

## Fellow's Presentation- MAKAIAS

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Topic: *Israel In Transition: Impressions and Inferences*

Presenter: **Priya Singh**, Fellow, MAKAIAS

External Expert: **Prof. Sanjukta Bhattacharya**

Date: **29.06.2012** Time: **3.30 pm**

Venue: **Azad Bhavan, Salt Lake**

Rapporteur: **Anwasha Ghosh**, Researcher, MAKAIAS

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Priya Singh's presentation focused on the state of Israel, which is going through a process of constant formation and transformation. She observed that as a consequence of far-reaching global, regional, and internal developments Israel is standing at a critical crossroads. The society is new, changing appreciably and quickly, highly diverse, deeply divided, receiving constant waves of immigrants, and creating novel social forms replete with problems, ambiguities and challenges. Singh argued that the future course of Israel will be determined by many players and dynamics, global, regional and internal. But to a great extent it is reliant on the collective behaviour in Israel. Assuming this to be the crucial element, it is imperative to introspect, analyse and reassess the condition of the Israeli state, a process which is pertinent considering the intense debate raging within over issues such as status, hegemony and power. Singh's presentation attempted to analyse some of the critical issues; for instance the structural, behavioural and procedural transformations that have occurred in Israel, which to an extent have been attributed to and accompanied by deeper and more profound attitudinal and perceptual changes. The presentation emphasized a sense of movement and looked at serious problems and arguably momentous transformations in the sphere of economy, politics, citizenship, religious/secular divisions, and Jewish/Arab relationships. It is precisely this sense of dynamic change that needs to be underlined. The Israel of today reveals a state distinctly different from the one that was formed in 1948. Singh depicted Israel as a state in flux and concluded with the contention that we are witnessing a struggle between the traditional forces in the Israeli social and political systems and the new tendencies toward liberalisation, which could inevitably further weaken the power of the state.

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### Discussion Session

The external expert **Prof. Sanjukta Bhattacharya** congratulated the presenter on her comprehensive presentation and then contributed valuable comments, observations and insights for the betterment of the paper. Dr. Bhattacharya advised the presenter to place her subject in a more local, regional and international context. She observed that the content dealt essentially with the Oslo Accord

period (1990s), which was insufficient to understand the transforming nature of the state. She also discussed the ideology of Zionism and how it clashes with the idea of Palestine. Prof Bhattacharya advised the presenter to chronologically discuss the transitional nature of Israel's economy in detail. She also encouraged Ms. Singh to take into consideration events like the victory of Hamas and attack on Gaza in 2008 and the latest developments in the country, where massive street protests have been organized. Dr. Bhattacharye also cited the example of the Social Justice Movement of July/August 2011 and advised the presenter to take note of these events carefully as they are essentially a kind of Third World reaction signalling a departure from the past. She also mentioned a renewal of protests in 2012 and that there has been a deliberate attempt to downplay this, and observed that an account of these recent developments can pose a counter argument to what had been said in the presentation; therefore taking them into account was essential. She ended by encouraging Ms. Singh to look at the local newspapers of the country for the recent developments.

**Dr. Sreeradha Dutta**, Director MAKAIAS, Kolkata also highlighted the importance of contextualizing the paper, even though she agreed that the presentation dealt with just a segment of a larger project. She requested the presenter and all the scholars present to specify the period they are presenting on and also link it to the larger context of the project they are undertaking. Dr. Dutta made an observation regarding quotations used in the presentation and added that clarification is needed on the usage of quotations in papers. She also observed that usage of certain phrases, which might indicate the personal inclination of the author, should be avoided. The formation of arguments, she felt, could have been done in a more balanced way. Finally she, like Prof. Bhattacharya, also highlighted the importance of including the international debate, which was not adequately covered in the presentation.

Comments and observations from the floor highlighted the following issues:

- Discussions were carried on regarding specific terms used in the presentation, such as 'Information Society' and 'Warfare Society'.
- It was observed that since Jews constitute about 70 percent of the population, the term Jewish 'State' as opposed to Jewish 'Society' can be considered.
- The 1977 Rabbi Assassination and its implications were touched upon.
- Discussions were carried out on the Oslo Accord that was signed in the 1990s and its impact.
- Contention of Israel being seen almost in the line of Western Democracy was contested and it was argued it can be called an implant of the West in the Arab World.
- It was argued that apart from India, if any country can be called 'Afro-Asian', then perhaps it is Israel.
- Issues of racial discrimination, ill treatment of foreigners, migrants etc were also raised.
- It was observed that it would be useful to give some weightage to the three groups mentioned in the presentation to understand their relative influence on the matter discussed.
- A question regarding the notion of economic development was raised especially since the public debt figure is 75% of the GDP.
- A question was raised on the usage of the term "Arab Actor" and on the influence that the Arab population outside the boundary of Israel has on the issues within.