major festivals, since the playing of musical instruments on these days has been forbidden since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. However, for performances apart from such days of religious significance, instruments may be played.

Thus, songs of the Bene Israel community, for example, may be accompanied by Indian instruments such as the sitar, harmonium, bulbultarang, violin and tabla. During the twentieth century, a music school directed by Eliyahoo Saataamkar provided musical training in the Indian classical tradition, on such instruments as the *tabla*, harmonium, *sitar*, flute and violin, for a number of pupils in Bombay.



The repertoire of the Bene Israel today comprises many influences including those of neighbouring Hindu and Muslim communities in coastal Maharashtra and later in Mumbai. While the texts of Bene Israel prayers, in keeping with all Jewish traditions, are mainly in Hebrew with some Aramaic, they are distinguished by the fact that a large part of their song repertoire is in Marathi. The Hindu form of *kirtan* (religious song) through was also adopted by the Bene Israel during the nineteenth century for religious education. Bene Israel *kirtan*-s were “Bible stories presented in Marathi verse and sung to Hindu tunes by the *kirtankar* (singer) either solo or with choral and/or instrumental accompaniment” (Isenberg 1988:91), and were inspired by Marāzhi translations of the Bible, by American and Scottish Christian Missionaries, in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Another distinguishing feature in the customs of the Bene Israel, and perhaps unique in the Jewish world, is the gathering for a prayer service known as “Eliyāhoo Hanābī” (Elijah the Prophet). Also known as *malīda*, it is a thanksgiving ceremony, celebrating a number of auspicious events. The service consists of the singing of a *pizmon* (hymn) associated with Elijah the Prophet, and the readings from the Pentateuch associated with the termination of the Sabbath. A tray with five different types of offerings is prepared, and includes appropriate fruits of the tree, the earth – and aromatic herbs, to fulfil the *miẓwōth* (religious obligations) of reciting the customary blessings. Isenberg (1988:115) notes that the *malīda* “has its obvious analogue in the Hindu *Puja*”

In Jewish life, the synagogue and home both serve as the primary performance contexts for most of the sacred repertoire, which includes prayer chants, hymns and biblical cantillation. These are heard in the context of daily, Sabbath and festival prayer services, and for occasions marking life-cycle celebrations. The Sabbath, in the Jewish tradition is considered the most important day in the calendar, and it is not surprising that a large number of hymns have been composed for this day. Even life-cycle celebrations are especially honoured on the Sabbath.

Baghdadian Jewish life in India maintained the traditions of its mother country – today’s Iraq. There has always been a strong emphasis on learning to read the bible and recite prayers in Hebrew, also with regard to keeping the Jewish-Babylonian



pronunciation of Hebrew, the language of religious observance. Religious and cultural traditions were upheld faithfully both at home and in the houses of worship. Learned Baghdadian *ḥakhāmim* (religious authorities) served the communities in Bombay and Calcutta. Beautiful synagogues were established in Bombay, Poona and Calcutta, with prayer services led by *ḥazzānim* (prayer leader, cantor), who were often from Baghdad.

In daily life, first generation emigrés maintained the Judeo-Arabic Baghdad dialect to converse with one another, though in time also learnt to speak Hindustani and English. At celebrations for life cycle events, songs in Iraqi Arabic and in the Judeo-Arabic of Baghdad were performed particularly for domestic celebrations. The Baghdad tradition of the *daqqāqa* – a professional woman musician who played the *naqqāra* (small kettle-drums) and sang primarily at the pre-wedding henna ceremony – was also known in Bombay. The most famous *daqqāqa* in Baghdad during the 1920s, was Mas‘uda alBambayliyyi (Mas‘uda the Bombayite), who had originally emigrated from ‘Imara to Bombay, with her parents and siblings.

Due to their relatively recent arrival in India and continued contact with West Asia, the music of the Baghdad Jews retains the languages, instruments, melodies and sounds of Baghdad. However, the musical ambience of Bombay (and of other cities, such as Calcutta, Poona) did result in musical changes in the performance of the second and third generations of this community as it drew on myriad influences ranging from Indian popular and film music, Hollywood musicals, Indian devotional music as well as Jazz, Western classical and popular music and Christian hymns.

Perhaps the most striking change in the music of Baghdad Jews in India was, in many cases, the disappearance of the “neutral” intervals created by the use of “half-flat” and “half-sharp” notes in a number of Middle Eastern melodic scales – creating, for example, the interval of the (approximate) three-quarter tone, and “neutral third” that characterises much Middle Eastern music. Particularly with later generations, these notes were often “rounded off” or replaced by the half- or full-tone as found in the standard scales of Indian and Western music. This change is also evident in musical borrowings by the Bene Israel of religious song from the Baghdad community. There are numerous Arab melodic modes (or scales), many of them not standardised in the Arab world.

THE MUSIC OF RIVERS OF BABYLON

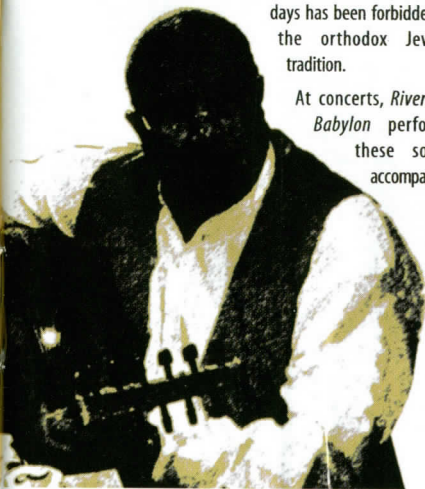
The music performed by *Rivers of Babylon* is primarily the religious and secular music of the Babylonian (also known as Baghdad or Iraqi) Jewish tradition: folk songs, hymns (Judeo-Arabic: *shba ḥoth* – lit. “Praises”; sing: *shba ḥ*) for Sabbaths, festivals and life cycle events, and Middle Eastern instrumental items. The languages of the songs range from Hebrew – in the Babylonian pronunciation – to Aramaic, Judeo-Arabic and Arabic. The melodies, composed in the melodic modes (*anḡâm* or *maqāmât*) of Arab music, reflect characteristics of Iraqi folk song.

Most of the songs performed are *shbahoth*, the most popular type of hymn in the Jewish Babylonian tradition. Also known as *piyyûṭim* and as *pizmonim* or *zémíroth* in other Jewish traditions, *shba ḥoth* are paraliturgical, sociable songs, sung around the dinner table, during or following a festive meal,

or at synagogue, on pilgrimage, or other occasions. The texts are especially composed poems, of a religious nature, often expressing national troubles and hopes, and are of great beauty and literary merit.

Adapting the quantitative metres of Classical Arabic poetry, Jewish poets wrote religious and secular verse in Hebrew, where the metre relied not upon syllabic stress but upon recurring groups created by the combination of short and long syllables. It was usual for the poet's "signature" (his first name) to appear as an acrostic formed from the initial letter of each verse, as will be heard on some of the tracks on this album. The melodies are transmitted orally. As already mentioned, on Sabbaths and Festivals *shba loth* are sung unaccompanied, the playing of musical instruments on these days has been forbidden in the orthodox Jewish tradition.

At concerts, *Rivers of Babylon* performs these songs accompanied



by a wealth of instruments, including 'oud (middle-eastern lute), violin, oboe, cor anglais, mandolin, Druze and Indian pipes, accordion, keyboard and percussion – most of which were represented on the Remembered Rhythms tour of India.

It is customary to accompany joyful songs, such as those for birth and marriage, with ululations – in the Iraqi tradition, performed by women as a high-pitched *kililili*. Nowadays both men and women call out with this sound at appropriate events, as did *Rivers of Babylon* audiences responding enthusiastically with *kililili* calls during our performances of life-cycle songs. Harking back to their Indian roots, *Rivers of Babylon* includes songs from the Bene-Israel Jewish tradition and vintage song from Indian films in its repertoire.

RIVERS OF BABYLON

Rivers of Babylon was established in 1999 by Sara Manasseh, in response to a request for a choir specialising in Iraqi-Jewish repertoire. This London-based group specialises in the religious and secular music of the Baghdad Jewish tradition, and has performed widely in London, at cultural events, music conferences, universities and public concerts, and also on radio and television programmes.

The *Remembered Rhythms* tour in India was the first international event in which the group participated. Most of the group members have known each other since childhood, and were born into the Baghdad Jewish community in India (Bombay and Calcutta), meeting frequently at school, synagogue and at weekly meetings and annual camps of the Jewish youth group, *Habonim* ("The builders"). *Rivers of Babylon* represents a cultural tradition,

which was transported from Iraq to India and beyond. The group includes ethnomusicologists, architects, composers, IT consultants, a doctor, secretary, taxi driver and fire prevention officer. The Rivers of Babylon have published one CD *Treasures* that can be ordered from their website.

More information on Rivers of Babylon can be found at www.riversofbabylon.com.

INSTRUMENTS USED BY RIVERS OF BABYLON

Dumbuk – Varieties of this goblet shaped single headed drum are found in much of the Arab world, Iran and South Eastern Europe.

Oud – A short necked, unfretted plucked stringed instrument found throughout much of the Arab world. The 'oud usually has five or six courses of strings and is played with a plectrum.

Druze, beduin and Indian pipes – These are all varieties of end-blown pipes – aerophonic instruments consisting of a tube which may be either open or stopped at the end and can have finger holes.

Sba'tén – This is a form of VERY loud finger clicking from Iraq and elsewhere in West Asia.

Accordion – This portable instrument of the reed organ family consists of two keyboards connected by a bellows. The treble keyboard has keys like those of a piano while the bass keyboard consists of buttons.

Oboe and cor anglais – Similar to the Indian shehnai and nagasvaram, the oboe is the principle double reed instrument in Western music. The cor anglais, or English horn, is a larger member of the oboe family, and tuned one fifth lower than the oboe.

Violin – Familiar to audiences around the world this instrument has also found a home in the music of the Baghdad Jews and more widely in Arabic music.





NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS

The translation and transliteration of the song texts are taken from Manasseh (2004).

1. Yéhi Shalom Bé'hélnû

("MAY THERE BE PEACE WITHIN OUR WALLS")

Mumbai 22 February 2005

Acrostic: Yéhoshû'a. Melodic mode: *rast* (adapted).

This is perhaps the most famous of hymns for the birth of a son. It may be sung at the synagogue, on the Sabbath following the birth, to honour the parents, or immediately preceding the circumcision ceremony, which is normally performed when the baby boy is eight days old. The song, in context, is performed unaccompanied by instruments. On this track, the song is introduced on the 'oud. As is customary on joyful songs for life-cycle celebrations, this track is accompanied by high-pitched ululations, and also by high trills on instruments. Audience reception as always to this song is enthusiastic both in participation in the ululations and in hearty applause.

TRANSLITERATION:

I Yéhi shalom bé-héylénû
Wéshalwáh bé-yisrá-él
Bésimán ʔob bén bâ lânû
Béyâmâw yâbo haggœl

Refrain: (Amen) Bésimán ʔob bén bâ lânû
Béyâmâw yâbo haggœl

II Hayyéled yéhi ra-ʿanân
Béʕél shadda-y yithlonân
Wubatoráh âz yithbbonân
Yé-alléf dâth lékhol sho-ʕl

- III Wumqoro yéhi bârûkh
Zéman hayyâw yéhi ârûkh
Wéshulhâno yéhi ʿârûkh
Wézibho lo yithgâél
- IV Shémo yéʕé békhol ʿéber
Ashér yighddal yéhi ghéber
Wulyir-é él yéhi hâber
Yéhi bédoro kishmûél
- V ʿAdéy ziqnâh wégham sébâh
Yéhi dâshén békhol ʔobâh
Wéshâlom lo wérob ahabâh
Âmén kén yomar hâél
- VI Hannimmol béthokh ʿammo
Yihyé lé-âbiw wul-immô
Wéyihyé élohâw ʿimmo
Wégham kol béth yisráél

TRANSLATION:


- I May there be peace within our walls, [Psalms 122.7]
And security in Israel.
In a good sign a son is born to us,
May the redeemer come in his days.

Refrain

(Amen) In a good sign a son is born to us,
May the redeemer come in his days.

- II The boy will be invigorated
Under the protection of the Almighty,
Studying the Torah,
Teaching the Law to all who enquire.



- 
- III And his fountain (family life) will be blessed,
[Proverbs 5.18]
The span of his days will be long,
His table will always be prepared, [Cf Psalms 23.5]
And his feast will not be defiled.
- IV His name will be known at home and abroad.
He will be a gentleman when he grows up,
And a friend to the God-fearing.
In his generation he will be as Samuel.
- V He will live to a ripe old age,
He will have abundance of all things good,
And will enjoy peace and abundant love.
May the Lord say 'Amen' to this.
- VI The circumcised one among his people,
With his father and mother (the length of their days).
And may the Lord be with him,
And with all the House of Israel.

2. Muqaddima Hijâz

Delhi 20 February 2005

Iraqi (trad.) Melodic mode: *hijâz*.

An Iraqi composition, *Muqaddima ʿĤijâz* is an instrumental "prelude" in the mode of *hijâz*. It is usually played at concerts as a prelude to a song in the same melodic mode, as in this case — where it introduces the songs in *hijâz*, in Track 3. *Muqaddima ʿĤijâz* is a secular piece, and not associated with a specific religious group or occasion. The instruments heard on this track are *ʿoud*, violin, cor anglais, accordion, *dumbuk* and tambourine.

3. Ki Eshmérah Shabbath (Because I Keep the Sabbath) / Balini-b Balwa (He Plagues me with a Plague)

Bangalore 17 February 2005

Text: Abrahâm Ibn ʿEzra (c 1089–c 1164)

Acrostic: Abraham. Melodic mode: *hijâz*

Balini-b Balwa: Anon. Iraqi folk song.

This track features a well-loved Iraqi folk song, *Balini-b Balwa* (He's a plague on me!), which was also widely known among the Baghdad Jewish community in India. *Balini-b Balwa* is sung in Arabic, but *Rivers of Babylon* begins and ends the performance with the Hebrew refrain of a popular Sabbath text, *Ki Eshmérah Shabbath*, which may also be sung to the same tune. Though it may appear inappropriate to combine religious and secular sentiments, the practice of singing a sacred text to a tune associated with profane lyrics has been standard practice for many centuries.

The text of *Ki Eshmérah Shabbath* was composed by Abraham Ibn ʿEzra (c1089–1164), one of the leading figures in the Golden Age of Poetry in Andalusian Spain. Known in many Jewish traditions, the text may be sung to a number of tunes, some associated with secular song, as in this case. *Balini-b Balwa* is a love song, despite its title! The Arabic text is collected from the singing of Salha Khattan, who often sang it as a lullaby to her grand children (recorded c 1983, Brian Elias, London) and from Jacob Baher (recorded 1985, Sara Manasseh, Manchester), both informants having lived previously in Baghdad and Bombay.



The 'oud introduces the song, joined by the remaining instruments, with voices following. The two instrumental interludes feature instrumental solos

TRANSLITERATION:

(Refrain: from Sabbath Text)

Refrain: Kî éshmerâh shabbâth é! yishmérénî
Oth hí lé'olméi 'ad béyno úbéynî

Iraqi folk song:

(Refrain.) Balîni-b balwâ yâ 'yûnî

Balîni-b balwâ

Wâllâh mâridâ yâ 'éynî

Balîni-b balwâ

- I Kul yom âgûl el-yom
Bâcher yibéynûn
Lanî lîl-imbâshir
Bosâ mnîl 'yûn
Wâllâh mâridâ yâ 'éynî
Balîni-b balwâ

- II Wushlon ânâm al-lél
Wunta 'alâ bâlî
Hattâ-simich bil mâ-y
Yibchî 'alâ hâlî

- III Kul el-blâm tfût
W'éynî 'alâ balmak
Wumnil-hawâ wul-roj
Rabbî yisalmak

(Final Refrain.) Balîni-b balwâ yâ 'yûnî
Balîni-b balwâ

Hubbî wa-âridâ
Balîni-b balwâ

TRANSLATION:

(Refrain: from Sabbath text)

Because I keep the Sabbath, the Lord will keep me,
It is an eternal sign between Him and me.

Iraqi folk song:

(Refrain) He plagued me with a plague, oh my eyes!

He plagued me with a plague!

By God! I don't want him, my eye!

He plagued me with a plague!

I Every day I say, today – or tomorrow – they will
come,

And I'll give the bringer of good news
A kiss from the eyes.

II How can I sleep at night,
With you on my mind?
Even the fish in the water
Weep at my condition.

III All night the rowing boats go by,
And my eyes are on your boat.
And from the winds and the waves
The Lord will protect you.

(Final Refrain) He plagued me with a plague, oh my eyes!

He's a plague upon me!

He's my love, and I want him,
He's a plague upon me!



4. Šiméni Rosh 'Al Kol Oyba'i

("Place Me Above All My Foes")

Pune 20 February 2005

Acrostic: Šhéłomoh ḥazzéq ("Solomon, be strong!")

Melodic mode: *nahawand* (It may also be sung in *bayât*).

A hymn for the Festival of *Purim* ("Feast of Lots"), which commemorates the saving of the Persian Jews from extermination, as related in the bible, in the Book of Esther. The festival is a happy one, with many of the songs in similar mood. The present song, in contrast, deals with the darker, more sombre aspect of the festival.

The performance is introduced by an improvisation on 'oud, leading to the melody of the refrain, and unaccompanied voices. The instruments play as an ensemble, but the silvery high sound of the mandolin, is especially prominent. The final refrains feature short solos by the vocalists.

TRANSLITERATION:

l Šiméni rosh 'al kol oybya-y
– Wuthsamméheni
Kíméy morddékha-y bén yâir
– Él ḥannûn wéḥonnénî

Refrain. Mâḥo thimḥéhu lé-édom
– Hakéhu ém 'al bânim

II Libashtâ malkhûth lahadassâh – Wéhiṣṣaltanî
Bé-qûm hâman hâ-aghâghî
– Kéthannîn léballé'énî

III Hâman ḥashab lé-abédénî
– Wulhashmidénî

Dâḥoh déḥithanî linpol – Wamonây 'azârânî

IV Ḥazzéq léb 'abddâkh kéqédém

– Wé-amméšénî

Bizkhûth yiṣḥâq 'aqédékhâ – Hashîbénî 'al kannî

Bizkhûth abrahâm ahûbékhâ

– Hashîbénî 'al kannî

Bizkhûth ya'aqob témimékhâ

– Hashîbénî 'al kannî

Bizkhûth yosef ṣaddîqékhâ

– Hashîbénî 'al kannî

Bizkhûth moshéh nébiékhâ

– Hashîbénî 'al kannî

Bizkhûth aharon kohanékhâ

– Hashîbénî 'al kannî

Bizkhûth dâwîd méshîḥékhâ

– Hashîbénî 'al kannî

TRANSLATION:

I Set me above my foes, and let me rejoice,
As in the times of Mordekhai son of Yair, Lord be merciful
and show me compassion.

Refrain: Wipe out Edom and destroy him completely.

II You clothed Esther in majesty, and saved me
When Haman the Agagite rose like a crocodile to
swallow me up.

III Haman thought to annihilate me, and stamp me out,
He thrust me down, I nearly fell, but the Lord supported me.
(Psalm 118.13)

IV Strengthen the heart of your servant as in the past, and
give me courage,

For the merit of Isaac, your bound one, restore me to my former position.

For the merit of Abraham, your beloved one, restore me to my former position.

For the merit of Jacob, your perfect one, restore me ...

For the merit of Joseph, your righteous one, restore me ...

For the merit of Moses, your prophet, restore me ...

For the merit of Aaron, your priest, restore me ...

For the merit of David, your Messiah, restore me ...

5. Yom Hashshabbâth ("The Sabbath Day")

Kolkata 8 February 2005

Acrostic: Maṣṣūr Melodic mode: 'ajam

Perhaps the best loved *shbaḥ* ("Praise song") for the Sabbath, the hymn praises this longed for day of rest. It is the song most likely to be heard at Sabbath meals, and is sung with verve, by family and friends – either between courses or at the end of the meal. Performed in the 'ajam mode (its melodic intervals equivalent to the North Indian *bilāval*, to the Karnāṭak *dhiraśhankābharaṇam* and Western major scale), this song lends itself well to impromptu harmonisation. Middle Eastern music is characterised by an absence of harmony, so that when harmony is encountered, the effect is unusual and surprising. This performance features vocal harmonisation from the outset.

In this performance, the accordion immediately evokes a jolly, convivial spirit so characteristic of the song. The instrumental ensemble, including the violin, and contrasting sounds of the high flute and low 'bud, plays together on the interludes, with the oboe, prominent in the repeat of the interlude following verse 2. In context, for example at the

dining table, it is quite usual for fewer people to sing the verses, with all participants joining in the chorus.

TRANSLITERATION:

Yom hashshabbâth éyn kāmohû

(Refrain): Bérakho élohîm wayqaddéshêhû

- I Miyymon rîshon 'ad yom shishshî
Liqrath shabbâth nikhséfâh nafshî
Kî bashshabbâth éśé ḥofshî
Wékhî yom ménuḥâh éqrâchéû
- II Nâghîl wénismaḥ kî ṭob léhodoth
Wulzammér 'élyon 'al kol odoth
Kî hashshabbâth lanû ḥamûdoth
Îsh ba'ar lo yédâ'éhû
- III Šiwwâh la'asoth shabbâth kahalâkhâh
Âz missînai mišwâh 'arûkhâh
Gam hî lëshomrâhh kéthér mēlûkhâh
Wékhâbod wéhâdâr tē'aṭṭéréhû
- IV Râśâh amonây wúbâḥar bânû
Wumikol lâshon hibddîlanû
Wuqdushshath hashshabbâth hinḥîl lânû
Kol zéra' ya'aqob kabbédêhû
(Kol zéra' yisraél yishméréhû)

TRANSLATION:

The Sabbath day, there is none like it,
Refrain: The Lord blessed it, and sanctified it.

- I From the first day (Sunday) until the sixth (Friday),
My soul longs for the Sabbath,
For on the Sabbath I go forth free,
And so I call it a day of rest.

- II We shall rejoice and be glad, for it is good to give thanks
And to sing praise to the Lord on high for all things.
For the Sabbath is our desire;
An ignorant man does not know its value.
- III He commanded us to make the Sabbath, according to the law,
From Sinai was the commandment set forth.
It is a royal crown to him who keeps it
And adorns him with honour and glory.
- IV The Lord willed and chose us,
And separated us from all peoples,
The sanctity of the Sabbath he gave us to inherit.
All the seed of Jacob shall honour it.
All the seed of Israel shall observe it.

6. Êl Êliyyahu ("Lord of Elijah")

Pune 20 February 2005

Acrostic: Abrahâm Text: Abrahâm Ibn 'Ezra (c 1089- c 1164)

Melodic mode: *bayât*

Written by Abrahâm Ibn 'Ezra, one of the leading luminaries of Hebrew secular and liturgical poetry, which blossomed in medieval Andalusian Spain, this hymn remains a favourite in the Baghdad tradition, where it has a dual function. It is sung every week, at the *habdâlâh* (Separation of the Sabbath from week-days) service following the termination of the Sabbath (*mosa-éy shabbath*), when it is believed that Elijah the Prophet visits. It is also sung for the birth of a boy, on the night of the *aqd el-yâs* (Judeo-Arabic: Binding of the Myrtle), and the following morning, at the circumcision ceremony, normally performed when the baby is eight days old. The

hymn, sedate yet festive, is sometimes punctuated by "*kililililil-s*" – ululations.

The song is performed in the mode of *bayât*, similar to the North and South Indian *âsâvari* and *naṭabhairavi*, respectively, and the Western natural minor scale, but with the second degree tuned a quarter tone flat, producing a three-quarter tone between intervals 1 and 2, and again between intervals 2 and 3. In the present performance, the song is introduced on the *'oud*, with a short rhythmic ostinato leading to the melody, joined by violin and mandolin on the repeat. The refrain is sung by all singers, with soloists on the individual verses. The two instrumental interludes feature the violin and the *'oud*. Both singers and instrumentalists join in the ululations – as did much of the audience!

TRANSLITERATION:

I (Refrain) Êl êliyyâhû

Êl êliyyâhû

Bizkhûth êliyyâhû

Hannâbî hâbênâ

II Bo yirtom rikhbo

Na' bashshébi kî bo

Lo shâkhab libbo

Gam lo râ-âh shénâh

III Rab maḥlî bir-oth

Kaḥshî wumsan-oth

Yâfoth wubrîyoth

Bâsar watir'énâh

IV Hashqêh sûr méy rosh

Šâr 'énâw yilqosh

Yom 'éna- / liqdosh

Yisraél tish'énâh

V Mâtha-y tar-êh oth
Yésha^c él qoroth
Lâkh wulkhâ nos-oth
Qolân watâronnâh

VI Hammal-âkh hago-él
Lifnéy dal shoél
Anna hâél él
Abrâhâm hâqrêh nâ.

TRANSLATION:

(Refrain) God of Elijah,
God of Elijah,

I In honour of Elijah,
Oh bring the prophet to us!

II He will harness his mobile chariot
Captive, in it.
His heart was restless,
And neither did he have any sleep.

III We are very disturbed when we see
That those who belittle and hate us
Are themselves beautiful, and wax
Fat, grazing (in the field).

IV Lord, give them bitter water to drink,
The enemy looks at us with piercing eyes.
My eyes look to the day when the Holy One
Pays heed to Israel.

V When Will You show the sign
Of salvation; they call You Lord,
And raise their
Voice and sing to You.

VI May the Angel of Redemption
Plead for the poor.
We beseech You, Oh Lord! God
Of Abraham, make it happen!

7. Éliyyahu Hannabee ("Elijah, the Prophet")

Pune 20 February 2005

Sung in Marathi, the language of the state of Maharashtra, the text is composed to the melody of the 1950s film hit *Dil Ek Mandir Hai* ("The Heart is a Temple") — another example of a melody to a secular song being used as the basis for a religious text. Elijah the Prophet is associated with the coming of the Messiah, and holds a particularly significant place in the Bene Israel tradition.

Marathi song texts of the Bene Israel often include names of biblical figures and words in Hebrew. In the present song, both words in the title itself are from the Hebrew: *Éliyyâhû* (Elijah) and *Hanâbî* (The prophet). Other occurrences of Hebrew in this song are: *Makkâbî* (the "Maccabees", signifying the Jewish people) and *Pinhâs* (Pinhas, the grandson of Aaron. There is a belief that Elijah, himself the precursor of the Messiah, is a reincarnation of Pinhas).

At *Rivers of Babylon* concerts in India, this song was particularly appreciated by members of the Bene Israel community and by Marathi speakers in general. At the Pune performance, heard on this track, the lines "darshana dyâ yâ, yâ garibâlâ, yé-ooni yâ bhoomiwari", drew an emotional response and appreciative applause from the audience.

The song is introduced by a free improvisation on accordion, leading to the melody in waltz-timing, or the 6-beat *dadra tâl* in Indian music. The remaining instruments enter with the voices, with the violin and cor anglais especially

prominent. The 'oud, mandolin and *dumbuk*, also add depth and colour to the ensemble. Vocal soloists with the ensemble add vocal harmonies at the end of the song, which is in the minor mode, but ends with a major chord, and appears almost as a ray of sunshine, as though the prayers have been answered, and that Elijah has indeed appeared in a vision. This song was added to *Rivers of Babylon* repertoire from the recording appearing on Shaked (2001).

TRANSLITERATION:

(Refrain) éliyâhoo hannâbî, wâTa tumchî
âza pahâté hî sârî makkâbî

- I gorâgaribântsa tu rakhawâlâ
tumchyâtsa nâwâchî zapato mî mâlâ
darshana dyâ yâ, yâ garibâlâ
yé-oonî yâ bhoomîwarî
- II êk sadichhâ pinhâsiyânchâ
âhé ho antarî

TRANSLATION:

(Refrain) Elijah, the Prophet – all the Jewish people
Constantly await your coming

- I You are the protector of all the poor
Your name is incessantly on my mind
Bless this poor person by granting a vision
By descending upon this earth
- II This is the one, profound wish of the Jewish people
The people of Pinhas [the Messiah]

8. (a) *Sinâi Sinâi Ayyêh Moshêh* ("Sinai, Sinai, where is Moses?")

(Trad. Babylonian)

Alphabetical acrostic. Form: call and response. Melodic mode: *nahawand*

(b) *Sinâi Dongrâwar Moshêlâ* ("To Moses, Upon Mount Sinai")

(Trad. Bene Israel) Form: call and response

Pune 20 February 2005

Both well-loved songs for *Sim /ach Torah* (Rejoicing of the Law), these are performed as call and response between the leader and congregation.

The Baghdad version is especially remembered in performance during the 1950s and '60s at the Keneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue (Fort, Bombay), as sung by Isaac Barukh, then the *shammash* (beadle) of the synagogue.

Sinai, Sinai, ayyêh Moshêh? ("Sinai, Sinai, where is Moses?") the congregation response changes around the order of the words "Sinai" and "Moshêh", thus:

Moshêh Moshêh, ayêh Sinai? ("Moses, Moses, where is Sinai?")

Of added interest is that the leader may present the words "Sinai" and "Moshêh" in reverse order, so that to 'get it right' the congregation has to be alert and be ready to swap the words around, depending on the leader's presentation.

Audiences, including children, at the *Remembered Rhythms* concerts were quick to pick up the format and supported the performance with their enthusiastic responses at all venues, without exception.

The song is in the Iraqi ten-beat *igrug* or *jurjina* rhythm (5+5).

The Bene Israel version, sung in Marathi, is based on the Baghdad song. *Rivers of Babylon* learnt the Marathi song from the singing of Hannahbai Aaron Penkar, and Dinah and Samson Korlekar (recorded 2003, Sara Manasseh, Mumbai). Here too, the element of call and response is a feature of the song, and the qualities of Moses' character are enumerated in the verses, though not in the form of an alphabetic acrostic. Members of the Bene Israel community who attended the concerts congratulated the group on the song being sung just as they remembered it, and on the Marathi pronunciation!

In performance, *Rivers of Babylon* combined the two songs, beginning and ending with the Baghdad version.

The introduction is unaccompanied voices, Sara Manasseh leading with the call on the refrain, and the group, including the instrumentalists, singing the appropriate response. The instruments enter with the verse, and during interludes, maintain the call and response pattern – most calls being initiated on 'oud, and during the longer interlude, by the accordion and violin. The flute and mandolin are also heard, while the *dumbuk* underlines the *igrug* rhythm.

The soloists also bring variety in terms of dynamics, with loud and soft calls leading to similar responses.

Following verse 6 and a short instrumental interlude, the Bene Israel song *Sinai Dongrawar Moshéla* is introduced, with the new 'call' in Marathi. The oboe enters now, adding to the instrumental timbre. Three verses are sung, as solo and the following verse is sung as a duet; the responses are sung by the group, and the instruments provide interludes. The *dumbuk* reinstates the *igrug* rhythm to lead back to a reprise of *Sinai Sinai ayyé Moshéh*, with the calls and

responses exploring a range of dynamics from very loud to the quietest whisper.

8a) Baghdad/Babylonian text (Hebrew)

TRANSLITERATION:

(Refrain) *Sînai sînai ayyéh moshéh?*
Moshéh moshéh ayyéh sînai?

- I *Âhûb nighlâh 'al hâr sînai – Bârûkh nighlâh 'al hâr sînai*
Gibbor nighlâh 'al hâr sînai – Dâghûl nighlâh 'al hâr sînai
- II *Hadûr . . . Wâ'éd . . . Zakâi . . . Ḥannûn*
- III *šâhor . . . Yâhîd . . . Kabbîr . . . Lâ'ad . . .*
- IV *Mélêkh . . . Norâ . . . Somêkh . . . 'Ozér*
- V *Podéh . . . Šaddîq . . . Qâdosh . . . Raḥûm*
- VI *Shaddai . . . Tâmîm . . . Tomêkh . . .*
Taqqîf

TRANSLATION:

(Refrain) Mount Sinai, Mount Sinai, where is Moses?
 Moses, Moses, where is Mount Sinai?

I The loved one was revealed (on Mount Sinai), the blessed one was revealed (on Mount Sinai), the heroic one (etc.), the distinguished one (etc.).

II The glorious one was revealed (on Mount Sinai), the eternal one was revealed (etc.), the righteous one (etc.), the merciful one (etc.).

III The pure one; the unique one; the mighty one; the eternal one.

IV The royal one; the awesome one; the righteous; the helping one.

V The redeeming one; the righteous one; the holy one; the merciful one.

VI The Almighty; the faultless one; the supportive one; the resolute one.

8b) Bene Israel text (Marathi):

Sinây Dongrâwar moshêlâ

Bene Israel (trad.) / Marathi

Sung in the call and response style with the chorus responding 'Sinâi Dongar' (Mount Sinai).

Chorus:

sinâi Dongrâwar moshêlâ
pawitra shâstra dilê âmhâlâ

Transliteration:

I phâr pawitra,
(Response) sinâi Dongar
namra âhé to,
(Response) sinâi Dongar
swachha âhé to,
(Response) sinâi Dongar

II lahân âhé to,
(Response) sinâi Dongar
prém bharît âhé,
(Response) sinâi Dongar
âhé âwaDtâ,
(Response) sinâi Dongar
III harsha karî to,
(Response) sinâi Dongar
nâchû lâglâ,

(Response) sinâi Dongar
gâ-û lâglâ,

(Response) sinâi Dongar

TRANSLATION:

Chorus:

On Mount Sinai, Moses
Gave us the pure and Holy Law

I Very pure, is he (Moses)

(Response) Mount Sinai

Humble, is he (Moses)

(Response) Mount Sinai

Chaste, is he (Moses)

(Response) Mount Sinai

II Small is he (Moses)

(Response) Mount Sinai

Full of love

(Response) Mount Sinai

Beloved is he

(Response) Mount Sinai

III Feeling joyous (Moses)

(Response) Mount Sinai

He began to dance (Moses)

(Response) Mount Sinai

He began to sing (Moses)

(Response) Mount Sinai

9. Êméth Atah Hathanénu (You are the True
Bridegroom!)

New Delhi 6 February 2005

Text: Ebyathar. Acrostic: Ébyathar / azaq ("Be strong")

Melodic mode: *nahcward*

One of the most popular wedding songs in the Jewish-Babylonian tradition. While not sung as part of the wedding ceremony itself, it may be performed in honour of the groom and the bride at celebrations for their engagement, or at synagogue, when the groom is called up to read the portion from the *torah* (Pentateuch) scroll on Sabbaths immediately before and after the wedding. The hymn may also be sung during the seven nights of blessings (*shéba' bérakhoth*) and festive meals following the wedding.

Following a short instrumental introduction, the group sings the refrain. Many of the verses feature vocal soloists. Refrains are often punctuated by ululations – both vocal and instrumental (oboe and flute). The final refrain is reinforced with clapping in time – again with audience participation.

TRANSLITERATION:

I (Refrain) Éméth atâh hâthânénû

– Kémo sahar béthokhénû

Kémélékh at léfânénû

– Yébârékhekhâ élohénû

II Békhalâthekhâ mé-od (hâthân) tismaḥ

Bérob mâmon wérob qémaḥ

Wéthizkeh laḥazoth sémaḥ

Wé-il qodsho yébiénû



III Yéhi zare'âkh béyisraél

Wéhokhmâthâkh kéghabriel

Wéṭobâthâkh lékhol sho-él

Wésîmân ṭob lékhullânû

IV Témim dé'im yébârékhekhém

Wéyafrékhém wéyarbékhem

Wéyar-akhém lé'énénékhem

Wéyar-énû méshîhénû

V Réu tho-ar hâthân misràh

‘Aléy rosho kélil torâh

Wékhallâtho kéziw orâh

Kémo shémesh bé-arshénû

VI Hazaq hâthân béhupâthâkh

Wéghil wusmaḥ békhalâthâkh

Wé-él shadda-y bé'ezrâthâkh

Wégham yihyeh bé'ezrenû

TRANSLATION:

I (Refrain) You are the true bridegroom!

Like the moon in our midst,

Like a king in our presence,

Our Lord will bless you.

II Oh (bridegroom), rejoice greatly in your bride,

With abundant riches and sustenance.

And you will merit the good fortune to witness your offspring,

And He will bring us His holiness.

III Your seed will be in Israel,

And your wisdom, like that of Gabriel's.

And your goodness will serve all those who ask,
It is a good sign upon us all.

IV The Lord, who is all-knowing, will bless you,

And you will be fruitful and multiply.

And He will show you, before your very eyes,
The coming of the Messiah.

V See the groom appear in his [new] role,

Bearing upon his head the *torâh* in all its glory.

And with his bride, a light shining,

Like the sun upon our land.

- VI Be strong, bridegroom, in your marriage,
And rejoice and be happy in your bride.
And may the Lord Almighty be a help to you,
As He is to us also.

10. Ya Nâbi ("Oh Prophet")

Pune 20 February 2005

Text: Anon. No acrostic. Melodic mode: 'ajam

This Judeo-Arabic text, in the Baghdad dialect, was sung traditionally on pilgrimages, during *Shabu'oth* (Pentecost), to the tomb of Ezekiel the Prophet, in Hilla, Iraq. The song also refers to a bridegroom, and is consequently also sung at weddings. Such references in songs that were originally for pilgrimage, may stem from the custom of newly-weds visiting the tombs of the prophets. The festive and joyous spirit of the song is emphasised, urging women to ululate, and men to clap hands in honour of the prophet. These sounds are heard in this performance, aided by the audiences who, with a little tuition, rapidly became expert in giving vent to the *kilililili* sound!

An unaccompanied vocal solo, in free time and sombre mood as an introduction, presents a contrast to the lively nature of the song that is to follow. The refrains are performed by the full group; the ululations are further emphasised on the mandolin. The repeat of the song is performed in the Iraqi *igrug* (or *jurjina*) rhythm (5+5), introduced on the *dumbuk* and 'oud'. Saeed Nathan's *sba'tén* (finger clicks) accompanies the solo refrain in the new rhythm. Men's and women's voices alternate in the verses, and the performance ends with a return to the original four-beat timing, and with a little surprise at the very end.

TRANSLITERATION:

(Refrain) Yâ n.âbî yâ n.âbî
Iḥfaḏ li ghiyâbî
Nish'al shmîc el-âsâl
Wunzûr.û lin.-n.âbî

I Yâ n.âbî weyyânâ
Hâthan weyyânâ
Endû bis'odt el-milâh
Yiḥfaḏhû en.-n.âbî

II Yâ n.âbî qellolû
Wushmîc shî'lolû
Yâ niswân halihlolû
Wurjâl safqû lo
Éliyyâhû han.âbî

TRANSLATION:

(Refrain) Oh prophet, oh prophet!
Watch over my absent ones.
We will light the beeswax candles,
And we will make a pilgrimage to the prophet.

I Oh, the prophet is with us,
The bridegroom is with us.
At his home for the circumcision feast,
The prophet will watch over him.

II Oh prophet, tell him (your desires),
And light candles for him.
Oh women, ululate for him,
And men, clap your hands for him,
Elijah, the prophet.

11. Longa Nahawand

New Delhi 6 February 2005

Composer: Riyâdh As-Sambâti Melodic mode: *nahawand*

A rousing instrumental composition by the acclaimed Egyptian composer, Riyâdh As-Sambâti.

As a genre, the Longa is composed in four-beat timing, with a number of sections, each of which is repeated. In addition, there is a recurring melodic refrain. The final new section is in Waltz timing, after which the recurring section returns. The Longa is a secular piece, and is often performed as the opening number at a concert. Sambâti's composition, with its lively, fanfare-like opening, is sure to attract the audience's attention, at whatever point of the programme it is performed.

This track features the instrumental ensemble, the melody instruments: *'oud*, accordion, oboe and violin); and percussion: *dumbuk*), tambourine and *sbatén*. The different sections contrast full ensemble playing with smaller instrumental combinations. Oboe trills often reinforces repeats of sections.

12 MÉRÂ Jootâ Hai Jâpânee – Phir Bhi Dil hai Hindustâni

New Delhi 6 February 2005

Lyrics: Shailendra Hasrat Jaipuri Music: Shankar Jaikishan

Singer: Mukesh Film: Shree 420 (1955)

Director/Actor: Raj Kapoor

This song is dedicated to the *Remembered Rhythms* audiences in India. Despite now residing in Britain, the members of *Rivers of Babylon* make it clear with this classic

Hindi film song that their hearts are still Indian. Two verses of the song are performed. The end of the song, in a special arrangement by Sara Manasseh for the India tour, underlines the heart of the song's sentiment, which echoes that of *Rivers of Babylon*: *phir bhi dil hai hindustâni – hindustâni!* (But my heart is Indian – Indian!).

The end of this song, and the end of the concert invariably concluded in spontaneous standing ovations and cries of *killillillil!* from the audience – indicating the strong rapport that had been built up between all present.

TRANSLITERATION:

Mera joota hai japani
Yeh patloon inglisthani
Sar pe laal topi roosi
Phir bhi dil hai hindustani
mera joota hai ..

TRANSLATION:

My shoes are Japanese
These pants are English
The red hat on my head is Russian
But my heart is still Indian

ALL TRACKS WERE RECORDED AS PART OF THE REMEMBERED RHYTHMS FESTIVAL
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