

## BLUE LIKE SIONA BENJAMIN

Judaism was one of the first foreign religions to arrive in India in recorded history. Indian Jews are a religious minority of India, but unlike many parts of the world, have historically lived in India without any instances of anti-Semitism from the local populace.

The Consulate General of India, New York and Global Wiser, on 23rd of June, 2014, celebrated Fulbright fellow, Siona Benjamin's upcoming documentary "Blue Like Me" produced by Mr. Hal Rifken at the first meeting of Club FilLit, an initiative by the Consulate where FILms and LITerature come together.



*Consul General Amb. Dnyaneshwar M. Mulay*

Consul General Amb. Dnyaneshwar M. Mulay, called Club FilLit, an effort to celebrate one of India's most vibrant and lively aspects - Films and Literature. Consul General briefed the audience about the coffee table books being prepared about the Consulate General of India and imprint of India on New York and its neighbourhood. Encouraging active participation, Amb. Mulay introduced Ms. Aroon Shivdasani, Executive Director, Indo-American Arts Council, who invited the audience to watch the rough cut of the documentary.

"Blue Like Me" is a documentary profiling Ms. Benjamin, her experiences as an Indian Jew and the transformation of the Jewish community in India over the last 2000 years. Ms. Benjamin's paintings depict the different similarities between Hinduism and Judaism and the cultural changes in the Indian - Jewish community. Ms. Benjamin's paintings, travelling through the small yet vibrant community in Mumbai encircling a pastoral setting with blue figures peering at you between pillars, arrest the viewers with a deep sense of connection with the community. The blue-eyed lady with a strong resemblance to

Lord Shiva , a Hindu mythological figure holding the traditional Menorah is a true reflection of how Ms. Benjamin has made *tikkun olam*, which translates to “mending the world”, central to her art.



*"Finding Home", a painting by Ms. Siona Benjamin*

The screening was followed by an interaction with Mr. Hal Rifken, director and producer of Blue Like Me, Ms. Aroon Shivdasani, Ms. Siona Benjamin, Ms. Eleanor Flomenhaft from the Flomenhaft Gallery and Ms. Morgan Lawson who is the brain behind the movie's animation. Speaking about the usage of vibrant colors in her painting, Ms. Siona explained how the themes and the narrative images reflecting feminist issues and pop art come from her cultural background. Treading along a very sensitive issue, Ms. Benjamin believes in handling criticism by helping people understand the theme of her paintings. Prof. Karl Bardosh from New York University's Film School applauded Ms. Benjamin and Mr. Rifken for their effort in putting together this wonderful piece of work.

The event attended by members of all communities, in keeping with the spirit of diversity in India, ended on a very positive note with the audience feeling totally enthralled by Ms. Benjamin's work, some of which were on display during the event.



*(L to R) Ms. Aroon Shivdasani, Mr. Hal Rifken, Ms. Siona Benjamin, Ms. Eleanor Flomenhaft and Ms. Morgan Lawson*