

“Making Marathi Kirtan Jewish in Colonial India”

**A talk by Dr. Anna Schultz
Stanford University**

**Thursday, February 16, 2012
12:00 — 1:00 PM
Olson Hall, Room 53A**



The webs of translation through which nineteenth century Marathi-speaking Bene Israel in Bombay and Pune articulated relationships to global Judaism and to Marathi Hindus were complex and fragile. After centuries of maintaining a Bene Israel identity with just a few Jewish practices and without clergy or texts, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought Bene Israel people into contact with groups eager to teach them how to be Jewish. From Christian missionaries, they learned Hebrew and received Marathi translations of Hebrew texts, and from Cochin Jews they learned rituals and practices central to Judaism. Armed with this new knowledge, Bene Israeli scholars sought media through which to instruct Marathi-speaking Bene Israel people unfamiliar with Hebrew or the Bible. One of the more successful art forms they adopted for the pedagogy of re-articulated Jewishness was a Hindu temple genre: Marathi naradiya kirtan. Using the song genres and structure of naradiya kirtan, Bene Israel kirtankars were careful about which songs they performed, what words they chose, which stories they told, and what ceremonial clothes they wore, but many aspects of Maharashtrian Hinduism remained untranslated in Jewish kirtan without censure. In this presentation, I interrogate the differing degrees to which the translation process was legible in the song, dress, language, and storytelling of early Bene Israel kirtan.

About the speaker:

Dr. Anna Schultz received her doctoral degree in Ethnomusicology from the University of Illinois in 2004. She has been an Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at Stanford University since 2010, having taught previously at the University of Minnesota, the University of Illinois, and Ithaca College. Schultz's first book, *Singing a Hindu Nation: Marathi Devotional Performance and Nationalism*, is forthcoming with Oxford University Press (2012).